

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)
ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)
AGENCY FOR COORDINATING MEKONG TOURISM ACTIVITIES (AMTA)**

13th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong
Subregion Tourism Sector

4-6 April 2002
Yangon

R E P O R T

ORGANIZATION

1. The 13th Meeting of the Working Group (the Meeting) on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Tourism Sector was held in Yangon, Myanmar from 4 to 6 April, 2002. 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 Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar, and with financial assistance from the Government of Japan.

ATTENDANCE

2. Representatives from national tourism organizations (NTOs) of Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam as well as representatives of ESCAP, ADB, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and AMTA participated in the Meeting. Representatives of various public and private sector organizations involved in tourism also attended the Meeting as observers. Members of the GMS Working Group on Environment participated in discussions on management of natural and cultural resources. The list of participants is attached as Annex 1.

OPENING SESSION

3. Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa, Chief, Tourism Unit, Transport, Communications, Tourism, and Infrastructure Development Division, ESCAP, welcomed delegates to the 13th Meeting of the Working Group. He highlighted the GMS' uniqueness as a tourist destination and outlined three aspects of tourism policy that ESCAP considers important for all GMS countries. First, there is now greater awareness that tourism should spread economic and social benefits widely throughout society, improving standards of living and reducing poverty. Second, it is important that governments and all other stakeholders take responsibility for ensuring that tourism contributes to long-term prosperity and the quality of life of future generations. Third, increasing numbers of tourists require tourism that is barrier-free and the GMS could take a leadership role in making destinations attractive and accessible to groups with disabilities and special needs. ESCAP will step up efforts to assist countries to build capacity to formulate and implement appropriate policies related to these three areas.

4. Mr. Arjun Thapan, Director, Social Services Division, Mekong Department, Asian Development Bank, expressed the Bank's continued pleasure at being associated with the GMS tourism sector. Just as world tourism has been through changes recently, so too has the Bank. Rededicating itself to poverty eradication, the Bank has restructured to become more country focused. A new Mekong Regional Department has been established. On-going projects such as the Mekong/Lancang Tourism Infrastructure Development Project and the East-West Economic Corridor Project will be based in this new department. To complement this renewed commitment, the Bank needs new project ideas from GMS countries and a renewed commitment from NTOs to owning the cooperative process, especially through their active support of AMTA.

5. Mr. Paisan Wangsai, Director of AMTA, welcomed participants on behalf of the AMTA, which is the Tourism Working Group's secretariat. He observed that GMS tourism continues to have promising growth prospects. In 2001, tourist arrivals to the GMS totaled about 14.7 million, a 6.7% increase over 2000. This is a good performance in a year of depressed conditions in many parts of the world. There was strong interest in the GMS from buyers at the recent ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) in Jogjakarta. The new GMS Tourism Marketing Fund will boost AMTA's marketing activities. Projects such as ADB's Mekong / Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure Development Project are helping in terms of identifying opportunities for investments in the industry and its infrastructure. The Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum, held for the first time in Myanmar, will be another notable GMS tourism event. In addition, the process of subregional cooperation is progressing through projects such as ADB's East-West Economic Corridor Project, which has a component of tourism marketing. The purpose of the Working Group is to apply practical tourism development concepts to keep these GMS tourism development activities on the right track.

6. U Khin Maung Latt, Director General, Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar, warmly welcomed delegates and expressed Myanmar's pleasure at hosting the Meeting. He confirmed the objectives of the meeting, which are to facilitate the implementation of priority tourism projects and to discuss areas of specific cooperation for promoting tourism in the GMS. The Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum to follow will also provide excellent networking opportunities.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The Meeting elected U Khin Maung Latt, Director General, Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar, 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.

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

9. Agenda Notes were circulated prior to the Meeting to facilitate discussion of the various agenda items. These Notes are attached as Annex 3.

