



## **22<sup>nd</sup> Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-22)**

**17 October 2008  
Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar**

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-22) was held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, on 17 October 2008. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Htay Aung, Director General, Directorate of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar and co-chaired by Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism & Sports of Thailand, and attended by representatives from national tourism organizations (NTOs) of Cambodia, PRC (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as representatives from the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO). The list of participants is in [Appendix 1](#).

#### **II. Opening Session**

2. H.E. Major General Soe Naing, Minister, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar, welcomed all the delegates to Myanmar and Nay Pyi Taw. He recalled the endorsement of the GMS Tourism Development Plan and GMS Tourism Marketing Plan at the 1<sup>st</sup> GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting in Bangkok. He also recalled the Joint Summit Declaration and the Vientiane Plan of Action 2008-2012. He stressed that GMS tourism ministers and senior officials were committed to working closely together to effectively and timely execute the Vientiane Plan of Action. A copy of Opening address by H.E. Major General Soe Naing is in [Appendix 2](#).
3. Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, delivered an opening speech on behalf of the GMS Delegates. She expressed condolences to Myanmar people who were affected by the Cyclone Nargis. She was delighted to have the new Executive Director of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office, carefully selected by the delegates from 6 GMS member countries in the interview held in Bangkok. She highly appreciated the presence of the Minister and Deputy Minister at the opening ceremony and thanked the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism for the warm welcome and hospitality. A copy of Opening speech by Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong is in [Appendix 3](#).

### III. Agenda Item 1: Adoption of the Agenda

4. MTCO proposed adding 2 subtopics (5.1 Report of Development Projects and 5.2 Report of Marketing Projects) under Agenda item 5, Evaluation of Priority Projects and Expectation of Member Countries.
5. The Meeting adopted the Agenda and additions proposed by MTCO. A copy of the Agenda is in [Appendix 4](#).

### IV. Agenda Item 2: Business Arrangements

6. Myanmar briefed the participants about the business arrangements.

### V. Agenda Item 3: Reports and Follow-Up of Previous Meetings

#### (i) The 3<sup>rd</sup> GMS Summit in Vientiane, Lao PDR: Result, Follow up, Next meeting

7. The Chairperson highlighted the main tourism related issues discussed by the GMS leaders during the Summit as follows:
  - 1) The aim of tourism is to reduce poverty and enhance overall economic growth, its contribution in this area is limited and inequitably distributed.
  - 2) For long term tourism development, it is required to work on promotion and marketing, accessibility, conservation of culture and nature, capacity building, private sector participation, facilitation of travel, infrastructure in the key areas of development.
  - 3) In the TSS, tourism infrastructure projects constitute more than 83 percent of the budget. So resources from the development partners need to be mobilized to implement the projects.
  - 4) Role of the development partners is to assist the lead countries and MTCO in preparing the feasibility studies for strategic projects, supporting MTCO, participating in workshops and seminars, providing financial and technical assistance for priority projects.

The leaders also endorsed the Vientiane Plan of Action on GMS development for the period 2008-2012 which involved 29 thematic and geographical projects. At the conclusion, the leaders signed and released the Joint Summit Declaration (JSD), which marked a milestone in the GMS, highlighting the implementation of sustainable natural and cultural tourism, the promotion of tourism in the subregion and the necessity to expand the role of MTCO.

8. Thailand emphasized key priorities for tourism sector stated in the Joint Summit Declaration:
  - Strengthen sustainable management of natural and cultural tourism sites;
  - Promote joint marketing of tourism in the subregion; and
  - Strengthen the MTCO.

The next GMS Summit will be hosted by Myanmar according to the alphabetical order system. Thailand will support Myanmar for the holding of the 4<sup>th</sup> GMS Summit. A copy of the summary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> GMS Summit can be found in [Appendix 5](#).

9. **The meeting agreed** that all levels of GMS meetings, either summit, ministers or senior officials, should be held according to alphabetical order.

#### (ii) The 1<sup>st</sup> GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting in Thailand

10. The Chairperson recalled the 1<sup>st</sup> GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting in Thailand in January 2008 that the Ministers acknowledged the aims and objectives of GMS Tourism Sector

Strategy, Tourism Marketing Plan 2008-2011, and Tourism Development Plan under 3 categories of prioritized projects during 2008-2015. The Ministers also accepted the ideas of tourism development which included the initiation of the Visit GMS Years for 2009-2010.

