

Thailand cuts visa-free stays, citing crime by foreigners

The new visa-free duration would be decided on a country-by-country basis

● Tourists will be able to renew visas once by visiting an immigration office

● The visa-free period was previously capped at 30 days but was extended to 60 in July 2024

● Tourism accounts for more than 10% of Thailand's GDP

AFP | Bangkok, Thailand

Thailand is drastically cutting the length of visa-free stays for tourists from more than 90 countries in an effort to curb crime involving foreign nationals, officials said on Tuesday.

Tourism is vital to the Southeast Asian nation's economy, but foreign arrivals are yet to return to their pre-Covid highs.

A recent series of high-profile arrests of foreigners has included cases linked to drug offences, sex trafficking and foreigners operating businesses such as hotels and schools without proper permits.



A Thai Buddhist monk looks down towards passengers on a traditional wooden long-tail boat, popular with tourists, in a canal in Bangkok

Under Thailand's current tourism scheme, travellers from more than 90 countries -- including Europe's 29-nation Schengen area, the United States, Israel and several South American countries -- are eligible to visit for up to 60 days without a visa.

Thailand's cabinet approved reducing visa-free stays for

travellers from those countries on Tuesday, Tourism Minister Surasak Phancharoenworakul told reporters in Bangkok.

The new visa-free duration would be decided on a country-by-country basis, with most foreign nationals granted stays of up to 30 days, while some could receive only 15 days, Surasak said.

Tourists will be able to renew visas once by visiting an immigration office, a government spokeswoman told AFP.

"The 60 days was automatic

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Under Thailand's current tourism scheme, travellers from more than 90 countries are eligible to visit for up to 60 days without a visa.

Tourists (C) pose for photos in front of the Phra Dhammakaya Thep Mongkol, a seated Buddha statue, at the Wat Paknam Phasi Charoen Buddhist temple in Bangkok



staying longer," she said.

Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow said last week that the plan to reduce visa-free stays was part of a crackdown on transnational crime.

Thailand was not targeting any specific country, he said, but rather individuals abusing the visa system by committing crimes in the country.

Tourists provided "benefits, such as boosting the economy, but the current scheme has allowed some people to exploit it", government spokesperson Rachada Dhanadirek told reporters on Tuesday.

The visa-free period was previously capped at 30 days but was extended to 60 in July 2024 as part of government efforts to boost tourism and the economy.

Tourism accounts for more than 10% of Thailand's GDP, although visitor numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Foreign arrivals dropped by about 3.4% in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2025, with visitors from the Middle East down by nearly a third, according to tourism ministry data.

Thailand expects about 33.5 million foreign tourists this year, up from nearly 33 million visitors last year, the government has said.

but the renewal will be decided by the officer and tourists will have to explain why they are

Musk loses blockbuster OpenAI suit as jury says too late

AFP | Oakland, United States

A federal jury ruled Monday that Elon Musk waited too long to sue OpenAI and its co-founders, delivering a decisive victory to the ChatGPT startup and ending one of Silicon Valley's most closely watched courtroom battles.

The swift decision caps a three-week trial that saw a parade of tech titans take the stand, with Musk arguing that OpenAI's pivot to a profit-driven business betrayed its original nonprofit mandate.

The jury in Oakland federal court found that Musk's claims against OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, President Greg Brockman, The OpenAI Foundation and Microsoft were barred by statutes of limitations, leaving the billionaire's core arguments largely unaddressed.

Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, who had asked the jury to advise her on the matter, accepted and confirmed their decision.



Turkey manhunt ends as shooter takes own life after killing six



Turkish police officers secure part of a main road in Kahramankazan, some 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Ankara (file)

AFP | Istanbul, Turkey

A massive manhunt for a gunman who killed six people in southern Turkey ended early yesterday when he turned the gun on himself after being cornered by police, the IHA news agency reported.

The 37-year-old suspect had fled to a forested area after going on a rampage with a gun near Tarsus, which lies between the southern cities of Mersin and Adana, in which he shot dead six people and wounded another eight.

The Anadolu state news agency said the man had reportedly shot dead his ex-wife before heading out on a murderous spree.

The DHA and IHA news agencies said the suspect opened fire in a restaurant, killing its owner and an employee, before fleeing and shooting dead two other men -- one of them a

shepherd watching his animals nearby, and the other a truck driver at a petrol station.

It was unclear who the sixth victim was.

The shooter fled with police launching a massive manhunt involving helicopters, which lasted into the early hours of Tuesday when they located him inside a house about 10 kilometres from where the shootings began.

The suspect turned the gun on himself to avoid being caught, IHA said.

Speaking to the agency from his hospital bed, Mehmet Han Topal, who works at the restaurant where the shootings began and who was wounded in the leg, described what happened.

"He came in without a word... We thought he was getting his telephone out, but he brought out a pistol," he said.

"I got down. He fired at me."

Russia begins three days of nuclear drills

● The drills will involve more than 65,000 soldiers and 7,800 types of equipment and weapons

● The ministry said it would also test-launch ballistic and cruise missiles

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Russia's army yesterday began three days of nuclear weapons drills involving thousands of troops across the country, as Kyiv escalates its drone attacks and with President Vladimir Putin headed to China.

Throughout its more than four-year offensive in Ukraine, Moscow has flaunted its possession of nuclear weapons and repeatedly threatened to use them.

"From May 19 to 21, 2026, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation are conducting an exercise on the preparation and use of nuclear forces in the event of a threat of aggression," the defence ministry said.

The drills will involve more than 65,000 soldiers and 7,800 types of equipment and weapons, including more than 200 missile launchers, the defence ministry said. Aircraft, ships, submarines and nuclear submarines will all take part.



Ukrainian servicemen who have just returned from frontline positions, take their equipment at an undisclosed location in Ukraine's Kharkiv region

The ministry said it would also test-launch ballistic and cruise missiles.

The ending of the New START agreement with Washington in February formally released the world's two largest nuclear powers from a raft of restrictions.

Russia has vowed to take a "responsible" approach to strategic nuclear capability.

But Putin has also said that developing Russia's nuclear forces is an "absolute priority", and Moscow this month tested a new long-range missile capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Moscow also said the drills "also address issues related to the joint training and use of nuclear weapons deployed on the territory of the Republic of Belarus".

Russia has deployed a nuclear-capable missile, the Oreshnik, to its neighbouring ally, which borders NATO.



Russia possesses the world's largest nuclear arsenal, with an estimated 5,000+ nuclear warheads – enough to destroy the planet many times over. A key part of its strategy is the "nuclear triad": missiles launched from land, submarines hidden deep underwater, and long-range bomber aircraft, ensuring Russia can retaliate even after a massive attack.