PROGRAM 1: DESTINATION MARKETING

10. The representative of AMTA expanded on the GMS' 6.2% overall growth in tourist arrivals in 2001, noting that this amounted to 14.67 million visitors in that year. The following developments under the Destination Marketing Program have taken place since the 12th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group in April 2001: (i) AMTA has upgraded and republished the GMS Map, printing 3,000 in English and 1,000 in Japanese; (ii) the AMTA newsletter was published three times over the year; (iii) AMTA organised GMS tourism booths at the PATA Travel Mart in April 2001, the ASEAN Travel Exchange at ATF in January 2001, the Thailand Travel Mart Plus Indochina in September 2001, and the 10th GMS Ministerial Meeting in Yangon in November 2001; (iv) the GMS tourism web site (www.visit-mekong.com) has been working all year and AMTA is soliciting for material for the site; and (v) new collateral was produced in the form of a brochure titled "Cruising in the GMS" and distributed to all NTOs.

11. The representative of AMTA then tabled a program of proposed destination marketing activities for the 2002 – 2003 financial year. Planned activities include: (i) AMTA's continued participation at major trade shows, possibly this year including the World Travel Mart (WTM) in London in November 2002, as part of Thailand's stand; (ii) producing new promotional and audio visual materials such as "GMS Exotic experience" CD ROM, leaflet and press kit; (iii) updating and circulating new material for the GMS Travel Manual; (iv) ensuring wider circulation of the AMTA newsletter; and (v) conducting agent and media familiarisation trips (FAM trips) to coincide with major GMS tourism events.

12. The representative of China commended AMTA's proposed marketing program and suggested AMTA join the major international travel marts, such as WTM in London, ITB in Berlin, the Chicago Travel Mart, etc.

13. The representative of AMTA elaborated on AMTA's strategy in regard to attendance at international trade shows. To a large degree, AMTA relies on the hospitality of the host agency. For example, PATA generously makes booth space available at the PATA Mart. ATF host countries also traditionally give booth space free of cost. TAT provides major sponsorship by sending TAT personnel to man the booths.

14. The representative of Cambodia congratulated AMTA on the new version of the GMS tourism map and AMTA's newsletter. Cambodia recognizes the need to find sources of funding for representation at international trade fairs. When using the term "GMS" in marketing, there needs to be an explanatory additional line.

15. The representative of AMTA explained that AMTA regularly uses "Exploring the Mekong" as a tag line. Feedback from the ATF was that "Mekong" is the key word in the minds of consumers and industry.

16. The representative of Vietnam noted that AMTA's marketing is working and Vietnam is benefiting from the results. As well as producing the GMS tourism map in English and Japanese, consideration should also be given to a version in German. Putting World Heritage sites on the map should also be considered.

17. The representative of AMTA noted that if AMTA succeeds in its plan to get contribution for the map from operators and airlines, the proceeds would make it possible to produce the map in other languages and make other improvements.

18. The representative of Lao PDR agreed with AMTA's proposed program and suggested that English is the most effective language for the tourist map.

19. The representative of Thailand strongly advocated that AMTA give emphasis to publicity and public relations in addition to marketing and promotion to the travel trade. For example, getting TV teams from Europe to film in the GMS should be a priority for AMTA. However, trade contact is also important and TAT would like to offer booth space for a GMS pavilion at the Thailand Golf Travel Mart, scheduled for 25 May 2002.

20. The representative of AMTA recalled AMTA's track record in arranging FAM trips to GMS countries and noted that this activity will now be expanded because of the new GMS Tourism Marketing Fund. In regard to expanding representation at trade fairs, the Shanghai/Kunming Travel Mart is an important prospect.

