

Explore southern Taiwan with new flights to Kaohsiung

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KAOHSIUNG, TAIWAN

KAOHSIUNG, the second largest city of Taiwan, has been selected as the newest destination of Thai Smile, the sister airline of Thai Airways International.

The inaugural flight between Kaohsiung and Bangkok was launched on October 1.

Thai Smile is attracted to the city by the increasing number of Thai nationals travelling to Taiwan following Taiwan's granting of visa-free privileges to Thai visitors.

Under the agreement, Thais are allowed to enjoy the benefits if they stay in Taiwan for not more than 30 days. However, the Thai government has not returned the favour, which is normally reciprocated.

The new daily service sees passengers with Thai Smile's A320-200 with full service. THAI takes responsibility for marketing the service.

Before the inauguration flight, Thai Smile and THAI also signed a cooperation agreement with Taiwan High-Speed Rail Corp providing passenger with service to its 12 stations. Travelling by high-speed train from Taipei to Kaohsiung takes only about 90 minutes.

Passengers of Thai Smiles who opt to travel in Taiwan by high-speed trains will enjoy discounted tickets, thanks to the agreement. A representative of THAI said the specific discount amounts have yet to be discussed, while the rail firm announced during the signing ceremony that they could be as high as 53 per cent off normal fares.

Wit Kitchathorn, THAI's general manager for Taiwan said the parent company had suspended flights to



Representatives of Thai Smile, THAI and Kaohsiung airport authority gather at the inaugural flight ceremony at Kaohsiung International Airport on October 1.

Kaohsiung about 14 years ago due to an outbreak of SARS disease. The number of Thais visiting Taiwan has almost doubled in recent years, after the free visas were granted in 2015.

Last year, about 190,000 Thais visited Taiwan, Wit said, and it seems that number was already surpassed by the end of August this year.

THAI and Thai Smile see much potential for Kaohsiung to become a popular tourist spot for Thai visitors. Taiwan's "New Southbound" policy has spearheaded developments to attract foreign investors and visitors. The policy is aimed at increasing cooperation with countries in the South.

Previously, Thais who wanted to travel throughout Taiwan landed in Taipei and then went to other cities including Kaohsiung before having to return to Taipei to catch a flight back to Bangkok. A Thai visitor can now land in Taipei Taoyuan International

Airport and travel to other cities and have more choices for their flight home. They could choose to fly with Thai Smile from Kaohsiung International Airport or with THAI from Taipei.

"Therefore, they do not have to waste their time travelling back and forth. Their travel in Taiwan is easy because the high-speed rail system has connected all the cities," Wit said.

Tzu-Wen Tseng, director general, Tourism Bureau of Kaohsiung City, said the number of Thais to Taiwan has increased thanks to the visa-free scheme.

She welcomed Thai Smile's newest service, saying her city has been more than ready to welcome tourists from Thailand with its excellent accommodations, trains and taxis, as well as tourist attractions such as temples, street food and shopping areas.

About 120,000 Thais came to

Taiwan in 2015, rising to 190,000 the following year after the free-visa scheme came into effect.

Tseng admitted that her city needs more tour guides to help visitors see the sights. Local guides must be Taiwanese and pass an examination.

To alleviate this, Tseng said the city is implementing a short-term measure of recruiting Thais who married a Taiwanese person and had changed their nationality.

As well, the city's tourist website will add content written in Thai so tourists could make their own choices.

The city has many restaurants and a reputation for particularly good seafood and other local dishes, Tseng said. But tourists wanting Thai dishes, will find hundreds of restaurants serving them.

Located at the southern tip of the island of island, Kaohsiung is the business hub of that region of Taiwan, with many locals working in factories in the city and along the coast.

Visitors to the city are invited to check out the top of Kaohsiung 85 building, the second-highest building in Taiwan to enjoy a sunset over Shou Mountain and view Kaohsiung Harbour and the beautiful scenery of Love River.

The elevator is the world's second-fastest lift, reaching the 75th floor in only 43 seconds at 600 metre per minute.

The Dome of Light at Formosa MRT station is also worth a visit for photo taking as it is spectacular with the largest glass work in the world, designed by an Italian artist.

Another popular destination is Fo Guang Shan Buddhist temple with its 108-metre-high sitting Buddha.