



**TWENTY THIRD MEETING OF GMS TOURISM WORKING GROUP (TWG-23)
Bangkok, Thailand, 2 June 2009**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

1. The 23rd Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG-23) was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 2 June 2009. Representatives of the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) of the 6 GMS countries (Cambodia, People's Republic of China-Guangxi Tourism Administration, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam), the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) of Thailand, and development partners including the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other organizations based in Thailand (GTZ, UNDP, UNESCO, NZAID, French Embassy, USAID's ACE Project, and PATA) attended. A list of participants is in [Appendix 1](#).

Agenda Item 1: Opening Session

2. In her opening remarks, Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, extended her warm welcome to all the participants. She looked forward to the discussions about the progress of work in tourism marketing and development, and the views of development partners about possibilities of support and cooperation in tourism. She expressed her appreciation to the MTCO staff for their coordination work, and gratitude to ADB for its continued assistance to the tourism sector as a vehicle for poverty eradication, recovery from global economic crisis, and sustainable development.

3. Ms. Shireen Lateef, Director, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB, congratulated the Tourism Working Group and the MTCO for their concerted efforts to push the subregional tourism marketing and development agenda in line with the principles and thrusts of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy (TSS). ADB, as an active partner of TWG, continues to support tourism initiatives including the organization of workshops that prepared detailed project proposals for 4 priority projects presented at a donors' conference in March 2009. The Mekong Tourism Development Project, completed in Lao PDR, is now completing in Cambodia and Viet Nam. A new GMS Sustainable Tourism Project will soon be underway in Lao PDR and Viet Nam and will support 3 of the 4 projects developed by MTCO. In addition, ADB, through the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management, has and continues to support the training of GMS government tourism officials. ADB is also working with the French

Government towards the continued secondment of a tourism expert to ADB to help coordinate the implementation of tourism development projects. In this regard, she announced that the French Government has agreed to continue this assistance for another 2 years but could only provide this assistance if the French-seconded project coordinator is based in the ADB's Resident Mission in Cambodia. ADB has agreed to this arrangement since the position is critical to further expand the development side of Mekong tourism and hopefully will also help expand the influence of the MTCO while maintaining the strategic position of Bangkok for marketing activities. She acknowledged the generous support provided by the Thai Government to the MTCO. Ms. Lateef noted that TWG will need to work even harder in creating more opportunities for intra-regional tourism in the face of the global economic downturn, and in mobilizing resources to implement priority projects.

4. Copies of the opening remarks are in [Appendix 2](#).

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of Agenda

5. The Meeting was chaired by Dr. Sasithara and co-chaired by Ms. Lateef.
6. The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda, copy in [Appendix 3](#).

Agenda Item 3: Business Arrangements

7. Thailand briefed the participants about the business arrangements. The meeting was held in plenary. Secretariat support was provided by the MTCO with the assistance of the GMS Secretariat based at the ADB.

Agenda Item 4: Report and follow-up of the previous meetings

4.1 Report and follow-up of the 22nd GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

8. Myanmar gave a brief report on the results and follow-up actions on items discussed at TWG-22 held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 17 October 2008. TWG-22 discussed: (i) the comprehensive review of the tourism cooperation manual which provides for the annual meeting of GMS Tourism Ministers back-to-back with ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Meeting, and annual contribution of \$15,000 by GMS NTOs for MTCO administration; (ii) plans to launch Visit Mekong Year 2009-2010; and (iii) issues regarding the MTCO Executive Director, contract and responsibility. The meeting agreed on: (i) term of contract for MTCO Executive Director for two (2) years, subject to annual review by the NTOs, and extension to be made only once; (ii) finalize the decision on rotation of the MTCO at the Tourism Ministers' Meeting in January 2009; and (iii) separate the budget for marketing and operation and for MTCO to seek prior approval from the TWG for both marketing and operational expenses.

9. The Chair noted that the arrangement for regular meetings of the TWG is in place on rotating basis, and that henceforth, in accordance with its mandate as TWG Secretariat, MTCO will handle the preparation of the meeting's report. She also requested ADB to update TWG on various meetings and activities on tourism, including those being carried out under ADB-assisted tourism projects. It was noted that a calendar of GMS events is posted in the GMS website <http://www.adb.org/gms>.