21. The representative of China confirmed that CNTA would welcome and support AMTA's involvement in the Shanghai/Kunming Travel Mart.
22. The representative of ESCAP recalled a proposal at the last Working Group meeting that NTOs should bring project ideas to subsequent meetings and invited countries to present their proposal under the appropriate program.
23. The representative of Lao PDR presented a project idea for a FAM trip for international tour operators to GMS countries at an estimated cost of US\$25,000.
24. The representative of Myanmar suggested a video on natural, historic and cultural tourism opportunities in Myanmar.
25. The representative of Cambodia noted that the Shanghai/Kunming Travel Mart falls on the same day as WTM in London and a choice may have to be made. The GMS tourism map should be widely available, for sale, throughout the world.
26. The representative of AMTA outlined the proposed budget for its planned marketing activities. TAT will remain a major sponsor. Cambodia has contributed US\$5,000 towards the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund. Similar contributions are expected shortly from Thailand, China and Viet Nam. Myanmar and Lao have agreed to contribute in cash and in kind.
27. The Meeting endorsed the proposed budget for AMTA's planned marketing activities and recognized the need to be inventive about funding. NTOs can assist by asking airlines to contribute in kind to GMS marketing activities.
28. The representative of AMTA accepted Thailand's generous offer of space at the Thailand Golf Travel Mart. It was agreed that AMTA will send invitations to the heads of NTOs and all NTOs will assist by supplying information on golf tourism for the stand.

PROGRAM 2: SUBREGIONAL EVENTS

29. The representative of PATA reported on preparations for the Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum to be held at the Sedona Hotel in Yangon, Myanmar from 5 to 6 April 2002. Registrations stand at 216, coming from as far away as Macedonia. 16 participants have registered as buyers and 60 have registered as sellers. The theme of the Forum this time is "Bridging the Mekong, Branding the Jewels". The program will include contributions ranging from strategic partnerships for marketing the Mekong to investigating the impacts of tourism growth on the economies in the GMS. This year's Forum will have a very interactive style. The representative of PATA expressed PATA's appreciation to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar for hosting the Forum, and to ADB and ESCAP for their support.
30. The representative of PATA also reported on progress with PATA's Mekong Innovative Tourism Product Award, advising that four top entries for the Award this year are: "The Ban Lorcha Community-Based Tourism Development Project" submitted by the PATA Thailand Chapter; "The Majestic Countries of the Mekong" by First Travel Cambodia; "Balloons Over Bagan, Myanmar"; and "The Mekong World Heritage Tour" by Bangkok Airways. These products will be showcased at the Seventh Mekong Tourism Forum. One will win the inaugural Award on April 6.

31. The representative of Myanmar thanked and congratulated PATA on the continued success of the Forum.
32. The representative of Vietnam reconfirmed that Vietnam is willing to host the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum at Hanoi in April, 2003. The Meeting acknowledged this with acclamation.

PROGRAM 3: TRAINING

33. The representative of AMTA summarized the history of tourism training in the GMS and noted that much of recent training has been led by ESCAP.
34. The representative of ESCAP outlined recent ESCAP-sponsored training activities involving GMS countries. ESCAP and TAT organized a Training Course on Development and Management of Cultural Tourism on 16-20 July 2001 at Bangkok. This course was delivered in collaboration with the Chulalongkorn University. ESCAP organized 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. ESCAP organized a Seminar on Promotion of Buddhist Tourism Circuits on 27-28 November, 2001 at Kisarazu, Japan and sponsored representatives from GMS NTOs. ESCAP and WTO also organized a Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Development in Lao PDR, Vientiane, on 19-21 March 2002. ESCAP gratefully acknowledges the assistance of many agencies in these courses and seminars, including UNESCO, The Canadian Universities Consortium (CUC), PATA and TAT.
35. The representative of ESCAP then outlined plans for future ESCAP-sponsored training activities including GMS countries. A Training Programme on Basic Skills in Hotel Industry is planned for Siem Reap in May 2002. A Seminar on Resource Management for Sustainable Tourism Development is planned for Viet Nam in August 2002. A Training Programme on Enhancing Tourists' Satisfactions is planned for Vientiane in September 2002. A joint ESCAP/UNESCO Seminar on Ecotourism is planned for Myanmar in June 2002. A Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development is planned for Kathmandu in early 2003. An APETIT Conference on Tourism Education and Training in the Asia-Pacific Region is planned for Colombo in August 2003.
36. GMS countries are encouraged to utilize opportunities available from the APETIT Network. APETIT now involves 120 tourism education/training institutes and national tourism organizations in 33 countries, including six GMS countries. Within the APETIT framework, training programmes, seminars and advisory services can be implemented with experts from APETIT member institutes acting as resource persons.
37. The Meeting accepted ESCAP progress report and future plans with acclamation.
38. The representative of China noted that these training course are greatly appreciated by participants. China hopes ESCAP will organize some training courses in collaboration with the Provincial Government of Yunnan.
39. The representative of Thailand briefed the Meeting on a plan for agro-tourism training to be held in the northern region of Thailand, which will be open to three personnel from each NTO of the GMS. Seven days of training is envisaged, taking advantage of good examples of agro-tourism in this area. The overall objective is to share experiences and

strengthen relationships. All countries supported this idea and thanked Thailand for its continued emphasis on human resource development and sharing experiences.

