

14th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector

Organization

The 14th Meeting of the Working Group (the Meeting) on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Tourism Sector was held in Hanoi, Viet Nam from 28 to 30 March, 2003. 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 (UNESCAP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) in collaboration with the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) 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 UNESCAP, ADB, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 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 [Annex 1](#).

Opening Session

Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa, Chief, Tourism Unit, Transport and Tourism Division, UNESCAP, welcomed delegates to the 14th Meeting of the Working Group. He noted that conditions for jointly promoting the GMS' remain strong and members of the Working Group remain committed. However, the challenges ahead are enormous. They include the need to address: freer movement of people to and within the GMS countries; enhancing quality of tourism products and destinations; human resources development; closer air linkages and better road networks; and spreading economic and social benefits to wide segments of society and enhancing tourism's contribution to poverty alleviation. Since the last Working Group Meeting, UNESCAP organized four national seminars in GMS countries on aspects of sustainable tourism development and a Seminar on Barrier-Free Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion, in conjunction with this Working Group meeting. More seminars are planned in the GMS for 2003, including a national seminar on Sustainable Tourism Resource Management in Phnom Penh in May 2003. Mr. Yamakawa put on record the Working Group's sincere appreciation to Mr. Paisan Wangsai, former Director of AMTA, for his immense contribution to tourism development in the GMS. He also welcomed Mr. Mana Chobthum, new Director AMTA, expressing confidence that under Mr. Mana's guidance AMTA will strengthen its role in coordinating tourism development in the GMS.

Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero, Social Sectors Division, Mekong Department, ADB, noted it has been eight years since the Working Group began its work and the significant growth in GMS tourism since then is in part due to cooperation among the six countries. ADB believes that the future of GMS tourism cooperation lies in fostering sustainable growth while at the same time seeking to exploit tourism more effectively as an instrument for reducing poverty and promoting broad-based economic growth. At the 11th GMS Ministerial Conference in Phnom Penh in September 2002, ministers of the six countries endorsed the GMS Tourism

Development Flagship Program. This Program is aimed at promoting and strengthening subregional cooperation towards sustainable tourism development. Mr. Perdiguero reported that ADB's recent contributions to implementing the Program include the recently approved Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP), involving tourism development loans to Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam. Within this project there is a subregional cooperation component with eight sub-components of particular relevance to the Working Group's agenda. One sub-component involves support for the human resources of AMTA. Mr. Perdiguero also noted progress on the ADB's East-West Economic Corridor initiative and a proposal made at the recent GMS Summit of Leaders to establish a GMS tourist visa for group tour participants. ADB remains committed to playing a coordinating role under the GMS Program, led by requests from the GMS countries.

Mr. Mana Chobthum, Director of AMTA, welcomed participants, thanked the supporting agencies and expressed sincere thanks to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism for hosting the Meeting. Tourism in the GMS did exceptionally well in 2001 and 2002, growing at 6.2% and 8.6%. International arrivals in 2002 reached 16.2 million. In each GMS country, tourism has become a major source of economic development, foreign exchange earnings and jobs. Tourism products from the GMS are now recognized in the world tourism market. UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites are located in the subregion. There was good interest in the GMS at the AMTA booths at the recent ITB trade fair in Berlin and at the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Phnom Penh. The GMS Tourism Marketing Fund now stands at US\$15,000 after contributions from Cambodia, Yunnan Province of China and Thailand. Mr. Chobthum also acknowledged the significance of the forthcoming Mekong Development Project and noted that AMTA will shortly distribute 1,000 copies of a new CD-ROM on the East-West Economic Corridor sponsored by ADB. In closing, Mr. Chobthum called for continued strong cooperation towards to ensure continuous growth and positioning the GMS as a single destination.

Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc, Vice Chairman, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism welcomed the participants to the 14th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector. He was convinced that concerted efforts of the Working Group would contribute to further development of tourism in the Greater Mekong subregion. Mr. Duc expressed appreciation to UNESCAP, ADB, PATA and UNESCO for their continuous support to the promotion of tourism in the subregion.

