

# Bolstering BAC

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With tourism at a halt in Thailand, Bangkok Air Catering is focusing on its other core businesses and diversification strategy to come back stronger than ever

Thailand has done well to manage COVID-19, with 3,962 total confirmed cases and 60 deaths, according to data from the country's [Department of Disease Control](#) website on November 25, the day this article was written. On that day, the site reported only four new cases.

This success is largely due to the limited number of foreign travelers permitted to enter the country, plus the mandatory 14-day quarantine as well as other measures set by the Ministry of Public Health, says Linus A.E. Knobel, Managing Director at [Bangkok Air Catering](#) (BAC) in an interview with *PAX International*.

As Knobel explains, the required curbing of the virus means little to no business for BAC, for which 90 percent of its revenue is derived from air travel. The caterer is not alone; a fifth of the country's economy depends on tourism and hospitality sectors.

BAC operates at five airports: [Suvarnabhumi](#), [Don Mueang International](#), [Phuket International](#), [Samui International](#) and [Chiang Mai](#). The latter three have temporarily adjusted business models to prioritize the domestic market, such as HoReCa, food fairs and online sales, Knobel says. While some domestic flight catering resumed in mid-September, he says the average flight loading factor remains at a mere 40 percent and kitchens are running at twenty percent capacity.

The company is concentrating on keeping its personnel safe with social distancing and in some cases moving workers to other businesses within the BAC group. It has reviewed its processes and employee training programs and is gearing up for ISO 9001 certification to enhance overall performance and efficiency.

“We’re shifting the emphasis of our strategy, relying less on BAC as the lynchpin of our group,” Knobel says. “We want all the building blocks we started with to be polished and in place so we spring right back into business without missing a beat. We have tried to see the crisis as an opportunity.”

BAC is bolstering its other revenue generating units; premium hospital catering (Gourmet House Culinary Care), its Gourmet House Group of Restaurants (Al Saray, Brasserie 9 and Ruen Noppagao) and food production (Gourmet Primo). Gourmet Primo recently opened its first “Gourmet Food to Go,” outlet at Foodland Supermarket and plans to open more in 2021. Finding success in these areas proves that the diversification strategy is “on the right path,” Knobel says.

Looking ahead, BAC will explore further the domestic market, targeting the business-to-consumer sector. It plans to launch ‘eatfit’, a health food delivery service, and an on-the-go airline meal box service called ‘Sky Deli’ in December. It will focus on building business in the Middle East, China, and eventually Hong Kong, starting with the Halal-accredited production of Thai meals and snacks for export.

The caterer is hopeful that international and domestic operations will gradually increase by about 40 percent in 2021. With state-of-the-art kitchens and roster of professional personnel, Knobel says the company remains the region’s expert in Arabic, Asian and European cuisine. It maintains HACCP/GMP standards and is certified as fully Halal and Kosher compliant.

“We intend to make the most of these attributes with a new venture in value-added products for export,” he says. “We’ll continue to attract business from overseas – but according to a new model. Our aim has been clear and simple; we will be a better skilled and stronger team than before.”