

# The Effect of Thailand's Subcultures on Other Southeast Asia States' Countercultures

Eswaranathan Ehambaranathan<sup>1\*</sup>, Shagesheela Murugasu<sup>2</sup>, and Mark Hall<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute of the Pacific United, Palmerston North, New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> Universal College of Learning, Palmerston North, New Zealand

<sup>3</sup> Institute of the Pacific United, New Zealand

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

ASEAN,  
conservatism,  
insular,  
liberalism,  
mainland

## ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia (SEA) is geographically divided into two sub-regions, mainland and insular. This region consists of 11 states that consistently oppose social liberal changes and uphold traditional values. Conservatism in politics, economy and society, including the legal realm, is always favoured in this region. However, recent developments in Thailand could test the conservative beliefs and practices in this region. In June 2022, Thailand decriminalised the cultivation and consumption of cannabis. This new law allows people in Thailand to consume marijuana edibles, marijuana-infused drinks and use marijuana for medical purposes. This is not the first time Thailand has liberalised its laws. For example, unlike other SEA countries, Thailand does not regulate the use clothing in private spaces; therefore, there has been a significant increase in the number of clothing-optional resorts in Thailand over recent years. Meanwhile, in 2015, Thailand became the first SEA country to recognise and protect the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals. Such laws and tolerance have now become part of Thailand's practices and subculture but remain taboo in other SEA states. Hence, this research has investigated the impact of developments in Thailand's subculture on the SEA sub-regions, with a particular focus on cannabis law reform. Therefore, this research addresses the primary research question: in the context of 'weed tourism', could Thailand's recent cannabis culture impact other Southeast Asian countries? Due to the infancy of this research, a qualitative and digital ethnographical research method was chosen. The thematic analysis was adopted from the secondary government-published data by eliciting key themes. The findings revealed that weed tourism activities would encourage the people in this region to understand, respect, or even practice Thailand's subculture themselves. The mainland states may tend to accept and observe Thailand's cannabis subculture in their states. However, the insular states will not accept such subcultures and will always consider such activities as countercultural.

\* Corresponding author E-mail address: nathane@ipu.ac.nz

### Cite this article as:

Ehambaranathan, E., Murugasu, Sh., & Hall, M. (2023). The Effect of Thailand's Subcultures on Other Southeast Asia States' Countercultures. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, 6(3): 108-121. <https://doi.org/10.33422/jarss.v6i3.1079>

© The Author(s). 2023 **Open Access.** This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and redistribution in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and source are credited.



## **1. Introduction**

The region of Southeast Asia (SEA) exemplifies both the benefits and drawbacks of globalisation. Due to its wealth in resources and its advantageous location, this region has, for a very long time, been subject to the influence of outside forces. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has introduced a new degree of regional cooperation to the area, has the purpose of integrating SEA countries in the region. The region of SEA is split into two sub-regions: the mainland and the islands (Figure 1). There are 11 different countries that make up this region. Membership in ASEAN which was founded on August 8, 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, and this has served to bring together the states that are located in this region. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand were the founding member states of ASEAN. Brunei Darussalam became a member of ASEAN on January 7, 1984. This was followed by Vietnam on July 28, 1995, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar on July 23, 1997, and Cambodia on April 30, 1999, bringing the current total number of ASEAN Member states to 10 (ASEAN, 2022; Henderson, 1999; SarDesar, 2013).

SEA comprises 10.5% of the overall land area of Asia and 3% of the total land area of the Earth. The population of this region is over 675 million people, which accounts for around 8.5% of the total population of the world (ASEAN, 2022; Narine, 2022). The mainland sub-region of SEA is referred to by names such as the Indochinese Peninsula and Indochina. It is located to the east of the Indian subcontinent and to the south of the Chinese mainland. To the west, it is bounded by the Indian Ocean, while to the east, it is bounded by the Pacific Ocean. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam are all members of this group of countries (Figure 1). Buddhism predominates across the board in the cultural landscape of this sub-region (Rowntree, Lewis, Price, & Wyckoff, 2010). It is also one of the regions in the world with the lowest rate of urbanisation and features a multicultural and multiethnic population. Human rights are routinely violated in this region as a direct result of the political instability that exists here. For instance, in the span of just more than a century, Thailand has seen 13 successful and 9 unsuccessful military coups. The most recent military coup occurrence in this sub-region took place in February of 2021 in Myanmar (Koga, 2022). Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, and the Philippines are the countries that make up the insular SEA sub-region known as the Islands of SEA. This area is a subrealm that is made up of a number of peninsulas and islands. However, despite its status as a developing region, it is frequently the site of environmental and regional strife. All of the states' histories in this sub-region include periods of colonial rule. In fact, Thailand was the only country in SEA that was never colonised.

