

## NBTC Initiative on Tourist SIM Cards

The NBTC would like to address concerns over the issue of the possibility of having designated tourist SIM cards in Thailand.

The idea of a tourist SIM card was discussed earlier this month at the ASEAN Telecommunications Regulators' Council (ATRC) Dialogue 2016, held from August 2 to 3 in Phuket, where all ASEAN regulators gathered to exchange views on core regulatory issues. The Malaysian regulator mentioned that in Malaysia there are SIM cards specifically designed to suit the needs of tourists as well as facilitate the management of scarce mobile numbers.

The NBTC saw that the idea could be useful to Thailand as it will help tackle three issues as follows.

**1. Numbering management.** Currently Thailand faces a shortage of mobile phone numbers. Of the 170 million mobile phone numbers that have been allocated to service providers by the NBTC, only 103 million are active. Of the 67 million unused numbers, many are numbers that have been used and discarded by tourists at the end of their short stay.

According to NBTC rule, consumers can retain the validity of their prepaid mobile phone numbers for up to one year. After that, the discarded numbers have to be kept for three months before they can be reused. The numbers used by tourists can be left idle for up to one year, clogging up the supply of numbers. Having special SIM cards designed for tourists will help solve this problem by shortening the life of numbers so that they can be reused sooner.

**2. Remaining credit in prepaid SIM cards.** By NBTC rule, when consumers cancel a prepaid subscription, they can get back the money that remains in the account. However, in the case of tourists who usually leave the country without canceling their subscriptions, the money remains in the system and adds up over time. Having tourist SIMs will allow us to manage this amount of money more productively. We can assign a default choice for what to do with the money, such as having it be allocated for telecommunications development or the provision of public services.

**3. Supporting the tourism industry.** With designated tourist SIM cards, service providers and developers have the option to easily provide tourist-specific services or add-ons. They can be used to facilitate the use of location-based services in order to provide a better visit experience. Tourists can easily find information on nearby tourist attractions, restaurants, information centers, transport options, and important places such as hospitals and police stations. In doing this we will in no way infringe upon the privacy and rights of users, whether local or foreign. Any services provided will strictly comply with privacy and data protection regulation within the context of the Thai law.

However, this idea is still in its preliminary stage. As per our rulemaking procedure, if the idea is to proceed further the NBTC will definitely hold public consultations involving all of the stakeholders namely service providers, consumers, tourism authorities, businesses and foreign entities. We normally expect to hold at least 5 to 6 rounds of public consultation, and the process will take no less than six months in total. We welcome opinions from all sides. Only after hearing from everyone will we decide on the appropriate implementation of the tourist SIM initiative.

The NBTC would like to assure all sides that at this point no policy on tourist SIM cards has been approved or implemented. We will study the issue very carefully, and the interests of consumers are always our top priority.