

Twelfth Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism

Organization

The 12th Meeting of the Working Group (the Meeting) on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Tourism Sector was held in Kunming, Yunnan Province, People's Republic of China from 30 March to 1 April 2001. The objectives of the Meeting were to facilitate the implementation of priority tourism projects and to discuss areas of specific cooperation for promoting tourism in the GMS. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) in collaboration with the China National Tourism Administration, the Yunnan Provincial Government, and the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration, and with financial assistance from the Government of Japan.

Attendance

Representatives from national tourism organizations (NTOs) of Cambodia, People's Republic of China (PRC), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam as well as representatives of ESCAP, ADB, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), and AMTA participated in the Meeting. Representatives of various public and private sector organizations involved in tourism also attended the Meeting as observers. The list of participants is attached as [Appendix 1](#).

Opening Session

Mr. Hu Guoyou, Deputy Director General, Tourism Promotion and International Liaison Department, China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) welcomed the participants of the Meeting. He noted the progress achieved in the various GMS tourism programs, which has contributed to deepening the friendship and relations among the peoples of the GMS. Mr. Hu reaffirmed the high priority being attached by CNTA to the GMS tourism sector. CNTA will continue to participate in the activities of GMS tourism cooperation and development by making its efforts in supporting and guiding Yunnan Province.

Mr. Shao Qiwei, Vice Governor, Yunnan Provincial Government, welcomed the participants to Kunming. He noted that Yunnan Province is rich in tourism resources. For the past 20 years, the tourism industry of Yunnan Province has witnessed remarkable improvements, making the Province one of China's most renowned tourism destinations. Yunnan Province has formulated a Master Plan for Tourism Development for the next 20 years. The Master Plan aims at speeding up the internationalization process of tourism in Yunnan Province. The Master Plan has placed great emphasis on Yunnan's participation in the GMS tourism cooperation. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Yunnan Provincial Government to tourism cooperation and development in the GMS.

Mr. Arjun Thapan, Manager, Water Supply, Urban Development, and Housing Division (West), ADB, highlighted the progress made under the ADB-supported Economic Cooperation Program in the GMS. With the strong commitment of the participating countries, numerous priority subregional projects have been implemented. He underscored the tourism sector's contribution to economic development and cooperation in the GMS. He announced that the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure Development Program is now ready for implementation. In terms of future direction, Mr. Thapan expressed ADB's

continued support to the trends discussed in previous Working Group meetings, including developing AMTA into a strong, professional regional marketing agency. He emphasized the need to raise the profile of the Working Group and forge genuine public-private partnership. Toward this end, Mr. Thapan proposed the establishment of a GMS Tourism Ministers Conference, possibly, in conjunction with the meetings of the Tourism Working Group. This Conference is envisaged to provide policy guidance on key issues affecting tourism in the GMS. It would also provide the needed mandate to catalyze private sector involvement. Mr. Thapan noted the strong relationship between tourism, economic growth, and poverty reduction. The tourism sector offers unique possibilities for benefiting the poor, especially in areas where the attraction is based on nature, culture, and adventure.

Mr. Paisan Wangsai, Director, AMTA, expressed appreciation to the GMS NTOs for their participation in the Working Group. He noted several developments that have contributed to the continued growth of tourism in the GMS, including new airports and aviation routes, the forging of Quadripartite Commercial Navigation Agreement among the four upper riparian countries, and construction of new road and rail links. As a result of these, the number of tourist arrivals to the GMS members grew by 11 percent in 2000 to over 14 million. He underscored the major challenges facing GMS tourism cooperation, including: (i) attracting high-quality, high-yield tourists, (ii) developing tourism-related infrastructure, and (iii) attracting investors to the tourism industry.

Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa, Chief, Tourism Unit, Transport, Communications, Tourism, and Infrastructure Development Division (TCTIDD), ESCAP, delivered the message of Mr. Hasudungan Tampubolon, Director, TCTIDD, ESCAP. He highlighted the rich social and cultural diversity of Yunnan Province. An important initiative of ESCAP was the Resolution adopted by the Commission at its 56th Session to designate the years 2000 to 2009 as the Decade of the GMS Development Cooperation. Tourism is one of the priority sectors where strategies would be developed in order to achieve economic growth and integration as well as alleviate poverty. In the immediate future, ESCAP plans to cooperate with the Tourism Authority of Thailand in organizing a training programme on tourism management for countries of the subregion to be held in Bangkok in 2001. He emphasized that the GMS is a unique destination and one of the most attractive tourism assets in the world. In this regard, the joint efforts of the Working Group, coupled with effective and creative marketing, could help enhance this asset. These efforts should include a deeper responsibility to preserve the environment and way of life along the Mekong/Lancang River.