PROGRAM 4: MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

40. The GMS Working Group on the Environment joined the Meeting for the period of discussion on Program 4.

41. The representative of AMTA recalled the history of work under this programme and noted the recent substantial assistance from the Canadian Universities Consortium (CUC).

42. The representative of CUC reported on a recent training course on Training Resource Managers in Conservation and Tourism (Heritage Management). This one-week course, designed for personnel from NTOs and sponsored by the Canadian Government, focussed on awareness of key issues associated with heritage management. One of the outcomes of the course was a request by participants for further training in areas such as visitor management, interpretation, carrying capacity, and sourcing funds for conservation projects. There are many important sites throughout the GMS that are under threat because of inadequate knowledge of techniques for visitor management.

43. The representative of AMTA commended CUC and suggested the GMS needs more of this type of training course in order to bring NTO staff up to the task before them.

44. The representative of Cambodia expressed strong support for this type of course for NTO personnel. There is also a need for training in awareness of the environmental issues associated with tourism.

45. U Thein Myint, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Myanmar and representative of the GMS Environment Working Group, commented that environmental concerns must be taken into account by all sectors, including tourism. Provision for considering environmental issues should be included in decision-making processes for tourism at both national and regional levels.

46. All NTO representatives endorsed the need for more courses in resource management for tourism. The representative of China suggested Hoi An in Vietnam as a venue for a workshop on cultural resource management because of the reported successes of management approaches in that area.

47. The representative of Vietnam proposed a US\$350,000 project involving a package of training in the management of natural and cultural tourism resources.

48. The representative of ADB suggested that a comprehensive assessment of training needs and opportunities may be advisable so that country governments have a framework in which to set priorities and decide on how best to meet their individual training needs. ADB will

talk to AMTA and, through AMTA, to NTOs and others about the need for such an assessment.

49. The representative of ESCAP reaffirmed that capacity building for sustainable tourism is now a major focus of ESCAP's work. ESCAP is ready to implement national level training programmes for sustainable tourism development. One is planned for Myanmar in June and another for Viet Nam in August 2002.

50. The representative of UNESCO noted that UNESCO is experienced in sustainable tourism, in particular associated with natural and cultural resources, and would be happy to assist in an assessment of training needs in this field.

51. Mr J.W. Evans, Director of Environment and Social Safeguards Division in ADB, and representative of the GMS Environment Working Group, gave a presentation on the environmental sector's impressions of the tourism, using material from the Worldwatch Institute. There needs to be an effective dialogue on the environmental issues of tourism at national and regional levels. An assessment of material on the Web about Mekong tourism suggests there may be a perception problem because many of the references report negative impacts. Because sustainable tourism relies on a high quality environment, the challenge facing Mekong tourism is to ensure that tourism development does not "bite the hand that feeds it". An overall GMS policy for tourism is needed to guide sustainable development. The GMS should position itself as a tourism destination with a sustainability theme. Potential issues associated with tourist use of environmentally significant areas include displacement of traditional uses and users. While tourism should not be singled out, the tourism sector needs strategies to manage its own wastes and, in addition, it should be lobbying for solutions to overall waste management problems.

52. The GMS Working Group on the Environment has been developing information bases and early warning systems for environmental problems. A Strategic Environmental Management System is almost ready for wider application, potentially including the tourism sector. The System involves monitoring "hot spots", areas that have been identified as being susceptible to impacts and under threat now. These areas have been identified using methods combining GIS technology and participatory approaches. The opportunity exists for the two Working Groups to work together in future.

