



## **Holiday in Thailand, \$60 for a Hospital Visit**

**With growing prosperity came an extension of the healthcare system to the smallest islands.**

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Last week, I spent some much-needed time off work, wandering around the Phang Nga Bay in Thailand. (I trust that all of you have missed my weekly [HumanProgress](#) chart.) My trip has provided me with an inspiration for today's post.

Last Tuesday, one of my American friends decided to go rock-climbing. Unaccompanied and unfamiliar with the rock face, he fell and badly injured himself. After he was found, all bloodied and bruised, by some hiking Norwegians, he was rushed to a local clinic on a near-by island. There an on-duty doctor x-rayed my friend's extremities, cleaned his wounds, bandaged him, gave him an abundance of painkillers and charged him \$60. Distrustful of the expertise of a small-island physician, my friend's partner insisted on visiting a spanking new hospital on a larger island nearby, where the original diagnosis was confirmed.

While I am not in favor of the Thai taxpayers picking up the tab for the health expenses of irresponsible Americans, the story has left me amazed. In 1960, inflation and purchasing parity adjusted per capita income in Thailand was \$1,629 or 9 percent that of the United States. Today, it is \$16,227 or 29 percent of the U.S. income. Along with increasing prosperity came massive extension of the healthcare system, with clinics and hospitals catering to the needs of ordinary people (and crazy foreigners) even on the smallest islands of the sprawling Asian kingdom.

Environmentalists like to wax lyrical about the beauties of the wilderness, but there is something to be said for a thriving tourist industry and hiking Norwegians, and electricity and x-ray machines on tiny islands in the middle of the Andaman Sea.



Source: World Bank

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