4.2 Report and follow-up of the 2nd GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting and the GMS National Tourism Organizations' Meeting in Ha Noi, Viet Nam

10. Viet Nam recalled the decisions of the NTOs' Meeting held on 7-8 January 2009 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam. The NTOs' Meeting agreed to: (i) sign the MTCO Executive Director Contract with Mr. Mason Florence as the new full-time MTCO Executive Director starting 7 January 2009 until 6 January 2011 (renewable); (ii) request the French Government to renew the secondment of Ms. Christine Jacquemin to ADB as MTCO Project Coordinator beyond the expiration of her current secondment in July 2009, and to seek additional technical and financial support from France; (iii) extend the contract of MTCO office manager for 1 year from 1 February 2009 to 31 January 2010; and (iv) maintain the current location of the MTCO in Bangkok. The NTOs appreciated MTCO's achievements in having organized workshops with support from ADB and France to develop detailed project proposals for presentation at a donors' conference in 2009 in order to mobilize resources, and in having developed the mekongtourism.org website into a regional knowledge platform to support a sustainable GMS tourism development as well as a new website www.exploremekong.org dedicated to GMS tourism marketing activities. The NTOs requested the new MTCO Executive Director to prepare within 4 weeks his work plan for 2009-2010 for consideration and endorsement by NTOs.

11. The 2nd meeting of the GMS Tourism Ministers, held on 9 January 2009 also in Ha Noi, acknowledged the progress of cooperation in tourism development and marketing. In their Joint Ministerial Statement, the Ministers agreed to take advantage of the improved and expanded sub-regional infrastructure and connectivity in order to further promote tourism growth in the sub-region in a sustainable and socially responsible manner. They agreed to continue to intensify efforts in promoting the GMS as a single tourist destination in the face of the global economic slowdown. The Ministers called on the TWG and the MTCO to mobilize the required resources and to further expand mutually beneficial partnerships in carrying out priority initiatives.

12. Copies of the presentations are in [Appendix 4](#).

Agenda Item 5: Progress Report on Status of Tourism Sector Strategy Projects

5.1 Activity Report 2008-2009 of the Development Project Coordinator

13. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, MTCO Project Coordinator, reported on various activities undertaken since 2007, including the classification and prioritization of projects under the TSS, the holding of 4 workshops, with support from ADB and France, to develop project profiles to jumpstart the implementation of 4 projects (tourism and biodiversity conservation, pro-poor tourism, tourism corridors, and strengthening of vocational skills of tourism SMEs). She presented the rationale, scope, expected impact and outcome, estimated costs, and existing and potential partners of each project. Ms. Jacquemin also reported on the progress of other tourism development activities, including further work done to improve the www.mekongtourism.org website to serve as an information tool on tourism project development for development partners and as a knowledge center to disseminate information on visa requirements, tourism facilities, good practices, training materials, references to existing literature, training courses, schools, and networks. A copy of her presentation is in Appendix 5.

Discussion:

14. Following are some of the comments from the participants:

- Myanmar has sent their comments on the project proposals to MTCO. MTCO in turn has made adjustments based on those comments, including selected project areas in Myanmar and the latter's inclusion in related training programs. The key is availability of funding resources to implement the projects.
- Lao PDR acknowledged the support provided by ADB and other development partners in the implementation of the TSS. On the strengthening of tourism management in protected areas, Lao PDR suggested that it be linked with the forestry and agriculture sectors.
- PRC/Guangxi Tourism Administration invited ADB to host a training course being organized by Guilin Tourism Institute this year, and MTCO to visit Guangxi which plays an important role in subregional tourism cooperation. Guangxi would like to join a 5-year project in the future.
- Cambodia mentioned that close coordination is being done with the Ministry of Environment and MTCO concerning the biodiversity and tourism corridors projects. Cambodia has received support on pro-poor tourism from UNWTO and SNV in 2 project sites and requested ADB to extend similar support.
- Viet Nam requested MTCO to continue to seek funding from partners so that the projects could be implemented, and that close coordination be done with the Working Group on Environment on the biodiversity corridors project.
- MTCO Project Coordinator mentioned that Guangxi is included in the 4 projects. In Cambodia, she is in contact with relevant authorities regarding selection of sites. She is also closely consulting and coordinating with the Environment Operations Center. Her next step is to actively seek funds to support the projects and follow-up on the initial interests indicated at the donors' conference held in March 2009.
- ADB stressed that 3 out of the 4 projects are already being funded under STDP for Lao PDR and Viet Nam which have both agreed that some of the training activities will be open to participation by the other GMS countries. ADB is also looking at developing a new package of assistance on pro-poor tourism. Given the prevailing environment of insufficient resources, TWG needs to be more