53. The representative of Myanmar endorsed the need for concern for the environment and noted that the Mekong/Lancang River contains many environmental "hot spots".

PROGRAM 5: MEKONG/LANCANG RIVER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

54. The representative of ADB reported that Phase I of the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure Development Project began in August 2001. While initially the work was not successful in identifying sub-projects, eventually three countries came forward with useful sub-projects. The RETA project now involves Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR. In February, 2002, a consulting team started working on feasibility studies for the sub-projects. In July, they will start a series of three national level workshops, to be followed by a regional level seminar in Bangkok. US\$30 million is tentatively committed as loan financing. If all goes to plan the project could be approved within this calendar year. The full assistance of NTOs is

requested. The Project is likely to feature a complementary package of policy and human resource development reforms.

55. In response to queries from the representatives of China and Myanmar, the representative of ADB confirmed that it is now too late for new inclusions in this project. However, there may be opportunities for extensions to new areas in future and dialogue should continue to this end.

56. The representative of ADB noted that regional cooperation projects such as this represent additional concessional and semi-concessional funding for the GMS countries. These funds are, for the moment, over and above normal country programme limits. Such concessional financing may not last. ADB needs project ideas from NTOs, preferably in partnership with the tourism industries. The definition of sub-regional cooperation is at least two countries working together.

57. The representative of Cambodia commended ADB and its consultants. Cambodia now has three clearly defined, priority sub-projects.

PROGRAM 6: FACILITATION OF TRAVEL

58. The representative of AMTA tabled a comprehensive summary of progress to date in this program. Updated information on air, land/railway, and cruise routes in the GMS was followed by a summary of the status of visa formalities in each country and a list of international border checkpoints

59. The representative of Lao PDR noted some updates to the lists. Visas to Lao (for 30 days) are now waived for all ASEAN member countries plus China and the Republic of Korea for holders of official and diplomatic passports. International tourists can now get a visa on arrival at the Pakse International Airport. Tourists from neighboring countries who enter Lao PDR with a valid border pass can now stay two nights / three days. The international checkpoint in the Champasack Province is between Vang Tao in Lao PDR and Chongmek in Thailand. A third international checkpoint with Viet Nam is between Na Phao in Lao PDR and Chalo in Viet Nam.

60. The representative of China tabled a list of notes on facilitation of travel in Yunnan. There are now 11 state-level (grade 1), nine provincial-level (grade 2) and 86 border-passes or trading places for locals along the 4,060 kilometer borderline of Yunnan. Of the grade 1, international ports, 3 are on the border with Viet Nam, 3 with Myanmar and one with Lao PDR. Two are airports, Kunming and Jinghong. Two are river ports, Jinghong and Simao. Third country passport holders with a visa for the destination country are permitted to leave and enter from all Grade I ports.

61. The representatives of Cambodia and Thailand agreed to talk further about implementation of the bilateral agreements on visa requirements at the borders between the two countries.

62. The representative of Vietnam noted a correction to the list, the addition of a port at Nha Trang.

63. The representative of ADB noted that three airport upgrade sub-projects are likely to be included in the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure Development Project. The three are Luang Namtha in Lao PDR and Rattanakhiri and Stung Treng in Cambodia.

64. At the suggestion of the representative of ADB, the meeting then debated the matter of a GMS visa. The general consensus was that while competent authorities other than NTOs are more likely to lead decisions about visas, it is appropriate that the tourism sector takes a position as a gentle advocate for the cause of a single GMS visa. The Meeting agreed that NTOs will consult with other concerned agencies and brief their Ministers of Tourism so that the Heads of State of GMS countries could consider including an endorsement of the principle of a GMS visa at the forthcoming GMS Summit in Phnom Penh in November 2002. It was noted that the ASEAN Summit is on the following day and this is also an issue on ASEAN's agenda.

65. The representative of ESCAP stressed that continuous efforts are required to facilitate travel in GMS. Such efforts should involve making destinations physically accessible and providing services to meet the special needs of people with disabilities and older persons. The Meeting noted that a one-day seminar on barrier-free tourism in GMS will be organized by ESCAP in conjunction with the 14th Meeting of the Working Group.

