

**Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation Program
Sixth Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism
30-31 October 1997
Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

ORGANIZATION

1. The Sixth Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Tourism Sector was held in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam from 30 to 31 October 1997. The objectives of the Meeting were to facilitate the implementation of priority subregional tourism projects and to discuss specific areas for promoting cooperation in the tourism sector in the GMS. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in collaboration with the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT).

ATTENDANCE

2. Representatives from national tourism organizations of Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam as well as representatives of ESCAP, ADB, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), and the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) participated in the Meeting. Representatives of Vietnam Airlines, and Earth Science Expeditions also attended the Meeting.

OPENING SESSION

3. In his opening statement, Mr. Bui Xuan Nhat, Vice Chairman, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, welcomed the participants to the Sixth Meeting, and expressed gratitude to ADB and ESCAP for their support in the promotion of subregional cooperation in the tourism sector in the GMS. He asserted that cooperation among the six countries created favourable conditions for effective implementation. He noted that the priority subregional tourism projects have received strong support from the six countries as well as from other international organizations. He looked forward to the progress that would be made at the Sixth Meeting to formulate measures and guidelines that would bring subregional cooperation in the tourism sector to a new dimension in the coming years. He expressed hope that cooperation for the purpose of tourism development would contribute to subregional cooperation in the other sectors as well as to peace, stability, and development in the GMS.

4. In his statement, Mr. Preben Nielsen, Manager, Water Supply, Urban Development and Housing Division (West), ADB expressed the need for the Working Group to take stock of achievements and future directions by focusing on key areas: (1) intensifying strategies that promote the subregion as a tourist destination; (2) devoting attention to conserving the subregion's unique heritage; and (3) improving the quality of tourism services. He made several suggestions that could be considered in the discussions covering these three areas. In addition to considering public-private sector partnerships for human resources development, he expressed ADB's willingness to help in the area of reviewing skill requirements

and assessing the resources available to undertake continuous training. He acknowledged the important contribution of the Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism, ESCAP, and all of the participants to the cooperative spirit that has guided the Working Group.

5. In his statement, Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa, Chief, Tourism Unit, Transport, Communications and Tourism Division, ESCAP noted the increasing importance of tourism worldwide, especially in South-east Asia. He was encouraged by the tangible results of cooperation among the six GMS countries on the priority tourism projects. He noted ESCAP's activities in tourism development, particularly those emphasizing promotion of regional cooperation and sharing of experiences. One significant recent activity was the Meeting for the Establishment of a Network of Tourism Training Institutes and Organizations in the Asian and Pacific Region held in September at Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Meeting established the Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT). He concluded that the Working Group had taken major steps in cooperation to promote tourism in the subregion and that international and regional organizations were pleased to have contributed to this progress.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. The Meeting elected Mr. Bui Xuan Nhat, Vice Chairman, Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism as Chairman, and Mr. So Mara, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia as Vice Chairman.

7. The Meeting adopted the Agenda which is attached as Annex 2.

8. Agenda notes were circulated at the Meeting to facilitate discussion. These notes are attached as Annex 3.

AGENDA ITEM 4(a): PROMOTING THE SUBREGION AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

9. The representative of PATA noted the significant increases in destination awareness about GMS as a tourist destination, as evidenced by increasing interest from overseas tour operators and by the voluntary attendance of members of the media at Mekong Tourism Forum. Two media trips were scheduled for this year to coincide with the Mekong Tourism Forum. Due to certain reasons, only one took place and the media persons were from the US. The media trips were made possible through the sponsorship of Air China and Vietnam Airlines. She noted that the Tourism Authority of Thailand confirmed that Thailand would host PATA's Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Mart scheduled in 1999. She suggested that the Working Group consider a joint participation at the Mart to make a bigger impact.

10. The representative of AMTA reported on the status of marketing initiatives his organization has undertaken: (1) The press kit has been prepared and distributed for consideration, and the Working Group was requested to make comments and suggestions to improve the press kit before the final press kit could be produced and circulated to members of the media. (2) The Tourism Authority of Thailand has completed a tourism map and a new version of the video on GMS tourism. (3) Thammasat University had been engaged to conduct the Tourism Marketing Strategy Study for the GMS which was scheduled to be completed in

July 1998. The representative of AMTA requested the Working Group to assist the tourism marketing strategy study team by collecting the necessary data for the team and submitting the data to AMTA as soon as possible. Data requirements are attached in Annex 4. The representative of ADB suggested that the study team's inception and interim reports be circulated to the Working Group for comments.

11. The representative of ESCAP noted the progress made by AMTA in undertaking the tourism marketing strategy study. ESCAP could make funding proposals for any follow-up activity related to the strategy, if information would be given to ESCAP by March 1998. He reported that ESCAP and the World Tourism Organization are organizing a National Seminar on Tourism Marketing in Viet Nam scheduled for 1998 which would emphasize on major destination markets. Similar seminars in the other GMS countries could be considered.

