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LEADERS IN TRAVEL

THAILAND - Travellers being warned they could face prison time for using e-cigarettes in Thailand

ELECTRONIC cigarettes may be widely used by smokers as a quitting aid but travellers are being warned they could face a lengthy prison sentence if they are caught with one in Thailand.

In October 2014, Thailand reportedly approved legislation banning the import of electronic cigarettes and baraku (shisha), defining them as prohibited items, according to the Bangkok Post.

And those who break the law are subject to a maximum of 10 years imprisonment or a fine equivalent to five times the price of imported or exported goods seized by the authority. Since then, it is understood that the sale or supply has also been banned.

According to CTV News, Thailand's deputy government spokesman Maj. Gen. Sansern Kaewkamnerd said the decision approving the ban proposed by the Commerce Ministry was made for health reasons. The Public Health Ministry originally suggested a ban, saying the items were luring young people into smoking.

Although it is common to see people vaping in Thailand, what this means is that offenders are technically breaking the law as e-cigarettes are prohibited items.

Pat Waterton, a UK-based travel agent and manager at Langley Travel, told Travel Weekly UK she will be warning all her clients about this little-known law after her nephew was arrested and fined £125 (\$AU205) after being threatened with jail for having an e-cigarette in Bangkok.

"I got a message from my sister saying James had been arrested in Thailand because he had an e-cigarette. He managed to pay the policeman, who had told him he could go to jail. Ten years seems a long time to go to prison for smoking an e-cigarette," Ms Waterton said.

"If I'm selling Thailand I will definitely mention it now. All agents should. Thailand is very popular so we should make sure we are telling people about things that could ruin a holiday."

Advice on the UK's Foreign Office website is clear about e-cigarettes, warning British travellers not to take them into the popular holiday destination.

"You can't bring vaporisers (like e-cigarettes and e-baraku) or refills into Thailand," the warning reads.



“These items are likely to be confiscated and you could be fined or sent to prison for up to 10 years if convicted. The sale or supply of e-cigarettes and similar devices is also banned and you could face a heavy fine or up to 5 years imprisonment if found guilty.”

The Foreign Office also added that several British Nationals have been arrested for possession of vaporisers and e-cigarettes in the South East Asian country.

But advice from Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) is not so clear. News.com.au contacted DFAT, who wouldn’t confirm or comment on the legislation and the warning provided to travellers from the UK’s Foreign Office. There is no such warning on DFAT’s Smart Traveller advice website for Thailand.

“Visa and other entry and exit conditions (such as currency, customs and quarantine regulations) change regularly. DFAT’s Smarttraveller website encourages Australians travelling to Thailand to contact the nearest Embassy or Consulate of Thailand for up-to-date information before leaving Australia,” a DFAT spokesman instead told news.com.au.

The department would also not comment on whether Australian travellers had been arrested in Thailand for possession of e-cigarettes.

But a spokesman for the Tourism Authority of Thailand reiterated the UK government’s advice to Travel Weekly UK, warning tourists not to bring e-cigarettes into the country.

In Australia, e-cigarette devices are legal but the sale and possession of the liquid nicotine used in them is illegal.

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