

Great variety, but differentiation is key

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Music festivals in Thailand



Belgium-based EDM festival Tomorrowland is holding its first full-scale outdoor festival in Asia in Thailand in December. PHOTO: TOMORROWLAND



Wonderfruit, one of Thailand's home-grown music festivals which typically takes place in mid-December, held its 10th edition in 2025. PHOTO: WONDERFRUIT

Teo Kai Xiang

Legendary electronic dance music (EDM) festival Tomorrowland is making its debut in Thailand in a crowded field.

The Belgium-based festival is holding its first full-scale outdoor festival in Asia from Dec 11 to 13 at Wisdom Valley in Pattaya.

One awkward consequence of Tomorrowland's long-awaited Asian debut is that the event will take place just 20km from the grounds that one of Thailand's largest home-grown festivals, Wonderfruit, has occupied for a decade.

Wonderfruit, often described as the region's answer to the Nevada-based Burning Man festival, held its 10th edition in December 2025. This multi-genre music festival typically takes place in mid-December, meaning it is likely to overlap with Tomorrowland Thailand.

Dates for Wonderfruit's 2026 edition have yet to be confirmed. The festival's managing director Jon Lor says "we think that resilience comes in part from not positioning Wonderfruit as a conventional music festival", and adds that a focus on non-musical programming is one of the festival's key draws.

"Tomorrowland is not here to replace anything," says the festival's spokesperson Debby Wilmsen. "We strongly believe that different festivals can coexist, each with its own identity, audience and creative vision, and together contribute to a stronger, more vibrant destination."

Tomorrowland is one of many global festival brands entering Thailand's increasingly saturated market, alongside others like Las Vegas-based Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC) and Britain-based Creamfields.

This oversaturation may already have claimed its first casualties in 2025.

SATURATION POINT?

In November, Creamfields Asia – the Thailand-based offshoot of the British EDM festival – abruptly cancelled its December festival three weeks before the event was set to take place in Bangkok. This came after announcing a line-up which included Scottish DJ Calvin Harris and American DJ Skrillex.

Organisers cited challenges that "prevent us from delivering the experience our fans deserve", and offered full refunds to ticket holders. This was not the only high-profile

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cancellation of 2025. International hip-hop festival Rolling Loud was called off one month before it was slated to take place in Pattaya in November.

These international festivals are entering a crowded local scene, especially in Thailand's peak travel months between November and January, when its cooler weather coincides with the year-end travel period.

December 2025 had a packed musical calendar that included Wonderfruit, outdoor and cross-genre Big Mountain Music Festival in Khao Yai, New Year's Eve countdown festival Neon in Bangkok and electronic music fest 808, also in Bangkok.

Dr Natt Srinara, a lecturer at EHL Hospitality Business School in Singapore, says Thailand's festival scene has not yet reached saturation point at the national level, "but the risk is real in specific segments, especially 'lookalike' EDM weekends clustered around peak periods".

As far back as 2017, media reports on Bangkok's EDM scene have noted how frequent festival programming had become.

"That should be a reminder that growth is not only about adding more events. The next stage has to be differentiation," says Dr Srinara.

In his view, this means clearer genre variety, stronger integration with local culture, credibly sustainable operations and diffusion of events beyond a few hot spots.

"If Thailand does that, it should maintain a steady lead in the region," he says. Otherwise, he warns about risks such as increased cannibalisation among businesses, friction with local communities and thinner margins for organisers.

A NATIONAL BET ON FESTIVALS

Tomorrowland's arrival is part of an aggressive national strategy in courting large-scale international events to boost Thailand's tourism sector.

In August 2025, the Thai government committed to spending two billion baht (\$82 million) to host Tomorrowland Thailand for five years, starting from 2026.

Government officials estimate that the festival will generate around 12 billion baht in economic value over the five years.

However, Dr Srinara says: "Thailand didn't start off with mega franchises. It first built capability through a wave of strong, repeatable events that created audience habit and an operational ecosystem."

One can trace this to the rise of Bangkok's EDM culture, with the launch of events like electronic music festival 808 in 2013 and the S2O Songkran Music Festival's commercialisation of the Thai New Year holiday.

The Thai New Year, Songkran, takes place in April. Known for its public water fights, the festive period has increasingly become a draw for party tourism.

In parallel, the country also developed "destination and lifestyle" offerings like Wonderfruit, which broadened Thailand's appeal beyond pure party tourism.

Post-pandemic, this strategy has matured into landing global brands and negotiating multi-year deals, with Tomorrowland being the headline example showing that festivals are now treated as part of Thailand's investment and tourism toolkit, says Dr Srinara.