12. The Meeting requested PATA to assist in conducting destination seminars for the GMS in Japan through PATA's Northeast Asian Representative Office. The representative of PATA noted the request.

13. The representative of Thailand proposed development of a GMS promotional stand incorporating product/travel packages that could be showcased at the 1999 Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Mart to be held in Thailand. The Meeting noted the suggestion and agreed to present this proposal to the Second Mekong Tourism Forum to be held in Ho Chi Minh City on 31 October 1997.

14. The representative of Thailand emphasized the need to improve air linkages between and among the GMS countries in order to increase intraregional as well as inter-regional tourism traffic. He suggested that a proposal from the Working Group to liberalize air transport policies in the GMS be submitted for consideration at the next Ministerial Conference. The representative from Viet Nam remarked that land and sea links should be added to the consideration of increasing intraregional and inter-regional tourism traffic.

15. The Meeting agreed in principle to address issues related to air linkages, and requested ESCAP, in collaboration with AMTA, to formulate a proposal for review by the Working Group, which could subsequently be submitted to the next GMS Ministerial Conference.

AGENDA ITEM 4(b): SUBREGIONAL TOURISM FORUM

16. The representative of PATA reported that attendance at the Second Mekong Tourism Forum to be held on 31 October in Ho Chi Minh City had gone beyond expectations. The original target was 120 participants, but there were 147 people registered. She reported that guidelines were sent to the six GMS countries to enable them to maximize the benefits offered by the Forum. She urged the Working Group members to use the Forum as an opportunity for networking with other Forum participants. She acknowledged the excellent contribution of the Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism in making local arrangements for the Forum.

17. The representative of ESCAP confirmed that People's Republic of China (PRC) would consider hosting the next Mekong Tourism Forum based on recommendations from the Working Group. The Meeting agreed to support PRC as host of the next Forum, and requested

AMTA and PATA to communicate the Working Group's decision to the China National Administration of Tourism. The representative of Thailand confirmed Thailand's willingness to serve as an alternative host to the next Forum should PRC decide otherwise. The representative of Lao PDR reconfirmed his country's willingness to host the Fourth Mekong Tourism Forum in 1999.

18. It was suggested that a travel mart or sellers' fair be held in conjunction with the Forum in order for the private sector to take an increasingly active role. The Meeting agreed that this matter be taken up during the Second Mekong Tourism Forum in order to solicit ideas from Forum participants about possible changes in the Forum's format. The representative of Thailand remarked that the Working Group may need to consider the issue of combining the Mekong Tourism Forum with the ASEAN Tourism Forum, given that four of the six GMS countries are currently members of ASEAN. The representative of PATA commented that there is still need to hold the Forum in conjunction with another international event in order to maximize participation from outside the region.

AGENDA ITEM 4(c): TRAINING THE TRAINERS IN THE BASIC SKILLS OF TOURISM

19. The representative of Thailand proposed a second programme for training the trainers in the GMS and requested ADB to support this programme again. He reported the results of an evaluation of the first programme on training the trainers. Overall, the participants found the programme very useful, and they had proceeded to conduct training courses in their countries.

20. The representative of ADB was encouraged by the results of the evaluation and expressed his organization's willingness to support the second programme for training the trainers. He also emphasized the need to take a long-term view on tourism training by undertaking a skills development project in which the private sector and national tourism organizations (NTOs) assess gaps in tourism skills and formulate ways to address them. The Meeting noted the suggestion.

21. The Meeting agreed that a consensus would be needed on the coverage of the proposed second programme for training the trainers. The representative of Thailand explained that the contents of the proposed second programme would include: (1) analyzing training needs; (2) developing instructional methodologies; (3) planning and preparing presentations and (4) developing presentation skills. Target participants of the proposed second programme would be those responsible for human resource development planning in the six countries' NTOs. The Meeting agreed that participants should be carefully selected in order to maximize the benefits from the training programme. The Meeting also noted that the training programme include a workshop where outputs on the training needs in the GMS would be produced by the participants. The representative of ADB suggested exploring the possibility of PATA's participation in the training programme. The representative of PATA expressed her organization's willingness to assist in conducting the training programme.

22. The representative of ADB suggested that a proposal be submitted to the World Tourism Organization on the formulation of a long-term skills development plan. The Meeting noted the suggestion.

AGENDA ITEM 4(d): TRAINING RESOURCE MANAGERS IN CONSERVATION AND TOURISM

23. The Meeting reaffirmed the importance of this project in the overall development of tourism in the GMS, although implementation of the project had been segmented into various environmental projects planned by ADB. The representative of ADB suggested that AMTA follow up with inquiries about UNEP's proposed assistance in this area. The representative of AMTA agreed to follow up as suggested.