- realistic as to where funds would come from. Countries could look at tapping bilateral donors for country-level funding; the more advanced GMS countries – Thailand and PRC – may also be able to share more resources.
- UNDP is interested in biodiversity conservation but also noted that there are other emerging issues related to tourism, e.g., impact of financial crisis, social impacts particularly health impact of H1N1, impact on vulnerable groups – particularly the poor, and ensuring that tourism revenues benefit them.
 - New Zealand has strategies that include a focus on pro-poor tourism for Cambodia and Lao PDR and is working with LNTA over the next 5 years on a program (\$4.5 million) that complements ADB's program. In Cambodia, NZAID is working with APSARA authorities in Angkor to ensure that communities benefit from tourism development. NZAID is also supporting 6-month English language learning programs for government officials in CLVM, one of which is planned to have a rural development and tourism focus.
 - USAID mentioned its tourism project with ASEAN. Although they are not yet involved with GMS, they are looking for opportunities to work in Cambodia next year.
 - UNESCO commended MTCO and the GMS countries for having selected the 4 projects. Their concern on tourism is on both negative and positive impacts of tourism. There are potentials for considering the projects in a more comprehensive fashion, to look at the conservation as well as pro-poor aspects and help bring more income for villages in tourism sites. They would like to hear more from MTCO on how to move forward with these projects. UNESCO is working with Mekong Institute in organizing a training in October 2009 that could be linked with the tourism corridors project.
 - France mentioned their partnerships with CLV and continues to support capacity building programs.
 - PATA provides a platform for members to join the tourism forum each year and share their views on tourism issues. PATA is also providing partial scholarships to members at the University of Hawaii.

15. The Co-Chair noted that the MTDP and STDP both emphasize the social impact of tourism. There is strong link and synergy between the biodiversity and corridor projects and other activities under the GMS Program, notably those on the biodiversity corridors being done by the Environment Operations Center (EOC). In addition, EOC is looking at trying to conserve and preserve the environment, while emphasizing the economic and poverty reduction benefits. Three of the 4 projects are to be financed by STDP in Laos and Viet Nam which have agreed to invite the other countries to participate in the knowledge-related activities of the project. The tourism corridors project is linked with the overall GMS Program, especially the development of transport corridors into economic corridors. An important element is to build tourism infrastructure in order to promote income-generating opportunities for communities in these areas. She mentioned the recent meeting of the Working Group on Human Resource Development and the inclusion in the working group's action plan of a focus on skills development, including capacity development for tourism officials. In addition, ADB is preparing 3 national projects in CLV on skills development which may include tourism-related training.

16. The Chair mentioned that Thailand has launched several updated policies that impact on tourism. She mentioned the recent APEC meeting which has interest in ecotourism. Thailand is ready to work with New Zealand and other donors in supporting the GMS framework as Thailand pursues its bilateral programs for tourism recovery. She expressed her appreciation to the French Government for its continued support to Thailand and would like that this be extended to the other GMS countries. She suggested for UNESCO to not only focus on cultural world heritage sites but also other sites that attract tourists, such as marine habitat. She suggested that the other GMS countries could take advantage of Thailand's membership in UNESCO's Executive Council to explore funding possibilities.

17. The Co-Chair agreed that there are other development projects that contribute to tourism by improving conditions like water and sanitation in tourism sites and border towns, and that there are other ways of spinning projects in order to mobilize funding that could also support tourism-related activities.

18. UNESCO-Thailand representative agreed that although tourism is not a sectoral priority, once a site is recognized as a World Heritage site, tourism activity increases and this has both positive and negative impacts, economic and social. It is important to have specific indicators to monitor and alleviate those impacts and there could be an opportunity for interface with TWG under the One-UN Framework.

19. The other GMS countries welcomed Thailand's offer to work with UNESCO in their behalf and draft a proposal on a heritage-related project. Thailand will circulate the proposal to the other countries prior to submitting it to the UNESCO Executive Council.

