

15th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector

Organization

1. The 15th Meeting of the Working Group (the Meeting) on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Tourism Sector was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 26 to 28 March, 2004. 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 Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and with financial assistance from the Government of Japan.

Attendance

2. 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 other 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

3. Mrs. Phornsiri Manoharn, Deputy Governor for International Marketing, Tourism Authority of Thailand, welcomed delegates to the 15th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group (TWG). She thanked and complimented ESCAP, ADB and AMTA, for collaborating with TAT in the organization of this Meeting. This year marks 10 years since the opening of the first Thai-Lao Bridge, an event that set in motion many developments to facilitate trade, travel and transportation in the GMS. Two weeks ago, at ITB in Berlin, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar launched "The Reflections of Everlasting Civilization", a collection of exclusive package tours. All six GMS countries are benefiting from billions of dollars worth of infrastructure development projects still emerging, supported by ADB and the Government of Japan. Having laid the foundations for creating growth, we now have to manage it. The challenge over the next 10 years is to ensure that GMS products remain sustainable and desirable.

4. Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa, Chief, Tourism Unit, Transport Policy and Tourism Section, ESCAP, added his welcome to delegates of the TWG. He noted that the challenges for present and future GMS tourism 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; enhancing service standards; human resources development; closer air linkages and better road networks; environmental management and spreading economic and social benefits to wide segments of society and enhancing tourism's contribution to poverty alleviation. Over the past ten years, ESCAP has been making efforts to promote tourism development in the subregion. Special emphasis has been placed on capacity building in sustainable tourism development. For instance, ESCAP organized the following five national seminars during 2002-2003: the National Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Development in Vientiane; the National Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Development of

Ecotourism in Bagan; the National Seminar on Enhancing Customer Services in the Tourism Industry in Vientiane; the National Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Resource Management in Hanoi; and the National Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Resource Management in Phnom Penh. At the subregional level, the Seminar on Barrier-Free Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion was held in Hanoi in 2003. All or most of the GMS countries also participated in the following three regional meetings organized by ESCAP in 2003: the Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development in Kathmandu; the Seminar on Crisis Management in Tourism in Bali; and the APETIT Conference on Tourism Education and Training in the Asia-Pacific Region in Colombo.

5. Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero, Social Sectors Division, Mekong Department, ADB, also welcomed participants. He reminded the Meeting that ADB is now focused on poverty alleviation and the Bank remains convinced that tourism is an important economic sector for the GMS in this regard. For the same reason, at the 11th GMS Ministerial Conference in 2002, ministers of the six countries endorsed tourism development as one of eleven GMS Flagship Programmes. At last year's TWG meeting, it was agreed to reorganize the TWG's agenda into the format of a Tourism Development Flagship Programme and seven programmes were identified. The Meeting's Agenda Notes have been rearranged accordingly and the TWG's programme of activities, past and present, has been incorporated into an overall GMS Development Matrix maintained by ADB. The most important question at present is after ten years of successful cooperation, it is now necessary to rethink about the goals, objectives, strategies, outcomes and activities of the working group required to strengthen GMS tourism, and to fulfill this new agenda and the higher expectations from GMS leaders and industry, ADB is willing to fund a GMS Tourism Sector Strategy to address this question. The TWG also needs a system for generating, assessing and approving new projects. ADB is currently working on a standard format of project concept papers for this purpose. The capacity of the TWG to take decisions needs to be addressed. The work of the TWG is becoming so important that either the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of NTOs should attend the annual Meeting. Somehow, the great commitment at high levels in GMS governments needs to be reflected in TWG meetings. AMTA is effective, thanks to TAT. However, the future of AMTA needs to be addressed and AMTA needs to be made stronger and become a professionally managed organization, with appropriate budget and staff. ADB remains firmly committed to assisting the work of the TWG.

