

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)
IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)
AND THE TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND (TAT)

First Meeting of the Working Group on the
Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector

3-5 April 1995
Bangkok

R E P O R T



ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

1. The First Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand on 3-5 April 1995. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in collaboration with Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), with financial assistance from the Government of Japan. The Meeting Program is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Participants included representatives from the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and national carriers of five of the six countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) – Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Thailand, and Viet Nam – as well as representatives from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Tourism Organization (WTO), European Union (EU), Interim Mekong Secretariat, and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). A list of participants is attached as Appendix 2.

OBJECTIVES AND CONDUCT OF THE MEETING

3. As agreed at the Workshop on Tourism Development in Countries along the Mekong River held in Kunming, Yunnan Province, the People's Republic of China on 13-17 December 1994 (Kunming Workshop), the first meeting of the Working Group aimed to provide guidance and professional support for the implementation of the five priority subregional tourism projects endorsed by the six countries at the Third Conference on Subregional Economic Cooperation in Hanoi, April 1994, and a special project on travel facilitation to and within the subregion agreed to at the Kunming Workshop.

4. Ms. Seiko Takahashi, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCAP, in her inaugural statement, noted the rapid expansion of tourism throughout the world and the increasing economic importance that the sector is playing in the subregion. ESCAP's role in developing the sector has been devoted to improving the policies for tourism development on the basis of an appraisal of the socioeconomic and environmental impact of tourism; strengthening the national capabilities in human resource development in the tourism sector; strengthening the national capabilities in tourism marketing and in taking effective steps to create a favourable investment climate for the development of tourism; and promoting regional and subregional cooperation in tourism development and promotion. Ms. Takahashi recognized the advantages of adopting a subregional approach to tourism development.

5. Mr. Eustace Nonis, Director, Agriculture and Social Sectors Department (West), ADB, noted the importance of this Meeting concerning the implementation of the priority tourism projects and highlighted the progress made in this regard since the Kunming Workshop. In consultation with ESCAP and other relevant agencies in the

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tourism sector, ADB prepared detailed draft project proposals for the priority tourism projects. In addition, Mr. Nonis confirmed ADB's interest in supporting Phase I of Project 3: Training the Trainers in the Basic Craft Skills of Tourism and Phases II and III of Project 5: Mekong/Lanchang River Tourism Planning Study. The former is currently being processed as an ADB regional technical assistance (RETA) for implementation later this year, while the latter will be processed as another ADB RETA for implementation in 1996.

6. Mr. Seree Wangpaichitr, Governor, TAT, noted that successful development of subregional tourism depends to a great extent on the communications and infrastructure linkages between the countries involved, as well as the development of human resource development. As for the former, Mr. Wangpaichitr noted the positive effects of the "Friendship" bridge which links Thailand and Lao PDR, the Thai-Myanmar bridge at Maesod, and the overland routes in the north of Myanmar as positive examples of such linkages. As for the latter, Thailand has a number of hotel and tourism training schools, and, according to Mr. Wangpaichitr, would be pleased to make these facilities available for the purpose of developing tourism in the subregion.

Election of Officers

7. The following persons were nominated and unanimously elected as officers of the Working Group: Mr. Pradech Phayakvichien, Deputy Governor for Planning and Development, Tourism Authority of Thailand as Chairman; Mr. Yang Liu Yin, Director, Department of Marketing and Promotion, China National Tourism Administration, People's Republic of China and Mr. Sannya Abhay, Deputy Director General, National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR as co-Vice-Chairmen; and Mr. Sok Chenda, Under Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia as Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda

8. The provisional agenda (Appendix 3) was adopted as presented.

DISCUSSION OF THE PROJECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9. Pursuant to the agenda of the Meeting, the participants, based on the draft project documents, discussed the key issues relating to each of the projects and agreed on specific action plans for their immediate implementation. The draft project documents are attached as Appendix 4.

Project 1: Promoting the Subregion as a Tourist Destination

10. This project will establish a joint, subregional marketing program to promote a carefully selected range of quality nature and culture tourism destination "jewels" of the subregion, aimed at high-yield, trend-setting markets.