These investments are coupled with a host of other incentives, such

as streamlined visa processes. In 2024, the Thai government introduced tax waivers and import duty exemptions for organisers of large international concerts, sporting events and festivals which invest at least 100 million baht.

Support also extends to local festivals. The 2025 edition of the S2O Songkran Music Festival, for instance, close to doubled its capacity by moving to Rajamangala National Stadium in Bangkok, with an international line-up that included artists DJ Snake, Marshmello and Alan Walker.

It was a move made possible by the Thai government easing restrictions around the sale of alcohol in sports stadiums, which was previously forbidden, reported Thai news outlet The Nation.

Thailand's niche, particularly compared with regional rivals like Singapore and Hong Kong, is having the space, infrastructure and labour necessary to support larger-scale outdoor music events, says Dr Kiatpoom Kiatkawsin, an associate professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology, who researches tourism and hospitality management.

"What these music festival organisers found was an abundance of space, a comfortable climate year round and a favourable tourism ecosystem," he adds.

MANAGING A TOURISM DECLINE

Exploiting these factors is key because of the outsized role of tourism in the Thai economy.

It accounts for 12 per cent of the country's gross domestic product and – directly and indirectly – employs over 20 per cent of the country's labour force, according to

government figures disclosed in 2024.

Singapore's tourism playbook is more selective and "high impact", and the tourism policy intent is explicitly to grow value rather than volume, says Dr Srinara.

This manifests in Singapore's willingness to back a small number of major tent-poles such as American pop star Taylor Swift, "where the value proposition is a clean, concentrated surge in tourist visits and spending".

Elsewhere, countries like Japan and South Korea are dealing with record levels of visitors, resulting in overtourism in some cities that risks overwhelming local businesses.

In contrast, Thailand's efforts come amid a softening outlook for its tourism sector. In 2025, the country recorded a decrease in foreign arrivals for the first time in a decade, outside the pandemic years. With 33 million arrivals, this marked a 7.2 per cent drop from 2024, according to Thai tourism ministry data.

Tourism revenue also fell to 1.5 trillion baht, marking a 4.7 per cent year-on-year decrease.

In Dr Srinara's view, this means that Thailand's focus on securing multi-year commitments with global festival brands can be seen as one part of a strategy to boost volume and demand.

Indeed, foreign entrants are operating on an entirely different sense of scale and international reach compared with their home-grown counterparts.

Wonderfruit's 2024 edition drew around 25,000 attendees, generating an estimated 710 million baht for the local economy. Thailand residents accounted for 31 per cent of attendees, followed by Singapore (13 per cent) and Hong Kong (11 per

cent) residents.

The S2O Songkran Music Festival drew over 100,000 visitors across its three-day event in 2025. It has built a regional following, licensing its format abroad to international offshoots in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Australia.

In contrast, Tomorrowland Thailand's organisers say they expect over 50,000 attendees each day. A three-day pass for the event costs 12,500 baht, compared with 8,900 baht for a five-day pass to the 2025 edition of Wonderfruit.

EDC's first festival in Thailand in 2025, which took place in popular island destination Phuket, drew over 120,000 attendees. The festival's 2026 edition, taking place from Jan 16 to 18, has a projected capacity of up to 200,000 attendees.

LEVELLING UP

For long-time enthusiasts, Thailand's emergence as a top festival destination feels like the culmination of a steady rise.

"I've longed to see this for a long time since I started partying," says Dr Kongpaphop Panya, 43, a Bangkok-based doctor, of Tomorrowland's debut in his home country. He typically attends one or two large-scale festivals every year, and sees the entry of global festival brands as signs of a maturing local scene.

Mr Bart van Brakel, a 40-year-old Singapore-based fintech worker, has attended festivals Neon, S2O, Siam Songkran, EDC and 808 in Thailand over the past three years. He has watched the country's music scene evolve at a rapid pace.

Still, he believes there is a difference between Thailand's home-grown festivals and international entrants. Home-grown festivals like S2O and Neon do not yet offer the "grand all-in experiences" of their foreign counterparts, says the Dutch national.

In Europe, EDM has transformed from something only hardcore fans attended, into a mainstream phenomenon over the past two decades, says Mr van Brakel, who has followed the genre since his 20s.

Tomorrowland's first iteration in Belgium took place in 2005 as a single-day event with 9,000 visitors.

"After Europe, this revolution happened in the US with festivals like Ultra and EDC," he adds. "And now, it's Asia's turn."

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