11. Thailand reiterated the commitment of the 6 GMS Tourism Ministers towards the development of tourism in the subregion. For Cambodia, more HRD trainings and product development should be conducted. PRC was committed to sub-regional cooperation to develop regional projects. For Lao PDR, the commitment was to conserve the natural heritage sites as well as the biodiversity of the sub-region. For Myanmar, the emphases were on sustainable tourism development in the sub-region, sharing the same identity and common natural resources. For Thailand, all member countries are invited to join the Visit GMS Years in 2009 and 2010 to be organized with financial support of Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand. The commitment of Viet Nam emphasized that MTCO needed to play a more proactive role in implementing the Strategy and action plans, as well as mobilizing support from development partners. A copy of the summary report of the 1<sup>st</sup> GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting is in [Appendix 6](#).
12. **The meeting agreed** to inform the new MTCO Executive Director of these commitments and noted the need for GMS countries to work harder for more substantive achievements to celebrate the years, as well as requested Viet Nam's support to hold GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting in conjunction with the ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Meeting. Viet Nam will confirm later including a press conference.

***(iii) The 21<sup>st</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting in Cambodia***

13. Chairperson recalled some important issues discussed during the TWG-21, (1) contributions for 2008 and 2009 (2) rotation of MTCO (3) organization of the 4 workshops (4) updates on the projects (5) response on the Explore Mekong slogan and the logo, (6) fund to be used for Marketing should be proposed before TWG meeting.
14. Cambodia briefed the meeting on the main decisions at the TWG-21, which included:
  - Member countries that have not remitted the due 2008 contribution should do so and send confirmation on their 2009 contribution to other TWG members and MTCO after consultation with their relevant authorities.
  - Each member country would provide MTCO with names and contact details of their respective officials who would provide the link to website of each country.
  - Rotation of MTCO would start from Lao PDR who proposed to host.
  - Member countries would work closely with MTCO in hosting 4 workshops: Two workshops had already been held in Bangkok and Vientiane, respectively. The other two would be held in Cambodia (November 2008) and Viet Nam (December 2008)
  - Member countries would communicate by email their position on the Explore Mekong logo and slogan.
  - The next TWG-23 would be held in Lao PDR.
15. Thailand viewed that the next TWG-23 meeting should follow alphabetical order. Viet Nam recalled the meeting that as Thailand had just hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting in January 2008 therefore Thailand passed to Cambodia to host the TWG-21 and Lao PDR proposed to host the TWG-23.

## VI. Agenda Item 4: GMS Tourism Administration

### (i) Review of GMS Tourism Manual

16. Chairperson expressed his appreciation for Thailand's efforts in preparing the comprehensive GMS Cooperation Manual.
17. Thailand presented the GMS Tourism Cooperation Manual: (1) Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) and its administration; (2) Application and enrollment as well as tenure and responsibility of MTCO Executive Director; (3) National Tourism Organizations (NTOs); (4) TWG Meetings and their organization; (5) Roles of Development Partners, highlighting the followings points:
- GMS Tourism Ministerial level should be set up and held a regular annual meeting back to back with ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Meeting (ATM) in order to approve work plans of GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG) and be informed of annual report.
  - To consider whether the MTCO will have an autonomous office in the future, timeline to be proposed and approved.
  - GMS NTOs to consider an annual contribution of US\$ 15,000 (calendar year) for MTCO administration. Modification of annual contribution has to be done at least one year in advance with the approval from GMS Tourism Ministerial Meeting.
  - The result of TWG Meeting should be reported at Tourism Ministerial Meeting and Summit.

A copy of GMS Tourism Cooperation Manual is in [Appendix 7](#).

### (ii) Invitation to Launch Visit GMS Years 2009 – 2010

18. Thailand briefed the meeting on its plan to launch the Visit GMS Years 2009-2010 and invited all GMS member countries to join. The event will be sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand. The objective of this campaign is to increase tourist arrivals within the GMS. The main activities of this campaign include:
- (1) **GMS Gathering:** Two nominated participants from NTOs and private sector of each GMS member country are invited to attend a workshop to plan all events for Visit GMS Years 2009 – 2010 in Chiang Mai province, Thailand, during 27-28 November 2008.
  - (2) **Count Down for New Year 2009:** The activity will be held on 31 December 2008 in the provinces along the East-West Economic Corridor.
  - (3) **Publication of GMS Festival Calendar and Tourism Information:** Based on the information gathered during the preparation workshop in the 1<sup>st</sup> activity, Thailand will publish the GMS Festival Calendar with the tourism information to promote tourism within the subregion.

A copy of document on Invitation to Visit GMS Years 2009-2010 is in [Appendix 8](#).