Election of Officers and Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting elected Mr. Nguyen Phu Duc, Vice Chairman, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Viet Nam, as Chairman of the Meeting, and Mr. Sok Sokun, Deputy Director, Planning Development Department, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia, as Vice Chairman.

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

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

The representative of AMTA gave a summary of AMTA's GMS marketing activities for 2002-2003. He reported that a GMS booth with a tagline " Exploring the Mekong" was displayed at the 2002 PATA Travel Mart in Singapore on 9-12 April, 2002. The new version of the GMS

Tourist Map was well received by Travel Mart participants. Also, when TAT organized the Thailand Travel Mart Plus Amazing Gateway to Mekong Region (TTM+ 2002) in Bangkok, Thailand on 17-21 September, 2002, TAT arranged display booths for GMS NTOs to showcase GMS attractions.

The representative of AMTA also reported that a GMS information booth was set up at the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 20-28 January, 2003. The amount of US\$ 963 was used from the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund to support the participation of one AMTA staff who set up and staffed the booth. ATF participants expressed keen interest in tourism products related to navigating the Mekong River. Also, PATA invited two AMTA staff to join the PATA Pavilion to promote the GMS at ITB on 7-11 March, 2003 at Berlin, Germany. TAT supported the costs of AMTA's participation, including airfares, accommodation and staff per diem. The registration fee (38.5 Euro Dollars) for the ITB was collected from the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund.

The representative of AMTA then tabled a program of proposed future destination marketing activities. An updated version of GMS Tourist Map is to be produced in both English and Japanese language. The presentation of a GMS pavilion at major trade shows, e.g. WTM in London, may not be implemented due to the high rental cost. The official GMS tourism website "www.visit-mekong.com" is to be managed by Asia Web Direct (HK) Ltd. As before, updated information on GMS tourism, such as the AMTA newsletter, will be posted on this website.

The representative of PATA reminded the Meeting that the PATA Travel Mart has shifted from April to October. The 2003 Mart will be held in Singapore and from then it will circulate to a different country every year. PATA will once again give one booth to AMTA. The GMS NTOs are encouraged to take a booth as well.

The representative of China thanked TAT for its continuing support for AMTA. Yunnan Province is pleased to be contributing to the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund. It would be useful to have a report on disbursements from the Fund. While China was unable to arrange for an AMTA booth at the Shanghai International Travel Mart in 2002, CNTA has provided a complementary booth at the Kunming International Travel Mart in November, 2003. AMTA should keep in touch with CNTA about registration arrangements, while Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration will assist.

The representative of AMTA tabled a comprehensive budget for its marketing activities and for disbursements from the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund.

The representative of Viet Nam congratulated AMTA, noted that VNAT is currently processing its \$US5,000 contribution and asked for early notice of any registrations required from GMS NTOs for international trade fairs.

The representative of PATA noted that PATA has other marketing events during the year and AMTA is encouraged to stay in touch about these.

A representative of the Private Sector asked AMTA to make the artwork of the GMS map available to the private sector.

The representative of AMTA tabled examples of recent brochures and the latest version of the GMS map, noting that AMTA is in the process of updating the map and the official GMS website. AMTA will welcome comments and corrections.

The Meeting endorsed the proposal to produce the GMS tourist map in the Japanese language as well as English.

The Meeting considered whether the artwork of the GMS tourist map should be released to the private sector and decided that it should, with free copyright but with a contractual arrangement specifying restrictions on its use.

The representative of AMTA encouraged discussion on the 2003 budget, noting the proposed GMS participation in trade fairs at the ASEAN Tourism Forum in January, PATA Mart in October, Thailand Travel Mart in September, JATA Japan in October, WTM England in November and at CITM Kunming in November. Three newsletters will be produced. New promotional material will be produced on ecotourism and agrotourism. The dissemination of the GMS promotion material will take place to accredited tour operators in key markets, particularly Japan, France, USA and Australia. The GMS map will be produced in English and Japanese. Familiarization trips will be arranged to coincide with major events such as MTF, TTM, PATA Mart, etc..

The representative of China noted that Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration will be pleased to provide staff to man the GMS booth at the Kunming Mart in November 2003.