PROGRAM 7: VILLAGE-BASED TOURISM

66. The representatives of CUC introduced the CUC's Tourism Destination Management Outreach Group. Reports produced by this Group are available on CUC's website, including feasibility study reports on all but two of the model village-based tourism sites selected by the GMS countries. The remaining two sites, in Myanmar and Yunnan, are to be assessed shortly. The Tourism Destination Management Outreach Group has also recently completed, in association with AMTA, two papers titled "Recommended Policies for Village-Based Tourism Development in the GMS Countries" and "Proposed Action Plan for Implementing Sustainable Village-Based Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion". These documents are designed to assist NTOs deciding how to approach village tourism development. Villages are fragile and need special techniques. Participatory approaches are essential. The choice of village should be made with great care. Villagers themselves must benefit. Market research is necessary. Good interpretation is essential. Villagers must be able to choose what is to be on public display and what is not. The Action Plan proposes a four-phase methodology involving i) Policy Implementation, ii) Training, iii) Demonstration and iv) Monitoring. To implement the Action Plan in 6 model sites throughout the GMS would cost US\$281,000.

67. The representative of all NTOs spoke in favor of this project and thanked CUC and AMTA for their continued interest in this area.

68. At the request of the Meeting, the representative of ADB explained that Bank financing in the form of grants for subjects such as capacity building and skills development will become increasingly difficult in future. However, funding through the concessionary loan window will remain possible. ADB looks forward to working with AMTA to find an ambitious and comprehensive way to approach the GMS tourism sector's needs, possibly culminating in a long-term investment project for tourism skills development.

PROGRAM 8: GMS TOURISM FLOWS

69. The representative of AMTA summarized progress on the ADB-financed GMS East-West Economic Corridor Project. AMTA and representatives from NTOs of the East-West Corridor countries were involved with the inception meeting of the East-West Economic Corridor Tourism Marketing Task Force in Bangkok in August 2001, organized by AMTA and ADB. The Second Meeting is scheduled for April 2002 in Yangon.

70. The representative of ADB confirmed that the initial tourism promotion activities of the Task Force involve producing a CD-ROM and a tourist map for the Corridor. The CD-ROM is almost finished.

71. The Representative of China urged the Meeting to promote the north-south corridor concept and to foster priority tourism projects associated with this concept.

PROGRAM 9: LINKS WITH OTHER TOURISM COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

72. The representative of AMTA noted that this new program has been added to the agenda in order to acknowledge frameworks that include the whole or some of the GMS and which help to promote the subregion as a tourist destination. The Agenda Notes include a summary of the recent activities in Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and in ASEAN.

73. The representative of UNESCO presented a summary of UNESCO's recent initiatives in support of sustainable tourism development in Asia and the Pacific. UNESCO is increasingly looking at how tourism can contribute to cultural conservation, with the ultimate goal of mobilizing every person on the planet to the cause of conservation. UNESCO's Nam Ha Ecotourism Project, in Lao PDR, was conceived in association with this Working Group. It has recently won a UN Development Award and was selected as a model ecotourism project at a meeting in Chiang Mai.

74. UNESCO also has eight Pilot Sites for Cultural Heritage and Tourism throughout Asia and the Pacific, three of which are within the GMS - at Hoi An in Vietnam, Luang Prabang in Lao PDR and Lijiang in China. The emphasis is on pooling experience in integrating and managing heritage resources and tourism infrastructure through community integration. Within the framework of this activity, two major conferences have been held in Bhaktapur, Nepal and in Lijiang, China. The UNESCO Asia Pacific Cultural Programme is also carrying out a case study series called "Impact", which is looking at the affect of the tourism on culture and the environment. UNESCO also manages the Asia-Pacific Heritage Conservation Awards programme, which acknowledges successful cultural restoration projects in the private sector.