AGENDA ITEM 4(e): MEKONG/LANCANG RIVER TOURISM PLANNING STUDY

24. The representative of ADB distributed copies of the technical assistance paper for the second phase of the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Planning Study. Consultant selection is being undertaken, and technical proposals are due by 3 November 1997. There was a need for all six countries to submit the signed letters of agreement to ADB covering the planned technical assistance, because these letters were a prerequisite before starting the study. The countries concerned stated that they would help follow up on the submission of their countries' letters of agreement. The technical assistance was scheduled to begin in December 1997 with an expected duration of six to eight months.

AGENDA ITEM 4(f): STUDY ON FACILITATION OF TRAVEL TO AND WITHIN THE GMS

25. The representative of ESCAP reported that the study on facilitation of travel to and within the GMS was being prepared for publication. He also reported that ESCAP planned to organize a regional seminar on facilitation of travel some time in 1998 to be attended by participants from 20 ESCAP-member countries, including the six GMS countries. The representative of ADB suggested that the seminar be held before the next Ministerial Meeting, tentatively scheduled for May 1998, in order that recommendations from the seminar be considered by the GMS Ministers. The Meeting agreed to this suggestion.

26. The representative of ADB emphasized that addressing non-physical barriers to cross-border trade and tourism was an important component in two priority subregional road projects (the Phnom Penh-Ho Chi Minh City Road Project and the East-West Transport Corridor Project), which were in the design stage. The resolution of cross-border issues would be necessary for making the proposed infrastructure development viable. He emphasized the necessity to address these issues in order to facilitate travel to and within the GMS.

AGENDA ITEM 4(g): VILLAGE-BASED TOURISM

27. The representative of AMTA confirmed that all six GMS countries had selected their respective villages, which are described in Annex 5. The representative of ADB confirmed that the second phase of the Mekong/Lancang river tourism planning study would include assessments of the selected villages. Several suggestions were made on possible approaches to project implementation involving networking among the villages. (1) The six GMS countries could develop the necessary database for the GMS Network for Ecotourism to be disseminated to the relevant private sector agencies in the GMS in order to help promote the villages. (2) The

GMS network could start with a newsletter in order to share experiences and expertise. (3) AMTA should approach the Mekong Institute at Khon Kaen University in Thailand to explore the prospect of a subregional training programme for the NTO personnel who will be implementing the projects. (4) The project could be undertaken in a phased manner, one village at a time, in order that funding could be organized for each country. The representative of ADB said that the last point would conflict with the concept adopted in the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Planning Study, where the feasibility of all village sites would be evaluated simultaneously. Thereafter, funding needs could be examined separately. The Meeting noted these suggestions. The representative of Lao PDR said that the Nam Ha village-based tourism project, funded by the Government of New Zealand and administered by UNESCO, had not yet started because of delays in signing the letter of agreement. The representative of ADB agreed to follow up with UNESCO on the status of the project.

28. The representative of ESCAP informed the Meeting that his organization would collaborate with the Asian Institute for Development Communications to organize a regional seminar on developing ecotourism with emphasis on the role of the government and media in 1998. The seminar would be attended by 18 ESCAP-member countries.

AGENDA ITEM 4(h): GMS NORTH-SOUTH TOURISM FLOWS

29. The representative of Thailand reported that a study team from Thammasat University in Bangkok was preparing a study on GMS North-South Tourism Flows. The findings of the study would be presented to the Working Group before it is sent to the next GMS Ministerial Meeting. He emphasized the need for this study to support the previously mentioned idea in a policy paper to the next GMS Ministerial Conference on liberalizing travel and aviation policies in the GMS in order to facilitate the formulation of travel packages that identify routes and various combinations of tourism destinations.

AGENDA ITEM 5: DATE AND VENUE OF THE SEVENTH MEETING

30. The representative of ADB reminded the Meeting that at the Fifth Meeting of Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector it was agreed that the Seventh Meeting would be held in Cambodia in 1998. The representative of Cambodia confirmed his country's willingness to host the Seventh Meeting sometime in March 1998.

AGENDA ITEM 6: OTHER MATTERS

31. The Meeting agreed that a presentation could be made on the status of the project entitled, "Six Nation Lancang-Mekong River Expedition." The private sector representative reported that financing arrangements for the project were being made. In order for the project to proceed, he expressed the need to obtain letters of approval for the project from the six countries. He presented a video showing two expeditions along the Lancang River in PRC.

32. The representative of Thailand proposed the identification of special border zones for tourism, such as in the "Golden Triangle" covering Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand. These border zones would provide potential opportunities for joint planning and investment in the GMS. The Meeting agreed to forward this proposal to the next GMS Ministerial Meeting.

APPRECIATION

33. The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism for the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting and the warm hospitality accorded to the participants. The Meeting expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan and ADB for financing the travel costs of the participants.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

34. The report of the Sixth Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was adopted on 31 October 1997.