The representative of AMTA encouraged each NTOs to immediately send in to AMTA the name and contact details of a person within each NTOs to be the focal point for AMTA.

The representative of UNESCO offered UNESCO's assistance with names and other information about World Heritage Sites in the GMS for the GMS tourist map. UNESCO also encourages NTOs to consult the UNESCO World Heritage website about the proper use of the World Heritage logo.

Program 2: Subregional Events

The representative of PATA noted that these are difficult times. The recent Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in Asia has caused difficulties for the Mekong Tourism Forum. However, PATA took the position that the industry should stand firm and show an example to the markets. VNAT has been very cooperative in supplying information about the crisis. Crisis management is the issue of the day and it is on the agenda of the Forum. Preparations for the Eighth Mekong Tourism Forum to be held at the Daewoo Hotel in Hanoi, Viet Nam from 29 to 30 March 2003 are well underway. Registrations stand at 265, which is a new record. The theme of the Forum this time is "Innovation: Selling the Mekong in a Dynamic Marketplace". PATA notes its appreciation to VNAT for hosting the Forum and to ADB and UNESCAP for their support. PATA will continue to go forward with the Mekong Tourism Forum as long as it remains financially viable.

The representative of PATA noted that the buyers/sellers "minimart" will be removed from the Forum program in future. There has been insufficient support from sellers for it to continue. The Forum will revert to being an exchange of ideas rather than a place for formal business.

The representative of Viet Nam expressed VNAT's relief that the SARS outbreak in Hanoi is now over. VNAT is confident that all necessary arrangements are in place for the Forum.

The representative of PATA announced that PATA is currently in discussions with TAT about holding the 9th Mekong Tourism Forum in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 26-28 March, 2004. All GMS countries are encouraged to seek the highest possible representation from NTOs at the Ninth Forum.

The representative of UNESCAP thanked all involved in the Forum and noted that concern about crisis management need not be restricted to isolated incidents. It can be a routine of cooperation and communication. UNESCAP plans to organize a seminar on crisis management in Bali sometime in 2003.

The representative of ADB congratulated PATA for its continued strong support for the Forum, without which the Forum could not be held. ADB particularly appreciates the difficulties this year and the way the industry has shown support for the GMS destinations by attending. ADB has committed to support the Forum this year with a sponsorship grant of US\$25,000. Next year this will reduce to US\$15,000. After that, ADB hopes the Forum can be self-sustaining. ADB supports the concern for crisis management and suggests that an aggressive campaign is needed, in cooperation with the private sector, to assure markets that the GMS is a safe place to visit.

The representative of Viet Nam reinforced the GMS countries concern for crisis management and encouraged AMTA to investigate the possibility of a seminar on this topic in the GMS.

The representative of PATA tabled a brochure on crisis management and reported that PATA, in cooperation with WTO and APEC, is currently working on a manual on crisis management.

The representative of China noted that crisis management is a global issue. The GMS needs to have response systems.

The representative of Thailand referred to ASEAN's Communications Task Force and suggested that the GMS countries should consider being part of this initiative rather than taking an independent approach.

Program 3: Training

The representative of AMTA reported that TAT is to be reorganized. Training will in future be a function of Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sport. This means TAT will no longer be able to support an annual AMTA-organized GMS training course as it had previously. At the 13th Meeting of the Working Group in Yangon, Myanmar, member countries showed keen interest in another training course on management of natural and cultural development. Financing sources for this training course are still being explored.

The representative of UNESCAP presented a list of seminars and workshops organized by UNESCAP in the GMS since 1994 plus detailed reports on three major training activities undertaken since the 13th Working Group Meeting. The first was a National Seminar on Sustainable Development of Ecotourism held in Bagan on 26 and 27 June 2002. Jointly organized by UNESCAP and UNESCO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar, and with financial assistance from Japan, the objective of this seminar

was to strengthen national capacity of Myanmar to foster sound development of ecotourism. The seminar defined ecotourism in an appropriate way for Myanmar and made a series of recommendations including training needs and other follow-up actions.

