

Ninth Meeting of the Subregional Working Group on Tourism

Organization

The Ninth Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Tourism Sector was held in Yangon, Myanmar from 4 to 5 May 1999. The objectives of the Meeting were to facilitate the implementation of priority tourism projects and discuss areas of specific cooperation for promoting tourism in the Greater Mekong subregion. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar and with financial assistance from the Government of Japan.

Attendance

Representatives from national tourism organizations of Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam as well as representatives of ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) participated in the meeting. Representatives of the Japanese Embassy in Thailand, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA) and Angel Airlines attended the meeting. A number of representatives from the private sector in Myanmar also attended.

Opening Session

In his opening statement, His Excellency Brigadier General Aye Myint Kyu, Deputy Minister for Hotels and Tourism mentioned that Myanmar recognized the significance of international and regional cooperation in tourism development. He highlighted a number of initiatives taken by Myanmar to facilitate travel. Myanmar had established border check points with China, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand. From these border check points, tourists from neighbouring countries would be able to travel with entry permits. Myanmar was expanding the road construction works linking the check points from the border areas to the main tourist sites including Pagan, Mandalay and Taunggyi. The Deputy Minister mentioned that if the road construction works were completed, tourists would be able to travel from the border areas by overland routes up to Mandalay and Yangon. He pointed out that countries in the Greater Mekong subregion were planning to take steps for removal of non-physical barriers related to cross-border movement of goods and people. If the existing problems relating to cross border movement could be solved, it would create an environment whereby people would be able to travel from one country to another easily in the subregion. He remarked that Wangpong facing Lao People's Democratic Republic across Mekong River had been identified as a site for the development of village based tourism. The Deputy Minister emphasized the importance of cooperation among countries in the Greater Mekong subregion to revitalize economies particularly at the time of financial turbulence. He wished the Ninth Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector a great success.

Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa, Chief, Tourism Unit, Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development Division (TCTIDD), ESCAP, expressed his appreciation to the Deputy Minister for Hotels and Tourism for his presence at the opening of the meeting. He emphasized the importance of active involvement of the private sector in the activities of the Working Group. He was pleased that a number of representatives from the private sector in Myanmar participated in the meeting. A statement of Mr. M. Rahmatullah, Director,

TCTIDD of ESCAP was delivered by Mr. Yamakawa. Mr. Rahmatullah remarked that human resources development was a crucial area where national tourism organizations and international organizations had to work together. He informed that the Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT) was established by ESCAP to promote cooperation in tourism education and training. Tourism education and training institutes in twenty-three ESCAP member countries were actively participating in the activities of APETIT. Mr. Rahmatullah mentioned that improvement in tourism-related infrastructure had also been recognized as essential for sustainable tourism development in the subregion. In this connection, he was pleased that ADB was considering launching a project on Mekong River tourism infrastructure development. He remarked that ESCAP had held its 55th session last week and adopted a Plan of Action for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Asian and Pacific Region. There was strong emphasis given to the need for regional and subregional cooperation to enable effective implementation of the Plan of Action. He remarked that the GMS Working Group was one excellent example of subregional cooperation that could be a model for similar initiatives in other subregions.

In his statement, Mr. Santichai Euachongprasit, Director, Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA), expressed his appreciation to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism for making excellent arrangements for the Ninth Meeting of the Working Group. He mentioned that in Thailand, "Nine" was considered as a lucky number since it literally meant progress. He highlighted major achievements of the Working Group. He remarked that GMS Tourism Marketing Strategies would provide useful guidelines in working together to achieve mutual benefit in marketing. He stressed that the concept of establishing GMS chapters and a marketing task force should be pursued in earnest. He mentioned that efforts in trying to raise the standard of personnel in the tourism industry had been progressing. He thanked ADB for financing a project on strengthening training units within the GMS NTOs as well as tourism training courses for tourism personnel in the GMS. Mr. Santichai mentioned that there were still many projects that required continued assistance and cooperation from member countries in order to get the already agreed projects to successful conclusion for the benefit of all member countries. A prime example for the need for active cooperation was the project on Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Planning Study which had been implemented by ESCAP and ADB. The result of this study was very valuable in terms of opportunities and guidelines to stimulate investment in the tourism sector such as construction of accommodations, passenger port facilities along the river and souvenir production. Mr. Santichai stressed the importance of improved investment incentives in business related to tourism. He remarked that areas that still had a bright investment opportunity included tourism training, attraction management, transportation and entertainment. He stressed that the government sector must play a leading role in promoting investment in tourism-related infrastructure with participation from the private sector. He hoped that in the new millennium, public and private sectors in GMS would have closer cooperation in tourism activities which would eventually make the subregion a world class tourism destination.