Religions were introduced into this region through Western colonisation and traders. Colonial powers such as the Portuguese introduced Roman Catholicism to Malacca, Malaysia, and areas of eastern Indonesia during the 15th century. Buddhism is currently widely practised in four states such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Muslims traders were the first to bring Islam to SEA. By 1650, Islam had surpassed other religions and became the dominant religion in Malaysia and Indonesia (Croissant & Lorenz, 2018; Selwyn, 1993). As a direct consequence of this, SEA is one of the regions in the world with the lowest religious diversity. For example, with approximately 87% of its 244 million people identifying as Muslims, Indonesia is now the world's largest state with a Muslim population (ASEAN, 2022).



**Figure 1.** Southeast Asia: The Mainland Region and the Insular Region

Note: Adapted from Universities of Texas Libraries (2003)

So, when Thailand became the first country in Asia to decriminalize the consumption of cannabis in 2022 several states were not comfortable with the new law. Thailand's new law allows marijuana foods, beverages, and medical use in Thailand. Such behaviours are part of Thailand's subculture but remain counterculture in other SEA states. The impact on SEA sub-regions was investigated in this study. This study seeks to answer the question: Could Thailand's recent cannabis culture have an impact on other SEA countries? Because this is a new study, qualitative and digital ethnography were employed. The secondary government data were analysed via thematic analysis. It is anticipated that due to tourism, people in this SEA region will be able to learn, respect, and, indeed, practise Thailand's new subcultures themselves.

Thailand's tourism industry recovered well in 2022, but international arrivals will not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2024. The gradual border reopening has resulted in an increase in international visitors in 2022, with 4.4 million tourists by the end of August 2022, up from slightly more than 380,000 in 2021. The increase in visitor arrivals is expected to continue in the coming years, supporting tourism jobs and revenues in Thailand. Tourism shall be a primary sector of economic growth and it is expected to increase Thailand's GDP in 2023 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022). The new cannabis law is expected to attract more international tourists and promote 'weed' tourism in Thailand. Thailand is currently the home of thousands of cannabis dispensaries, and is unofficially known as the "Amsterdam of the East" (Ford, Richards, & Vimons, 2022; France 24, 2022; Mehran, Olya, & Alipour, 2017; Shin, 2022).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Social Conservatism**

The historical and religious influences in the region contribute to the social conservatism that is an essential characteristic of SEA. Social conservatism is a political philosophy whose primary concern is the maintenance of long-established norms, values, and beliefs (Rowntree, Lewis, Price, & Wyckoff, 2010). It places emphasis on a concern with moral and social values, which many adherents of the ideology believe have deteriorated in today's modern society as a result of liberalism. Social conservatives in SEA organise in support of duty, and move to uphold traditional values and social institutions such as traditional family structures, gender roles, sexual relations, and national patriotism (Croissant & Lorenz, 2018; SarDesai, 2013). Social conservatives in SEA also uphold traditional religious practices. The anti-democratic and anti-liberal social forces in SEA have successfully outweighed democratic and liberal elements via laws and policies in civil society (Ralinas, Juhanda, Faozen, & Jatmiko, 2022; Saat & Ibrahim, 2022). As a result, political and ideological divides exist in this region and they have become more pronounced over the course of the most recent years.

As a case in point, on December 6, 2022, the Indonesian legislature unanimously enacted a new, comprehensive criminal code that criminalises extramarital sexual interactions. The law is applicable to everyone in Indonesia including international tourists (Frost, 2022). Recent modifications to the Indonesian penal code are a clear reflection of the trend of rising social conservatism that is prevalent throughout SEA. There are trends that are suggestive of tension in this regard, however. Only a few days before the Indonesian law came into force, for instance, on November 29, 2022 Singapore decriminalised male sexual activity (Goh, 2022). But, concurrently, the constitution in Singapore was altered to preclude legal challenges to the conventional standards of marriage. Several public issues, particularly those pertaining to public housing, education, and family planning, are affected by the way marriage is interpreted in Singapore. As a result, same-sex couples cannot enjoy the rights and advantages of marriage, including social security, inheritance, adoption, common ownership of property and goods, tax and benefits. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese government announced on November 11, 2013, that it will no longer impose fines on anyone who conduct public same-sex wedding ceremonies (Toui Tre News, 2013). However, such ceremonies are neither recognised by the law nor offered legal protection.

In spite of its rapid economic progress, Singapore is still often regarded as a conservative state that is especially stringent with some regulations. Violators of these laws face the possibility of being arrested or imprisoned. The authorities even continue to use a centuries-old procedure called corporal punishment, which consists of hitting a person with a rattan cane. As a legacy of British colonisation, caning is still employed as a form of disciplinary action in Malaysia and Brunei. The province of Aceh in Indonesia, which has a mainly Muslim population, is the only one in the country to observe Islamic law and to publicly cane people for offences such as stealing, gambling, and adultery. In Aceh, Sharia law is strictly implemented, which includes prescribing the outward appearance of society members via a dress code (Rowntree, Lewis, Price, & Wyckoff, 2010; SarDesai, 2013).

