# Decriminalisation of Cannabis in Thailand: Balancing Growth and Uncertainty



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Since the decriminalisation of cannabis in Thailand in June 2022, the country has witnessed a rapid proliferation of marijuana shops, especially in tourist hotspots like Bangkok, Krabi, and Phuket. Over 7,000 cannabis shops, including trendy dispensaries, beachside bars, and street stalls, have popped up across the nation, drawing both tourists and entrepreneurs into the burgeoning market.

However, the recent election has introduced uncertainty concerning the future of cannabis legality. The new government, led by the Pheu Thai party, campaigned to ban recreational use. Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has indicated plans to reclassify cannabis as a narcotic before the year's end, reflecting the party's stance.

This potential reversal is met with resistance from various stakeholders. Tourists and local businesses, who have embraced the decriminalisation, argue that it enhances Thailand's appeal as a travel destination and supports the post-pandemic economy. Despite the reported boost, critics have pointed out regulatory inconsistencies and concerns about underage access to cannabis.

Economic forecasts denote significant financial implications; the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce projected the cannabis sector could be worth $1.2 billion by 2024. Street vendors like Malee, who transitioned from selling vegetables to cannabis, reflect the entrepreneurial shift influenced by decriminalisation. They now face market pressures such as competition from illegal imports and rising costs.

Political analysts, such as Paul Chambers from Naresuan University, suggest that completely removing cannabis from the economy is improbable. Instead, stricter regulations or licensing requirements may be imposed, which could indirectly increase costs for consumers while maintaining market availability.

Locals like Somyos Saetae, who works in cannabis shops, view this market shift as an opportunity for career advancement. He contends that the media’s portrayal of cannabis use fails to acknowledge the broader consumer base seeking relaxation rather than just recreational partying.

As Thailand navigates this legal crossroads, the cannabis debate continues to impact daily life for both residents and tourists, making the future of the industry one to watch closely.