Election of Officers and Adoption of the Agenda

The meeting elected U Khin Maung Latt, Director General, Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar as Chairman, and Prince Sisowath Chivannariddh, Under Secretary of State for Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia as Vice Chairman.

Agenda Item 4(a): Destination Marketing

The representative of PATA reported on the PATA Adventure Travel and Ecotourism Conference and Mart held at Chiang Mai, Thailand in February 1999. She reported there was a strong focus on GMS tourism at the Conference and one display booth at the Mart, made available on a complimentary basis by PATA, had been occupied by AMTA, representing the GMS countries. The representative of PATA also described the successful participation by AMTA, representing GMS countries, in a Media Briefing Workshop at the PATA Travel Mart held in Singapore in April 1999. She undertook that PATA will make promotional opportunities available for AMTA again at these two events in 2000.

The representative of PATA invited NTOs to participate in a planned upgrade of PATA's web-site on the Internet. PATA's web-site designer has offered to introduce, without cost, clips of the Jewels of the Mekong video into the PATA web-site and introduce direct links to individual country web-sites. She invited individual NTOs to contact her directly if they wish to participate in the web-site upgrade or if they have any new publicity material of any kind that PATA can use in its GMS promotions or circulate through its international chapter networks.

The representative of PATA also reported that PATA has agreed to fund the Project Coordinator position in AMTA for another year. PATA is currently working with AMTA on the idea of GMS visit add-on's for international industry and media familiarisation tours that have been invited and often sponsored into the region by TAT. The first of these is planned in November 1999 to coincide with the Fourth Mekong Tourism Forum in Lao PDR. Also being planned is a Japan Outbound seminar, a Communications Seminar and various other "How To..." seminars, some of which will also be associated with the Fourth Mekong Tourism Forum. PATA will also offer two product catalogue shows to GMS countries in 1999 and invite GMS countries to make greater use of PATA's communication channels.

The representative of AMTA reported that AMTA has been active in marketing initiatives. The GMS Tourism Marketing Strategy Study - a project funded by TAT - is now complete and the final report will be published and disseminated shortly by AMTA. AMTA is also currently involved in many other GMS publications including: an introduction to AMTA leaflet; a brief travel guide on the border formalities of GMS countries; an "Exploring the Mekong" booklet; the AMTA newsletters, now being produced three times per year; and a new, greatly improved version of the Mekong Tourist Map.

The representative of AMTA explained that the objective of the new Mekong Tourism Map is to ensure that all the six NTOs and the private and business sector industries have a high quality map for visitors. It will include lists of the tourism operators on the Mekong/Lancang River, NTO addresses and guides to major cross-border circuits. He presented a mock-up of the new map and requested the assistance of NTOs to check the spelling of place names. He also requested, and received, a commitment of US\$356 from each NTO present at the meeting to be put towards the initial print run of 5,000 copies.

The representative of ATTA noted that the proposed map will be beneficial to all in the industry. He suggested that, in future, some of the costs of producing promotional material might be covered by advertising and sponsorship from the private sector. The representative of AMTA agreed but explained that in this case the proposed Mekong Tourist Map will be complex enough without adding advertising. He also explained that it is important for AMTA to produce this map first in order to demonstrate AMTA's commitment to quality and its value to the industry. The representative of TAT suggested that NTOs could each produce their own supplement to the subregional map which could be specifically tailored to the individual countries and may contain advertising.

The representative of ESCAP confirmed that ESCAP will organize a seminar on tourism promotion in Lao PDR in July 1999. The objective of the seminar will be to enhance the capability of Lao PDR to approach major travel markets. The seminar will be held in conjunction with a Seminar on Expansion of Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion Through Improved Air Transport. The representative of ESCAP also confirmed that ESCAP could organize national level seminars on subjects requiring the urgent attention of the government, if requested by NTOs.

The representative of PATA noted her concerns about the distribution process for GMS promotional material. The representative of Thailand agreed and suggested that GMS countries should make maximum use of the distribution opportunities provided by PATA's networks and distribution systems, including PATA's ability to distribute material by electronic means.

