

**"AMAZING THAILAND" – ITS
CONTRIBUTION TO GROWING THE
COUNTRY'S COMPETITIVENESS**

Abstract

This paper describes and analyses the branding campaigns of Thailand from 1998 to 2011, shows how the brand has evolved, explains the best practices applied by the Thai authorities in this field and assesses the effects of the branding strategy from the perspective of the increasing number of tourists, revenues from tourism and the country's international prestige.

Keywords: country brand, branding strategy, marketing strategies, promoting campaigns, tourism.

JEL CODES: L83, M39, N45, N75

**CONTRIBUȚIA
STRATEGIEI DE
BRANDING "AMAZING
THAILAND" LA
CREȘTEREA
COMPETITIVITĂȚII ȚĂRII**

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Rezumat

Lucrarea prezintă și analizează campaniile de branding ale Thailandei din 1998 până în 2011, arată modalitățile prin care brandul a evoluat, explică bunele practici aplicate de autoritățile thailandeze în acest domeniu și evaluează efectele strategiei de branding din perspectiva creșterii numărului de turiști, a încasărilor din turism și a prestigiului internațional al țării.

Cuvinte cheie: brand de țară, strategia de branding, strategia de marketing, campanii de promovare, turism.



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1. SHORT PRESENTATION

The Kingdom of Thailand is a country located in Southeast Asia, which has an area of 513,115 km² (49th place in the world) and a population numbering over 66 million inhabitants (Wikipedia, 2013); the most numerous are the ethnic Thai (80%), followed by the Chinese (10%), Malaysians (4%), Lao, Mons, Khmers, Indians and Burmese. Thailand is a constitutional monarchy made up of 75 provinces.

Since the early 70's and 80's, the industrialization of Thailand has known a fast pace, with the key areas being electronics and textiles, while the service sector has been dominated by tourism.

Currently, the country has the second-largest economy in size in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, a position it has held for many years. Without experiencing any economic miracle in recent years (because there is still a gap between rich and poor¹), Thailand, however has the biggest growth in the area: over six percent in recent years, with an explosion in industry and especially in tourism services.

2. THE BRANDING STRATEGY OF THAILAND

Thailand's tourism industry began to develop when the American military that fought in the Vietnam War came here in the 60s for peace and relaxation.

At present, Tourism is a very important industry to Thailand's economy. It contributes significantly to Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP), affecting employment, investment, and foreign exchange earnings (Chokethaworn et al., 2010a).

International tourism is the fastest growing industry in Thailand (Chaitip and Chaiboonsri, 2009c; Chaiboonsri et al., 2010). The country has continuously experienced a growth in the number of tourists and revenue from the industry (Chokethaworn et al., 2010b). Thus:

- The number of tourists grew from 336,000 in 1967 to over 15 million in 2010;
- Revenues grew from THB 299 billion (Thai Baht) in 1997 to 450 billion in 2005.

In 2003, Thailand ranked 15th in terms of revenues from international tourism (USD 7.9 billion), accounting for 1.7% of the world total, or 4.4% of the country's GDP (Chokethaworn et al., 2010b). In 2007, the tourism sector accounted for 6.7% of the country's GDP.

¹ Poverty in the economy has come down from 38% in 1990 to 11% in 2004 but there is still a high degree of inequality (Shome and Tondon, 2010). Thus, the gap between the quality of life in urban and rural regions grew at an alarming pace and lead to a major migration of the population towards the cities. Especially Bangkok is confronted with the problems generated by the massive population growth, and it experiences one of the biggest pollution and traffic jams in the world.

Thailand's marketing strategy aimed at:

- Increasing Thailand's visibility throughout the world by building a strong country brand;
- Developing on the long run the Thailand tourism industry's capabilities of increasing the country's competitiveness on the international market;
- Promoting tourism in terms of quality, not quantity.