The representative of UNESCAP explained that the second training event was an APETIT National Seminar on Enhancing Customer Services in the Tourism Industry held on 21-22 August, 2002, in Vientiane, Lao PDR. This seminar was organized by UNESCAP, the National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR (NTAL) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in cooperation with the Lao-Japan Human Resource Cooperation Center and the JAL Foundation. The objective was to strengthen the national capability of Lao PDR to improve customer services in the tourism industry through the acquisition of the theoretical and practical knowledge on customer satisfaction, hospitality and service standards. The seminar concluded that NTAL should take a leading role in implementing training programs to enhance customer services in collaboration with various segments of the tourism industry.

The representative of UNESCAP explained that the third event was a National Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Resource Management held on 4-5 September 2002 at Hanoi. This seminar, organized by UNESCAP in collaboration with VNAT and with financial assistance from the Government of Japan, was aimed at strengthening national capabilities of Viet Nam in resource management and utilization to ensure that the tourism industry develops in a sustainable way. Among the outcomes of this seminar was a series of initiatives to be implemented.

The representative of UNESCAP noted that UNESCAP has also organized a regional seminar on Barrier Free Tourism in Hanoi on 27 March, 2003. This will be reported on under agenda item 4 (f).

The representative of Myanmar responded to UNESCAP's request for feedback from the participants at these training events by explaining that Myanmar's tourism development is aimed at enhancing the preservation of cultural heritage sites and protection of unspoiled ecosystems and environments. Myanmar is blessed with rich natural, cultural and religious heritage, tourist-friendly climate throughout the year, unique ethnic diversity and simple hospitality. Myanmar has plenty of ecotourism sites, from the mountains in the north to the islands, unspoiled beaches and marine life in the southern tip.

The representative of Lao PDR said that participants at the seminar in Lao PDR had reported favorably and NTAL is grateful to UNESCAP for its continued support.

The representative of Viet Nam also reported that the participants at the training courses in Viet Nam had found them very useful.

The representative of Cambodia suggested that AMTA could give higher priority to training in future. Cambodia would be particularly interested in a national level course on tourism planning and management in the market economy and a regional course on natural and cultural resources management.

The representative of PATA congratulated UNESCAP on its training initiative and noted that in future, PATA also wishes to contribute in the area of training.

The representative of ADB noted that it is sometimes difficult to get an overview on where everything is going in training in the GMS. For this reason, the forthcoming Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP) includes funding for a training needs assessment. The three countries participating in the MTDP will need to agree on a terms of reference for this study, which may be on a subregional basis if other countries are interested in contributing.

The representative of China noted that management of natural and cultural resources is very important. In Yunnan, authorities are concerned with the balance between tourist numbers, impacts and yield and are increasingly conscious of the need to educate tourists.

Program 4: Management of Natural and Cultural Resources

The representative of AMTA reported that the Mekong Institute in Khon Kaen University, Thailand, is a potentially valuable resource for training in natural and cultural resource management. In the past, the New Zealand Government and at times ADB has supported the Institute. The New Zealand Government is currently reducing its support. Ideas for future use and possible financial support for the Institute are being sought.

The representative of UNESCO reported on the work being undertaken under UNESCO's cultural program in relation to the management of natural and cultural sites with a focus also on tourism development. UNESCO is constantly trying to link this work with subregional cooperation in the GMS. One of the leading initiatives in this regard is the Cultural Heritage Management in Tourism Project. Started in 2000, the project targeted heritage towns. At each site, attention has been given to identifying how local stakeholders are benefiting from tourism and how conservation management is achieved. Two major regional workshops have been held within the framework of the project to share the experiences of many such projects. UNESCO is now working on the production of work-books to record the experiences and to present models for: physical management; investment by the tourism industry in sustainability; skills training and conflict resolution. As it is produced, the material will be available on UNESCO's website.

The representative of PATA noted that the forthcoming PATA Conference 15 -17 April 2003 in Bali will be based on the theme of culture. This is appropriate because the last conference held in Bali, in 1991, was on nature. PATA sees its role in these issues as "communicator" rather than "expert". PATA will be pleased to work with the organizations leading work in this field.

The representative of Myanmar queried the procedures for establishing World Heritage sites.

