

Tayme Thapthimthong and “The White Lotus” effect on travel

What to listen for:

More than just a lush and vibrant place to visit, Thailand recently took center stage on the global screen in season three of “The White Lotus.” Tayme Thapthimthong, the British-Thai actor and breakout star of the show, joins host Elisabeth Goodridge to explore the TV megahit’s set-jetting effect on travel.

They chat about what it was like filming on location, collaborating with Mike White, and how the show authentically captured Thai culture for a global audience. Plus, we find out what Tayme does immediately after checking into a hotel.

Tune into the full interview below to learn how pop culture drives bookings, and what to do when the spotlight lands.

Introduction:

[00:00:02] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Hello, I'm Elisabeth Goodridge, your host of Powering Travel, a podcast brought to you by Expedia Group. Today, what a show we have for you. I am so excited to be talking to the brilliant actor Tayme Thapthimthong. He just had a recent breakout performance as the security guard in the most recent season of White Lotus. You know, that smash hit streaming on Max that has inspired vacations all over the world. It's a trend we're now calling set-jetting. So, let me tell you a little bit about Tayme. He was born in the UK and went to school for dance. He also trained for the Royal Marines. Later, he moved to Thailand where he competed in a singing reality show and joined the Thai military. I am so excited to talk to him today because we'll speak about Thailand, travel, and his experience on White Lotus. So please help me welcome to Powering Travel, Tayme Thapthimthong. Thank you so much for joining us today.

[00:01:01] **Tayme Thapthimthong** You're very welcome.

[00:01:01] **Elisabeth Goodridge** We are thrilled at Expedia Group to have you.

[00:01:04] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Thank you very much for having me. It's a pleasure.

[00:01:06] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So, I bet you're going to be surprised, like gobsmacked, that we're going to talk about travel.

[00:01:13] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Oh yeah. Let's do it.

Capturing the authentic Thailand:

[00:01:14] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And we're going to talk about TV shows and how they influence travelers. But of course, let's start with what everyone wants to hear about, which is White Lotus. So, what was it like being on a show that highlights Thailand? Because you've been an actor for a couple of years and lots of different things. Tell me what it was like to shoot in Thailand.

[00:01:31] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Well, I have to say first, I've been an actor before, but I've always done projects in Thailand.

[00:01:38] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:01:38] **Tayme Thapthimthong** But nothing has really captured Thailand the way Mike White captured it in White Lotus.

[00:01:44] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay, and so it's for a global audience shot in Thailand for a Thai audience.

[00:01:49] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yes. Yes.

[00:01:50] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Got it. So tell me how that's...

[00:01:51] **Tayme Thapthimthong** It's just like, I mean, I think it's just the way he sees it. The way he wanted to portray Thailand. He was so considerate of like the sort of the culture and everything and how Thai people are in real life. Because before I even did my first day of filming, he got me to go meet him in his villa, and then literally go through the whole script, and then sort of say, like, in this bit, I wrote it like this because da-da-da. Do you think this is what Thai people would do in real life?

[00:02:24] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So, he was appreciating local customs, and he wanted to be respectful of.

[00:02:29] **Tayme Thapthimthong** It was really nice, and it allowed us to give our own input and put our Thainess and Thai ways into it. So, it was really nice to be able to do that. And also just like, it's nice to represent, like, this is how Thai people are. Like they have a very high degree of respect and they're very polite people usually. And yeah, it was great to show that to the world.

[00:02:51] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Yeah, and you felt heard, and he was acting on it. That's amazing. So, did he and maybe you feel like that location was a character in the story?

[00:02:59] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I think the location definitely adds character to every story, every season. There's so many reasons why people go to Thailand, right? And this kind of like explores different areas of that. The parties, the temples, the restaurants. The fighting, yeah, the Muay Thai and all that, yeah. And just like the lifestyle of the locals, like they just ride their little scooters around the island. And I definitely got a taste of that local life when I was there because we were filming that for like seven months. So, there would be times where we're like, you know what, I've got a few days off here. I want to just rent a scooter and ride around the island. And you really get the feeling like, wow, no wonder people move here and don't want to move back to the city. It's just like wind blowing in your hair, just riding and then you can stop anywhere on the island and there's always good food around, fresh food, fresh seafood or fresh coconuts for cheap.