To achieve the above objectives, the Thai government embarked on process meant to deliver an exceptional tourism education and to raise the awareness of its citizens; it has taken over time, various measures essential to success:

- Maintaining the existing market share by working with strategic partners;
- Promoting quality tourism;
- Offering promotional packages and holiday specials;
- Launching partnerships with restaurants, airlines;
- Organizing business tours in Thailand;
- Participating in trade and tourism fairs;
- Building / adding more terminals, computers and passport control counters to ease formalities when entering the country;
- Training the staff working in airports.

The evolution of Thailand's country brand² is presented below.

→ **"Amazing Thailand 1998-1999"**

In the late '90s, Thailand felt the need to develop a country brand in order to compete in an increasingly competitive global market.

Amazing Thailand Campaign was launched to counter the negative effects of the Asian economic crisis of 1997 and has managed to combine various aspects of the country (places full of history and culture, great cuisine, beaches of rare beauty and a very friendly people) in one word: amazing, amazing.

The Thai Government, through the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and in collaboration with the

² Recently, the country brand has become the central instrument in boosting a country's competitiveness, because a bad reputation or no reputation at all can affect in a major way a country's means of competing (Popescu, 2009). When properly designed and created, a brand can build a country, can concentrate the tourism offer, which can stimulate investment in and out of a country, can restore its reputation and create a renewed pride among the citizens of that country (Popescu and Corboș, 2010). Also, several authors (Andronicenu, 2009; Burlacu, 2011) have shown that in economically developed countries, the measurement of the quality of life can't be achieved without taking into account the opportunities for culture, art, creative activities, education and tourism.

Leo Burnett advertising agency and other organizations working in the tourism sector, has launched this campaign in 1998, after two months of teamwork. The campaign aimed at increasing the number of tourists³ by promoting shopping, Thai cuisine, beaches and traditional Thai massage.

In the promoting stage of the brand, the project team has proposed that Thailand's positive elements and characteristics be communicated to both tourists and residents because the image of a place is influenced by the perceived values of the inhabitants and how they pose them to visitors.

→ *The study "Branding Thailand" (2001-2003)*

The project, called suggestively *Branding Thailand*, was initiated by the Thai Government in 2001, with the help of two major business schools, Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration from Chulalongkorn University (Thailand) and The Kellogg School of Management at North-western University (USA) (Maesincee et al., 2003).

The first phase of the project sought to determine the perceptions of people all around the world regarding Thailand, especially in the field of tourism. The study lasted one year (April 2002 – May 2003), during which time was questioned a significant percentage of people who used or not Thai products and services (Nuttavuthisit, 2007, p. 22).

The research has helped identify both strengths and weaknesses of the country from a marketing perspective. The biggest problem for Thailand, which gave it a real disadvantage, was an image based on sex tourism⁴. To correct this negative image, the project team concluded that the positive aspects should be highlighted through campaigns promoting local hospitality, natural beauty, specific culture, traditional places and other such items for which Thailand has an advantage over most of the world.

Thus, for defining the brand were identified **four major characteristics of the "Thai spirit"** (Nuttavuthisit, 2005), based on the perceptions of tourists about Thailand:

- *"Fun"* refers to the lifestyle of Thai people who have a dynamic life, not missing the fun and celebration;

³ In 1997 the number of foreign tourists that came to Thailand was 7.22 million contributing an income of THB 220 billion to the Thai economy. In 1998, the number of foreign tourists increased to 7.76 million and the income increased to THB 242 billion. The following year there were 8.58 million tourists and the income was THB 253 billion (Chaiboonsri et al., 2009).

⁴ According to a study performed by Chulalongkorn University about Thailand's subterranean economy, between 1993 and 1995, prostitution accounted for 2.7% of the country's GDP. It was thought that at least 10% of the tourists' money was spent on sexual tourism.

- “*Fulfilling*” gives the impression of escaping reality or peace of mind evoked by a relaxed lifestyle and the quiet places of Thailand;
- “*Friendly*” is the most used term by visitors coming to Thailand, which is seen as a comfortable environment;
- “*Flexibility*” was brought into question when consumers referred to the very open relationship between very different people, as well as to places in Thailand.