5.2 Progress Report on Tourism Sector Strategy Projects

20. Ms. Christine Jacquemin circulated a matrix outlining the progress/status of the projects under the TSS, copy attached as [Appendix 6](#).

5.3 Review of technical assistance on development projects

21. Mr. Maurice Siveton, Regional Counselor for Cooperation, French Embassy in Thailand, noted the many developments in GMS tourism cooperation that have occurred since the last meeting that he attended in January 2008. He noted that the tourism development plan is being realized in many ways and that project proposals developed by MTCO are now being circulated among the donors' community. Implementation of these projects would contribute to a more profitable and long-term tourism development that would benefit the people economically and socially, and contribute to the maintenance of the precious natural and cultural resources that tourists enjoy. Despite the economic downturn, the resilient tourism sector would be one of the quickest to recover, and the GMS will become one of the major world tourism destinations if it can establish its competitive advantage in the world scene. France continues to support sustainable tourism development in most GMS countries. In addition to providing technical assistance to ADB and MTCO with a project coordinator, France also supports human resource development, protection and conservation of cultural and natural resources, and responsible tourism. France will always be ready to share its

experience and expertise in rural and nature tourism, in the good management of mass tourism destinations, and expertise in displaying cultural assets.

22. The Chair expressed her appreciation to the French Government for their continued support.

5.4 Presentation of Development Project Coordination Action Plan 2009-2010

23. Ms. Jacquemin presented the 2009-2010 development project coordination plan which will focus on Program B - Human Resource Development (capacity building of trainers in vocational institutions, and HRD plan for public officials), Program C – Heritage Conservation Management of Negative Impacts (ecotourism development along biodiversity corridors, and mitigation of social negative impacts and promotion of responsible tourism practices), Program D – Pro-Poor Tourism Distribution of Benefits (tourism initiatives to alleviate poverty), Program E – Private Sector Participation (facilitation of SMEs and private sector investment in tourism), Program F – Facilitation of Travel (visa information, statistics database), Program G – Sustainable Tourism Development in Priority Zones (Southern Economic Corridor, East-West Economic Corridor, North-South Economic Corridor, Emerald Triangle, Green Triangle, Heritage Necklace). She emphasized that strong leadership by lead countries, financial support from partners and governments, and close communication and coordination with MTCO are important elements for success. A copy of her presentation is in Appendix 7.

Agenda Item 6: Progress Report on Marketing Projects

6.1 Report on the progress of marketing activities from November 2008 through May 2009

24. Mr. Mason Florence, MTCO Executive Director, reported on the progress of marketing activities from November 2008 to May 2009, including updating done on the www.MekongTourism.org and www.ExploreMekong.org websites with new content. There has been an increasing trend of unique visits to the MekongTourism website, with the U.S. being the top country visiting the website. The ExploreMekong website is also seeing a gradual increase in visits, following the launch of the GMS Responsible Tourism Guide, and introduction of blogging content. Future plans for the Mekong Tourism website include changing the software for easier management of content, implementing the “social media” marketing strategy for ExploreMekong.org, and continued expansion of the Responsible Tourism Guide subsite. GenaRes Asia is providing the online booking mechanism for www.exploremekong.org which serves as a booking engine that provides easy access for visitors to confirm accommodation and tour packages online. Other activities include networking arrangement, enhancement of databases (profiles of industry/trade, consumer, media), and conceptualization of a Mekong photo contest to be launched later in the year. The proposed Mekong Photo contest is expected to create brand awareness, encourage travel in the GMS, and help develop the MTCO photo library. The judging process will take place in November 2009 and the winner announced in December 2009. This will be followed by a travelling photo

exhibition to attract more people to come to the Mekong. A copy of his presentation is in Appendix 8.

Discussion/Decision:

25. In response to a query from Viet Nam, Mr. Florence stated that he is now looking at linking the MTCO website with the member countries' website. This will be accomplished within one month or **by end of June 2009**.

26. MTCO could consider putting up teasers in the website that would drive visitors to go to the country websites, in order to avoid duplicating information.

27. MTCO is requested to ensure transparency in reporting to TWG about revenues generated from the booking/business engine.