Agenda Item 4(b): Subregional Events

The representative of PATA gave a summary of the Third Mekong Tourism Forum and reported on the success of the new forum format involving a mix of plenary sessions and break-out workshops. She noted that PATA has published and distributed the proceeding of the Third Forum. She also presented a summary of key points arising from the Forum with the purpose of ensuring that the Forum discussions are noted by the Working Group and used as a stimulus for new project ideas.

The representative of PATA also presented a tentative programme for the Fourth Mekong Tourism Forum to be held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 28- 30 November, 1999. She noted that the tentative programme addresses both product development and marketing issues. It includes a presentation by AMTA on progress with the Working Group's programmes and, for the first time, it introduces sessions specifically for buyers and sellers. She asked NTOs to consider the tentative programme and to send comments to PATA. She also urged country governments to consider sending, in addition to NTO personnel, officials from government agencies other than tourism to the Forums so these other agencies can be exposed to the views of the industry.

The representative of Lao PDR reported that the NTA is working closely with PATA on the organization of the Fourth Mekong Tourism Forum and preparations are well under way.

The representative of ESCAP drew attention to the fact that the proposed timing of the Fourth Mekong Tourism Forum will mean that the next Working Group Meeting will be held on Sunday 28 November. After discussion, it was agreed that there were no objections to meeting on Sunday.

The representative of Thailand suggested NTOs should actively encourage their tourism industries to attend the Forums. The representative of ATTA responded by undertaking to urge his member to go to Vientiane in November. The representative of Lao PDR thanked ATTA for this initiative and extended a warm welcome to Thailand's travel industry.

The representative of Cambodia reconfirmed Cambodia's willingness to host the Fifth Mekong Tourism Forum. The meeting then debated whether future Forums should remain in the current November timing or whether they should revert to the original timing of April in order to coincide, as originally planned, with the PATA Conference and Mart which is when many international buyers come to the region. It was agreed that there were no objections to reverting to an April timing. PATA and Cambodia were asked to give consideration, before

the next Working Group Meeting, to ways to achieve this, including the option of scheduling the Fifth Mekong Tourism Forum for April 2001, thus not having a Forum at all in the year 2000.

Agenda Item 4(c): Training

The representative of AMTA reported that since the last Working Group Meeting: a Training the Trainers in the Basic Skills of Tourism was completed in November 1998 at the Dusit Thani College; a Training Experienced Tourism Trainers in Tourism Management Course was held in March/April 1999 at the Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen University; and a Feasibility Study on Strengthening Tourism Skills Development in the GMS had commenced and would be completed within two weeks.

The representative of AMTA further reported that while the two training programmes had been successful, the organizers had noted that in future there could be improvements to the selection process for trainees. They recommended that all trainees should have good levels of English language ability so they can extract the maximum benefit from the training and they should be from the same or similar organizations so that the training experience helps to create and improve beneficial working partnerships. He also noted that the Feasibility Study will produce suggestions of further NTO training needs.

The representative of ESCAP informed the meeting that the Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT) which was established by ESCAP in 1997, now has 23 countries actively participating. The activities of the Network are being implemented by five regional focal points. He noted that the first meeting of the APETIT General Council will be held at Macau in May 1999. He urged all NTOs to consider whether there are tourism training institutes in their countries suitable to join APETIT and, if so, the NTOs should inform ESCAP.

The representative of Cambodia thanked all the agencies involved in the training initiatives and urged them to continue with this very useful work.

The representative of AMTA reminded the Meeting that the Working Group has not given up on the plan to attract a donor for a substantial, long term training of trainers project. He reported on a recent discussion with a tourism training expert which left him convinced of the soundness of the Working Group's original proposal to model the large project on the successful ASEAN "Ripple Seminars". AMTA is currently collecting information in order to make another submission to EU or other organizations for funding of such a project.

Agenda Item 4(d): Management of Natural and Cultural Resources

The representative of AMTA reported on a further meeting with Dr Walter Jamison, a Canadian researcher based in the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok. He reported that Canadian Government's interest in assisting a subregional programme of training for resource managers has been confirmed and that Dr Jamison has prepared a proposal for a training programme based on the principles of sustainable tourism development. He distributed copies of Dr Jamison's proposal. An initial pilot study of the village tourism project idea of Thailand and Viet Nam is to be undertaken as a first step to evaluating the need for the training programme.