→ “***Be my guest***” (2002-2003)

Be my guest campaign was launched in November 2001 and was meant to:

- Awaken foreign tourists’ conscience and promote the country as a destination of special value;
- Promote Thai products.

→ “***Unseen Thailand***” (2003)

In 2003, the Thai government launched the campaign *Unseen Thailand* that was designed to cover not only the history, culture and Thai cuisine, but also golf, adventure, scuba diving and promotional packages for weddings.

→ “***Thailand – Happiness on Earth***” (2005-2006)

In 2005, TAT has launched the campaign *Thailand - Happiness on Earth* that aimed:

- That tourists as much as possible to equate the concept of holiday with happiness, with Thailand, seen as a garden of paradise;
- To position Thailand as one of the luxurious countries offering in this respect high quality tourist services (whether it’s spa treatments, golf courses or cruises).

→ “***Thailand Unforgettable***” (2006-2007)

In 2006-2007, there was another attempt to promote the image of Thailand under the slogan *Thailand Unforgettable*. The concept took into account three components: (1) Sun, sand, sea; (2) Modern and traditional; (3) Shopping, restaurants and golf.

According to TAT, the campaign should have lasted three years, but because it had not the expected impact (experts said that *Thailand Unforgettable* felt too abstract and intangible in many respects),

although the costs were not insignificant (about USD 600,000 for the logo and slogan creation, supporting and developing the promotional campaign costing approx. USD 6,000,000).

→ **"Seven Amazing Wonders of Thailand" (2007 -2008)**

The return to the logo and slogan *Amazing Thailand* (see figure 1) took place at the ASIAN Tourism Forum in Singapore in 2007. The solution has been embraced at government level, the tourism minister saying that the return to *Amazing Thailand* is due to the results that the brand brought in 1998-1999. Also, this recovery was the best solution given that it saved significant sums that would have been necessary if they would have had to build a new brand.



FIGURE 1. "AMAZING THAILAND" SLOGAN AND LOGO
Source: thai-blogs.com

In the same period, in order to strengthen the brand strategy, TAT has segmented and regrouped the main tourism services and products in a package that included seven key points that have been marketed worldwide under the slogan *Seven Amazing Wonders of Thailand*.

This campaign was based on a SWOT survey of the Thai tourism industry that has shown that although there were some problems; Thailand has a generally positive image throughout the world, which gave it a significant competitive advantage. In many travel magazines and lifestyle surveys, Thailand was ranked consistently in the "Top Ten" for its beaches, entertainment and restaurants, the value of the products, recreation and shopping facilities. The seven thematic products (see Figure 2) were taking into consideration (TAT, 2007):

- *Thai Spirit / Thai Lifestyle*: "Experience the art of the Thai living style" refers to the traditional hospitality, lifestyle and friendliness of Thai people.
- *Treasures*: "A country of heritage and history" refers to the UNESCO World Heritage sites, historic sites, temples and Thai museums.
- *Beaches*: "Fun, sun, surf and serenity of Thai beaches". This "miracle" is not recognized the popularity of Thai resorts for international and domestic tourism.

- *Nature*: “Meet the pure beauty of Thai nature”. The concept has focused on environmental conservation and the provision of products taking into consideration the phenomenon of global warming.
- *Health and welfare*: “Land of a healthy smile” refers to the well-known curative and preventive Thai therapies on a fast growing market.
- *Modernity*: “Experience the Thai trends”, an urge addressed to the new generation of tourists, with emphasis on hotels, shopping centres, restaurants, nightlife and entertainment.
- *Festivals*: “Enjoy Thailand’s international festivals”, including popular Thai parties and festivals such as the Phuket Regatta, Elephant Polo, etc.