The representative of UNESCO responded by noting that UNESCO has clear guidelines for submitting World Heritage nominations that require actions from the country involved. UNESCO has previously sent missions to Myanmar to assist in this regard and is willing to consider doing so again if requested.

The representative of Viet Nam acknowledged the work being done by UNESCO and noted that Viet Nam is currently working on a World Heritage Road Project in central Viet Nam that will package together a number of heritage sites. VNAT will appreciate any possible assistance in this project.

Program 5: Mekong/Lancang River Tourism Development

The representative of ADB confirmed that in December 2002, ADB approved loans of \$US15.6 million, \$US10.9 million and \$US8.5 million, respectively, to Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam for the Mekong Tourism Development Project. The project will promote the development of the tourism sector in the lower Mekong River basin, and support the GMS Tourism Development flagship initiative. The Project, which arose from previous feasibility studies, is in three parts. Part A, Part B and Part C.

The representative of ADB explained that Part A includes a series of infrastructure projects in the three countries. In Cambodia, Part A will involve: environmental improvement in Siem Reap; Road access improvement to the Genocide Memorial; improvements to Rattanak Kiri Airport; and improvements at Stung Treng Airport. In Lao PDR, Part A will involve: improvement to Luang Namtha Airport; improvement of the Access Road to Konglor Cave; and improvement of the Access Road to the Kwangsi Water Fall. In Viet Nam, Part A will involve: environmental improvements at Sam Mountain in An Giang Province; a tourist river pier development in An Giang Province; the tourist river pier development at My Tho in Tien Giang Province; and environmental improvements in Tien Giang Province.

The representative of ADB further explained that Part B of the Project is focused on pro-poor, community-based tourism development. Good models exist already in the GMS for projects in this area, in particular UNESCO's Nam Ha project in Lao PDR.. Learning from such examples, the three countries have designed Part B and allocated significant funding to support activities at the provincial level to spread the use of such models, with particular focus on ensuring participation in the benefits of tourism by women and indigenous groups and protection against any potential negative impacts from increased tourism. For Part B, Cambodia has allocated \$US600,000, Viet Nam has allocated \$US800,000, and Lao PDR has allocated \$US1,600,000.

The representative of ADB presented preliminary findings from a study on implementation strategies for Part C of the MTDP. Part C is focused on subregional cooperation and has opportunities for other GMS countries to participate if they wish. The eight components of Part C involve: i) a facility for small projects; ii) improvement to border posts; iii) fostering tourism marketing and promotion boards; iv) a common hotel classification system; v) a GMS tourism plan; vi) harmonization of tourism statistics; vii) diversification of AMTA's personnel, and viii) GMS tourism human resource development. In general, the implementation strategies will involve: one NTO acting as component coordinator; AMTA assisting to share the preliminary action plans between all GMS NTOs; approval of final action plans by National Project Steering Committees; AMTA coordinating approval by the Sub Regional Project Steering and concurrence by ADB; AMTA assisting in coordinating some cooperative activities, inviting the GMS tourism's traditional supporters (UNESCAP, PATA, UNESCO and WTO, etc.) to assist implementation where their programs and interests coincide; and the Subregional Project Steering Committee reporting annually to the GMS Working Group.

In response to a query by the representative from Cambodia, the representative of China informed that China appreciated that the name "Mekong" is the most useful for an international context.

Program 6: Facilitation of Travel

The representative of AMTA tabled an updated version of the comprehensive matrix of information on air, land/railway, and cruise routes in the GMS first tabled at the 13th

Meeting of the Working Group in Yangon, Myanmar. AMTA wishes to maintain this matrix and calls on all NTOs to assist.

The representative of Myanmar noted a new air route between Kunming and Mandalay being flown by China Eastern Airlines.

The representative of Lao PDR reported three new visa-on-arrival points, two on the border with Thailand and one on the border with Viet Nam.

The representative of China noted new air routes from Kunming to Ho Chi Minh City flown by China Eastern Airlines and from Hanoi to Kunming now flown by Viet Nam Airlines.

The representative of Cambodia reported that the name of Pochentong airport has recently been changed to Phnom Penh International Airport.