Agenda Item 4(e): Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Development Study

The representative of ADB reported on progress within the Bank on preparations for a Feasibility Study on the prospect of a major investment project to help implement the recommendations of the successfully completed Mekong/Lancang River Planning Study, implemented previously by ESCAP and ADB. ADB was approached at the last Ministerial Meeting and asked to consider such a project which may result in a non-traditional collaboration between the GMS country governments, the private sectors of the subregion and ADB and in investments of significant scale in tourism developments along the River.

The representative of ADB undertook to send draft terms of reference (TOR) for the proposed Feasibility Study out to all NTOs. He urged NTOs to consider the TOR carefully as they will guide the future of the Study and any resulting project. In particular, he asked for guidance on the question of development priorities. For example, should the project select certain segments of the River and implement all of the priority projects recommended by the Planning Study for those segments, or should a range of priority projects be selected across all six segments of the River?

The representative of ESCAP expressed gratitude to ADB for following up on the implementation of the Planning Study.

The representative of PATA applauded the emphasis on private sector involvement and offered to PATA's help, if required, in coordinating and forging public sector/private sector partnerships.

Agenda Item 4(f): Facilitation of Travel

The representative of AMTA reported that AMTA has begun actively monitoring GMS initiatives in this field and has been pleased to note considerable progress in many aspects, including that most GMS countries now have visa on arrival and new border check points are being opened all the time. He suggested, however, there are still many issues to be addressed. Problems regularly commented on by tourists include: difficulties obtaining visas for overland border crossings; difficulties when multiple entry is required by cross-border itineraries; and the cost of visas, especially at overland check points. Some of these problems will take time to address. Overall, AMTA is convinced that all GMS NTOs are trying hard to gradually ease problems.

The representative of AMTA urged all NTOs to regularly inform AMTA of new developments in the area of facilitation of travel. AMTA will help to ensure that the industry gets to hear of these developments.

The representative of AMTA also reported on progress with the idea of facilitating trial overland tours. In the ensuing discussion, the Meeting noted that the private sector operators at the Third Mekong Tourism Forum expressed enthusiasm for this idea and that ASEAN is also developing overland, caravan style tours. The representative of AMTA reminded the Meeting that AMTA had previously proposed routes number nine, eight and three as possible candidates for GMS trial tours. However, because these only involve three countries he suggested that more candidate routes should be added to list. The representative of Cambodia proposed Bangkok-Siem Reap and Phnom Penh-Ho Chi Minh City. The representative of Myanmar proposed Mae Sai - Tachileik - Kyaingtong - Monglar - Jinghong, Mae Sot - Myawatty - Pha an - Bego - Yangon, and Kanchanaburi - Nateindaung - Dawei - Ye - Mawlamyaing - Bego - Yangon. It was agreed that AMTA will continue to coordinate progress towards developing trial overland tours along these six routes, and individual NTOs will take on specific planning responsibilities as follows:

Cambodia

- Bangkok - Siem Reap.
- Phnom Penh - Ho Chi Minh City.

China

- Route No. 3.

Lao PDR

- Route No. 8.

Myanmar

- Mae Sai -Tachileik - Kyaingtong - Monglar - Jinghong.
- Mae Sot - Myawatty - Pha an - Bego -Yangon.
- Kanchanaburi - Nateindaung - Dawei - Ye - Mawlamyaing - Bego - Yangon.

Thailand

- Assist with all.

Viet Nam

- Route No. 9.

The representative of ADB suggest that AMTA might eventually play a useful role in future by checking the credentials of commercial operators wishing to operate overland cross border tours and commenting on the suitability of operators to NTOs.

The representative of Myanmar spoke in support of the trial overland tours concept. He also summarized recent developments in facilitation of travel to and within Myanmar. Tourist visas are now for 28 days, extendable for further 14 days on application, visas on arrival are now available for cruise ships, and business visitors are able to obtain multiple entry visas.

The representative of Lao PDR spoke in support of the trial overland tours concept and noted that Lao has hosted five commercial caravan tours from Thailand using border passes. He reported that Lao PDR has recently reduced the visa fee from \$US50 to \$US30, partly in response to industry feedback at the Third Mekong Tourism Forum. He also noted that NTOs often need to involve many other government agencies in decisions on facilitation of travel and suggested this as a possible topic for AMTA or ESCAP-led national level seminars.

The representative of Cambodia spoke of the facilitation difficulties associated with the lack of infrastructure and urged development funding agencies such as ADB to help in this respect.