Election of Officers and Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting elected Mr. Luo Ming Yi, Deputy Director General, Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration (YPTA) as Chairman of the Meeting, and H.E. Prince Sisowath Chivannariddh, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Tourism, Royal Government of Cambodia, as Vice Chairman.

The Meeting adopted the Agenda, which is attached as [Appendix 2](#).

Program 1: Destination Marketing

The Meeting noted the following developments under the Destination Marketing Program that have taken place since the 11th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group in April 2000: (i) PATA organized a marketing workshop in Phnom Penh on 5 April 2000; (ii) TAT sponsored "Travel-logue" on GMS entitled "The Magic of the Mekong"; (iii) AMTA has initiated new marketing tools for the GMS, including: (1) GMS marketing logo and tag lines,

(2) GMS Website "visit-mekong.com", and (3) GMS Travel Trade Manual; (iv) GMS booth at the ATF 2001 held in Brunei Darussalam on 11 - 16 January 2001 (GMS tour packages, list of tour operators, travel agents as well as information on air-linkages were made available during the event); and (v) GMS booth will be present at the upcoming PATA Travel Mart in Singapore during 3 - 6 April 2001.

The representative of PATA reported that the number of participants to the 6th Mekong Tourism Forum will exceed 200, the largest number since the First Mekong Tourism Forum held in Pattaya, Thailand in 1996. He noted that the Mekong Tourism Forum has already matured in terms of bringing people together to address common issues to help in the development of tourism in the GMS. The representatives of PATA reaffirmed PATA's commitment to assist the GMS countries in tourism promotion and marketing through PATA's future initiatives, such as the "See you in Asia" promotional campaign to be launched during the PATA Annual Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, marketing seminar on "Upselling Through E-commerce", and the PATA Travel Mart in Singapore, where the GMS countries will be provided booth space.

The representative of AMTA noted the strong cooperation that AMTA has received from PATA in the various destination marketing activities of the GMS Tourism Working Group. This includes materials used in the GMS website, and free-of-charge exhibition space during the PATA Travel Mart.

The representative of AMTA emphasized the need for GMS NTOs to provide financial contribution to the GMS tourism marketing activities. While private sponsorship from airlines and tour operators have been obtained, the budget for the production of tourism promotional materials remains insufficient given the huge requirements. He proposed that each NTO consider providing US\$5,000 to AMTA to be used in the tourism marketing activities. The representative of Cambodia confirmed Cambodia's commitment to provide US\$5,000 as earlier indicated by the Minister of Tourism of Cambodia. The representative of YPTA committed YPTA's financial support to the GMS tourism marketing activities. The representatives of Lao PDR and Myanmar stated that their respective NTOs would communicate directly with AMTA concerning the proposed financial contribution. The representative of AMTA will follow-up with the NTOs on their reply on this issue by the end April 2001.

The representative of AMTA clarified that the financial contribution from the NTOs will be used for the following: (i) update and upgrade the Mekong tourism map, which has proven to be popular among tour operators; (ii) support the organization of AMTA participation in major trade shows, such as the ASEAN Tourism Forum, PATA Travel Mart; and (iii) destination showcase at major trade shows.

The representative of ETC Asia Co., Ltd., (ETC) reported to the Meeting on the progress made in developing the GMS tourism website. The official GMS tourism website, which is developed and maintained by ETC under a public-private partnership, was launched in November 2000. To date, it has 200 pages of tourism-related information on the GMS, and over 600 links to other related websites. ETC plans to produce 180 new pages within the next three months featuring hotels, guesthouses, and tours. ETC worked with the Mekong Project Development Facility in the conduct of seminars in Cambodia and Lao PDR to assist hotels and guesthouses to be connected to the Internet. He requested the Working Group to provide ETC with information for posting on the website. He thanked all AMTA, and all stakeholders, especially the NTOs, for all the assistance and cooperation that ETC has received in the development of the GMS tourism website.