Thus, being modestly dressed in SEA, such as being covered from the waist to the knees for men, and having the arms, legs, back and chest covered for women are typically regarded as essential. For instance, despite being a multicultural society, Malaysia has many local dress code traditions and expectations. In Malaysia, it is strongly recommended that members of the public, particularly tourists, stay away from certain types of apparel, such as singlets and short skirts. Meanwhile, in Singapore, Section 27A of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and

Nuisance Act) makes it illegal to be naked in public, which includes being naked in private locations that are visible to the general public (Singapore Statutes Online, 2020). However, despite the fact that going topless or nudist while sunbathing is considered impolite in Thailand, Thailand's legal system does permit clothing-optional resorts. In a move consistent with this trend toward social liberalisation, meanwhile, on June 9, 2022, cannabis in Thailand was removed from the list of illegal substances (Channel News Asia, 2022).

## **2.2. Weed Tourism: Subculture vs Counterculture**

This legal framework for cannabis dates back to the 1970s. The Narcotics Act was enacted by Thailand in 1979. The classification of cannabis as a Class 5 controlled substance was determined. However, in 2019, Thailand passed the Narcotics Act (No. 7), which legalises the use of cannabis for scientific and medical study. Therefore, initiatives to use cannabis in research and development have been given the go-ahead to instigate the cannabis subculture (Ives, 2022; Sommano, et al., 2022). In the year 2020, the Thai Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that cannabis leaves and roots generated from recognised sources will not be matched the criteria for classification as type 5 narcotics. These actions made it possible to legalise cannabis while setting some restrictions. During the following year, the FDA registered approximately one hundred locations such as government entities and agricultural communities with state registrations to cultivate marijuana (Hagit & Sharon, 2022; Ives, 2022). On June 9, 2022, Thailand made history by permanently removing cannabis and hemp from the list of Category 5 narcotics (Frost, 2022).

This decision was highly significant enormous with regard to the tourism industry in Thailand. Initially, all aspects of the cannabis plant, including possession, manufacture, distribution, consumption, and sales, were legalised in Thailand for medical use only. However, since the beginning of June 2022, numerous food and beverage companies around the nation have capitalised on the recent liberalisation of marijuana by stocking the shelves of convenience stores with cannabis-infused foods and beverages containing marijuana-derived ingredients. It should be noted that while in order for food and drink products to be legally sold in Thailand they must contain less than 0.2 percent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), cannabis-infused food and drinks can be served including to tourists in cafes and restaurants provided the THC content of these products remains below the 0.2 percent threshold. Notwithstanding this point, a recent study conducted at a renowned institution in Thailand revealed that thirty percent of these items exceeded the 0.2% THC limit set by the government (Bush, 2022). THC is the principal psychoactive component of marijuana. As a result, without a doubt, the cannabis counterculture has begun to grow in Thailand following the drug's legalisation.

It is plausible to argue that in global terms the cannabis subculture functions as a cultural subgroup inside the larger culture. Members of this group could hold beliefs and passions that are not shared by the larger culture. Around the world there are now neon-lit signs featuring cannabis plants, and cannabis is making its way into the food, drinks, and cosmetics industries. This tendency is bolstered by the prospect of profit from weed tourism, which is anticipated to be worth more than one billion dollars for Thailand by 2025 (France 24, 2022). The revenue from cannabis has been a lifeline for cities devastated by the restrictions related to Covid, which have wrecked Thailand's tourism-based economy (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022). Cannabis in Thailand has now been advertised as a vacation experience by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), which has published a series of guidebooks promoting places where tourists may visit organic cannabis fields and receive cannabis oil massages (Tanakasempipat, 2022). Since June 2022, more than one million people have been granted permission to cultivate cannabis through the government's mobile phone application.

According to the Thailand Ministry of Public Health, this number is anticipated to continue rising (Ives, 2022; Sommano, et al., 2022).

However, throughout the rest of the SEA, drug prohibitions are stringent. In Singapore, in 2022 itself, five men were executed for drug trafficking offences (Amnesty International, 2022). Human Rights Watch (2022) reports that since assuming office on June 30, 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines has waged a war on drugs that has resulted in the deaths of over 12,000 Filipinos, largely the urban poor. The Philippine National Police has been implicated in at least 2,555 killings. In a campaign that may constitute crimes against humanity it has been reported that Duterte and other senior officials have approved and incited those killings (Human Rights Watch). Thus, with the prominent exception of Thailand, the cannabis culture in SEA remains a prominent counterculture. The ideals and conventions of cannabis consumption behaviour diverge significantly between Thai and other SEA mainstream societies. The Thai society's tolerance towards cannabis appears to be strongly contradictory to SEA mainstream cultural values.