The representative of Viet Nam reported new border check points with Cambodia (now 8 check points / 2 of which are for international visitors) , Lao PDR (now 8 check points / 2

international) and China (now 21 check points / 4 international). He noted that such progress required cooperation within governments as well as externally. He spoke in support of caravan tours on routes nine and eight.

The representative of Thailand confirmed his government's policy of seeking to work closely with neighbours on cross-border issues. Thailand has 11 border check points with GMS countries.

The representative of Lao PDR emphasised the importance of government's efforts in facilitating travel involving all concerned government agencies. The representative of ESCAP mentioned that ESCAP would consider organizing national level seminars on facilitation of travel in any of GMS countries upon request.

Agenda Item 4(g): Village-Based Tourism

The representative of AMTA announced that a significant new initiative is about to be launched in this programme. As a result of previously mentioned discussions with Dr Walter Jamison at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, a pilot study of the selected pilot villages in Thailand and Viet Nam is about to be undertaken by Dr Jamison and his colleagues. With funding from the Canadian Government, this pilot study is aimed at developing a conceptual framework for further assistance to GMS NTOs in the area of village-based tourism and in tourism training.

The representative of AMTA went on to explain that all expenses for the pilot study will be paid for by the Study Team but the host NTOs - TAT and VNAT - have been requested to provide two officers to assist the team, one with good guiding skills for liaison in the field and one with a training background to assist with curriculum development.

The representative of Viet Nam expressed his pleasure at hearing this good news and assured the Meeting of VNAT's willingness to assist.

The representative of Myanmar urged that the pilot project be put on a six country basis as soon as possible.

The representative of AMTA confirmed AMTA's willingness to continue to act as the coordinating agency for initiatives in this programme.

Agenda Item 4(h): GMS Tourism Flows

A representative from Angel Airlines expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to experience a Working Group Meeting. She explained that Angel Airlines is now the second designated national carrier in Thailand. The Company presently operates on domestic routes into Phuket, Chiang Rai and Bangkok and on international routes into Kunming and Chendu in China and Singapore. In future, it has plans to operate out of Chiang Rai into Luang Prabang, Mandalay and Jinghong. She congratulated the Working Group on its achievements to date and asked AMTA to approach Angel Airlines if ever the airline can assist the Working Group.

The representative of ESCAP confirmed that ESCAP will organize a Seminar on Expansion of Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion Through Improved Air Transport, in Lao PDR in the last week of July 1999, in conjunction with the previously mentioned seminar on tourism

promotion. ESCAP will finance participation of two officials from each country, one from tourism and one from aviation, and all regional airlines are invited on a self funding basis. He also noted that ESCAP is considering a study of air linkages and tourism prior to the seminar and that country reports will be expected from each country.

Agenda Item 5: Establishment of a Meeting Task Force

The representative of AMTA spoke in favour of retaining the idea of networking within markets, at least to the extent of having GMS Marketing Committees in three key markets - Japan, USA and the UK. He explained that Thailand and China have representative offices in these markets and the other four countries could be represented on the proposed Committee by their embassy officials. The purpose of these Committees would be to facilitate the implementation of joint marketing efforts in the markets.

The representative of AMTA then suggested that the Marketing Committee idea should for the moment remain as a second step in the process, the first step being to establish a Marketing Task Force. Because most members of the Working Group have development backgrounds, a Marketing Task Force is needed to do marketing work in between meetings. He suggested the Marketing Task Force could meet at the same time as the Working Group and that its work should be integrated with, not separate from, the work of the Working Group. He suggested that the first step should be for all countries to invite a marketing person from the NTO to attend the next Working Group meeting and, if possible, at least one person with marketing experience from the private or business sectors.

During the ensuing discussion, the representative of ATTA endorsed the idea of private sector involvement and urged all countries to establish formal tourism industry associations so that the private sector representative can truly represent the industry. The representative of Thailand agreed with the Marketing Task Force concept and pointed out that the summaries of the proceedings of the Third Mekong Tourism Forum suggest many ideas for the Task Force to operate on. He suggested the marketing people could meeting together informally before Working group meetings. The representative of ESCAP called for expressions of preference between integration with the Working Group or having separate meetings for the Marketing Task Force and there was a clear consensus in favour of integration with the Working Group. The representative of ADB suggested that a "working Task Force" is needed, not a "meeting Task Force". The representative of AMTA suggested that increasing the involvement of marketing people and the private sector in the Working Group meetings should be seen as part of a process of gradually developing the Working Group as an effective mechanism.