Program 2: Subregional Events

The representative of PATA noted the record registration for the Sixth Mekong Tourism Forum to be held at the Bank Hotel in Kunming, PRC from 31 March to 1 April 2001. The theme of the Forum is "Appraising the Jewels of the Mekong." The representative of PATA expressed PATA's appreciation to the CNTA and YPTA for hosting the Forum, and ADB and ESCAP for their support.

The representative of ADB expressed appreciation to PATA for having organized the Mekong Tourism Forums. He expressed the need for the Forum to be self-sustaining, which can be achieved given the growing private sector interest. He requested PATA to help in finding private sector sponsors for future Forums. He explained that in the interest of fostering ownership of the Forum by the GMS countries, industry people should take the lead in organizing the future Mekong Tourism Forums. In response, the representative of PATA committed to make the Mekong Tourism Forum a self-sustaining activity starting 2002 with the Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum.

The representative of Thailand reported that overseas offices of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in Los Angeles, New York, Paris, Tokyo, and Fukuoka had made arrangements for familiarization trips for outbound tourism operators to attend the Sixth Mekong Tourism Forum.

The representative of AMTA emphasized the important role being played by airlines in the successful organization of tourism events, such as the Mekong Tourism Forum. He proposed that each GMS NTO cooperate closely with their respective flag carriers to enable participation of tourism buyers from a greater number of markets in the future Mekong Tourism Forums.

The representative of Viet Nam confirmed Viet Nam's wish to host the Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum in Hanoi, Viet Nam in 2002. The representative of Myanmar expressed Myanmar's intention to host the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum in 2003. The representative of Thailand expressed readiness in hosting any of the future Forums in the event that Viet Nam and/or Myanmar decide to withdraw their respective offers.

Since the Mekong Tourism Forum has not yet been held in Myanmar, the Meeting agreed that the Seventh Mekong Tourism should be held in Myanmar in 2002, and that the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum be held in Viet Nam in 2003. The representative of Myanmar confirmed that Myanmar is willing to host the Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum in 2002. The representative of Viet Nam expressed the willingness to host the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum in 2003.

Program 3: Training

The representative of ESCAP underscored ESCAP's support to the Program on training of the Working Group. He informed the Meeting of the outcome of the national seminars on sustainable tourism development in Yangon in August 2000 and in Tianjin in November 2000. He announced the planned holding of a series of subregional seminars in the GMS countries, and remarked that ESCAP will invite representatives from GMS countries in seminars that it will organize for the Asia Pacific region. ESCAP and the World Tourism Organization organized a Regional Seminar on Tourism Statistics and the Development of Tourism Satellite Accounts in Bangkok on 21-24 February 2001, which was participated in by representatives from all GMS countries. For its future training activities, ESCAP and TAT

will organize a training programme on tourism management for the GMS countries in Bangkok on 16-20 July 2001. ESCAP will also organize a Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT) Conference on Tourism Education and Training in the Asia-Pacific Region at Khajuraho, India on 7-10 August 2001, and a Seminar on Promotion of Buddhist Tourism Circuits at Kisarazu, Japan on 5-7 September 2001. The Meeting noted ESCAP's readiness to organize national level seminars in tourism for the GMS countries. The representative of ESCAP informed the Meeting of activities of APETIT. A total of 100 education/training institutes and NTOs from 30 countries, which include the six GMS countries, have been actively participating in APETIT's activities. He informed the Meeting that within the framework of APETIT, 10-day training programmes on front office operation were conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in December 2000.

The representative of PATA reported that it organized two seminars last year, namely, Crisis Management Seminar in Bangkok and a Technology Seminar in Da Nang. For the coming year, PATA will organize marketing seminars in Viet Nam and Thailand, and an ecotourism seminar in Myanmar. Similar ecotourism seminars for the other GMS countries are planned to be organized by PATA.

The representative of YPTA made the following suggestions/comments: (i) Yunnan Tourism College and other technical schools in Yunnan Province should be included in the joint tourism training programs for the GMS countries; (ii) AMTA should ensure that YPTA is informed of planned tourism training activities; and (iii) in conjunction with ongoing work being done by YPTA with the World Tourism Organization, an information conference on tourism will be convened in Yunnan Province.

Program 4: Management of Natural and Cultural Resources

The representative of AMTA reported that a one-week program on Training Resource Managers in Conservation and Tourism (Heritage Management) sponsored by Canadian University Consortium (CUC) and AMTA was successfully organized on 21-27 August 2000 at the Asian Institute of Technology. A total of 17 participants attended. She informed the Meeting that the training program was successful based on the evaluation made. The training program provided a venue for the participants to share experiences in the area of conservation and natural resources management.