[00:03:55] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And food is so big when it comes to travel.

[00:03:58] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah.

[00:03:59] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And experiencing the local customs.

[00:04:01] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah.

[00:04:01] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Do you feel like for White Lotus it was the location, the island, or do you think it was the resort, or do you think it's the combination of the both that really made it become such a character?

[00:04:12] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I think it's a combination of every single element that happened this season. You know, from, yes, the food for sure, the team, like, just Mike White's writing about Thailand, the way he just brought out different things, different Thai things, but managed to like cause some chaos with it and have some tears and some laughs. You know, without one of those elements, it wouldn't quite be what it is. So, I definitely think it is a combination of everything.

When fiction meets a real party:

[00:04:41] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And you think in White Lotus he hit the reasons why people should go to Thailand?

[00:04:45] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, I mean, obviously there's a lot of things where people might be like, oh my god, what? But you know, I think everyone knows it's just a show, but you know there's a lot of relatable things. And I think things like the full moon party, the first time I actually got to go in here.

[00:05:02] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And I actually wanted to be on the boat there.

[00:05:04] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Oh my god, well, the boat ride there was pretty extreme. Because we were heading into the sort of the monsoon season already by the time we were filming that scene. And I remember the producers saying like, man, like at first they were considering like, should we try and do a mock-up Full Moon Party and try to film it like in a private location so it's easier. But in the end, they're like, but no, we'll never be able to recreate that sort of energy with everyone around. So that was why I thought it was such an amazing scene. And I went with them to film it, even though I wasn't in the scene. They were just like, just come along with us, it'll be fun. So, I went with them, and we took this boat and my God, the sea was so rough. It was so rough that people were like, oh my God, are you sure? So, we're gonna be fine, we're going to be fine. But we got there eventually, and the party was just incredible. It was my first time, and I was like, wow, like this is, I mean, it gets pretty crazy, but we left before like the crazy, crazy bit starts. So, we left around like 1:30, 2am. But we've been filming since like 8pm.

[00:06:13] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay, but what you're describing, though, I think, is every traveler's dream, because that party was real, and you always, are you actually going to get that experience you see on TV? Well, it's fiction, but you're describing it was actually real.

[00:06:26] **Tayme Thapthimthong** We actually went there.

[00:06:28] **Elisabeth Goodridge** How many people put us there?

[00:06:30] **Tayme Thapthimthong** People who are actors who are actually in the scene, I think there's only four of the actors, Patrick and Sam. So they were in the scenes, but they brought along all the set PAs, all the lighting guys to dress up as the party goers. As the party goes.

[00:06:46] **Elisabeth Goodridge** I love it.

[00:06:47] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, and then so, kind of like, so they would set themselves up just kind of towards the beach, end of the beach and then sort of like decide where they're gonna, exactly they're going to do this particular scene. Then they, so when they're ready to film, they're like, okay, you ready, you're ready? Okay, everyone surrounds, like, everyone surrounds the camera and the actors and then just kind of like, actors, whoa, whoa, then just like kind of, like, immerse themselves into the crowd and then they just really blend it in. It was amazing how they managed to not get the attention of like a lot of intoxicated partygoers.

[00:07:24] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Intoxicated party goers that would be like enthralled if they were an extra in White Lotus. All right, but there you have it. You actually have a scene that you would see if you went to Thailand.

An actor's guide to Thailand:

[00:07:36] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah.

[00:07:36] **Elisabeth Goodridge** What are other parts of Thailand that you think travelers should go to? And the travel providers there, like what they can do to get more travelers to come? Because it's a big business, White Lotus.

[00:07:46] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, I mean, obviously, White Lotus has done a lot for the Southern Islands because we didn't just stay on Samui, we stayed on Samui for like, I mean, the majority of it, but we also went to Phuket, and we filmed at the Rosewood Hotel. And those scenes were actually the scenes that we, it was the dinner scenes. So, you know, the bit where I just come in.