It was agreed that marketing people from NTOs, airlines and from the tourism private sector will be invited to the next Working Group meeting with a view to forming a Marketing Task Force and AMTA will liaise with NTOs about the logistics and practicalities of this. NTOs agreed that apart from one ESCAP-sponsored participant, additional official responsible for marketing would attend future working group meetings on a self-financing basis.

Agenda Item 6: Strengthening Ownership

The representative of AMTA recalled the strengthening options mentioned in the previous Eighth Working Group Meeting:

- i. Direct funding by NTOs to a special joint marketing fund for implementing Working Group projects

- ii. Personnel seconded from NTOs to AMTA, with expenses paid by the NTOs for a certain period, during which they would also receive training
- iii. Personnel stationed within the NTOs but allowed to devote considerable amounts of time acting for AMTA on joint marketing projects as part of the Marketing Task Force.
- iv. Individual NTOs could take on the implementation of specific subregional projects under AMTA's guidance.

He suggested option iv) has been agreed to previously when the NTOs accepted responsibility for planning the trial overland tour routes. Option iii) is assumed in the Task Marketing Task Force concept. AMTA also wants NTOs to be actively involved in AMTA either by way of option i) or ii), but funding is the main constraint. He suggested a funding formula involving contributions by the NTOs (25%), TAT (25%) and ADB (50%).

The representative of ADB responded by suggesting that ADB saw the key to sustainability of AMTA lying primarily in the degree of ownership and commitment by GMS countries. The Bank had no means of funding institutions like AMTA on a continuing basis, nor did it consider this a desirable proposition. He suggested, in this context, that the Working Group undertake a thorough assessment of the whole GMS tourism cooperation picture, to take stock of where we have been, where we are today and where the future lies. He suggested that such a review is appropriate at this time because the ADB is reviewing its entire GMS Programme. He suggested that the review might be supported by the Bank, participated in by AMTA, and might result in a document that the Working Group can make good use of to explain itself when seeking to encourage the cooperation of others, particularly the private sector. The representative of ADB also noted that the review report may be useful for presenting to potential donors for Working Group projects. The question of ownership and commitment to AMTA would be comprehensively addressed in this review and concrete recommendations developed.

After discussion, the Meeting endorsed ADB's suggestion of a Review of Progress and Future Directions of GMS Tourism Sector Initiatives and asked AMTA to cooperate with the Review. The Meeting agreed to defer further consideration of strengthening measures until after the Review.

Agenda Item 7: Restructuring to a Programme Approach

The representative of ADB explained how the Agenda Notes and Agenda had been changed in relatively subtle ways to make the change from the old "project" orientation to a new "programme" orientation. Whereas the old approach was appropriate when immediate tasks had to be carefully divided up between implementing agencies, now that the Working Group is operating in a more cooperative manner and progressing on broader fronts, a longer term view is more appropriate. The programme approach will make it easier to accommodate new ideas and new initiatives within a framework of mid-term objectives. The Meeting was asked if it approved of the changes and there was unanimous agreement.

Agenda Item 8: Date and Venue of the Tenth Meeting of the Working Group

The Meeting accepted the offer of Lao PDR to host the Tenth Working Group Meeting in November 1999. The representative of ESCAP informed the Meeting that ESCAP, as co-organizer, would finance the participation of GMS representatives in this meeting.

Agenda Item 9: Other Matters

The Representative of ADB drew attention to the summary notes from the Third Mekong Tourism Forum that had been distributed earlier and pointed out that these notes had often been referred to during the course of the Meeting. He suggested that such summaries should be a regularly produced after Forums so that participants at the Forums can be assured their inputs will be listened to. The Meeting agreed.

The Representative of Thailand spoke in favour of keeping the Six Nation Lancang/ Mekong River Expedition Project alive and asked the other countries to reconsider their options about this Project. The Representative of Myanmar responded that the stumbling block for Myanmar is the assigning of personnel for such a long period. The Representative of Cambodia agreed to reconsider Cambodia's position.

Appreciation

The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting and the warm hospitality accorded to the participants. The Meeting also expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan for financing the travel arrangements of ESCAP-sponsored participants.

Adoption of the Report

The report of the Ninth Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was adopted on 5 May 1999.