

‘The Beach’ closing to tourists

Ailing Thai beach made famous by Hollywood needs time to rest

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA
Associated Press

MAYA BAY, Thailand — Once a pristine Thai paradise, the secluded bay made famous by the Leonardo DiCaprio movie “The Beach” has been exhausted by mass tourism. Now it’s getting a break.

After Friday, the daily influx of dozens of boats and thousands of visitors unsuccessfully scrambling for an unspoiled view of Maya Bay’s emerald waters and glistening white sand will end. The attraction is being closed for four months to give its coral reefs and sea life a chance to recover.

Thailand has promoted unfettered tourism for decades and the onslaught on Maya Bay, which is on Phi Phi Leh Island in the Andaman Sea, has only picked up pace in recent years. Authorities now say they are striving to balance profit and conservation and the closure will happen every year.

It is part of a rethink happening globally about unrestricted tourism that brings in big dollars but damages historic sites, harms the environment and often alienates locals.

Last month, the Philippines began a six-month closure of popular Boracay Island, whose waters President Rodrigo Duterte described as a “cesspool.” Venice, the famed Italian lagoon city that lives off tourism, installed gates at two access bridges during a four-day holiday in April so it could turn back visitors if numbers became overwhelming.

Many of Thailand’s marine national parks are closed from mid-May to mid-October during the monsoon season but because of Maya Bay’s popularity, it hasn’t had a break since a Hollywood crew set foot on its sands in 1999 to film the dark backpacker tale based on a novel



AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Tourists enjoy the beach on Maya Bay, Phi Phi Leh island in Krabi province, Thailand, Thursday.

by Alex Garland. Its corals have been decimated by the suffocating clouds of sand and sediment churned up by speedboats.

“I tried to push this campaign for many, many years, but you know in Thailand we are a tourism industry country and we need a lot of money, so before not so many people listened,” said Thon Thamrongnawasawat, a marine biologist and member of a government committee on development and the environment.

“It should have been done 10 years ago but at least it has been done,” he said.

Thailand had about 35 million international visitors last year, a five-fold increase in little more than two decades.

Shi Pengfei, among the last tourists to visit Maya Bay before its closure, said he had no idea that there would be so many people on the beach.

“I feel that there are so



AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Jeanette van Leeuwin, a 29-year-old from The Netherlands, helps national park rangers with coral propagation on Maya Bay, Phi Phi Leh island in Krabi province, Thailand, Thursday. The popular tourist destination of Maya Bay in the Andaman Sea will close to tourists for four months from Friday to give its coral reefs and sea life a chance to recover from an onslaught that began nearly two decades ago.

many people here,” said Shi, from Henan, China. “The government’s plan to close off the beach for a

few months is only natural because the ocean needs a break, a chance to recover, so that the next generation



AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Tourists are reflected in sunglasses on Maya Bay on Phi Phi island in Krabi province, Thailand, on Thursday.

can have a better and even more beautiful destination.”

But locals aren’t entirely happy. The head of the Phi Phi Tourist Business Association, Watapol Jantharo, said he was surprised when the closure was announced in March by Thailand’s National Parks and Wildlife Department.

He said locals were under the impression that Maya Bay would only be closed to boats, while visitors would still walk to the bay from the other side of the island.

“We are not against pro-

tecting our environment,” he said. “We know full well that Maya Bay is our important resource, like a rice field to a farmer, but we wish there are more communications about the government’s plan before the decision was made.”

Thon, however, said the plan was discussed with locals for three years before a decision was made.

“In the past, we made some mistake because we think that the money is very important. But now we are trying to change our idea,” he said. Overseas visitors are “very important to our country, but the most important thing is our national resource. We have to preserve and hand it to the next generation.”

The government has set a limit of 2,000 tourists a day when the bay reopens — about half the current number. Boats will no longer be allowed to anchor but must dock on the opposite side of the island.

Make a juicy blueberry pie and keep your crust crisp

We wanted a pie that had a firm, juicy filling full of fresh blueberry flavor with still plump berries, and we also wanted a crisp, flaky crust.

To thicken the pie, we tried cornstarch as well as our gluten-free flour blend but preferred tapioca starch, which was subtle enough to allow the berry flavor to shine through. Too much of it, though, created a congealed mess.

Cooking some of the blueberries down to a saucy consistency helped us reduce the amount of tapioca required, as did adding a peeled Granny Smith apple that we shredded on the large holes of a box grater.

Rich in pectin, the apple helped thicken the berries naturally. Since gluten-free pie crusts can easily turn soggy, we found that preheating a sheet pan in the oven and baking the pie on the lower rack helped keep the crust crisp. (We also offer a gluten-free flour blend).

It’s not safe to place a glass (Pyrex) pie plate on a preheated baking sheet. If you must use a glass pie plate, do not preheat the baking sheet; note, however, that your crust will not be as crisp. This pie is best served the day it is made.