19. Chairperson suggested that community and private sector should be involved in the opening ceremony. In order to ease border crossing formalities, it is necessary to inform the immigration bureau and checkpoints earlier such as Mae Sai - Thachilek, Ranong - Koh Thauang, and Mae Sot - Myawwaddy.
20. After the first launch, the Visit GMS Years will be regularly extended to each GMS member country.

**(iii) Review of MTCO Administration*****Executive Director, contract, responsibility***

21. As the host of MTCO Executive Director Interview in Bangkok on 15 October 2008, Co-Chairperson briefed the meeting about the result of the interview. The selected candidate was Mr. John Mason Florence, an American tourism content writer who is currently based in Bangkok. Though Mr. Florence is not a GMS citizen, his qualifications most matched the selection criteria. The new Executive Director will commence his job on 1 November 2008.
22. **The meeting agreed** that the term of contract for MTCO Executive Director is two (2) years. The contract is subject to annual review by the NTOs. Extension of the contract can be made only once.

***Scope of work of MTCO, financial report, staff recruitment, cash contribution from Member Countries***

23. The meeting discussed the rotation of MTCO, which was currently located in Bangkok. Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar informed the meeting that they were not ready to host the MTCO. PRC had to consult the government first.
24. **The meeting finally agreed** upon the rotation of MTCO in alphabetical order every 2 years and both functions of MTCO, whether development or marketing, have to be moved together. The host government has to take care of MTCO for every matter as MTCO status cannot be considered as either a diplomatic or international organization. The best timeframe for rotation of MTCO is the beginning of 2010. The decision to rotate the MTCO will be finalized at the next Ministers' Meeting in January 2009 according to the availability of countries by alphabetical order starting with Cambodia.
25. **The meeting noted** that it was difficult to send a representative to work at MTCO.
26. MTCO reported financial status that it started to use the marketing funds in mid 2008. Most of the marketing budget was spent on the content of 13 popular tourism zones and development of the website [www.exploremekong.com](http://www.exploremekong.com). Some of the marketing budget was spent on Explore Mekong Campaign logo and online survey and artwork for Socially Responsible Tourism Guidebook to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. In addition, MTCO was committed to payment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> installment for the development of [www.exploremekong.org](http://www.exploremekong.org) before the end of 2008. So the foreseen balance of marketing budget by the end of 2008 would be US\$ 9,757. Concerning the Operational budget, the total figure of contributions remitted to MTCO since its foundation was US\$ 255,000, the operational expenses from May 2008 until early October 2008 totaled US\$21,319. A copy of the presentation is in [Appendix 9](#).
27. The meeting came up with the below foreseen available budget for 2009, which included both marketing and operational funds as well as the receivable Myanmar's 2008 contribution and the six countries' contributions in 2009 .

Marketing funds	US\$ 9,757 (less due payment)
Operational funds	US\$ 79,579
Receivable (Myanmar's 2008 contribution)	US\$ 15,000
Contributions for 2009	US\$ 90,000
Total budget available	<u>US\$ 194,336</u>

28. MTCO will send a letter requesting member countries to pay 2009 contribution at the beginning of 2009.
29. Co-Chairperson suggested hiring a local staff to assist the Office Manager in administrative tasks. His/her salary might be THB10,000 or 12,000 per month.
30. Mr. Brinley Waddell mentioned that there is a need to have a coordinator for the Explore Mekong Campaign (whose salary will be around 24,000 Baht per month) to develop a database for the online booking engine which would generate some money from the private sector such as local tour operators and hotels, who would subscribe for a membership via the website. It was expected that MTCO would earn credits around US\$50 per subscription. This campaign targeted 120 hotels such as in Viet Nam and Myanmar. Besides, Mr. Waddell added that there were possibilities to get sponsorship from airlines such as Thai Airways International and Viet Nam Airlines whose banners would be posted on [www.exploremekong.org](http://www.exploremekong.org). He would further discuss with the new Executive Director on this issue.
31. **The meeting agreed** to separate the budget for marketing and operation **and insisted that** MTCO must seek approval from the TWG before spending on both marketing and operational expenses.
32. **The meeting decided** to extend MTCO Manager's contract for another 1 year. She shall receive the salary of THB 30,000 per month. For the MTCO new Executive Director, his starting salary will be US\$ 4,000 per month. He will commence his job on 1 November 2008 and his full contract will be signed and delivered during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministers' Meeting in Viet Nam in January 2009. For MTCO Project Coordinator, the renewal of her contract will be considered during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministers' Meeting as well.
33. **The meeting required** the new Executive Director to present the following proposals at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministers' Meeting in Hanoi:
- Plan for marketing and operational budget (how to use it in a productive way)
  - A mechanism for raising marketing funds
  - Staff recruitment if necessary (1) administrative assistant and (2) marketing coordinator
  - Performance evaluation form for MTCO staff members