Mr. Satit Nillwongse, Director of AMTA, thanked all the supporting agencies and in particular, ESCAP and ADB for inviting representatives of the private sector of GMS countries to participate in the Meeting. It is not an overstatement to say that the tourism products of the Mekong Region are among the most desirable in the world. AMTA is proud to have helped put the Mekong Region on the world's tourism map. Recently, there have been significant new tourism developments, such as the improvement of land transport links between GMS countries, the emergence of low cost airlines in the wider region and the simplification of visa regulations among GMS countries. These developments will facilitate and encourage further expansion of Mekong tourism in future. AMTA is concerned to ensure that tourism resources remain sustainable and desirable in future and that tourism continues to benefit all stakeholders, taking into account environmental, social and economic dimensions. To achieve this, coordination of the government and private sectors is necessary in order to ensure effective implementation of the GMS tourism development programme. AMTA hopes that the public and private sectors of the GMS will cooperate more closely in subregional tourism activities with the common goal of making this subregion a world-class tourism destination.

Election of Officers and Adoption of the Agenda

7. The Meeting elected Ms. Phornsiri Manoharn, Deputy Governor for International Marketing, Tourism Authority of Thailand, as Chairperson of the Meeting, and Mr. Yuan Guanghan, Deputy Director General, Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration, China, as Vice Chairperson.

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.

Programme A: Programme to Promote the GMS as a Single Tourist Destination

10. The representative of AMTA gave a summary of AMTA's GMS marketing activities for 2003-2004. He reported that TAT organized the Thailand Travel Mart Plus Amazing Gateway to Mekong Region (TTM 2003+) in Bangkok Thailand on 16-18 September, 2003. A special area of "Mekong Pavilion" was set aside for GMS NTOs and the private sector to showcase Mekong's new products and attractions.

11. The representative of AMTA also reported that a GMS information booth was displayed at the PATA Travel Mart in Singapore in October, 2003. Buyers and media showed great interest in cruising along the Mekong River and new modes of transport such as the travel by train to GMS countries. A GMS booth was also put up at the China International Travel Mart in Kunming in November, 2003 and a GMS tourism information booth was put up at the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) in Vientiane in February, 2004. Participants at ATF expressed keen interest in GMS information material.

12. The representative of ADB reported that a Subregional Marketing Plan would be incorporated into the proposed GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. He introduced a Concept Paper for the preparation of this Strategy, noting that it will include the preparation of an agreed, coherent and focused GMS tourism marketing strategy to position and promote the subregion as a single destination. The marketing strategy would include: i) identification of the appropriate type, range and location of products including tour circuits based on the priority areas, ii) a target market segmentation strategy and the forecast of tourism volumes between 2006 and 2015 broken down by product and activity interest, by source markets, and by socioeconomic profile, iii) a brand image and market positioning strategy for the subregion that would be used by individual NTOs as a marketing umbrella for their own activities and to organize marketing and promotional activities at the subregional level, and iv) a plan for establishing and financing an appropriate institutional structure to implement subregional marketing activities.

13. The representative of ADB further reported that the process of preparing the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy would involve consultations with NTOs and national industries plus two subregional workshops. The first subregional workshop, scheduled for December, 2004 will consider a draft GMS Tourism Sector Strategy and preliminary ideas for an Action Plan. The second subregional workshop, scheduled for March 2005 to coincide with the meeting of the TWG, will involve at least Heads of NTOs and hopefully Ministers of Tourism.

14. The representative of PATA responded to the Chairperson's invitation for comments on AMTA's report and the proposed GMS Tourism Sector Strategy by noting that this year's Mekong Tourism Forum has a new format. The new format aims to create an environment for generating ideas from the participants. These ideas will be feed back as recommendations to the TWG.

15. The representative of Thailand spoke in support of ADB's planned GMS Tourism Sector Strategy, noting that the TWG already has a number of previous studies, the information in which needs updating. He stressed the need to address the issue of funding for marketing and a definite timeframe for action.