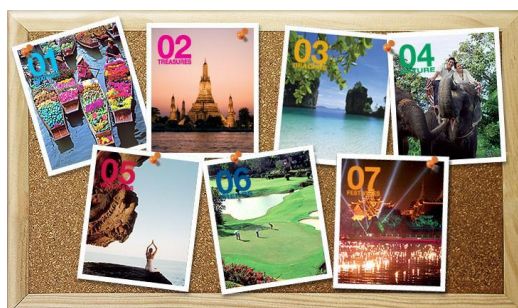


FIGURE 2. PROMOTING THE CAMPAIGN “SEVEN AMAZING WONDERS OF THAILAND”

The new campaign was organised in order to achieve the objective of 14.8 million visitors in 2007 and 15.7 million in 2008 (TAT, 2007).

→ “Visit Amazing Thailand 2009”

The campaign *Visit Amazing Thailand 2009* was initiated by TAT, in cooperation with Thai Airways International and other partners. It was launched on 8 October 2008 and had the following objectives:

- Increasing the number of foreign tourists;
- Encouraging residents to travel in the country, giving up holidays spent abroad.

→ “Amazing Thailand, Amazing Value” (2010)

In 2009, because of the economic crisis and the declining number of visitors (less than 14 million tourists), TAT has decided to promote Thailand through discounted prices changing at the same time, the slogan from *Amazing Thailand* into *Amazing Thailand, Amazing Value* and associating its logo with the country’s logo (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. "AMAZING THAILAND, AMAZING VALUE" SLOGAN AND LOGO

The new brand identity communicates the concept of value with messages like "an amazing experience at an amazing value" or "great deals". One should mention that no other country has integrated the concept of value into its identity on such a scale.

The *Amazing Thailand, Amazing Value* campaign has been implemented largely by TAT in collaboration with the Department of Export Promotion, the Thailand Board for Investment, Thai Airways International Public Company Limited, other government agencies, and the private sector.

Amazing Thailand, Amazing Value campaign was promoted both at national and international level through:

a) Mass-media: television, short documentaries (broadcasted by CNN, BBC, Discovery, AXN, ESPN and Euro Spot), radio, written press (market leaders in the Asia Pacific region, Europe and USA) (see figure 4).



FIGURE 4. PRESS RELEASES AND POSTERS FOR "AMAZING THAILAND, AMAZING VALUE"

Source: TAT, 2010b

b) Outdoor promotion (e.g. 120 taxi cabs from London have been branded with the campaign’s logo – see figure 5).



FIGURE 5. LONDON TAXI CABS – PROMOTING “AMAZING THAILAND, AMAZING VALUE”

c) Direct marketing: *Online* (through presentation websites⁵ which targeted markets from Asia, Europe, North America and Australia, which use the virtual environment as principal mean of information), *social networks* (Thailand is present both on Twitter⁶ and Facebook⁷), *brochures*.

d) Festivals and events: The emphasis was put on certain themes dedicated to niche markets, such as one dedicated to golf, spa treatments, shopping.

Highlighting its value as a country, Thailand has been able to address to tourists who still wanted to go on a holiday, but a less expensive one. A survey conducted by CNN International has demonstrated the effectiveness of this campaign, calling Thailand “the most visited destination in the Asia-Pacific region”. TAT Governor, Mrs. Phornsiri Manoharn, commented: “In today’s unfavourable economic conditions, to be considered the destination with the best in quality – price ratio is probably the best brand image that Thailand might enjoy (TAT, 2010a).

→ “Amazing Thailand, Always Amazes You” (2011)

On July 5 2010, in Bangkok, TAT was announcing a new promotional campaign for 2011. Thus, the central idea *Amazing Thailand* was complemented by *Always Amazes You* (see figure 6) in order to strengthen the concept of “Thainess” which makes the kingdom to be a truly exceptional destination, the differentiation from other countries is given by the confidence of travelling to Thailand for holidays and business meetings.

