

**Minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting**  
**Phnom Penh, Cambodia**  
**Sunday, September 10, 2006**

**Present**

Mr Vang Rattanaovong (Chairman)	- Lao National Tourism Administration
Mr Stephen Yong (Secretariat)	- Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office
Mr. Chaiwat Srisantirut	- Ministry Of Tourism and Sport, Thailand
Ms Chandarabha Svasti	- Ministry Of Tourism and Sport, Thailand
Mr. Chen Zhenglong	- Yunnan Province Tourism Administration
Mr. Frank	- Guangxi Tourism Administration
Mr. Li Changhui	- Guangxi Tourism Administration
Mr. Qi Yongjiang	- Yunnan Province Tourism Administration
Mr. Rous Sam Ear	- Ministry Of Tourism, Cambodia
Mr. Sounh Manivong	- Lao National Tourism Administration
Mr. Steven Schipani	- Lao National Tourism Administration
Ms. Tran Phuong Nhung	- Vietnam National Administration
Dr. Trevor Sofield	- Ministry Of Tourism, Cambodia
Mr. Thavipheth Oula	- Lao National Tourism Administration
Mr. Tith Chantha	- Ministry Of Tourism, Cambodia
Mr. Yuan Tiexiang	- Guangxi Tourism Administration
Mr. Zheng Xiakun	- Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration
Mr. Zhu Feng	- Guangxi Tourism Administration
Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero	- Asian Development Bank
Dr. Paul Rogers	- SNV World

**Observers**

Mr. Albert Lim	- Asia Pacific Project INC
Ms. Anne Maria Makela	- SNV World
Mr. Don Ross	- TTR Weekly
Mr. James Kheng Sok	- Cambodia Hotel Association
Mr. Jin Bourgeot	- French Embassy, Thailand
Mr. Ludwig Rieder	- Asia Pacific Project INC
Ms. Nguyen Thi Min Thu	- VNAT
Mr. Pavit Ramachadra	- ECO
Ms. Sanda Thant	- Mekong Institute
Ms. Tran Hoang	- VNAT

**Apologies**

Mr. Htay Aung	- Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar
Mr. Ryuji Yamakawa	- UNESCAP
Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong	- Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Tourism Working Group (TWG)**

1. Welcome remarks were given by Chairman Amb. Vang Rattanaavong.
2. Delegates introduced themselves by country/province starting with Cambodia, then Yunnan, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Guangxi. Observers and others in attendance also introduced themselves.
3. The minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Sub-region TWG held at Luang Prabang, Laos in March 2006 were approved, on motion by Cambodia seconded by Thailand.

The Report of the 17<sup>th</sup> GMS TWG was reviewed. Regarding item #9, Executive Director Stephen Yong requested confirmation from the French Government and the ADB regarding budgetary support for MTCO project manager. It was reported that there were no new developments along this line. Regarding item #60, the delegate from Guangxi explained why this meeting could not be held in Nanning City at this time. The report was adopted by the body.

4. A report on the activities, challenges and achievements of the MTCO for the past five months was rendered by Executive Director Yong. These included the launch of the website MEKONG TOURISM.ORG, logo, newsletter, increased collaboration with global and regional organizations for joint initiatives, strengthening of institutional relationships. He also reported on events he attended in representation of MTCO. Partnerships being developed were then reported on, including those with Explore Asia, Tourism Authority of Thailand, UNESCAP, Mekong Institute, Innovata and PATA. Also reported on were the various proposed publications including a coffee table book, map and destination brochure. Finally, a Mekong Golf Tour/tournament is being planned to promote the GMS. Mr. Yong emphasised the need for sending information to help MTCO avoid duplication of efforts by NTOs and MTCO.

Upon invitation for comments by the member countries, Mr. Tith Chantha pointed out the need to correct land area of Cambodia in the destination brochure. He requested Mr. Yong for a report on a strategy to raise funds for marketing GMS, in order to minimise the need for countries to fund MTCO. In response, Mr. Yong pointed out to the golf tournament but also said that he could not yet elaborate on the business proposals he is negotiating with the private sector to raise funds for MTCO. (It was pointed out that the private sector are taxpayers and expect government to fund MTCO activities. Therefore private companies can not be expected to fund MTCO operations.) Mr. Qi Yungjiang clarified the proper address in Yunnan to send invitations to

attend tourism markets. Regarding the logo, Mr. Sounh Manivong pointed out that the noses on the faces were not typical of the peoples of the GMS. The

Vietnamese delegate also clarified that all MTCO related correspondence should be sent to her office. The Thai delegate also pointed out that there are also mistakes in the destinations in Thailand in the brochure, which need to be corrected. The Guangxi delegate pointed out that Guangxi also has a lot of golf courses and invited MTCO to hold a golf tournament there.

Mr Alfredo Perdiguero noted that ADB no longer co-chairs the meeting, showing the maturity of the group. He exhorted the member countries to send information to the secretariat. He suggested that the reports be circulated by the secretariat in advance so that more comments may be made during the meeting. While the report is satisfactory on the market positioning of GMS, he commented that the report itself lacked an update on the status of the development agenda. He suggested that the report should reflect efforts of the secretariat in attracting private sector investments. He reminded the countries that if they agree on the logo, it should be used by all countries in promoting their respective destinations. Finally, he wondered how many people visited the website to appreciate how popular the destination is becoming.