- BLUEBERRY PIE**
Servings: 8
Start to finish: 3 hours
30 ounces (6 cups) blueberries
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and shredded
5 1/4 ounces (3/4 cup) sugar
2 tablespoons tapioca starch
2 teaspoons grated lemon zest plus 2 teaspoons juice
Pinch salt
1 recipe Double-Crust Pie Dough (recipe below)
1 large egg white, lightly beaten
Cook 3 cups blueberries in medium

saucepan over medium heat, mashing occasionally with potato masher to help release juices, until half of berries have broken down and mixture is thickened and measures 1 1/2 cups, about 8 minutes. Let cool slightly.

Place shredded apple in clean kitchen towel and wring dry. Combine apple, cooked berry mixture, remaining 3 cups uncooked berries, sugar, tapioca starch, lemon zest and juice, and salt in large bowl.

Adjust oven rack to lowest position, place foil-lined rimmed baking sheet on rack, and heat oven to 425 F. Roll 1 disk of dough into 12-inch circle between 2 large sheets of plastic wrap. Remove top plastic, gently invert dough over 9-inch metal pie plate, and ease dough into plate; remove remaining plastic. Roll other disk of dough into 12-inch circle between 2 large sheets of plastic. Remove top plastic. Using 1 1/4-inch round cookie cutter, cut hole in center of dough, then cut out 6 more holes, about 1 1/2 inches from hole in center, evenly spaced around center hole.

Spread blueberry mixture evenly into dough-lined pie plate. Gently invert top crust over filling and remove remaining plastic. Trim dough 1/2 inch beyond lip of pie plate, pinch dough edges together, and tuck under itself to be flush with edge of pie plate. Crimp dough evenly around edge using your fingers. Brush pie with egg white.

Place pie on preheated baking sheet and bake until crust is light golden brown, about 25 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350 F, rotate baking sheet, and continue to bake until juices are bubbling and crust is deep golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes longer. Let pie cool on wire rack to room temperature, about 4 hours. Serve.

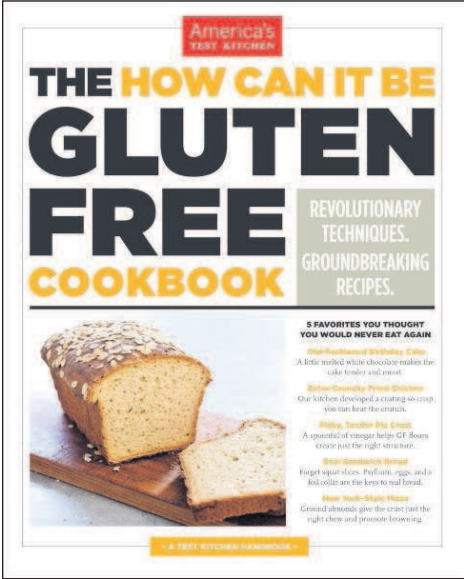
- DOUBLE-CRUST PIE DOUGH**
Makes enough for one 9-inch pie



Carl Tremblay/America’s Test Kitchen via AP

This undated photo provided by America’s Test Kitchen in May 2018 shows a blueberry pie in Brookline, Mass. This recipe appears in the cookbook “The

- 6 tablespoons ice water
3 tablespoons sour cream
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
13 ounces (2 3/4 cups plus 2 tablespoons)
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon xanthan gum
16 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1/4-inch pieces and frozen for 10 to 15 minutes
Combine ice water, sour cream, and vinegar together in bowl. Process flour blend, sugar, salt, and xanthan gum together in food processor until combined, about 5 seconds. Scatter butter over top and pulse until crumbs look uniform and distinct pieces of butter are no longer visible, 20 to 30 pulses.
Pour half of sour cream mixture over flour mixture and pulse to incorporate, about three pulses. Add remaining sour cream mixture and pulse until dough comes together in large pieces around blade, about 20 pulses.
Divide dough into two even pieces. Turn each piece of dough onto sheet of plastic wrap and flatten each into 5-inch disk. Wrap each piece tightly in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour. Before rolling out dough, let it sit on counter to soften slightly, about 30 min-



America’s Test Kitchen via AP

This image provided by America’s Test Kitchen in May 2018 shows the cover for the cookbook “The How Can It Be Gluten-Free Cookbook.” It includes a

utes. (Dough can be wrapped tightly in plastic and refrigerated for up to 2 days.)

- GLUTEN-FREE FLOUR BLEND**
Makes 42 ounces (about 9 1/3 cups)
It is important to bring the mix to room temperature before using it in a recipe. Be sure to use potato starch, not potato flour. Tapioca starch is also sold as tapioca flour; they are interchangeable. See notes at right about shopping for rice flours and substitutes for potato starch and nonfat dry milk powder.
24 ounces (4 1/2 cups plus 1/3 cup) white rice flour
7 1/2 ounces (1 2/3 cups) brown rice flour
7 ounces (1 1/3 cups) potato starch
3 ounces (3/4 cup) tapioca starch
3/4 ounce (3 tablespoons) nonfat milk powder
Whisk all ingredients together in large bowl until well combined. Transfer to airtight container and refrigerate for up to 3 months.