⁵ <http://www.tourismthailand.org/>, www.tourismthailand.co.uk, <http://www.amazing-thailand.com/>

⁶ <http://twitter.com/thailandFanClub> and <http://twitter.com/go2thailand>

⁷ <http://www.facebook.com/AmazingThailand>



FIGURE 6. "AMAZING THAILAND, ALWAYS AMAZES YOU" LOGO AND SLOGAN
Source: TAT, 2011

The 2011 marketing campaign has been extremely visible worldwide and was accomplished through:

- the use of traditional promoting channels (TV commercials, print advertising, brochures and posters);
- promoting using the participation of famous actors and sports stars to the major events in Thailand;
- encouraging the movie industry to consider the country as a suitable location for various productions;
- direct marketing (presentation sites, social media, videos broadcasted on YouTube, short documentaries, the usage of e-books and e-Brochures, an i-Thai application for smart Phone users, presenting new tourism information about Thailand, an Internet call-centre) in order to attract young travellers;
- different activities that are popular with visitors from Asia (shopping and golf) or Europe (bike tours).

3. TARGET GROUPS

Between **2000 and 2005**, Thailand's main target markets were Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China, Singapore and Taiwan (Chaitip and Chaiboonsri, 2009a).

According to TAT, in **2007**, 55% of tourists who visited Thailand came from the Asia Pacific region, from Japan, and Malaysia. The number of tourists who arrived from the Middle East and Russia was growing.

In **2008**:

- 52.37% of tourists who visited Thailand came from the East (especially from Japan) and South-East Asia (especially from Malaysia: about 2 million);
- Europe has provided nearly 4 million visitors (27.22%);
- The number of visitors from America, South Asia and Africa was much smaller;
- Australia has provided about 700,000 tourists.

In the **2009 – 2011** periods, worldwide, one can speak of four key markets:

- **Tourists "Ready to travel"** (Scandinavian countries, India, Russia, Indonesia and some Middle East countries). Thailand remains one of their most popular destinations;
- **Tourists "In danger of not coming back"** (covering several countries in Europe and the United States). Customers from these markets have an affinity to visit Thailand, but are affected by the global economic crisis and therefore, are more attentive to the value of spending on travel;
- **Tourists "Worried about travelling"** (China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam and Australia). Customers from these markets still consider the kingdom as a convenient tourist destination, but have some reservations about the return;
- **Tourists "Extremely sensitive"** (includes countries such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan, who suffered a deep economic recession due to its close ties with the U.S. economy).

4. THE EFFECTS OF THE BRANDING STRATEGY

The strategy's effects were felt in the number of visitors who arrived in Thailand in the years after launching the campaigns, in the revenues from tourism, but also in the prestige which the country has won worldwide.

4.1. Number of visitors (1998-2010) and revenues from tourism (1998-2007)

The change in the number of foreign tourists in the 1998-2010 periods (table 1) presents a significant growth. Big fluctuations can be seen in moments like the respiratory epidemics, and also after the 2004 tsunami. The global economic recession (started in the end of 2008), the internal political instability (2008-2010) had also negative effects on the number of arrivals of foreign tourists (Chaitip and Chaiboonsri, 2009b).

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF FOREIGN TOURISTS IN THE 1998-2010 PERIODS

Year	Number of tourists (millions)	Change from previous year (%)
1998	7.76	+ 7.53
1999	8.58	+ 10.50
2000	9.51	+ 10.82
2001	10.06	+ 5.82
2002	10.80	+ 7.33
2003	10.00	- 7.36

2004	11.65	+ 16.46
2005	11.52	- 1.15
2006	13.82	+ 20.01
2007	14.46	+ 4.65
2008	14.24	- 1.52
2009	14.15	- 0.63
2010	15.8	+ 11.67

Source: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat-page/about-tat/statistic/>

Interesting to say, the tourism sector does not depend exclusively on the number of foreign tourists. The number of domestic tourists is much bigger than the one of foreigners (table 2). But the Thai spend less per day of stay (table 4), and their journeys are shorter, with a mean duration of two and a half days (table 5).