## VII. Agenda Item 5: Evaluation of Priority Projects and Expectation of Member Countries

### Report on Development Projects

34. MTCO reported the updates of development project activities based on the document prepared by Ms. Christine Jacquemin, MTCO Project Coordinator. The main activities were divided into 3 categories:
- **The new development website** ([www.mekongtourism.org](http://www.mekongtourism.org)): Launched on 15 September 2008, it includes new items such as information on activities of development partners, details of GMS Tourism strategy describing the projects, provides selected resource materials (training manual, guidelines on different subjects) giving access to the most relevant literature focusing on sustainable tourism development, a section will also be dedicated to funding resources available, visa information, statistics, information on countries' tourism authorities with direct links to their website, etc.
  - **The advancement of the 4 priority projects:** Two workshops out of four have been organized. One was on Tourism and Biodiversity which was held in Bangkok during 17-18 September 2008. Another was on Pro-Poor Tourism which was held in Vientiane during 2-3 October 2008. The other 2 workshops dedicated to GMS

Economic Corridors and Vocational Training are scheduled to be held in Viet Nam and Cambodia in November and December 2008. Specific dates of the upcoming workshops will be communicated later.

- **Status report on the GMS TS projects:** Member countries were widely encouraged to communicate on a regular basis to MTCO on the different projects taking place in their respective countries. The limited information strongly affected the capacity of MTCO to build up constructive proposals likely to be endorsed by potential donors, not being able to provide them with sufficient information on tourism development projects already taking place.

A copy of the Report on Development Project Activities Updates is in [Appendix10](#).

35. Cambodia requested MTCO to send an official letter to the relevant authorities regarding the next workshop to be hosted by Cambodia in late 2008. Myanmar requested that MTCO to consult the member countries prior to organization of workshops and send a planner to each country to inform them of the workshop arrangements. Vietnam proposed to postpone the training program to 2009 as they would be engaged with other activities and they required a planner so that they could get an approval from their relevant authorities. PRC said their Government approved the funds for only at the end of 2008; however, they would consult their Government for the possibilities of 2009 funds.
36. **The meeting tasked** MTCO Project Coordinator to consult the host country about their needs and time availability before conducting any activities.
37. PRC reported the progress of activities: (1) Golden Quadrangle Area: there are new international checkpoints: Daluo-Mong La, linking Thachilek and Jinghong; (2) In Xishuangbanna area, there were promotion activities in Luang Prabang (Luang Prabang and Yunnan had signed an agreement on tourism promotion activities). These activities were now enlarged to the Northern part. The highway from Kunming to Tengchong will be completed by the end of 2008. Tengchong Airport is scheduled to be opened in 2009; (4) Three festivals will take place during October-November 2008 along Myanmar-China border areas. Two familiarization trips will be conducted at the end of 2008; (5) China International Travel Mart will be held in Shanghai 17 - 24 November 2008, where two booths are reserved for GMS tourism. PRC encouraged other member countries to attend the event (6) Website for tourism promotion: PRC urged other member countries to send travel information as well as short DVD presentation to be posted on the website. (7) Cross border tourism studies, field trips, visits to local tourism authority will be conducted to destinations such as Kunming-Hanoi; (8) Border area bilateral cooperation and ecotourism plan: there will be cooperation between China - Lao PDR and China - Viet Nam. PRC also proposed a plan to organize a training program for Vietnamese tourism officers at the end of 2008 and would assist Viet Nam in promoting the Red-River Corridors.
38. PRC would need technical assistance from international NGOs in implementing the projects. MTCO should act as a coordinator to seek assistance from international NGOs. Co-Chairperson added that MTCO Project Coordinator should conduct field trips and work out a project implementation plan with local officers in Yunnan. Co-Chairperson suggested that the new Executive Director market the 7 GMS destinations in an economic way such as taking advantage of China International Travel Mart as suggested by PRC.
39. Chairperson reminded Myanmar to note the following points: (1) Upgrading of Mong La entry (2) Report of facilitation of travel in Mong La, Tachilek, Lao PDR entries (3) Request PRC to involve Myanmar in activities held in Xishuangbanna area (4) Road linking Tengchong and Myanmar.