This is not the first time Thailand has legalised a subculture that contrasts with that of other SEA nations. In 2007, NAT, which stands for Naturist Association Thailand Co., Ltd., was founded. In 2011, Chan Resort became the first resort in SEA to legally permit visitors to disrobe on the property (Naturist Association Thailand, 2022). In 2015, when the Barefeet Naturist Resort in Bangkok initially opened its doors, visitors were not permitted to choose whether or not to wear clothing. Guests are required to be naturists or to be accompanied by a naturist at all times (Naturist Association Thailand, 2022; Simandhan, 2013). The NAT has three thousand members as of 2016, including individuals from India, Australia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Taiwan. In 2022, Thailand was home to eight resorts that did not restrict tourists to wearing clothing. The resorts are well established around Thailand's major cities such as in Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, and Chiang Mai, despite the pandemic (Naturist Association Thailand, 2022). Thailand is a popular destination for naturists from other nations since the climate is good throughout the year. The majority of non-Western clothing optional tourists are not just from SEA but also from Australia, India, the Middle East, and China (Simandhan, 2013).

Meanwhile, in 2015, the Thai Parliament passed the Gender Equality Act. This law is intended to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community members from discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (Royal Thai Embassy, 2015). Although Thailand has a long history of tolerant attitudes towards LGBT individuals, this is the first law that clearly guaranteed their rights (Reid, Newman, Lau, Tepjan, & Akkakanjanasupar, 2022). As a result, in 2017, Bangkok was voted the second most LGBT-friendly city in Asia due to its thriving LGBT community. Bangkok was ranked as the 61st greatest LGBT destination in the world, despite the fact that same-sex marriage remains outlawed. The score was determined based on surveys conducted in 80 nations, in which respondents ranked the LGBT tourism such as dating places, nightlife, openness, safety, and legal rights in each location (Jackson & Duangwisets, 2017; Nestpick, 2018). As expected, no other ASEAN cities were ranked and listed on this survey.

Meanwhile, travelling to Bangkok or other cities in Thailand is not a challenge for ASEAN community members. The ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption, which was launched during the 39th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on July 25, 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, was a significant initiative designed to boost and speed up intra-ASEAN and labour liberalisation (Ehambaranathan, Murugasu, & Wilkinson, 2019; Petri, Plummer, & Zhai, 2012). This programme permits ASEAN individuals including tourists travelling throughout the SEA to travel visa-free for 14 working days from the date of admission (Pinatih, 2015; Ramos, Untong,

& Kaosa-ard, 2017). As a result of geographical distance and visa exemption, tourists from other SEA have been visiting Thailand in great numbers (Haini & Anastasiou, 2021; Henkel, Henkel, Agrusa, Agrusa, & Tanner, 2006). Thus, SEA tourists passing through Thailand would have easy access to behaviours or substances, including cannabis, forbidden in their own countries.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The research objectives were to understand the effect of Thailand's Subcultures on other SEA States' Countercultures. The primary research question was to investigate the effect(s) of Thailand's Subcultures on other SEA states in the context of weed tourism particularly, that is, Thailand's recent cannabis culture. As a result, a qualitative research approach drawing on data and analysis were utilized. Qualitative data that was non-numerical in nature such as text documents was compiled and analysed in order to gain a better understanding of ideas, perspectives, or experiences. The method of digital ethnography was selected for the study of individuals in a real-world setting. Digital ethnography, also known as mobile ethnography, is a modern, digital-first approach to conducting ethnographic research remotely (Glaser & Strauss, 2000) (Collis & Hussey, 2009). In terms of data gathering, the social and behavioural sciences rely heavily on ethnography, which is also a common qualitative research technique. Secondary data collection was employed to collect data, which was then transformed into knowledge that may be utilized to develop conclusions on the functions of societies and individuals. This methodology also allowed researchers to observe responses from the SEA states in their natural surroundings.

To participate in this study, SEA states were required to meet two inclusion criteria. The consequences of the recent cannabis counterculture and cannabis law in Thailand were the sole factor taken into account. Firstly, only the views and opinions after June 9, 2022, from the SEA government authorities, specifically government ministries and leaders were considered. Second, only viewpoints from ASEAN member states were examined. Consequently, only the opinions of the governments of the 10 member states were considered. The East Timor government's views on the cannabis subculture in Thailand were not included because East Timor is not an official ASEAN member state.