The representative of CUC commented on the ability of the GMS countries to respond to these training needs. Based on CUC's experience, the GMS countries need specific techniques to address carrying capacity issues at sites that are under pressure, and interpretation techniques to tell their natural and cultural stories. CUC is exploring the use of distance learning methods to address these needs.

Program 5: Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Development

The representative of ADB reported that ADB is now ready to implement the regional technical assistance (RETA) for the conduct of feasibility studies for the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure Development. The delay in the implementation has been due to the lack of willingness on the part of the governments of some of the GMS countries to secure ADB loan for tourism projects. He announced that ADB has identified additional loan resources for subregional cooperation projects. It is now possible for the GMS governments to seek ADB funds over and above their indicative respective country allocations to implement their respective segments of the Mekong/Lancang tourism infrastructure projects. He informed the Meeting that AMTA would serve as coordinator of the RETA. The

results of the RETA will be published and disseminated to the private sector. The RETA will start soon and will take 6-8 months to complete. Processing of subsequent loan may immediately follow after completion of the RETA. Over the course of the RETA implementation, feasible public-private partnerships will be explored in the development of Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure projects. He requested that the NTOs participate, cooperate, and help to sensitize the respective Government agencies in charge of securing official development assistance to ensure their full cooperation.

The representative of AMTA remarked that the result of the RETA could be used by the newly-established GMS Tourism Investment Task Force. This Task Force was established under the umbrella of the ASEAN tourism cooperation to promote investments. The first meeting of the Task Force will be held in Kunming, PRC on 1 April 2001.

An observer from the PRC proposed that ADB extend regional technical assistance to conduct studies on tourism development and poverty reduction. The representative of ADB clarified that ADB could not accommodate the requested technical assistance since additional resources to be given by ADB for subregional projects are for loan investments and not for technical assistance grants. He expressed appreciation that tourism is now being seen as an effective tool to reduce poverty.

Program 6: Facilitation of Travel

AMTA provided the Meeting recent information that AMTA compiled on international flights to and within the GMS, and international checkpoints in each of the GMS members. The Meeting agreed that the NTOs will provide AMTA with their comments and updated information on international checkpoints. The representative of AMTA noted that developments in the area of facilitation of travel happen very fast.

The representative of Yunnan Provincial Government informed the Meeting that a visa is no longer necessary for official passport holders from Lao PDR, Viet Nam, and Thailand. Visas on arrival could be granted to foreigners in certain border areas in Yunnan Province. Upcoming developments in road, rail, and air transport are expected to facilitate the flow of tourists to Yunnan Province.

The representative of Cambodia informed the Meeting about three new international checkpoints, namely: (i) Phnom Den in the Cambodian/Vietnamese border; (ii) Don Kralor in the Cambodian/Laotian border; and (iii) Koh Kong water checkpoint.

The representative of AMTA proposed that the Working Group collaborate with outbound operators in educating inbound tourists to the GMS countries on the local culture and proper behavior. On the part of the GMS country being visited, he encouraged the GMS countries to provide adequate facilities to ensure the convenience and safety of tourists.

Program 7: Village-Based Tourism

The representative of AMTA reported that situation reports for the Had Bai village in Thailand, Pak Beng village in Lao PDR, and Hung Phong village in Viet Nam have been completed and circulated to the countries concerned. A survey of Koh Dach is planned for the near future. The next step will be the convening of stakeholders' meetings in each of the subject villages. The purpose of these meeting is to help the communities come up with their initial action plans.

The representative of CUC urged the NTOs to consider their level of readiness, including capacity for natural and cultural resources management, before doing Village-based tourism. If successful, the GMS countries should develop segments to link the villages together by possibly promoting the villages through the Internet.

The Meeting expressed appreciation to CUC for their contribution to the development of Village-Based Tourism.