16. The representative of ESCAP noted that the marketing component of the GMS tourism strategy should be based on making maximum use of existing resources. For example, GMS marketing has benefited greatly from TAT's seventeen international representative offices. Opportunities available from PATA's existing international network of chapters could be considered for promotion of GMS tourism.

17. The representative of ADB called for reflection on what the next major focus of GMS marketing should be. The job of positioning the Mekong Region in the eyes of the international industry has been done. The next phase of marketing may involve emphasis on positioning GMS products, such as Buddhist circuits and village-based tourism.

18. Led by the representative of Cambodia, the Meeting spoke in favour of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. The Meeting asked ADB to proceed with the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy and agreed with the objectives, components and implementation arrangements in the Concept Paper. A draft strategy should be ready for consideration at a Ministerial Meeting in March 2005.

19. The representative of Myanmar noted with disappointment that Myanmar is not in the list of countries included in the Concept Paper and called for changes to the wording of the Concept Paper referring to Myanmar.

20. The representatives of ADB agreed to make changes to the wording of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Concept Paper, noting that while this project will not include Myanmar, ideas for new projects that do involve Myanmar should be developed in the proposed new standard format for TWG project concept papers.

21. The representative of China confirmed that CNTA's attitude continues to be that joint destination marketing is effective. CNTA will offer AMTA a complementary booth for the GMS at the Shanghai International Travel Mart in 2004. China has also contributed its \$US5,000 to the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund.

22. The representative of Viet Nam agreed that joint destination marketing is important and confirmed that Viet Nam has paid its \$US5,000 contribution to the Fund.

23. The representative of AMTA reported on plans for a GMS presence at the PATA Travel Mart from 22 to 24 September, 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand and the ASEAN Tourism Forum from 22 to 29 January, 2005 in Langkawi, Malaysia. Depending on the availability of funds, a choice may have to be made between the two and AMTA has assumed the TWG would prefer to the PATA Mart because it is within the subregion.

24. AMTA proposes that an updated version of the GMS tourist map should be produced using a new company because of a copyright issue. The new map will be produced in English first, and later it may be translated into other languages, such as German. AMTA is currently seeking a sponsor for the GMS map, which is a popular item with the industry. Draft text for a new GMS guidebook entitled "GMS for Special Interests" is now in the

process of information checking. The deadline to send back corrections to AMTA is 15 April 2004. The guidebook will be ready in June 2004.

25. AMTA distributed copies of the GMS Travel Trade Manual and asked TWG members to submit updated information on the lists of travel agents in each country, visa formalities and accessibility. The information is required before June 2004, ready for republication in September, 2004. AMTA is also seeking commercial sponsorship for the Manual.

26. The representative of AMTA tabled a report on the current state of the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund. The Fund currently has Baht811,736 (approximately \$US18,000) remaining.

27. The representative from Cambodia noted that Cambodia made its contribution to the Fund in 2001 and there should be consistency of approach.

28. AMTA proposed that the AMTA Newsletter should become an annual report, in order to help reduce the problem of manpower to gather information and insufficient sources of information. 600 copies of the newsletter are produced each time. Since reorganization of Thailand's government agencies in tourism, there have been changes of personnel and there are now manpower shortages. TAT would prefer the newsletter to be on the GMS website in future.

29. The representative of ADB commented that AMTA is often left on its own in such matters. ADB would advocate more newsletters. However, all countries must contribute.

30. The representative from Cambodia asked AMTA to ensure there are easy mechanisms for the NTOs to engage with AMTA on such matters

31. The representative of AMTA introduced a representative from Asia Web Direct (HK) Ltd, manager of the official GMS tourism website "www.visit-mekong.com". The representative confirmed the firm's intention of establishing a long-term partnership with AMTA on the basis of making the website self-funding through a booking system. This will mean commercializing the site, which is what the market wants. The firm has plans to market the site, through promotions to the industry and through crosslinks to other sites. The site is already highly ranked on Google in a search for "Mekong". The Chairperson asked NTOs and other GMS tourism organizations to link and promote the website.