40. Cambodia reported the progress of development projects: (1) More international checkpoints have been opened: Chamyeam (visa on arrival), Preakchak (visa on arrival); (2) Airport in Sihanoukville can now link to Phnom Penh and Siem Reap by charter flight (3) Road No.48 constructed with a loan from Thai Government is now completed and ready to be opened to public in late 2008; (4) Under MTDP, Cambodia printed 4,000 copies of Socially Responsible Tourism Guidebook to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, around eight hundred and fifty of which had been sent to the MTCO for distribution. Also under MTDP, there was development of Rattanakiri Airport scheduled to be completed in 16 months; National Road No. 6 is under construction; (5) Travel facilitation between Cambodia and Vietnam: 6 more international checkpoints are opened. There are 150 buses travelling between Cambodia and Viet Nam. THB 1.4 million is mobilized to make a linkage from Thailand's National Road No. 68 to Siem Reap.
41. Viet Nam reported the progress on the Green Triangle Project: VNAT held a field trip to visit the Green Triangle area in early August 2008. It was found that the road linking Viet Nam and Lao PDR was in a good condition. However, the Road No.7 was not, especially in the rainy season. In this area, there were 3 couples of border checkpoints but only 1 checkpoint in Cambodia provided visa on arrival. On Viet Nam side, tourists could get visa at the international border checkpoints with prior application permission from the Vietnamese authorities. Culture tourism should be promoted in Viet Nam as there were World Heritage sites on its highland. Following the field trip, there was a workshop, where the following decisions were made: (1) Champasack province in Lao PDR is rich of cultural tourism and there is an international airport where tourists can apply for visa on arrival. So, the meeting decided to include Champasack province in the Green Triangle Area; (2) the three countries, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Viet Nam, should identify the main tourism spots; (3) the three countries will work together to formulate a Green Triangle Tourism Guidebook, the contents of which will be published on the [www.mekongtourism.org](http://www.mekongtourism.org). Lao PDR suggested that MTCO should work actively to fund the projects.

### Report of Marketing Projects

42. Mr. Michael Looney and Mr. Brinley Waddell, MTCO representatives, presented the newly launched website [www.exploremekong.org](http://www.exploremekong.org), which is dedicated to MTCO's marketing activities. Soft launched on 10 October 2008, this new marketing website serves as the foundation of Explore Mekong Marketing Campaign. Its public launch is scheduled on 1 December 2008. The main content of this website includes (1) features on 7 GMS destinations (Cambodia, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and Yunnan Province), (2) features on 13 popular destinations within the GMS such as Shangri-La, Golden Quadrangle, Red River Valley, East West Corridors, etc. In addition, the website also contains the following additional key features:
- Accommodation Booking Engine
  - Interactive Maps
  - Activity Guide
  - Streaming Videos
  - Comprehensive Events & Festival Calendar
  - Blogging content by team of travel gurus and locals
- A copy of the presentation is in [Appendix 11](#).
43. The slogan for the Explore Mekong Campaign 'Explore Asia's Last Frontier-The Mekong', **the meeting tasked** MTCO to create more slogans so that member countries could choose the best one.

### VIII. Agenda Item 6: Consideration on Nay Pyi Taw Declaration

44. Chairperson briefed the meeting about Nay Pyi Taw Declaration, highlighting the goals and themes of GMS cooperation which should be consistently followed up and implemented within the timeframe: (1) initiation of launching the Visit GMS Years (2) progress of MTCO administration (3) development of priority projects with assistance of development partners (4) facilitation of travel by all means (5) acknowledgement and appreciation for technical and financial support of the multilateral and bilateral development organizations.
45. Co-Chairperson proposed amendment of the item No. 2 in the Declaration as follows:
- “The GMS Member Countries have tasked the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) to review its administration in order to have full participation from member countries.”*
46. **The meeting adopted** the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration as appears in [Appendix 12](#).

### IX. Agenda Item 7: Other Matters

47. Thailand and Myanmar will have a meeting to work together on the Andaman Coastal Area during 2009 - 2010.
48. Co-Chairperson proposed organizing an ad-hoc TWG prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministers' Meeting to discuss contract of the new Executive Director, Project Coordinator, and other MTCO operational and marketing issues.

### IX. Agenda Item 8: Date and Venue of the Next Meeting

49. Based on alphabetical order, it will be Thailand's turn to host the 23<sup>rd</sup> TWG, either in March or April 2009. Thailand will discuss this issue during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministers' Meeting in Viet Nam in January 2009. Exact date and venue will be communicated later.

### XI. Agenda Item 9: Consideration and Adoption of the Report

50. Chairperson concluded the main issues discussed at the meeting: (1) Questions on MTCO administration (budget, salaries, contracts) which will be resolved at the next meeting (2) Launch of the Visit GMS Years 2009-2010.
51. **The meeting agreed** that those who had not attended the meeting were not supposed to provide any comments on the minutes of the meeting.
52. The Meeting Summary will be submitted to the TWG by email for comments and review after the Meeting.

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