[00:08:08] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Yes, and you're not supposed to be there.

[00:08:09] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, I'm not so excited when Fabian is like, what are you doing? Like, so that was...

[00:08:14] **Elisabeth Goodridge** He was a great actor. Boy, they cast him perfectly.

[00:08:17] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Oh, he was amazing.

[00:08:18] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Is he a nice guy?

[00:08:19] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Really nice guy and very funny.

[00:08:21] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Oh, I bet. Oh, I bet. I bet. What are you doing here? Oh, it's brilliant in that accent.

[00:08:26] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, and yeah, it was great to do those scenes there because it made me feel like, wow, man, like I, in reality, I've walked from my, from my booth in Samui to all the way to Phuket.

[00:08:40] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Oh, the power of the camera.

[00:08:41] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, wow, the camera is amazing, how the editing is just like, wow, that was so seamless. But it was, it was yeah, just like I love traveling around these southern islands for that. It's just island vibe is always, I'm sure most people who visit Thailand have always come down to the islands. Another place that's always, yeah, I feel very connected to is Chiang Mai.

[00:09:03] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Chiang Mai, okay. Which is up north.

[00:09:06] **Tayme Thapthimthong** My grandfather used to live up there before he passed. And so we still have a house up there near the...

[00:09:13] **Elisabeth Goodridge** A family house?

[00:09:14] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, a family house near the Ping River Ping. And I just love the North because it's different. It's very different from the South. It's like a different vibe. There's no beaches or anything like that, but it's like more mountains.

[00:09:26] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:09:27] **Tayme Thapthimthong** And I feel like people are just more chill in a way. Islands are very chill as well, but like, in Chiang Mai, you just got to see it. It's just people are very chilled out. They're more, it's like a slower life.

[00:09:43] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Would you say you could have a more authentic visit if you visit there from like overseas, or it really, it's your attitude, like that?

[00:09:51] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I think it's your attitude and your mindset, but whenever I had friends visiting from abroad, I would always tell them, base yourself in Bangkok because that's his own culture. Then, take yourself down south if you want, like, island life. And then after that, go up north, and you'd get to see everything.

[00:10:12] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:10:12] **Tayme Thapthimthong** You don't have to spend too long in each place. I reckon like three nights in each place, you would have seen enough.

[00:10:19] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So three days for a nice, authentic experience, a taste of this different place.

[00:10:23] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, if you plan it well, I think three nights in Bangkok, three nights down south on one of the islands, and then three nights up north. I think that's a really good.

Living the American movie dream:

[00:10:32] **Elisabeth Goodridge** We're going to see a lot of people interested in Thailand after. I mean, it was a big destination even before White Lotus. But we're going see a lot of, have you ever been inspired by a movie or a television show? And where did you go? Tell us, tell us that story.

[00:10:45] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Absolutely. Well, I grew up watching American movies.

[00:10:49] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:10:49] **Tayme Thapthimthong** So I've always wanted to come to America.

[00:10:53] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay, okay, okay.

[00:10:53] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I really mean that because I grew up watching so many '90s, 2000s action movies where you see the chases on the freeways in LA.

[00:11:02] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Yeah, and that happens all the time.

[00:11:08] **Tayme Thapthimthong** No, I haven't seen it yet. So that's why in 2015, I actually decided to come to America for the first time.

[00:11:19] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:11:19] **Tayme Thapthimthong** But, you know, at that time, I was on such a budget, and I felt like, oh man, I don't think I can afford to just stay in LA because it's so expensive. So, I thought the next best thing I could do, so I came with my girlfriend at the time. And we got off at LAX, and we went pretty much, I think we stayed in Santa Monica one night just to rest. And then after that we went straight to Malibu.

[00:11:43] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:11:43] **Tayme Thapthimthong** To pick up an RV, because that's how.

[00:11:47] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Hey, you're making a quintessential decision to make a quintessential American vacation. You picked up an RV. Where did you guys go?

[00:11:53] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I can't wait to tell you this, because it's like one of my, it is, actually, still probably my favorite holiday ever. Because even though we're on such a budget, but we made it work. And we had the best time because from Malibu, I was a little nervous because I hadn't driven in America before. I've never driven on the left side.

