

# THAI launches Bangkok-Tehran

**BOONSONG KOSITCHOTETHANA**

**Thai** Airways International (THAI)'s inauguration of its Bangkok-Tehran service today is expected to help ramp up passenger traffic between the two countries.

The flag carrier's launch of four flights per week is projected to double the number of Iranian arrivals to Thailand this year to nearly 200,000 and multiply Thai visitors to the Islamic Republic, currently numbering in the thousands.

Iranian visitors to Thailand grew by 20% to 88,000 last year, a figure that was set to grow to 120,000 this year prior to THAI's decision to launch its Tehran service.

"We should see a surge in traffic volume this year as Bangkok and Tehran are better connected," said Sunanta Wuthisakul, chief executive of Thai Orchid Tour and Holiday Co, a Bangkok-based travel agent that has long specialised in arranging tours to Iran.

The presence of THAI, a well-established airline with a good international image and safety track record, is set to encourage greater travel on both ends, she told the *Bangkok Post*.

THAI is providing a third option for non-stop flights between the Thai and Iranian capital, joining long-haul low-cost carrier Thai AirAsia X (TAAX) and Tehran-based Mahan Airlines, whose safety and service images are perceived as falling below



The Azadi Tower, symbol of Tehran. THAI flights from Thailand to Iran begin today.

international standards.

THAI is operating a Boeing 777-200 jet configured with 309 seats on the route, adding a sizeable increase in capacity.

TAAX, which started offering non-stop Tehran service on June 22 with three flights a week, operates an Airbus 330-300 with 370 seats on the route.

Mahan Air alternates between a single-aisle Airbus 310-300 (202 seats) and a wide-body Airbus 340-300 (215 seats), with four flights per week.

The lifting of sanctions against Iran in January has turned Tehran into a new economic frontier and an emerging tourism market, thus catching the attention of international airlines like THAI.