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF THAI TOURISTS IN THE PERIOD 1998-2007

Year	Number of tourists (millions)	Change from previous year (%)
1998	51.86	- 0.72
1999	53.62	+ 3.02
2000	54.74	+ 2.08
2001	58.62	+ 7.09
2002	61.82	+ 5.45
2003	69.36	+12.20
2004	74.80	+ 7.84
2005	79.53	+ 6.33
2006	81.49	+ 2.46
2007	83.23	+ 2.14
2008	84.01	+ 2.15

Source: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat-page/about-tat/statistic/>

TABLE 3. REVENUES FROM TOURISM IN THE 1998-2007 PERIODS

Year	Revenues from international tourism (THB millions)	Change from previous year (%)	Revenues from domestic tourism (THB millions)	Change from previous year (%)
1998	242,177	+ 9.70	187,897.82	+ 4.16
1999	253,018	+ 4.48	203,179.00	+ 7.42
2000	285,272	+ 12.75	210,516.15	+ 3.61
2001	299,047	+ 4.83	223,732.14	+ 6.28
2002	323,484	+ 8.17	235,337.15	+ 5.19
2003	309,269	- 4.39	289,986.81	+ 23.22
2004	384,360	+ 24.28	317,224.62	+ 9.39
2005	367,380	- 4.42	334,716.79	+ 5.51
2006	482,319	+ 31.29	365,276.28	+ 9.13
2007	547,782	+ 13.57	380,417.10	+ 4.15
2008	604,968	+ 14.60	385,478.11	+ 4.08

Source: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat-page/about-tat/statistic/>

TABLE 4. TOTAL EXPENSES OF VISITORS

Year	Expenses of foreign tourists (person/day) (THB)	Change from previous year (%)	Expenses of local tourists (person/day) (THB)	Change from previous year (%)
1998	3,712.93	+ 1.12	1,512.70	+ 3.19
1999	3,704.54	- 0.23	1,523.55	+ 2.29
2000	3,861.19	+ 4.23	1,717.77	+ 12.75
2001	3,748.00	- 2.93	1,702.70	- 0.88
2002	3,753.74	+ 0.15	1,689.52	- 0.77
2003	3,774.50	+ 0.55	1,824.38	+ 7.98
2004	4,057.85	+ 7.51	1,852.33	+ 1.53
2005	3,890.13	- 4.13	1,768.87	- 4.51
2006	4,048.22	+ 4.06	1,795.09	+ 1.48
2007	4,120.95	+ 1.80	1,767.35	- 1.55

Source: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat-page/about-tat/statistic/>

TABLE 5. TIME SPENT

Year	Foreign tourists (days)	Local tourists (days)
1998	8,4	2,37
1999	7,96	2,43
2000	7,77	2,48
2001	7,93	2,51
2002	7,98	2,55
2003	8,19	2,61
2004	8,13	2,60
2005	8,20	2,73
2006	8,62	2,65
2007	9,19	2,63

Source: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/about-tat-page/about-tat/statistic/>

4.2. The prestige

In 2006, TAT has researched the competitive position of Thailand to assess the results of the branding strategy and found that the country is among the top ten tourist destinations of respondents, in some segments of travel: family destinations, nightlife, beaches and tourism business.

Another research conducted by the *Lonely Planet* magazine showed that Thailand is seen as a top destination in terms of value for money and gastronomy.

In another global study performed by Future Brand (2005-2009), Thailand was ranked in 2005, in the first ten countries of the world (8th), and in the sections rankings Thailand occupied the top spot for three consecutive years (2007-2009) in the section “best value for money”.

Regarding the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, Thailand was ranked 33 in 2009, up one place from 2008 (GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media, 2009).

The quality of the brand strategy has been recognized internationally by an impressive number of professional awards. Most recently it won in February 2011 the prestigious award – The World's Best Tourist Country, granted by the Norwegian travel trade, for the eighth consecutive year.

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