11. The Meeting agreed that, as there is no overall donor for this Project, seeking support from all possible sources, including the private sector, is a high priority. The Meeting agreed that certain aspects could proceed to implementation without formal funding commitment for the entire project. These activities include (i) identifying the jewels to be promoted; (ii) promoting the subregion as a tourist destination through the Internet; and (iii) preparing and distributing promotional materials such as posters and video.

12. The Meeting agreed that TAT, in collaboration with ADB and ESCAP, will coordinate the process for selecting the jewels. To assist in this process, the Meeting agreed that each country could nominate not more than five jewels, listed in priority order, from which selection could be made as required for different media. The Meeting also agreed that in each production of marketing material, an equal number of jewels should be projected from each country.

13. The Meeting agreed that PATA will take responsibility for placing the subregional images on the Internet. ADB offered to assist in this and to investigate other means for displaying the tourism images.

14. The Meeting confirmed the four-phased approach for implementation of Project 1 as outlined in the Project documents; however, the final implementation arrangements are subject to the policies of the donor agencies.

15. The Meeting agreed that PATA would assist in the implementation of Project 1. This brings the prospect of adding PATA's worldwide network of chapters to the existing marketing networks provided by the six countries' tourist offices and embassies overseas.

Project 2: Subregional Tourism Forum

16. This Project will establish an annual Subregional Tourism Forum to bring government and non-government tourism people from the six countries together.

17. The Meeting agreed that PATA will serve as the executing agency of Project 2. The Meeting further agreed that the subregional tourism forum will be known as the Mekong Tourism Forum, organized by PATA with assistance from ADB and ESCAP.

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18. The Meeting agreed that PATA will be responsible for planning and executing the Mekong Tourism Forum in consultation with the Working Group. The venue for the first Forum will be Pattaya, Thailand, to be held on 15-16 April 1996, immediately preceding the PATA Travel Mart and Conference.

Project 3.1: Training the Trainers in the Basic Skills of Tourism (Study Tours to Thailand and Singapore)

19. In view of funding considerations, Project 3 was reformulated. Project 3.1 will provide a study tour to upgrade the teaching skills of the subregion's trainers in those basic skills.

20. ADB confirmed that a RETA is being processed to implement the project. Under the RETA, ADB will finance travel and travel-related expenses for three participants each from the six countries. Agreements, in principal, have been reached between ADB and TAT and ADB and the Government of Singapore to support the project. WTO offered to contribute to the training by providing trainers and teaching materials. The Meeting agreed to this proposal.

21. The Meeting agreed that the six countries will nominate the participants based on the general criteria to be submitted by ADB.

Project 3.2: Training the Trainers in the Basic Skills of Tourism (Travelling Short Courses)

22. This Project will provide a series of short courses to upgrade the teaching skills of the subregion's trainers in basic skills in the tourism industry.

23. Dr. M. Rahmatullah, Director, Transport, Communications and Tourism Division, ESCAP, emphasized the importance of human resource development in the tourism sector. In this context, the Meeting noted the valuable contribution made by the EU and WTO in promoting human resource development in the tourism sector in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The Meeting reaffirmed the high priority of this Project.

24. WTO noted the need to reformulate the project proposal for submission to EU for possible financing and offered its assistance in this regard. The Meeting accepted WTO's offer and agreed that ESCAP will take the lead role in redrafting the project documents in consultation with ADB and WTO.

25. WTO informed the Meeting that EU support requires local counterpart financing. ESCAP suggested that in view of the financial situation in four of the six countries, this requirement be made part of donor funding. The Meeting agreed that the draft project document will be circulated to the member countries of the subregion prior to submission to the donors.

Project 4: Training Resource Managers in Conservation and Tourism

26. This Project, as originally proposed in the ADB Project Profiles, would develop a tertiary-level program of education and in-service training in the management of natural and cultural resources for conservation and tourism.

27. In response to the request made by the six countries at the Kunming Workshop, ADB included this Project as a component of a proposed RETA on Sustainable Management of Forestry Resources in the Greater Mekong Subregion to be administered by its Office of Environment and Social Development. Phase I of the RETA will involve a pre-implementation workshop to discuss the work program for Phases II and III. Five participants from each of the six countries will be invited to attend this Workshop, and ADB urged the Meeting to ensure that the NTOs will be part of the country delegations. Phase II will involve the establishment of a training centre for forestry resource management which will include tourism and conservation as part of its curricula.

