



THAI HOLIDAY HABITS REVEALED

Fewer Thais feel vacation-deprived than people in other countries, but they are more likely to let work pressure spoil their travels

Everyone looks forward to a holiday – a week or two at the beach, a few days exploring a new city, even some time at home to disconnect from work and catch up with friends and family. It has long been recognized that taking regular vacations is important for physical and mental well-being, positive for both workers and employers in terms of happiness, alertness, productivity and efficiency.

Yet there are stark variations in the approach to taking time off in workforces around the world, as laid bare in the 2017 *Vacation Deprivation Study* conducted by travel giant Expedia. The Asia-Pacific region leads the pack as the most vacation-deprived globally, with South Korea topping the list as the country with the biggest proportion of working adults feeling the effects of not taking time away from the office to recharge; 81% of full-time working South Koreans reported feeling vacation-deprived. Thais ranked comparatively positively – in Asia-Pacific and worldwide – with less than half of the working Thai population reporting the same symptoms.

The picture painted by the survey isn't entirely rosy for Thailand, though. While Thais value their health and well-being, they fear taking leave from work; 81% of Thais told the survey they feel they deserve more holiday leave than they receive from employers – making them the fifth most likely in Asia to express this sentiment, after South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and India.

This is despite the fact that over half of Thai workers reported taking less leave than their annual allowance, taking an average of eight days. Employees in Thailand receive fewer vacation days than those in many other countries in ASEAN and around the world, with the average Thai worker receiving just 10 days off a year. However, Thailand's public holiday roster – typically 16-20 days a year – partially compensates, since it is more generous than elsewhere.

Expedia's survey – now in its 17th year, conducted annually since 2000 – found feelings of vacation deprivation to be on the rise not just in Thailand but across the globe; 53% of those questioned in 2017

reported not having enough time away from work, a 4% increase on the previous year. France, Malaysia, Hong Kong and India rounded out the remaining top five countries for vacation deprivation.

Scandinavian countries – frequently ranking among the best in the world in happiness and quality of life, including in terms of work-life balance – predictably did well in workers feeling less deprived of holiday time. Norway came out in first place, followed by the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden and Taiwan, and closely trailed by Finland and the United Kingdom in sixth and seventh place.

“While [vacation] habits differ, the emotional impact of vacations does not,” said Expedia's General Manager for Southeast Asia and India Simon Fiquet. “Somewhere between 80 and 90% of people worldwide say that vacations make them feel happier, better rested, closer to their family, less stressed and more relaxed.”

Indeed, the Expedia study exposed the importance Thai workers attach to using holiday time to reconnect with family. This, together with exploring a new place and getting to know a new culture and cuisine, was identified as a crucial element of the vacation experience; 75% of Thai workers said spending quality time with family, friends or a significant other is what makes them happiest when on holiday, compared to 66% of all those questioned.

Globally, those in marketing and media roles are most likely to feel vacation-deprived, with 66% of their rank identifying in this way, followed by those in food and beverage, education and government professions. Aside from work pressures, an employee's financial situation also plays a part, with those in the agricultural industry most likely to report being unable to afford a holiday, alongside marketing and media, food and beverage, retail and education professionals. Overall, though, just 14% of Thais cited money issues as the reason for not taking a holiday, compared to 35% globally.

Leaders in these most-affected industries may want to take note. While over half of Thai employees

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surveyed agreed that their employers are supportive of them taking leave, managers undoubtedly have more to do to make that realistic. Thais cited the day-to-day realities of work pressure as a significant factor in preventing them from using their full annual leave allowance; 37% said their work schedule does not allow them to take a break or there would be insufficient resources to cover their workload while away.

Indeed, Thais rank No 1 globally among employees most likely to cancel or postpone a vacation due to work pressures – 75% of Thais reported having done this, followed by Emiratis at 70% and Indians at 67%. Likewise, almost three quarters of Thais say the thought of the workload they will have to contend with on their return from vacation plays on their minds when considering how long to spend away from the office.

Even when they do take holidays, Thais rank high in their tendency to check in on work emails or voicemails; 28% of the workforce reported they were likely to do this at least once a day while away, trailing Taiwan, India, Brazil and the Netherlands but nevertheless highlighting an inability to truly disengage from work and take time to relax and recharge.

There is strong evidence that creating a corporate culture that encourages staff to take regular vacations, and disconnect from work when they do so, is in the interest of employers as much as employees. Statistics show this is a fact that companies already recognize.





Higher numbers of employees in Asia than other parts of the world experience feelings of rejuvenation when they return to work after vacation – and Thais lead the pack here. Needless to say, feeling refreshed and clear-headed puts employees in a positive position to increase productivity and efficiency.

As many as 53% of Thai employees waste at least two hours a week at work dreaming about or planning potential holidays; 76% dream about future vacations at work, compared to 60% worldwide, while 85% actively plan their holidays on company time, against 57% globally.

“Thai workers tend to sacrifice their holiday plans for career progression,” suggested Dr Sakita Mounmaithong, clinical instructor in maternal-foetal medicine and host of TV show *The Dr Oz by Siriraj*. “This should be reversed,” he added, “and employers should start cultivating and practising work-life balance options, to create a committed and healthy workforce.”

Speaking to *Elite+* at the launch of the *Vacation Deprivation Study*, Mr Fiquet stressed: “Managers need to realize that putting pressure on employees not to go on leave, not providing them with the cover they need in order to be able to take leave, and even asking them to answer emails during their holidays, all creates a vicious circle and prevents people from switching off, and that is bad for the company. People are more productive if they are relaxed.”

Forward-thinking workplaces like his own, Dr Sakita said, create a safe environment where it is acceptable to plan and take vacations – and indeed where employees are encouraged to do so, based on the understanding that this is healthy for everyone involved.

Fiquet told *Elite+* that, as a manager himself, he leads by example in encouraging his staff to regularly disconnect. “When I go on vacation, I don’t look at my email, and I specifically tell my team to only contact me on WhatsApp if it’s urgent,” he said.

“I set an example by not checking my email all the time, so when my team goes on vacation they feel more at ease doing the same. I also make sure I take all my leave during the year, so my team see me doing that and follow my lead.”

THAI VACATION HABITS IN NUMBERS

- 48% are vacation-deprived
- 75% have cancelled or postponed a trip due to work pressure
- 81% think they deserve more holiday than they get
- 53% spend 2+ hours a week at work dreaming about or planning trips
- 55% find their employer supportive of them taking leave
- 51% take less annual leave than they are entitled to
- 28% check their email or voicemail while on vacation