32. The representatives from Cambodia and Lao PDR requested that links to national websites be established and called for the website to focus on niche marketing, for example on the theme of ecotourism.

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34. The representative from PATA confirmed that PATA intends to work with AMTA on a planned Marketing Training Course for GMS countries. PATA is also willing to assist AMTA to expand its capabilities, as it is unfair that Thailand must bear all the burden of unifying the GMS NTOs. PATA believes a unified approach by the NTOs is important if private sector is to be encouraged to support events such as the Mekong Tourism Forum.

35. The representative from Cambodia called for understanding of the situation of NTOs.
36. The representative from ADB noted that the Bank's continuing commitment to supporting GMS tourism is dependent on continuing commitment by all countries.
37. The representative from ESCAP suggested that a funding formula for the GMS Marketing Fund be prepared by AMTA for consideration at the 16th Meeting of TWG.
38. The representative from Lao PDR undertook to transfer its US\$5,000 in April, 2004.
39. The representative from Myanmar agreed to reactivate the matter of Myanmar's contribution.
40. The representative from Lao PDR reported on the second meeting of the tourism working group of the ADB-financed GMS East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) project, in Savanakhet in February 2004. Maps and a brochure are being prepared. ADB has assisted in the preparation of a CD-ROM on the tourism aspects of the EWEC. It was agreed to integrate reporting on the tourism activities on the East West Corridor under the TWG.

Programme B: Programme to Develop Tourism-related Infrastructure

41. The representative of AMTA introduced the Programme and its objectives, thanking ADB and ESCAP for their support.
42. The representative of ADB noted that the TWG has always placed emphasis on infrastructure. Initially, the focus was on infrastructure associated with the Mekong/Lancang River. The Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP), involving loans totally in the order of \$US28 million, is currently active in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam. The first MTDP Steering Committee meeting will be held on 28 March 2004. ADB hopes the forthcoming GMS Tourism Sector Strategy will help to clarify the future directions of the infrastructure programme.
43. The representative of Cambodia thanked ADB for its on-going assistance. In Cambodia, the essential rationale of the MTDP is to link existing tourism patterns to new areas such as Stung Treng and Rattanakiri, thus bringing opportunities for tourism benefits to remote, poor communities, and to reduce environmental constraints in overburden destinations such as Siem Reap.
44. The representative of Myanmar noted concern that Myanmar is not associated with the MTDP. However, bilateral cooperation projects in tourism related infrastructure between Thailand and Myanmar are proceeding well.
45. The representative of Lao PDR added thanks to ADB for the MTDP and many related projects and agreed that a cooperative tourism development project at the Golden Triangle could be a TWG flagship project of the future.
46. The representative of Thailand reported that the governments of India, Myanmar and Thailand are cooperating in a project to improve road linkages between their three countries and action is anticipated this year. Also the governments of Lao PDR, Cambodia and Thailand are cooperating in Emerald Triangle Project. For example, the improvements to the

Wat Tai International Airport in Vientiane are proceeding in advance of the ASEAN Summit meeting there in November, 2004.

Programme C: Programme to Improve Human Resources in the Tourism Sector

47. The representative of AMTA introduced the Programme, noting that ESCAP is a major supporter.

48. The representative of ESCAP presented an updated list of seminars and workshops organized by ESCAP in the GMS since 1994, some national and some subregional, and gave detailed report on four major activities undertaken since the 14th Working Group Meeting involving participants from the GMS, namely, the National Seminar on Sustainable Tourism Resource Management in Phnom Penh, the Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development in Kathmandu, the Seminar on Crisis Management in Tourism in Lombok and the ESCAP/APETIT Conference on Tourism Education and Training Institutes in Tourism (APETIT) in Colombo. He informed the Meeting that APETIT now has 168 member institutions from 39 countries. Of the 168 members, GMS country institutions account for 54. GMS countries were encouraged to take full advantage of opportunities available from APETIT.