Mr. Rogers of SNV suggested that the space between the faces in the logo should be coloured blue so it would be more clearly depicted as the Mekong River which is common to all the countries. He also suggested that the new ADB project, currently being designed by Mr Ludwig Reider's team, could assist the NTO's and MTCO by including funds to enable their staff to be temporarily based at the MTCO office to deal with specific assignments. .

5. Mr. Yong reported on the finances of MTCO. He noted that there is \$60,150 in a U.S. \$ account and \$6,423 in Thai baht. The latter amount is the balance of funds from the initial input of Baht 2.2 million minus the operating expenses of Baht 1.9 million, leaving a balance of Baht 256,959 or \$6,423.
6. Mr. Schipani reported that the ESCAP funding for heritage guide training was approved. He encouraged the countries to nominate people to send to this training.
7. For Cambodia, Mr. Chantha reported on the progress of the Southern Tourism Corridor that links Cambodia to Thailand and Vietnam. The development project requires human resource development, improvement of the border posts, among other sub-projects. It was proposed that the three countries adapt a common name, the "Southern Tourism Corridor," that a formal agreement formalizes this cooperative arrangement, that the 3 countries nominate 2 to 3 provinces each to participate in this project, that a joint feasibility study be undertaken, and finally, that each country appoint a focal point to facilitate coordination.

8. For Guangxi, Mr. Frank reported on the status of the infrastructure projects linking Guangxi to the rest of GMS, including a port to support the coastal and river cruise lines from Guangxi to Ha Long Bay. Second, in connection with cultural heritage protection, he reported that two eco-museums were completed in 2005 and 3 more are being completed. Finally, he reported on the human resource training being undertaken, initially focusing on the trainers. With regard to challenges faced, he suggested that MTCO could link Guangxi to North Vietnam for cooperative projects. Lack of funds is also an issue in Guangxi so he hoped that MTCO and ADB could improve their communication with the Chinese Ministry of Finance. He wished that investors would be attracted to Guangxi.
9. For Yunnan, Mr. Qi Yungjiang reported on the Golden Quadrangle Area, a preliminary plan for tourism development has just been completed and approved at the provincial government level. The plan will be endorsed to the national government. Border posts will be upgraded from provincial to national level. The other project assigned to Yunnan will be reported on in the next meeting.
10. For Laos, Mr. Thavipheth Oula reported on the Training of Guides at Heritage Sites, one of four projects assigned to Laos. A training for trainers will be held in Luang Prabang next month. The program consists of three modules consisting of the core, thematic and train-the-trainer modules. Trainees include site managers from relevant World Heritage and national heritage sites as well as representatives from the travel industry. Finally, he invited everyone to the Lao Ecotourism Forum 2007 entitled "Bridging the Mekong Region" in July, 2007.
11. For Thailand, the representative of the Deputy Permanent Secretary reported that Thailand would like to draft a concept paper on Crisis Preparedness and Management. Thailand would also like to encourage GMS to take up human trafficking as an issue. The Thai delegate also reported on the feasibility study on the Emerald Triangle project involving 3 GMS countries, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. The sites survey in those countries is completed, finding the land access, international airports, cross-border checkpoints, attractions (ecotourism, natural, cultural and heritage tourism), human resource development needs.
12. For Vietnam, Ms. Nhung reported on the preparation of a concept paper on the Green Development Triangle involving 4 million people in 10 provinces in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The area's attractions include the waterfall, river and stream systems and 40 ethnic minorities. Presently, around 400,000 tourists visit the area, 13% of which are international. After the concept study is approved by the two other countries, the ADB will be requested for a concessional loan to fund the two sub-projects.

13. Regarding the presentations, Mr. Perdiguero commented on the dilemma of reporting broadly or in depth. Mr. Ludwig Rieder and Mr. Perdiguero noted that the number of projects can be overwhelming and suggested that the Tourism Working Group should prioritise the 29 projects in order to ensure better success in implementation. Mr. Perdiguero informed that the ADB is sponsoring a human resource development training in November, to be held most likely in Cambodia. Further, ADB is supporting the feasibility study of the Southern Corridor project and the Siem Reap water project and some border posts, pro-poor tourism. He informed of the GMS Sustainable Tourism TA that will support many of the projects just reported on.
14. Mr. Pavit of EOC, who is involved with GMS Biodiversity Conservation Initiative reported on his current projects which are related to the MTCO projects.
15. Ms. Ann Marie Makela inquired whether there is room to invite more private sector representatives inasmuch as the private sector is expected to be a development partner in some of the projects.
16. Mr. Yong inquired about the latest arrivals statistics of the different countries who reported on their respective performances for the first six months.
17. Regarding the venues of future meetings, the original plan to hold meetings according to alphabetical order was disrupted for various reasons. However, future meetings will be hosted according to alphabetical order.
18. The Chairman thanked the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia, for supporting the holding of the meeting, thanked Mr. Yong for his presentations and closed the meeting.

### **Acknowledgement**

The minutes was prepared with the kind assistances of Mr Albert Lim from Asia Pacific Projects INC