Program 8: GMS Tourism Flows

ADB Advisor to the GMS Program presented the key findings of the tourism sector report for the ADB-financed Preinvestment Study for the GMS: East-West Economic Corridor. The report was finalized during a workshop on the study held in Bangkok on 13-14 March 2001. The East-West Corridor is rich in natural, cultural, and historical tourism resources that could be developed individually or jointly. Major impediments to tourism development and cooperation in the Corridor include: (i) lack of facilities and infrastructure, (ii) entry barriers to private sector investment, and (iii) limited promotion and marketing and product development. There is a large potential for joint promotion, marketing, and product development. A total of 12 priority projects were proposed on which cooperation could be pursued. The first two projects are aimed at increasing awareness of the Corridor as a tourist destination. The third project proposes a detailed comprehensive planning study of tourism infrastructure requirements. The fourth project proposes a training program for tourism authorities in the Corridor provinces. The fifth project is aimed at preparing appropriate measures to preserve the Corridor's tourism resources. Six project profiles were prepared to develop six types of tourism products that capitalize on the Corridor's unique resources. One single-country program of tourism initiatives for Lao PDR was included in the list of priority Corridor projects.

The Tourism Sector Report of the Preinvestment Study for the East-West Economic Corridor was endorsed by the representatives of the four Corridor countries, namely, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The representative of Cambodia expressed enthusiasm for Cambodia's participation in the development of tourism under the East-West Economic Corridor initiative.

The Meeting agreed that AMTA will follow-up with the NTOs of the East-West Corridor countries on their respective representatives to the proposed East-West Economic Corridor Marketing Task Force. The Meeting also agreed that AMTA will convene the meeting of the Task Force to discuss initial joint promotion and marketing activities as proposed in the first project profile. Possible initial marketing activities include the development of an EWEC tourism map and EWEC tourism video, and the inclusion of EWEC tourism in the Official GMS Tourism website.

The Meeting noted the following comments on the proposal to promote and market the EWEC as a single tourism destination: (i) there may be some confusion created between EWEC and GMS that could negatively affect the overall marketing effort; (ii) these activities may be premature since the physical infrastructure is still to be developed; and (iii) promotion of other GMS destinations outside the EWEC may be undermined. In response, ADB Advisor clarified that the EWEC tourism initiative still remains within the entire umbrella of the GMS Program. He also mentioned that EWEC development is a pilot initiative for economic corridor development. Other economic corridors in the GMS will also be developed, such as the North-South Corridors.

The representative of YPTA, recognizing the rich and diverse tourism resources of Yunnan Province, proposed the development of tourism along the North-South Economic Corridors.

The representative of ETC agreed to work with AMTA and ADB to include the EWEC tourism attractions in the Official GMS Tourism website.

Strengthening Ownership

The Meeting agreed that AMTA should prepare official letters to the GMS NTOs concerning the financial commitment for the marketing activities of the Working Group. The letters should indicate the specific purpose of the funds to be contributed. The representative of Myanmar indicated that it might be difficult for Myanmar to make a commitment to contribute to the planned marketing fund.

The representative of Thailand expressed the need for the involvement of ADB and ESCAP in the activities of the Working Group given their involvement in various subregional activities in the GMS.

The representative of ADB recalled the previous plans for reform of the Working Group to make it more active and more responsive to the private sector. He challenged the NTOs to each bring two new projects along to the next Working Group Meeting, together with interested private sector partners.

As discussed during previous meetings of the Tourism Working Group, the Meeting agreed that in order to raise the profile of the Working Group, subsequent meetings of the Working Group should be participated in by the heads of the GMS NTOs as well as NTO officials in marketing and planning. The Meeting also agreed to propose the concept of establishing a GMS Tourism Ministers Conference under the ADB-supported Program of Economic Cooperation tentatively scheduled for June 2001.

Date and Venue of the Next Meeting

The Meeting agreed that the 13th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector would be held in Myanmar. The Working Group will be informed of the exact date and venue of the 13th Meeting in due course.

Other Matters

The representative of AMTA informed the Meeting of two new subregional cooperation frameworks that are expected to enhance inter-regional tourism, namely, the Great Wonders of Suwannaphumi and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation. The Great Wonders of Suwannaphumi was a result of the agreement among Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand. The Meeting of Tourism Ministers of the four countries held in Bangkok in 2000 agreed to include Viet Nam in this initiative, which would promote products that combine tourist attractions of the five countries. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was established during the first meeting among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Tourism of Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam held in Vientiane, Lao PDR in November 2000. Tourism authorities of the six countries have finalized plans to initiate marketing promotional links between the Mekong and Ganga rivers.

Appreciation

The Meeting expressed appreciation to the China National Tourism Administration, the Yunnan Provincial Government, and the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration 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 of ESCAP-sponsored participants.

Adoption of the Report

The Report of the 12th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was adopted on 1 April 2001.