



AS IT IS

Pandemic Silences Thailand's Tuk Tuks

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Hundreds of **tour** buses, boats and three-wheeled motorized “tuk tuks” sit unused across Thailand’s capital, Bangkok. The coronavirus pandemic and a lack of foreign tourists have brought the transport industry to a halt.

Lunar New Year celebrations begin on Friday. In normal years, the holiday would bring a rise in spending and travel among Thais. It also would bring visitors from China and other places in Asia. Tuk tuks, buses and boats would be in high demand.

But the pandemic has left many drivers and owners struggling economically. A recent study predicted Lunar New Year spending would suffer its sharpest fall in 13 years.

Kraisat Kulkiatprasert **rents** tuk tuks to drivers. Recently, he has been renting out no more than 10 vehicles a day. In the past, he would rent out more than 100 in a day.

“These tuk tuks have been parked for a year...you can see them all covered with dust,” Kraisat said.

“I will **monitor** the situation for another year,” he added. “If it doesn’t get better, I will have to shut down.”

Campon Taikae is a 50-year-old tuk tuk driver. He said he had earned only 50 baht (\$1.70) after driving for hours a day earlier. But he felt he had no chance of finding another job.

In another part of Bangkok, long lines of passenger tour buses sit empty.

“Before the COVID pandemic, I’ve never been short of work,” said driver Tossaporn Rakratchakarn. He remembers busy days in the past when he would **drop off** one group of passengers and immediately pick up another.

“It’s been a year now and there’s been no movement at all,” Tossaporn added.

Wasuchet Sophonsathien is president of the Thai Transportation Operators Association. He said only about 10 percent of Thailand’s 40,000 tour buses were still operating.

The story is the same for many tour boats. Mani Hogkhontod is a 54-year-old boat driver. In the past, passengers would fill his boat. But now, things are completely different.

“I have been thinking about finding a new job,” he said. “But I am worried that I have to start from zero, because of my work experience and age.”

I’m Jonathan Evans.

The Reuters news agency reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted it for VOA Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor.

Words in This Story

tour - *n.* an activity in which you go through a place (such as a building or city) in order to see and learn about the different parts of it

rent - *v.* to pay money in return for being able to use (something that belongs to someone else)

monitor - *v.* to watch, observe, listen to, or check (something) for a special purpose over a period of time

drop off - *phrasal verb.* to take (someone or something) to a place and then leave