75. The representative of PATA explained PATA's recent activities of relevance to the GMS as it pursues its mission to promote value and quality of travel and tourism in Asia and the Pacific. In the GMS, all 6 NTOs are members of PATA. Thailand and Vietnam have PATA chapters and Cambodia is considering having one. In 2001, PATA held two seminars on Tapping New Markets in Vietnam, a MICE seminar in Bangkok, and sent a PATA Taskforce to the Northern Triangle of Vietnam to undertake a Product Development and Marketing Plan for Hanoi and nearby provinces. PATA's program for 2002 includes a seminar on Aviation in Hanoi, a PATA Taskforce to Koh Chang Islands in Thailand, a seminar on Tourism Satellite

Account and IT for Tourism Marketing in Vietnam, a seminar on Tourism in the New Economy in Thailand, and PATA Chapter Exchanges between Thailand and Vietnam.

76. PATA hopes to build the Mekong Tourism Forum into the best industry networking and marketing opportunity in the GMS. Plans are underway for the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum in Hanoi. It would assist PATA if the venue for future forums could be decided two years in advance in order to allow sufficient time to plan and promote the event.

77. The representative of ESCAP explained ESCAP's recent activities aimed at strengthening capacity of governments to formulate and implement integrated strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development. ESCAP does this through regional forums to exchange experience and best practice, training and advisory services, and providing networking opportunities. He highlighted activities undertaken by ESCAP under the two regional initiatives, the Plan of Action for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Asian and Pacific Region (PASTA) and Network of Asia Pacific Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT).

78. An example of ESCAP's cost-effective approach is a recent ESCAP sponsored APETIT cooperation exercise between Viet Nam and Thailand. Hanoi's Tourism College benefited greatly from a 10-day visit by two experts from TAT's Hotel and Tourism Training Institute, who conducted training programmes for the hotel industry in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. ESCAP provided air transportation. The rest was arranged and paid for by the agencies involved.

79. The representative of ADB outlined ADB's activities in GMS tourism, which include: the Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Infrastructure Development Project, with national workshops starting in July and, if all goes well, final approval by December 2002; the East-West Economic Corridor Project, within which the East-West Economic Corridor Tourism Marketing Task Force is active; and support for the Mekong Tourism Forum. The Bank strongly believes its sponsorship of the Forum should be phased out and the Forum should become self-sustaining, as PATA has agreed to.

80. ADB also has two GMS loan projects in the pipeline. One is a Tourism Infrastructure Development Project in Cambodia, for which project preparatory technical assistance is likely to be approved shortly. The other relates to a Small Airports Improvement project in Lao PDR that may cover up to 10 small domestic airports country-wide. Project preparatory technical assistance is likely to be mobilized in 2002.

STRENGTHENING OWNERSHIP

81. The representative of AMTA noted that the Working Group has previously discussed various issues associated with upgrading and strengthening AMTA. One such issue is the rotation of Director. Another is the co-opting of staff from other NTOs. In the meantime, TAT has an on-going policy of providing the services of the Director and supporting staff.

82. The representative of ESCAP noted the greater number of participants at this Meeting than at previous meetings. It is important that all NTOs feel ownership of the Working Group.

83. The representative of Thailand confirmed that while TAT is willing to continue providing staff for AMTA, it encourages other NTO's to contribute to the future strengthening of AMTA.

DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

84. The Meeting agreed that the 14th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector would be held in Hanoi, coinciding with the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum. The Working Group will be informed of the exact date and venue of the 14th Meeting in due course. ESCAP will organize a one-day seminar on barrier-free tourism in GMS in conjunction with the 14th Meeting.

85. In response to PATA's earlier request, the Meeting called for interest from NTOs in hosting the Ninth Mekong Tourism Forum and 15th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector. Thailand expressed willingness to be host once again and this was accepted by the Meeting with acclamation. The city will be announced in due course.

OTHER MATTERS

86. The representative of AMTA informed the Meeting about the Expedition Mekong 2002 Project. This is set to become the first trip of its kind to navigate the entire stretch of the Lancang/Mekong River from Simao, China to the Vietnam Delta. It was originally planned to start in November 2001, but has been postponed until November 2002.

APPRECIATION

87. The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, 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 of ESCAP-sponsored participants.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

88. The Report of the 13th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was adopted on 6 April 2002.