49. The representative of ADB suggested the Agenda Notes should be cleaned of projects that are not proceeding in this Programme and confirmed that the Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP) includes limited funding for a GMS training needs assessment.

50. The representative of Thailand agreed with the need for a strategic approach to human resource development, including identifying the strengths of each country and sharing training resources.

51. The representative of ADB suggested that a human resource development strategy could be part of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy project.

52. The representative of the University of Hawaii noted that training of trainers programmes remain relevant and the key to their success is selecting the right people to attend. Suitable courses are available. The primary constraint is funding for the participants to attend.

53. The representative of Cambodia noted a concern in Cambodia about the consistency of training being offered by a wide range of providers. Cambodia has a plan for a national academy that will, amongst other things, set standards for training providers.

54. The representative of Lao PDR noted that human resource development in tourism can also be approached at an academic level, for example by funding exchange programmes between universities.

Programme D: Programme to Improve Standards of Management of Natural and Cultural Resources for Conservation and Tourism

55. The representative of AMTA introduced the Programme, noting that UNESCO has been an advocate for this programme and the Canadian University Consortium (CUC) has also been a sponsor.

56. The representative of the University of Hawaii reported that there is continuing need for training of GMS officials in this field. Training on Trainers remains a valid approach. The University of Hawaii has developed a programme called Cultural Heritage Tourism: Managing Historic Resources within a Tourism Context. The course has been prepared in cooperation with Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports and will involve training materials targeted specifically for the GMS.

57. The representative of Thailand reported that the Ministry of Tourism and Sports has agreed to contribute \$US12,500 to fund this Programme and the University of Hawaii has agreed to fund the remaining costs.

58. The representative of ADB suggested that the Agenda Notes for Programme D should be simplified, noting also that UNESCO had sent apologies to the TWG for not being able to attend this Meeting.

59. The representative of SNV reminded the Meeting of Kasetsart University's RECOFTC programme based in Bangkok. SNV is investigating whether a one-month RECOFTC training on community-based tourism course can be included within Lao PDR's MTDP programme.

60. The representative of Lao PDR confirmed that community-based tourism is a significant part of the Lao PDR's MTDP programme and many training courses will be funded.

61. The representative of the University of Hawaii noted that UNESCO has a Cultural Heritage Management in Tourism Programme, involving training in techniques of combining tourism and heritage management.

62. The representative of ADB urged GMS governments to take cultural and natural heritage management seriously and noted with concern that the NTOs of the GMS are not always actively cooperating with resource management agencies.

Programme E: Programme to Promote Pro-Poor Community-Based Sustainable Tourism

63. The representative of AMTA introduced the Programme noting that international NGOs working in pro-poor styles of tourism in the GMS will be welcome at TWG Meetings. In this regard, the presence at this Meeting of SNV is appreciated.

64. The representative of ADB reported on progress on Part B of the MTDP focused on pro-poor, community-based tourism development. Team Leaders have been appointed, or are soon to be appointed, for Part B in Lao PDR and in Cambodia. The Team Leaders have joined these countries' delegations at this Meeting.

65. The Team Leader of Part B of the MTDP in Lao PDR gave a joint presentation to the Meeting with SNV. The presentation introduced the key issues of pro-poor tourism, presented Lao PDR's draft National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan and explained the approaches being adopted by the pro-poor tourism partners in Lao PDR.

66. The candidate for Team Leader of Part B of the MTDP in Cambodia gave a presentation to the Meeting focusing on the general rationale, targets and likely strategies for Part B in Cambodia.

67. The representative of ADB summarized the intentions of Part B of the MTDP. Part B programmes will involve: community development; conservation; tourism marketing; cooperation between relevant government agencies; and changes to the policy context for ecotourism.

68. The representative of China introduced a wide range of active ecotourism projects in Yunnan Province, noting in particular the need for NTOs to cooperate with other government agencies.