Thematic analysis was conducted to investigate the recurring themes within the secondary data (Olsen, 2004). As it is a method rather than a methodology, this approach is not beholden to a particular epistemological or theoretical stance, unlike many other qualitative research studies. Thus, this analysis makes it a very versatile strategy added a substantial advantage given the diversity of this research topic (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). This qualitative data analysis was used to analyse primarily non-numerical data such as audios, videos, and texts from government and official press websites, as well as from the official ASEAN website. The researchers classified all the data systematically and then organised the codes, based on similarities, into larger and larger categories, resulting in a hierarchical structure represented by the likes of code, subtheme, and theme. The researchers followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, which included familiarising themselves with the obtained secondary data, generating initial codes, searching for common themes, evaluating the themes, identifying themes, and writing up the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Using Voxco software, the researchers analysed the selected reports and searched for salient patterns in the data's repeated themes.

#### 4. Findings

Since the 1970s, ASEAN governments have primarily employed strong punitive measures in an attempt to curb drug consumption and distribution. Nonetheless, on June 9, 2022, Thailand legalised the cultivation of cannabis and its consumption in food and beverages, and removed cannabis from its list of prohibited drugs. Thailand's new law aims to enhance its agriculture and tourism industries and allow the use of plant for medical purposes. Immediately following its introduction, this new Thai law was reported in the media of all ten ASEAN member states. Hence, the researchers reviewed and analysed the responses of the ASEAN member states' leaders and government representatives to the reports of the change in Thai cannabis law with the objective being to address the primary research question. The findings of this research indicate that weed tourism activities in Thailand will help the inhabitants of this region to comprehend, respect, or perhaps even themselves adopt Thailand's subculture. Geopolitical factors have an intriguing effect on the cannabis culture in SEA. In terms of Thailand's subcultures, mainland and insular states tend to hold opposing viewpoints.

##### 4.1. Mainland States

The Kingdom of Cambodia (Cambodia) - Khan Samban the director of the industrial crops department at the Ministry of Agriculture said *"while cannabis cultivation will be still illegal here, the government could consider lifting the ban. It is an easy crop for planting and can grow in many areas, the government would consider amending the law for special cases."* (Olszewski, 2022).

Republic of the Union of Myanmar (Myanmar) – There has been no official remark from the military government of Myanmar regarding the legalisation and usage of cannabis in Thailand. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law in Myanmar, which was passed in 1993, regulates the use and possession of cannabis in Myanmar. Cannabis is still prohibited in Myanmar. However, this law was changed in 2018 to state that drug users are no longer considered criminals. Drug use has been decriminalised, although possession of minor quantities has not. Some argue that this weakens the entire regulation because it is difficult to use cannabis without also possessing it (Veldman, 2021).

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) – Similarly to Myanmar, Laos government officials made no official statements regarding cannabis legislation in Thailand. However, the Lao Ministry of Health informed the Thai Ambassador to Laos in a letter dated July 2022 that the kratom plant shall remain illegal in Laos. This includes cultivating, possessing, purchasing, selling, processing, storing, and importing or providing the plant to Laos (Vongphachanh, 2022). Kratom is a herbal substance that has effects similar to those of opioids and may cause psychotropic effects. It can also be addictive.

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (Viet Nam) – The Viet Nam government also issued no formal pronouncements regarding this topic. Even for medical purposes, cannabis is outlawed in Vietnam, however the nonpsychoactive chemical contained in marijuana is permitted and readily distributed. Vietnam classifies marijuana as a controlled substance, like heroin and cocaine. As such, it bears the same severe punishments as imprisonment or the death penalty. Recent reports indicate that police in Vietnam do make arrests on recreational cannabis consumption-related offences. However, offenders, including tourists, only face a maximum of a USD100 fine and a harsh warning (Asia News Network, 2022).

#### **4.2. Insular States**

Malaysia – The Home Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainuddin in a speech read by Home Ministry deputy secretary-general Datuk Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman stated *“Malaysians traveling to Thailand would be easily exposed to cannabis-based products in the form of food, drinks and supplements sold there. Furthermore, cannabis-based products in the form of food, drinks and supplements may be smuggled into Malaysia. Malaysia is concerned that some Malaysians may become addicted to cannabis because they had unwittingly consumed such products.”* (Basyir, 2022).

Republic of Singapore (Singapore) – The Minister for Home Affairs and Law, Kasiswanathan Shanmugam shared the point that *“freer availability of cannabis in Thailand, to which a lot of Singaporeans go to and from, where a lot of tourists come to Singapore, is going to present more challenges.”* (Channel News Asia, 2022)

Republic of Indonesia (Indonesia) - *“The Royal Thai Embassy in Jakarta warn Thai people not to carry cannabis, hemp, or products with cannabis or hemp ingredients into Indonesia. Violators of the law could face a fine of at least 5 years to life imprisonment, capital punishment or a fine of roughly 2.4 million baht (approximately USD 67,800)”*.