[00:12:15] **Elisabeth Goodridge** On the right side. Yes.

[00:12:18] **Tayme Thapthimthong** So on the right. And then also never driven such a huge vehicle.

[00:12:21] **Elisabeth Goodridge** We have enormous, particularly RVs.

[00:12:23] **Tayme Thapthimthong** And so, me and my girlfriend at the time, we had some shopping. Because we had visited Camarillo, shopping with us. And so we're like, okay, I think a two-man RV is going to be too small. So, we got a four-man one for two of us. Two little Asian people in it. We had so much space. And honestly, I liked it more than the place I was living at the time. I love the cozy bed. I love to shower. The water pressure is better than my house.

[00:12:55] **Elisabeth Goodridge** I grew up in a pop-up tent trailer. That's how we would take a vacation. My parents had this huge station wagon with a trailer in the back. I loved it, because you were playing house.

[00:13:05] **Tayme Thapthimthong** And I loved it, and they said, oh, a new feature of the RV now is that once you park, you can actually expand the living room. So, it goes out like another like two, three feet or something.

[00:13:18] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Ingenious.

[00:13:18] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, it's like, oh my god, like this is amazing. So it was, I love it.

[00:13:23] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Where did you guys go?

[00:13:24] **Tayme Thapthimthong** So, we started in Malibu, then we went to Joshua Tree.

[00:13:29] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay, beautiful.

[00:13:30] **Tayme Thapthimthong** And that had its own character; we did some hikes there. And then after, we went to Grand Canyon, which is incredible.

[00:13:37] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Right, they're no words.

[00:13:39] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, no words, no picture will ever do that justice. You just gotta see it. And then, after we were in Lake Powell, we did the Antelope Canyon, the Horseshoe Bend.

[00:13:50] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And then like, Powell, yeah.

[00:13:51] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Oh really? The water is so clear.

[00:13:55] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So clear.

[00:13:56] **Tayme Thapthimthong** And then after we circled back and we stopped at Vegas. So that was the first time I got to see the Vegas Strip. So, we hooked up the RV off the Strip and took a taxi in.

[00:14:06] **Elisabeth Goodridge** I love this. You saw so much of America.

[00:14:09] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, and I loved it because I felt like if we flew from place to place; first of all, it's probably going to be way more expensive, and we have to pack up each time. Going in the RV was just like, why don't people do this more? Because you get to drive in this really nice vehicle, the power steering just makes it so light. It's actually easier to park than my compact car back in Thailand because the wing mirrors aren't this side. The wing mirrors are like that, so you can see everything. There's cameras all around. And like, it was just, I just thought it was the best way to travel. You see how the terrain changes from California, where it's like more yellow kind of desert. Into Arizona, it gets more like orangey red. It was just like, and my girlfriend at the time, she's an artist. She was just drawing pictures the whole time.

[00:14:53] **Elisabeth Goodridge** And the colors are just so amazing, aren't they? So, were there any other places, you mentioned Joshua Tree, Vegas, what other places in the world have moved you?

The power of authentic travel:

[00:15:04] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I'm a big fan of Lord of the Rings, so it's definitely on my bucket list too to go to New Zealand. Seeing those aerial shots in the film just made me like, wow, that's where I want to go hiking and climbing.

[00:15:16] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Talk about green.

[00:15:17] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, for sure. And I think like there's so many different types of terrain there from the North Island, the South Island. So, that's definitely on my bucket list. And also another one.

[00:15:27] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Also based on a movie.

[00:15:29] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Also based on a movie.

[00:15:31] **Elisabeth Goodridge** It's that jetting right here.

[00:15:33] **Tayme Thapthimthong** And the other one is a safari, an African safari is where I'd love to go. I just love the outdoors, and I want to see some wildlife.

[00:15:40] **Elisabeth Goodridge** That's my bucket list, too. I haven't done it. And it's kind of one of those things where I'm kicking myself. You've been wanting to go for so long and hit the safari. All this travel you're doing and then shooting at White Lotus, what travel providers, what hotels can do to kind of tap into this trend of set jetting. And do you see hotels or destinations, what could they actually do to get more business from people inspired by movies?