69. The representative of ESCAP briefed the Meeting on various initiatives related to poverty alleviation through tourism, which included the organization of the Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development in Kathmandu and the preparation of publication "Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development". An Expert Group Meeting on Measuring the Impact of Pro-Poor Tourism Initiatives and Policies will be organized in Bangkok in 2004 in collaboration with the University of Hawaii. The Meeting noted the offer of SNV to cooperate in this Expert Group Meeting.

70. The representative of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand made a presentation of a case study on linking tourism with One Tambon One Product (OTOP) for Sustainable Development. The representative of TAT reported on Thailand's initiatives to promote agrotourism. The Meeting noted that these two initiatives are expected to bring positive impacts on poverty alleviation.

71. The representative of ESCAP reported on ESCAP's publication on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development. The publication was produced in advance of the Regional Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Sustainable Tourism Development in Kathmandu. The key outcome of this Seminar was a recommendation to develop indicators to measure poverty reduction through tourism. ESCAP plans to hold a meeting to address this recommendation in the middle of this year. ESCAP will also gather examples of best practices in pro-poor tourism.

72. The representative of ADB noted that the proposed GMS Tourism Sector Strategy will include a component on pro-poor Tourism. ADB continues to have faith in this concept.

Programme F: Programme to Encourage Private Sector Participation in the GMS Tourism Sector

73. The representative of PATA reported on preparations for the Ninth Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF). The MTF had this year attracted 189 participants, representing 20 countries. This level of patronage is not sufficient to be self-sustaining in future. At least 300 paying participants are required. This situation gives rise to three options: i) find ways to increase attendance or else increase attendance fees, ii) persuade ADB to continue sponsorship, or iii) amalgamate MTF with the PATA Travel Mart. PATA believes the third option will not be attractive to GMS countries because the PATA Travel Mart travels around the Asia-Pacific region. PATA is not able to subsidize the MTF.

74. The representative of ADB noted that while ADB believes strongly in the value of the MTF, having supported its developmental stages, a way must now be found how to make it self-sustaining. ADB's sponsorship of the MTF will cease after the Tenth MTF.

75. The representative of PATA noted that this year's MTF marks a new effort by the organizers to improve the format, responding to suggestions after last year's event.

76. The Meeting noted that the Ninth Mekong Tourism Forum Declaration contains a set of action-oriented recommendations, which provide a short-, medium- and long-term framework for cooperation. Representatives from the organizer of the Forum, PATA and collaborating organizations, ADB and ESCAP expressed their hope that NTOs, AMTA, public/private sectors and international organizations would make all possible effort to implement these recommendations.

Programme G: Programme to Facilitate the Movement of Tourists to and within the GMS

77. The representative of AMTA tabled an updated version of a matrix of information on air routes and frequencies in the GMS and a matrix of visa formalities of the GMS member countries.

78. The representative of Thailand reported on recent proposals to i) waive fees for border crossing by nationals of neighboring countries and ii) give extensions to tour groups from neighboring countries for travel beyond the current border travel areas. The proposals are with the Ministry of the Interior at present and will be finalized in 4 or 5 months.

79. The representative of Thailand further reported that, with the intention of ensuring that the benefits of tourist visits to Thailand spill over the borders to neighboring countries, Thailand is currently assisting with road improvement projects adjacent to borders. Examples of such projects are the upgrading of the Alongveng - Siem Reap road (No. 67) in Cambodia, improvement to route R3 in Lao PDR and assistance to Myanmar with the road linking Myanwaddy, Gokkariek, Paan, and Thaton.

80. The representative of ADB reported on progress with the idea of a GMS tourist visa. An "initiation paper" has been prepared by ADB. The paper provides recommendations and an action plan for the establishment of a GMS visa framework. Implementing a full-scale common visa arrangement is not recommended. To implement a more modest system, it is estimated that up to \$US900,000 would be required for the design phase.