Negara Brunei Darussalam (Brunei) - On 13 July 2022, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) made a formal statement stating that people convicted of ingesting Class 'A' drugs face up to ten years in jail, a fine of up to USD 15,000, or both. Therefore, NCB reminded Brunei citizens and permanent residents who visit foreign countries that they must be aware of this penalty. Under Brunei's law, Bruneian and its permanent residents caught ingesting drugs outside of the country are also subject to prosecution, regardless of where the drugs were ingested. Chapter 27 of the Misuse of Drugs (MDA) Act of Brunei criminalises the possession, consumption, and cultivation of cannabis (Hayat, 2022). Distribution or possession of more than 500 grams of cannabis will result in the obligatory death penalty (Narcotics Control Bureau, 2022).

Republic of the Philippines (Philippines) - The Thai cannabis law has not as yet impacted on the legal position regarding drugs in the Philippines. There was no formal statement but the new President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., has pledged to take a softer stance on illegal narcotics than his predecessor. However, the government made it clear that cannabis possession will remain illegal in the Philippines. In 2002, the Comprehensive Dangerous Drug Act was passed, which classified cannabis as a dangerous substance. Possession and use of cannabis are therefore regarded as illegal in the Philippines, with possible punishments including life imprisonment or the death penalty (Strangio, 2022).

According to the findings, the mainland and insular states of SEA are currently engaging with prepared to face the new cannabis law in Thailand. Cannabis culture will continue to exist as a counterculture in all SEA states for the foreseeable future. However, mainland SEA states such as Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam may have the propensity to tolerate and observe Thai cultural characteristics within their own territorial boundaries. The degree of these states' acceptability of cannabis use can be deduced from their official proclamations that have been disseminated through various media outlets. However, it does not appear that the insular SEA states are prepared for the establishment of such subcultures, and it is apparent that they will continue to categorise cannabis-related activities as those belonging to countercultures. There is a chance that the role played by politics and religions is the essential factor that requires further examination in future studies of this matter. For example, the Philippines and Vatican are the only two independent jurisdictions in the world where divorce remains illegal under their respective legal systems. According to the Philippines Commission on Women (2021),

the Family Code enacted in 1987 authorises relative divorce or legal separation but still imposes no regulation on divorce per se. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), Brunei's Sharia law requires the death penalty (by stoning) for offences such as having sex with a non-spouse (Articles 68 and 69) or having anal intercourse (Article 82). Therefore, with these strong markers of social conservatism in mind, it would be difficult for these insular states to ease their cannabis regulations. Consequently, in the future, there may be significant geopolitical issues in SEA as there could be differences between the two sub-regions, as governments on the mainland may adopt a more relaxed and liberal attitude on their cannabis regulations, while those on the insular may take the opposite posture. Therefore, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption could be stalled or revised as SEA states could face severely divided views on cannabis subculture and weed tourism in Thailand, which could also jeopardise ASEAN and the region's stability and prosperity.

## **5. Conclusion**

The SEA region is divided into mainland and insular sub-regions. The ten member states of the ASEAN region have always been known for opposing social liberalisation and upholding traditional values. Thailand decriminalised cannabis in June 2022, permitting cannabis-infused foods, beverages, and medical use of the drug widely throughout Thailand. In contrast, other SEA nations, prohibit the usage of cannabis in their states and consider cannabis use to belong to a counterculture in Thailand. This study assessed the impact of this law change on SEA sub-regions. This study addressed the question of whether Thailand's recent cannabis law could influence other SEA nations. Due to the novelty of this research, qualitative and digital ethnography were employed. The approach included the study of content extracted topics from secondary government data. The findings of this research suggested that mainland states may accept and apply their existing cannabis counterculture as a subculture. However, Thailand's cannabis subcultures and weed tourism in Thailand shall remain countercultures in the insular states' region. Given this point regarding the relevant geopolitical differences, such as the acceptance and tolerance of cannabis culture between insular and mainland states, it is stated that the issue could pose a future challenge to the prosperity of this SEA region.

