

Statement by UNESCO Bangkok
28th GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting and GMS Travel Exhibition
27-29 November 2011, Bagan, Myanmar

On behalf of UNESCO Bangkok, I would like to thank the organizers for extending an invitation to UNESCO to take part in the 28th GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting and GMS Travel Exhibition. UNESCO is pleased to continue our fruitful decade-long cooperation with the GMS Tourism Working Group, which is the foremost forum for coordination among GMS countries in the development and promotion of sustainable tourism in the sub-region.

World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism: Global Cooperation

Tourism at World Heritage properties around the world is growing rapidly. There are currently 936 properties on the World Heritage List, and tourism management is increasingly becoming a central issue for many of these properties. The relationship between World Heritage and tourism is two-way: if managed well, tourism offers benefits to World Heritage properties and local communities and can contribute to cross-cultural exchange. If not managed well, tourism can pose challenges to heritage sites and local communities.

The World Heritage Committee has requested the World Heritage Centre to convene a new and inclusive programme on World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism. The programme, currently being developed, will be presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 36th session next year.

An important part of the programme is to strengthen UNESCO's engagement with tourism-related partnerships/initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism and the Steering Committee of Tourism for Development (SCTD) which aim to support sustainable tourism development through establishing innovative, multi-stakeholder projects. In a practical manner, principles, standards and criteria for sustainable tourism at heritage sites will also be produced for wide-spread dissemination and adoption.

Sustainable Cultural and Eco-tourism in the GMS

With the growing popularity of World Heritage sites in the GMS, which now number 19 in total, UNESCO has been working closely with site management authorities and tourism authorities to ensure that the sites are well-conserved, provide an interesting visitor's experience and contribute to development objectives.

Well-designed cultural or eco-tourism programmes can contribute to the alleviation of poverty in local communities by capturing revenue from tourism. Examples of practical mechanisms that UNESCO has introduced at various heritage sites in the sub-region include:

- Employing local residents in the tourism and peripheral construction industry,
- Sourcing goods and services such as food, lodging, transport, souvenirs and guiding services from local businesses or residents,
- Encouraging local communities to supply agricultural goods and raw materials to local markets that serve tourist needs,
- Mobilizing local communities to help in the care and protection of the heritage sites, in return for a share of the revenue from entry tickets

Over the past decade, UNESCO has undertaken a range of standard-setting sustainable tourism projects in the GMS and the Asia-Pacific region, notably:

- **UNESCO-LNTA Nam Ha Eco-tourism Project, Lao PDR**
Developing community-based ecotourism (CBET) to support the social and economic development of villagers from ethnic groups living in and around one of Lao PDR's largest National Protected Areas.
- **Lao-UNESCO Programme for Safeguarding the Plain of Jars, Lao PDR**
Putting mechanisms in place to ensure **protection of the ancient archaeological landscape**, while improving socio-economic benefits for the local communities through tourism development.
- **United Nations Joint Programme on Integrated Highland Livelihood Development in Mae Hong Son, Thailand**
Building the capacity of community-based tourism groups to develop and manage cultural and eco-tourism, with a focus on integrated tourism development in two pilot communities.
- **Integrated Culture and Tourism strategy for Sustainable Development in Quang Nam, Vietnam**
Developing an integrated culture and tourism strategy for Quang Nam Province, and creating visitor management plans for the two World Heritage sites and one Biosphere Reserve in the province.
- **IMPACT: the Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment publication series**
Examining the impact of tourism on culture and the environment in selected heritage sites in Southeast Asia and providing methodologies and guidelines to assist tourism planners and site managers in working with local residents and other stakeholders to achieve the goals of sustainable tourism.
- **Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide (CHSG) Programme**
Training tourist guides at World Heritage sites, in order to improve livelihood opportunities, strengthen guiding skills, enhance the visitor experience, and educate tourists about conservation issues and codes of responsible conduct.

Building on its global leadership position in sustainable heritage tourism and its past body of applied experience in the Asian context, UNESCO is pleased to continue to work closely with Member States and development partners to ensure that cultural and eco-tourism can be mobilized successfully for conservation and development objectives in the GMS.



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