



THE NEXT season of “The White Lotus” is expected to provide a big boost to Thai tourism. Above, at Chawang Beach on Koh Samui.

Thailand gears up for role payoff

Mike White, the creator of the HBO series “The White Lotus,” was in Thailand searching for the perfect place to film the show’s third season. His journey had led him to the island of Koh Samui and into the open-air lobby of the Four Seasons Resort, overlooking lush mountains, glimmering ocean and \$9,000-a-night villas.

The hotel’s general manager, Jasjit Singh Assi, was ready with his pitch. But it didn’t take much to persuade White.

“He was quiet for a bit,” Assi recalled. “Then he says, ‘All right, this is it.’ It was as if he fell in love with it.”

Nearly two years later, the entire country is preparing to reap the benefits when the new season is released next year.

Set at a fictional resort called the White Lotus, the murder-mystery dramedy has garnered acclaim for its satirical portrayal of wealthy tourists and the working locals who cater to them. It’s also known for sparking real-life travel booms as fans of the show seek out the set locations — a phenomenon that has been

Nation prepares for luxe travelers and more Hollywood work with next season’s “The White Lotus”

By Stephanie Yang | Reporting from Koh Samui, Thailand



TOURISTS POSE as an inbound plane flies overhead in Phuket, Thailand. Some Season 3 scenes will be filmed in the resort city.

dubbed the “White Lotus Effect.”

A starring role is an imitable advertisement for Thailand, which has broader ambitions to make more money from Western film productions and tourists alike. Last month, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra met with Hollywood executives in Los Angeles and announced a plan to increase cash rebates for foreign filmmakers.

The plan, which awaits approval by lawmakers, would lift the maximum rebate from 20% to 30%, with no upper limit on total cash back.

“It’s amazing,” said Cod Satrusayang, head of development at Indochina Productions, a Bangkok-based production services company. “It puts us literally within the first tier in Asia, and very competitive with the rest of the world.”

With Hollywood under pressure from rising production costs, the streaming slowdown and last year’s strikes, many other countries have come courting with cheaper services and

A slim loss for GOP in House race

Democrat Adam Gray flips Central Valley district. A 187-vote margin decides final congressional contest.

By Laura J. Nelson and Melissa Gomez

Democrats claimed the final congressional seat in the 2024 election cycle Tuesday as former state lawmaker Adam Gray ousted Republican incumbent Rep. John Duarte in a photo-finish race in California’s Central Valley.

California’s 13th Congressional District was the final race to be called for the U.S. House of Representatives, with the closest margin in the country: Just 187 votes separated the two candidates.

Duarte’s loss does not change the balance of power in the House but helps hold Republicans to a razor-thin majority.

The Central Valley seat represents one of three congressional districts that Democrats flipped in California this year, a rare bright spot for the party during an election marked by a broader conservative shift. Republicans won control of the U.S. Senate and the White House and flipped three seats in the California Legislature, while Golden State voters rejected several progressive ballot measures.

But none of those contests were as tight as the race for a congressional seat in a purple swath of the Central Valley.

“It was an insanely close race this time, and it was an insanely close race last time,” said Paul Mitchell, a Democratic campaign consultant and vice president of Political Data Inc.

Gray, who has built a reputation as a moderate “Valleycrat,” Mitchell said, was “probably uniquely qualified to even make this district as competitive as it was.”

The nearly monthlong



TRANS RIGHTS activists rally outside the Supreme Court. Since 2021, 24 states have adopted laws that ban prescribing hormones for gender transition in youths.

Justices seem ready to back banning hormone treatments for trans teens

By David G. Savage

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court’s conservatives said Wednesday they are inclined to uphold state laws in half the nation that prohibit the use of hormone treatments for transgender teens.

Led by Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., they spoke of an evolving medical debate over the use of puberty blockers and sex hormones

for adolescents who suffer from gender dysphoria.

Britain recently joined Sweden and Finland in sharply limiting these treatments for adolescents, they said. Roberts said the justices should be wary deciding disputes among medical experts.

“Doesn’t that make a stronger case of us to leave those determinations to the legislative bodies rather than try to determine them for ourselves?” Roberts

asked Solicitor Gen. Elizabeth Prelogar as she opened her argument.

“My understanding is that the Constitution leaves that question to the people’s representatives rather than to nine people, none of whom is a doctor.”

Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh agreed.

“It just seems to me the Constitution doesn’t take sides on how to resolve this,” he said.

[See Transgender, A6]

Trump considering DeSantis for Defense as Hegseth scrambles

Concerns reportedly increase over the former Fox News host’s prospects for Senate confirmation.

By Thomas Beaumont, Adriana Gomez Licon, Zeke Miller and Tara Copp

WASHINGTON — Pete Hegseth fought to save his nomination to be Donald Trump’s Defense secretary Wednesday as the president-elect considered possible replacements amid growing questions about the former Fox News host’s personal conduct and ability to win Senate confirmation.

Hegseth met with legislators on Capitol Hill, conducted a radio interview and released an opinion article denying allegations of sexual assault and excessive drinking. He insisted that he was “not backing down one bit” and that Trump was still supporting him. But the president-elect’s team was looking at alternatives including Republican Florida



FLORIDA Gov. Ron DeSantis is among the possible alternatives for the Cabinet position.

Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Trump remained quiet about Hegseth while issuing a flurry of statements on social media Wednesday about other nominees and his news coverage.

Hegseth is the latest nominee-designate to be imperiled by personal baggage after the recent withdrawal of Trump’s initial pick for attorney general, former Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, whose vulnerabilities were well-documented. But Hegseth’s past, including the revelation that he made a settlement payment after

Chief executive shot to death

Manhattan slaying of UnitedHealthcare’s Brian Thompson was a targeted attack, officials say. **NATION, A4**

Dodgers doing it the right way

By building a culture and spending money, the team is a model for others, Bill Plaschke writes. **SPORTS, B10**

‘Squid Game’ hits the stores

Netflix is ramping up retail efforts based on its shows, teaming up with Puma and other brands. **BUSINESS A7**

Weather

Fog to sunshine.
L.A. Basin: 68/49. **B6**

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