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## **Thailand extends royal invitation to golfers worldwide**

*With Golf in a Kingdom, premier courses and luxury hotels aim to put country on world golf map*

BANGKOK (June 24, 2009) — In an bid to tell world golfers what Asian golfers already know, the golf establishment in Thailand has launched ‘Golf in a Kingdom: The Thai Golf Experience’, a cooperative itinerary that matches the country’s top courses with its most desirable hotels.

The Kingdom of Thailand has for decades been the destination of choice for Asian golfers, thanks to its stellar courses, superb year-round climate and welcoming culture. By banding together to form ‘Golf in a Kingdom: The Thai Golf Experience’ ([www.golfinakingdom.com](http://www.golfinakingdom.com)), these courses and hotels mean to cement a place for Thailand alongside the world’s premier golf destinations.

“I think golfers in North America have an inkling that golf is played in Thailand; Europeans have slightly more of an inkling, but I don’t think golfers on either continent fully realize that this is a country with more than 250 courses, many of them as good as you’ll find anywhere in the world,” said Mark Siegel, president of Bangkok-based tour operator Golfasian.

The Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT) has partnered with eight premium golf properties, Golfasian and six of the country’s premier hotels to form ‘Golf in a Kingdom: The Thai Golf Experience’.

The cooperative effort has been in the planning since 2007, but its launch this month is timely. According to TAT, some 3.2 million visitors arrived in Thailand the first quarter of 2009 — a 19 percent decrease from the previous year. It’s unclear whether this drop is attributable to the peaceful-but-ongoing political disquiet in Thailand or the worldwide economic slump.

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“I live here and the reality is, the political issues in Thailand haven’t had any effect on the day-to-day lives of citizens or tourists — but the economic slowdown has surely affected tourists: prices have dropped across the board,” Siegel asserted. “I don’t think there’s ever been a more economical time to visit here. That’s not hype; it’s a fact. Launching ‘Golf in a Kingdom’ now has allowed us to offer value we could not have offered in 2008.”

In May 2009, a CNN International tourism poll asserted that Thailand, among first-world nations, represents the best value for travelers in the entire Asia Pacific region. Conducted across CNN English websites, the survey had more than 5,000 respondents globally.

“The world gets a bit smaller every day,” Siegel continued. “We hope to shrink it just enough with ‘Golf in a Kingdom’ to give North American and European golfers a taste of Thai culture and hospitality, because one visit is normally all it takes. The number of golfers who try Thailand then return for a second and third helping is pretty extraordinary.”

From the mystical hill country of Chiang Rai in the northwest corner to the breathtaking beaches of Koh Samui in the Gulf of Thailand, ‘Golf in a Kingdom: The Thai Golf Experience’ takes in some of the most lush and varied terrain on the planet. That sort of real estate — linked by Thailand’s enviably modern transportation infrastructure — translates into the Kingdom’s stunning golf properties, including:

- Banyan Golf Club, a new hillside course just outside the charming coastal town of Hua Hin, preferred holiday retreat of the Thai Royal Family for almost a century.
- Chiang Mai Highlands Golf & Spa Resort, an inventive Schmidt/Curley design 1,000 feet above sea level in the cool, northern region.
- Muang Kaew Golf Club, the closest course to bustling Bangkok, with sterling greens and a par 3 that looks eerily similar to the 12th at Augusta National.
- Santiburi Chiang Rai Country Club, where Robert Trent Jones II crafted 18 dramatic holes that either skirt a chain of lakes or flow over the low hills of Bang Bor.
- Santiburi Samui Country Club, site of the newest Asian Tour event, the Queen’s Cup, and traversing a jungle of towering coconut trees at the foot of Khao Pom Mountain.

- Siam Country Club, Plantation Course, this 27-hole Schmidt-Curley design played host to the 2009 Honda LPGA Thailand just two years after opening
- Siam Country Club, Old Course, always immaculately maintained, it hosted the 2007 Honda LPGA event and features perhaps the toughest closing stretch in the country.
- Thai Country Club, site of Tiger Woods's 1997 Asia Honda Classic victory and the 'Best Championship Course in Asia', as voted by *Asian Golf Monthly* readers in 2008.

Thailand also harbors the Asia's newest and broadest collection of 5-star accommodations — at prices North Americans and Europeans may not believe at first. 'Golf in a Kingdom' embraces that development by bridging rounds of golf with nights at posh, brand-name resorts, including:

- Anantara Phuket, a collection of 83 private pool villas set within indigenous gardens of jasmine, orchids and birds of paradise. *Conde Nast Traveller* magazine just named this property to its coveted worldwide "Hot List" for 2009.
- Bangkok Marriott Resort & Spa, located across the Chao Phraya River from the city center but with all the tranquility and kick-back appeal a traveler could wish for in an urban setting.
- Anantara Golden Triangle, a luxury nature retreat set amid 160 acres of tropical jungle, all of it hewing to the winding Mekong River and a border dividing three countries.
- Anantara Hua Hin, nestled in 14 acres of luxuriant tropical gardens along the white sand beaches on the Gulf of Thailand.
- Anantara Koh Samui, serenely perched above a quiet stretch of sand, and just steps from the shimmering waters that lap Samui Island.
- Hua Hin Marriott Resort & Spa, whose architecture combines space, color and natural light with traditional Thai design themes to create a sense of harmony and grandeur.

"The beauty of this marked shift toward high-quality lodging, which has been taking place here for 20 years actually, is that Thailand remains affordable," said Boyd Barker, Hua Hin Marriott's general manager. "If there's a positive to the hit tourism has taken here, of late, it's that prices reflect this drop in demand. There's no better place to go on holiday, and there's no better time than right now."

The attraction extends beyond golf and resorts. Never colonized by foreign powers and known as Siam until 1939, Thailand remains a constitutional monarchy. But during the past half century it has managed to seamlessly blend Western influences and Buddhist beliefs, producing a first-world destination with an Old World feel.

Six distinct geographical regions — ranging from 8,000-foot-high mountains in the north to a maze of limestone islands rising out of the Andaman Sea in the south — only add to the country's diverse allure.

“Of all the countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand provides the greatest value,” said Santi Chudintra, Director of TAT Los Angeles. “The people are welcoming, the culture is unique and the scenery is spectacular. Thai food, which everyone wants to talk about, is just a small part of the menu.”

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*For more information on ‘Golf in a Kingdom: The Thai Golf Experience’, or to make golf travel plans in Thailand, visit [www.golfinakingdom.com](http://www.golfinakingdom.com), or send email to [info@golfinakingdom.com](mailto:info@golfinakingdom.com)*