## **References**

- Amnesty International. (2022). *Singapore: Fifth execution in under four months carried out*. London: Amnesty International. Retrieved November 5, 2022, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/singapore-execution-nazeri-bin-lajim/>
- ASEAN. (2022). *About ASEAN*. Jakarta: Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Retrieved from <https://asean.org/about-asean>
- Asia News Network. (2022). *Vietnam's cannabis laws: Fine for recreational use, jail time for criminal offenders*. Manila: Asia News Network. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2022/08/31/vietnam039s-cannabis-laws-fine-for-recreational-use-jail-time-for-criminal-offenders>
- Basyir, M. (2022). *Legalisation of cannabis in Thailand a challenge for Malaysia to curb drug abuse, smuggling*. Kuala Lumpur: New Straits Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/10/837717/legalisation-cannabis-thailand-challenge-malaysia-curb-drug-abuse>
- Benazic, M., Uckar, D., & Benazic, D. (2022). *The Impact Of Tourist Arrivals On Retail Trade Turnover In Croatia*. Economic and Social Development.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bush, A. (2022). *Cannabis is now legal in Thailand, but it's complicated: what travelers need to know*. Lonely Planet. Retrieved November 30, 2022, from <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/news/thailand-cannabis-guide>
- Channel News Asia. (2022). *Legalisation of cannabis in Thailand will present more challenges, with many people travelling to and from Singapore*. Singapore: Channel News Asia. Retrieved from <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/thailand-travel-weed-legal-cannabis-cnb-singapore-shanmugam-2915951>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2009). *Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Higher Education.
- Croissant, A., & Lorenz, P. (2018). *Comparative Politics of Southeast Asia : An Introduction to Governments and Political Regimes*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Economist Intelligence Unit. (2022). *Thailand's tourism industry: Adapting to changing times*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit. Retrieved December 5, 2022, from <https://www.eiu.com/n/thailand-tourism-industry-adapting-to-changing-times/>
- Ehambaranathan, E., Murugasu, S., & Wilkinson, P. (2019). India's Act East Policy: How important is it towards ASEAN? *Foreign Policy Research Centre*. Retrieved from [https://www.fprc.in/fprc\\_journal.php](https://www.fprc.in/fprc_journal.php)
- Ford, M., Richards, D., & Vimons, S. (2022). *'It's like the new Amsterdam': The rush to cash in on Thailand's hazy cannabis laws*. Sydney: ABC News. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-06/legal-cannabis-changing-thailand-into-amsterdam-of-asia/101500422>
- France 24. (2022, November 10). The rise of weed tourism: Is Thailand turning into the 'Amsterdam of Asia'? Paris.
- Frost, R. (2022). *Indonesia bans sex outside of marriage: Will new laws affect tourists too?* Lyon: Euronews.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (2000). *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Taylor & Francis Inc.
- Goh, Y. H. (2022). *Parliament repeals Section 377A, endorses amendments protecting definition of marriage*. Singapore: The Straits Times.
- Hagit, B.-N., & Sharon, H. (2022). Post-pandemic cannabis and gambling policy changes to attract tourists may lead to future health problems and costs. *Journal of Travel Medicine*.
- Haini, H., & Anastasiou, Z. (2021). Examining the productivity of the ASEAN economies in the presence of transient and persistent efficiency. *Journal of Business and Economic Analysis*, 4(2), 95-117. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2737566821500067>
- Hayat, H. (2022). *Bruneians consuming drugs overseas can also be charged*. Bandar Seri Begawan: Borneo Bulletin. Retrieved from <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/bruneians-consuming-drugs-overseas-can-also-be-charged/>

- Henderson, J. C. (1999). Tourism management and the Southeast Asian economic and environmental crisis: a Singapore perspective. *Manging Leisure*, 107-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/136067199375887>
- Henkel, R., Henkel, P., Agrusa, W., Agrusa, J., & Tanner, J. (2006). Thailand as a tourist destination: Perceptions of international visitors and Thai residents. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 11(3), 269-287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941660600753299>
- Human Rights Watch. (2019). *Brunei's Pernicious New Penal Code*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/22/bruneis-pernicious-new-penal-code>
- Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). *Philippines: Events of 2021*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/philippines>
- Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). *Philippines' 'War on Drugs'*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/tag/philippines-war-drugs>
- Ives, M. (2022). *Weed Is Now Legal in Thailand. How Long Will the High Times Last?* New York: New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/world/asia/thailand-weed-cannabis-law.html>
- Jackson, P. A., & Duangwiset, N. (2017). Review of studies of gender and sexual diversity in Thailand in Thai and international academic publications. *3th International Conference on Thai Studies*. Chiang Mai.
- Koga, K. (2022). *Managing Great Power Politics: ASEAN, Institutional Strategy, and the South China Sea*. Singapore: Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2611-2>
- Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. *The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 8(3), 33501-33514.
- Mehran, J., Olya, H. G., & Alipour, H. (2017). Trend of Outbound Tourism Expenditure Modeling: A Review Study. *7th Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management (AHTMM) Conference* (p. 610). Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management.
- Narcotics Control Bureau. (2022). *Cannabis*. Bandar Seri Begawan: Prime Minister's Office, Brunei Darussalam. Retrieved from <https://www.narcotics.gov.bn/SitePages/Cannabis.aspx>
- Narine, S. (2022). *Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626373440>
- Naturist Association Thailand. (2022). *Naturism Newsroom*. Bangkok: Naturist Association Thailand. Retrieved from <https://thailandnaturist.com/naturist-news-update/>
- Nestpick. (2018). *Best LGBT Cities 2017*. Berlin: Nestpick Global Services. Retrieved from <https://www.nestpick.com/best-lgbt-cities/>
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Olsen, W. (2004). *Triangulation in social research: Qualitative and quantitative methods can really be mixed*. Ormskirk: Causeway Press.
- Olszewski, P. (2022). *Thai medical cannabis advocate retires in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Khmer Times. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501090781/thai-medical-cannabis-advocate-retires-in-cambodia/>