[00:16:07] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Well, I think it has to come together with the hotel, so representing that culture and that place.

[00:16:16] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So, the groups together kind of, okay, we might have an onslaught, let's work together.

[00:16:20] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, I feel that they should. I mean, the way the, like the way the Four Seasons was just so built in the one on Samui, it was just like built into the, into the cliff.

[00:16:32] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Stunning architecture.

[00:16:34] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I've been to some hotels before where it just kind of like, you land in the country, you love the atmosphere and everything and then you check into this hotel, and it's just like kind of the decor and everything just doesn't go with the country or the surroundings.

[00:16:49] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So make it authentic.

[00:16:50] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, I think.

[00:16:51] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Yeah, because I've been there too. You're like, it's, you've all these beautiful colors. Yeah, you have all this beautiful influence on the outside. It doesn't fit.

[00:16:59] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah, you know what I mean? So, it's that kind of, you feel more immersed into it. And Four Seasons just did a perfect job with that, with sort of, in covering the villas into the cliff sides, which are then have like a lot of palm trees and just a lot of green around it. So, you feel like kind of encased.

[00:17:19] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Yeah, it's a natural environment.

[00:17:21] **Tayme Thapthimthong** In that natural environment, and at the same time, there wasn't that many, like, there weren't any bugs. Some people might feel like, oh, I don't want to be encased in like a sort of like a green room. I think they just look after the property so well. And it was so clean and yeah, you just feel so immersed in that, in that sort of life. That it felt like an, I was an islander but living at some five-star hotel.

Final thoughts and a check-in ritual:

[00:17:44] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay, one last question, somewhat related. It's an easy one, and I'm asking this of all of my guests. First thing you do when you check in, so maybe it's a gorgeous island hotel or maybe it's a vacation rental, but what is the number one thing you?

[00:17:59] **Tayme Thapthimthong** I like to just get into my board shorts and then my Hawaiian shirt.

[00:18:05] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Okay.

[00:18:06] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yeah. And then I always go for a nice walk around the hotel and look for a coconut.

[00:18:13] **Elisabeth Goodridge** So, you're putting on your vacation uniform and then a coconut.

[00:18:17] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yes, I always do that. I don't know why. Every hotel I go to, as soon as I get there, it's always like, I need a coconut right now. Like, I don't know why.

[00:18:26] **Elisabeth Goodridge** Do you want them, or do you want to crack them open and drink? Like the coconut milk or eat the fruit or?

[00:18:33] **Tayme Thapthimthong** It's like a, that's what I love about the coconut is like these young coconuts, you can drink it to rehydrate. So, after a long flight or whatever, you get to rehydrated, and then you take the spoon, and you scoop out the meat inside. So, it's also like a little snack, and it's all healthy and natural. So, it is like guilt-free as well. So, after long flight, and I usually don't eat on planes that well. So, when I get to the hotel, I'm usually a little hungry, and that's just the best way to lie my stomach. I go for a walk so I can see where everything is. I like to explore the hotel and see where the pool is, where the beach is. And then it kind of primes me up for a nice dinner later.

[00:19:14] **Elisabeth Goodridge** I've had such a nice time talking with you, and I wish you the best of luck and the best tasted coconuts on all of your vacations. And I love the idea of putting on a vacation uniform as soon as I check in. I might do that.

[00:19:24] **Tayme Thapthimthong** Yes, it helps. Like clothing just makes you feel yeah.

[00:19:27] **Elisabeth Goodridge** It changes everything.

[00:19:31] **Elisabeth Goodridge** That's it for the episode. We had an incredible time talking to Tayme, about his love for Thailand and that life-changing experience he had starring on a show filmed in that country and broadcast to the world. If you want more information about that trend set-jetting, visit the link in description. And to stay tuned for more interviews like this one, be sure to subscribe. You can go to Apple Podcast, Spotify, anywhere you listen to your favorite podcasts. So, thanks for listening to this podcast, Powering Travel. I'm your host, Elisabeth Goodridge, and I can't wait to see where you go to next.