The representative of UNESCAP congratulated AMTA for maintaining the matrix on GMS linkages and suggested that AMTA should publish it so the private sector has access to the information.

The representative of AMTA agreed that this was the intention and encouraged all countries to send in corrected information.

The representative of ADB reinforced how important this information is to the public, especially information on exactly which border posts provide visa-on-entry. ADB is generally pleased with recent progress on the spread of visa-on-arrival ports, especially in Lao and Cambodia. ADB is also pursuing the suggestion arising from the GMS Summit of Leaders on November 30, 2002, of a GMS tourism visa. This proposal was further discussed at the GMS Senior Officials' Meeting held in Manila in March 2003. The officials agreed in principle to the concept because it will facilitate travel by tourists from non-GMS countries and support the promotion of the GMS as a single destination. The GMS visa is envisioned to be like the "schengen" visa in Europe, where visitors from outside schengen region need only to get the visa from any one of the participating country but which would be valid to the rest of the participating countries. It is proposed that initially the GMS visa will be provided in accordance with agreed eligibility criteria, such as restricting the visa to group tour participants.

The representative of UNESCAP reported on a Regional Seminar on Barrier-free Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion held in Hanoi on 27 March, 2003. More than 70 participants from throughout the GMS attended the seminar, which was assisted by experienced resource persons. The focus was on access for the people with disabilities and older persons. What emerged was a series of recommendations. Among these were: the importance to take action to improve accessibility; the role of tourism masterplans to establish appropriate policy, taking into account the rights and needs of the disabled; the need for better legislation in this area; the need to strive for barrier free physical infrastructure; the need for publicity about barrier-free; the need for custom-designed tourism services for the disabled; and the need for more research in this field. Because the population of tourists is ageing, action should be taken now.

The representative of Viet Nam expressed appreciation to UNESCAP for the seminar on behalf of all the participants.

The representative of UNESCAP noted that UNESCAP is preparing a study of barrier free tourism in Asia. GMS countries were requested to report on their progress at future meetings of the Working Group.

Program 7: Village-Based Tourism

The representative of UNESCAP reported that UNESCAP will organize a Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development in Kathmandu from 22 to 24 July 2003. Twenty countries, including all GMS countries will be invited to attend. The aims of the seminar will include identifying the types of tourism most beneficial and how to develop pro-poor tourism.

The representative of China noted that farmers in China benefit from village-based tourism. Prompted by this program, the Province of Yunnan has invested in pilot villages. Funds from UK are assisting environmental and poverty reduction studies. CNTA currently has a program to promote agricultural tourism and industrial tourism.

Program 8: GMS Tourism Flows

The representative of ADB reported on progress on the ADB-financed GMS East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) Project including the completion of a CD-ROM on the tourism aspects the EWEC, which will be distributed by AMTA.

The representative of China noted that North/South links are also very important and it is hoped that work can proceed on the North/South Economic Corridor as soon as possible.

The representative of ADB suggested that because of the success of the East-West Economic Corridor project, it is likely that more attention will soon focus on the North South Economic Corridor initiative.

Review of Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Programmes

The representative of ADB praised the past strategies of the Working Group before suggesting it is time to progress in the structure of the agenda of the Working Group. The 11th GMS Ministerial Conference held in Phnom Penh in September 2002 endorsed a GMS Tourism Development Flagship Program as part of the 10-year GMS Strategic Framework. The GMS Summit of Leaders in Phnom Penh in November 2002 endorsed the Strategic Framework and the 11 Flagship programs. It would be ideal if the Flagship Program and the Working Group agenda could be harmonized.

After considering a comparison chart of the two lists of programs, the Meeting agreed to proceed on a course of harmonization and asked ADB to follow up with a paper suggesting a common format involving changes to both lists.

Public/Private Partnership

The representative of PATA also praised the history of the Working Group before suggesting that the Working Group needs to consider bringing in more private sector voices. PATA is an advocate for public/private partnership. In fact PATA is the only international tourism organization that embraces both public and private sectors of tourism. PATA currently represents 45 countries throughout the Asia / Pacific region. The most successful countries

in the region have "let go" of tourism to the private sector. Small business, employment, etc. are all promoted by developing the private sector. The essential challenge for the future of GMS tourism is to reach out and embrace the private sector. PATA stands ready to assist this.