- Petri, P. A., Plummer, M. G., & Zhai, F. (2012). ASEAN Economic Community: A General Equilibrium Analysis. *Asia Economic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Philippines Commission on Women. (2021). *Adopting Divorce in the Family Code*. Manila: Philippines Commission on Women.
- Pinatih, N. D. (2015). ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption and Its Impact to the Rise of Transnational Crime in East Java Province, Indonesia. *The International Academic Forum*. The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijss.2.2.02>
- Ralinas, F., Juhanda, Faozen, F., & Jatmiko, H. (2022). Recovery Strategies of Tourism Businesses in the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. *ASEAN Journal on Hospitality and Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.5614/ajht.2022.20.1.07>
- Ramos, V., Untong, A., & Kaosa-ard, M. (2017). ASEAN's intra-regional tourism demand to Thailand. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 22(9), 909-921. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2017.1359192>
- Reid, L., Newman, P. A., Lau, H., Tepjan, S., & Akkakanjanasupar, P. (2022). A Scoping Review of LGBT+ Inclusion in Thailand: Policy Proposals and Recommendations. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 19, 1731–1746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-022-00751-6>
- Rowntree, L., Lewis, M., Price, M., & Wyckoff, W. (2010). *Diversity Amid Globalization: World Regions, Environment, Development*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Royal Thai Embassy. (2015). *Thailand praised for recognizing LGBT rights*. Washington D.C.: Royal Thai Embassy (USA). Retrieved from <https://thaiembdc.org/2015/10/06/5684/>
- Saat, N., & Ibrahim, A. (2022). *Alternative Voices in Muslim Southeast Asia: Discourse and Struggles*. Amsterdam: Brill Publishers.
- SarDesai, D. R. (2013). *Southeast Asia: Past and present*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Selwyn, T. (1993). Peter Pan in South-East Asia. In M. Hitchcock, V. K. King, & J. G. Michael, *Tourism in South-East Asia*. Routledge.
- Shin, M. (2022). When life gives you lemons, make lemonade: post-COVID marketing strategy to motivate travel by triggering traveler's inaction regret. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 940-953. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2022.2142621>
- Simandhan, V. M. (2013). *Naturism in Thailand*. Retrieved from <https://www.simandan.com/naturism-in-thailand/>
- Singapore Statutes Online. (2020). *Miscellaneous Offences Act 1906*. Singapore: Singapore Statutes Online. Retrieved from <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/MOPONA1906>
- Sommano, S. R., Tangpao, T., Pankasemsuk, T., Ponpanumas, V., Phimolsiripol, Y., Rachtanapun, P., & Prasad, S. K. (2022). Growing ganja permission: a real gate-way for Thailand's promising industrial crop? *Journal of Cannabis Research*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42238-022-00121-4>
- Strangio, S. (2022). *Philippine President Marcos Promises to Dial Back Deadly Drug War*. Washington, D.C.: The Diplomat. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/philippine-president-marcos-promises-to-dial-back-deadly-drug-war/>
- Tanakasempipat, P. (2022). *Thailand's Cannabis Industry Clouded as Legal Threats Emerge*. Bloomberg. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-11->

[24/thailand-s-cannabis-tourism-industry-clouded-as-legal-threats-emerge#:~:text=The%20Tourism%20Authority%20of%20Thailand,and%20get%20cannabis%20oil%20massages](#)

Toui Tre News. (2013). *Vietnam to remove fines on same-sex marriage*. Ho Chi Minh City: Toui Tre News.

University of Texas Libraries. (2003). *Southeast Asia: The Mainland Region and the Insular Region (the Islands)*. University of Texas Libraries. Retrieved December 26, 2021, from [https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/southeast\\_asia\\_pol\\_2003.jpg](https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/southeast_asia_pol_2003.jpg)

Veldman, M. (2021). *Cannabis in Myanmar – Laws, Use, and History*. Amsterdam: Sensi Seeds.

Vongphachanh, M. (2022). *Laos Informs Thais that Kratom Remains Illegal*. Vientiane: The Laothian Times. Retrieved from <https://laotiantimes.com/2022/07/08/laos-informs-thais-that-kratom-remains-illegal/>