28. The Meeting agreed to accept ADB's inclusion of tourism in its RETA, and expressed its desire to participate in Phase I.

Project 5: Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Planning Study

29. This project will assist the six countries in working together on a program of planning studies of river-based tourism along the Mekong/Lancang River.

30. The Meeting agreed that the Project will be jointly implemented by ADB and ESCAP in consultation with the six countries. ESCAP will finance Phase I (the assessment study) of this project, and ADB will finance Phase II (the conceptual planning study) and Phase III (feasibility studies and option studies). The Meeting agreed that a senior official from each of the NTOs be appointed as National Planning Project Coordinator.

31. The Meeting agreed that the needs and concerns of the indigenous peoples of the six countries will be considered in Phase II. The Meeting noted the importance of UNDP's capacity-building program for ethnic and highland minorities in four of the six subregional countries.

32. The Meeting noted the importance of the Interim Mekong Secretariat in the development of the Mekong River and accepted the Secretariat's offer to cooperate with ADB and ESCAP in the implementation of the Project.

Special Project: Study on Facilitation of Travel to and within the Greater Mekong Subregion

33. This Project will review the current situation in travel to and within the Greater Mekong Subregion, analyze the potential for expanding this travel, identify the routes which can be promoted, assess the physical conditions related to travel in the subregion, identify impediments to and within the subregion, and recommending possible solutions for overcoming existing impediments.

34. The Meeting reaffirmed the need for this project and requested ESCAP to undertake the study, which could begin immediately.

35. The Meeting noted that an ADB-sponsored Subregional Transport Forum will be held in Yangon, Myanmar on 24-25 April 1995 to discuss, among other things, the issues related to cross-border travel. The Meeting agreed that the results of this Forum will be taken into consideration during the conduct of the study. The Meeting also agreed that the findings and recommendations of the study should be brought to the attention of the inter-ministerial coordinating committee of each country to facilitate implementation.

CONSIDERATION OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WORKING GROUP

36. The Meeting agreed to update the terms of reference (TOR) of the Working Group by deleting references to actions by the First Meeting (item 7 of the TOR); and that meetings will be held, in principle, two times a year. The Meeting also agreed to revise item 8 to include WTO as an international organization offering technical and/or financial support to the tourism Working Group. The revised TOR is attached as Appendix 5.

37. The Meeting noted that this Working Group and its actions are part of the Institutional Arrangements agreed to at the Fourth Conference on Subregional Economic Cooperation held in Chiang Mai, Thailand on 15-16 September 1994 and that the results of this Meeting will be reported to the next ministerial-level meeting.

CONSIDERATION OF DATE AND VENUE OF THE SECOND MEETING

38. The delegation from Lao PDR offered to host the Second Meeting of the Working Group. The Meeting agreed with appreciation that the next meeting will be held in Vientiane, Lao PDR sometime between October and November 1995. The Second Meeting of the Working Group will be jointly organized by ESCAP and ADB.

OTHER MATTERS/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

39. The Meeting expressed regret that representatives of Myanmar were unable to attend. The Meeting requested Dr. Rahmatullah to discuss with officials of the

Myanmar NTO the Report of the Meeting during his upcoming mission to Yangon, Myanmar. Dr. Rahmatullah agreed to this request.

40. The Meeting agreed that the proposed agenda for the Mekong Tourism Forum will be submitted by PATA to the NTOs on or before the first week of May 1995. The Meeting further agreed to forward their comments on this proposed agenda to PATA on or before June 1995. The Meeting agreed that PATA will announce the Mekong Tourism Forum at its April 1995 meeting in Auckland, New Zealand.

41. The Meeting agreed that the members of this Working Group will act as contact persons/liaison between the country and PATA for the purpose of arranging the Mekong Tourism Forum.

42. The First Meeting of the Working Group on Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was congenial and productive. The participants expressed their deep appreciation to PATA and WTO for the constructive assistance provided to the Working Group, to the Chairman and Co-Chairmen for the efficient conduct of the Meeting, to the Rapporteur for the assistance in drafting the report, to ESCAP and ADB for the excellent arrangements, to the Royal Thai Government and the Tourism Authority of Thailand for the gracious hospitality, and to the Government of Japan for its funding support.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

43. The Report was considered and adopted by the Meeting on 5 April 1995.

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