The representative of the Private Sector suggest improvements to the format of the Forum, including returning to the idea of break-out groups at which the public and private sectors can meet together to address key issues, especially product development issues. That worked well in the past.

The representative of ADB noted that in future, product development issues could be brought to the Forum by the proposed tourism marketing and promotion boards, which will be public/private partnerships. These boards need to take a broad definition of marketing, to include dealing with product development issues.

The representative of PATA responded to the suggestion of changing the Forum format by agreeing to be adaptable and to consider these ideas for future Forums.

Strengthening Ownership

The representative of AMTA recalled discussions on this topic at previous Working Group meetings and noted that Thailand is willing to consider circulation of AMTA around other countries. At the same time, Thailand is also willing to continue to have TAT as the base for AMTA.

The representative of ADB presented a personal view, suggesting that the three countries associated with the ADB Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP) might like to consider using the opportunity presented by the MTDP to take a turn at hosting AMTA? The reason for this suggestion is to fulfill the long-standing aim of the Working Group to rotate AMTA. Under the MTDP, the three countries involved have already agreed to commit personnel to support to AMTA. This could occur with AMTA based in Thailand as at present. The suggested alternative is that AMTA could be relocated to one of the three MTDP countries for the five-year life of the MTDP. A key to this would be to separate the marketing functions from the coordination functions of AMTA. No country wishes to see the GMS marketing functions leave TAT. Whether this suggestion is taken up or not, AMTA is going to have the support of personnel from the MTDP countries and a new role as secretariat for the MTDP's Sub Regional Steering Committee.

The representative of AMTA suggested that whatever happens, the directorship of AMTA should be on at least a four-year basis. TAT is willing to consider the idea of separating the marketing and coordination functions of AMTA.

The representative of China confirmed that if CNTA at the national level cannot nominate a representative to AMTA, the Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration is willing to address this. China strongly supports the idea of multinational personnel for AMTA.

The representative of ADB warmly welcomed this as a complement to the MTDP initiative.

The representative of Viet Nam spoke in support of personnel dedicated to AMTA based in NTOs.

In response to a question from the representative of PATA, the representative of ADB suggested that the key questions to take back for consideration are different for each country. For Thailand, the question is whether TAT can retain the marketing functions if the coordination function starts to circulate. For the three MTDP countries, the two questions are whether to take this opportunity for a turn at hosting AMTA and where in the three countries it should be located. For China and Myanmar the question is whether to support the idea of circulating AMTA.

After further discussion on these ideas, the Meeting agreed to ask ADB for a paper outlining these ideas, so they can be properly considered at all relevant levels.

Date and Venue of the Next Meeting

The Meeting agreed that the 15th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector would be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand coinciding with the Ninth Mekong Tourism Forum. The dates are set at 26-28 March, 2004. Noting that a Seminar on Barrier-free Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion was very useful, the Meeting requested UNESCAP to organize subregional seminars on the subjects of particular interest to GMS countries in conjunction with future meetings of the Working Group.

After speaking in support of the choice of venue for the 15th Meeting, Cambodia offered to host the 16th Meeting in 2005 and, subject to discussions with PATA, the 10th Mekong Tourism Forum. The location would be advised later.

The representative of Thailand welcomed participants to Chiang Mai next year. It is a place with beautiful handicrafts, art and natural tourism resources.

The representative of ADB noted a particular concern about the level of representation at the Working Group and urged all participants to encourage representation in future at the highest possible level and to encourage other potential support agencies to attend future meetings.

Other Matters

The representative of AMTA confirmed that the Royal Thai Government undertook a re-organization in October, 2002, as part of which the Ministry of Tourism and Sports was created. H.E. Mr. Sontaya Kunplome leads the new Ministry. In line with this reorganization, TAT will focus mainly on tourism marketing.

Appreciation

The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism for the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting and the warm hospitality accorded to the participants. The Meeting also expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan for financing the travel of UNESCAP-sponsored participants.

Adoption of the Report

The Report of the 14th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was adopted on 30 March 2003.