81. The representative of Thailand reported that a similar initiative is under way, led by Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand Economic Cooperation Strategy (CLMT-ECS). Investigations have been carried out in Brussels. Thailand will host a meeting of the four countries in May 2004 to agree on a future path.

82. The representative of China noted that cross-border transportation agreements exist between China, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand along the Mekong River from Jinghong to Golden Triangle. If required, this area could be the site for an experiment in a single GMS tourist visa.

83. The representative of Viet Nam reported that Viet Nam already has visa free arrangements in place with Lao PDR and Thailand.

84. The representative of ADB noted that the MTDP will support the upgrading of check-post facilities on the borders of the three countries involved.

Strengthening Ownership

85. The representative of ADB presented a paper on Suggestions to Strengthen Ownership and Institutional Arrangements for GMS Cooperation in Tourism. The paper raised issues such as why should only Thailand carry the burden of the Directorship of AMTA. The paper also suggests that in order to fulfill the role as coordinator of GMS tourism activities, AMTA needs: a marketing plan; clarity on the GMS institutional roles; a secure budget; human resources, preferably involving personnel from other GMS countries as well as Thailand; and clear reporting procedures.

86. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) agreed to seriously consider the requests and proposals from the GMS NTOs to provide further continued support for AMTA but pointed out that this was subject to availability of internal resources in future as well as support from the NTOs themselves and international organizations. Subject to availability of funds from the GMS Marketing Fund, TAT offered to provide an office and engage a full time staff member to operate the AMTA Secretariat. This arrangement will last for as long as TAT is providing the Director of AMTA. TAT is willing to provide the contribution of \$US5,000 per year for the GMS Tourism Marketing Fund.

87. It is also subject to all countries considering the idea proposed in the 9th Mekong Tourism Forum Declaration of an independent manager of AMTA. This proposal would cost each NTO \$US15,000 per two year. NTOs reactions to this proposal should be sent to AMTA before 25 May 2004. Cambodia agreed to send personnel from time to time to work at the AMTA Secretariat in Bangkok. Lao PDR will positively consider doing the same.

88. The representative of the media suggested that ADB's proposed budget of \$US800,000 for the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy is excessive and part of that money could be better put to making one last major contribution by ADB to AMTA and the work of the TWG.

89. The representative of ADB explained the reluctance of development agencies such as ADB to give grants of that nature. However, given that the consultants who will be employed to develop the Strategy will be working with AMTA, there will be opportunities for AMTA to benefit.

90. The representative of ADB noted that some delegates have referred to the need to consult higher authorities before decisions can be made. This suggests higher level representation is required at TWG meetings, as the TWG must be able to make decisions. Future funding of AMTA and TWG activities must also be addressed. The three countries involved in the MTDP now have sufficient financial resources, through the MTDP, to be able to contribute to AMTA and TWG activities if they chose to.

91. The Meeting resolved to seek ways to attract the highest possible level of representation at future TWG meetings and agreed to remain with one TWG meeting per year.

92. The representative of ESCAP requested GMS countries to be prepared for self-financing of participation in the 17th Meeting of the TWG in 2006 and thereafter.

Date and Venue ff the Next Meeting

93. The Meeting agreed that the 16th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector would be held in Siem Reap, Cambodia coinciding with the Tenth Mekong Tourism Forum. The dates are set at 25-27 March 2005.

Other Matters

94. The Chairperson issued a warm welcome on behalf of TAT to all GMS NTOs to attend the PATA Travel Mart in September.

95. The representative of PATA reminded the Meeting of the PATA Travel Mart in Bangkok on 22-24 September 2004. PATA will offer a 20% discount to GMS NTOs for booths and the first delegate may attend for free.

96. The representatives of the NTOs at the Working Group endorsed the proposal, concept, objectives and components presented by ADB for the preparation of Technical Assistance financed by the ADB to assist the Working Group in drafting a GMS Tourism Sector Strategy.

Appreciation

97. The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Tourism Authority of Thailand 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

98. The Report of the 15TH Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector was adopted on 28 March 2004.