6.2 *Mekong Tourism Forum and its concept of organization*

28. Mr. Florence recalled the previous Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF) events and presented the concept of reviving the Forum. He emphasized the need to continue promoting the dialogue between the private and public sectors. It is proposed that the 11th MTF be organized on the theme "*Connecting Mekong Stakeholders*" and several proposed logo samples were presented. A budget of \$30,000 is contemplated, \$10,000 of which will come from the ACE project; the rest could be covered by the MTCO budget and sponsorships from other donors and the private sector. Once the dates and venue are determined, he will start soliciting sponsorships. The MTF could be done back-to-back with a TWG meeting or as a stand-alone event. His presentation on the MTF is incorporated in Appendix 8.

Discussion/Decision:

29. The Meeting discussed lengthily the advantages and disadvantages of linking the MTF with a TWG meeting, the issues of timing (it should not be close to ASEAN Tourism Forum in January), cost-saving measures, revenue-generation and sponsorship schemes, and varying themes and activities for each Forum.

30. The Meeting agreed in principle to revive the MTF in conjunction with the TWG meeting, starting in Cambodia in June 2010, and on a yearly basis thereafter, as a jointly sponsored event by government and private sectors, subject to further discussion at TWG-24 in Viet Nam scheduled in late 2009 about implementation details and confirmation of agreement to host by the Cambodian Government. The Meeting requested Mr. Florence to prepare a more detailed concept paper describing the theme, expected outcome, proposed format and activities, potential participants, contemplated sponsorship and revenue-generating arrangements, logo, and other items for consideration, for further discussion and decision at TWG-24. **The detailed concept paper should be circulated to TWG at least one month before the TWG-24 meeting.**

6.3 *Presentation of Marketing Plan 2009-2010 (jointly with Agenda Item 7)*

Agenda Item 7: *Review of MTCO Administration*

31. Mr. Florence gave an update on the Marketing Plan for 2009-2010. He also presented the financial report for January-May 2009 and the proposed allocation of budget for the remainder of 2009, copy appears in Appendix 9.

32. He proposed that part of the MTCO budget be utilized for an additional staff - a dedicated marketing person in the MTCO to assist in the expanded marketing activities. An additional website for the Mekong photo contest will be put up. There are plans to produce new Explore Mekong collateral (brochures/fact sheets, thumb drive, t-shirts/caps, calendar, guide books, cookbooks, and Passport to the Mekong discount voucher book) to replace the old collateral produced by TAT even before MTCO came into being and which now need updating. Another area of focus will be several trade fairs and travel shows in 2009, where a Mekong pavilion/booth could be set up by MTCO to promote the subregion. Media familiarization trips and overland road shows will also be organized, starting in August/September 2009. Mr. Florence proposed a budget of \$64,000 to be disbursed up to December 2009, to be taken out of \$99,000 currently available in the account of MTCO which includes 2009 contributions received from Lao PDR and Thailand. Contributions from the other 4 countries are awaited.

Discussion/Decision:

33. The Meeting stressed that Mr. Florence should in future present a comprehensive budget covering both the marketing and operational aspects, taking into account the actual money available in the MTCO account. Some of the planned marketing activities could be deferred if available budget is not enough for 2009. In the meantime, he could proceed to plan out activities with an indicative budget of \$30,000 for the rest of 2009 except the proposed additional marketing staff since MTCO already has enough staff and could outsource certain items. The door will be kept open in the future if marketing activities would indeed accelerate and justify the hiring of an additional person. For operational expenses, the Meeting approved a budget of \$7,000 per month for the rest of 2009.

34. On the issue of whether to change the name of MTCO to MTO, the Meeting decided that MTCO will remain as the officially-recognized name; however, informally MTO may also be used.

Agenda Item 8: *Other Matters*

35. Viet Nam presented a draft proposal on Japan-Mekong Tourism Cooperation, to be launched through an event, "Mekong-Japan Culture and Tourism Days to be organized by Viet Nam in December 2009 in Can Tho City (copy appears in Appendix 10). The event will consist of the following:

- Mekong-Japan Tourism Ministers' Meeting (half day)
- Mekong-Japan Tourism SOM (half day)
- Regional Mekong-Japan Tourism Workshop (full day).

Viet Nam will provide complimentary board and lodging for 4-5 delegates from each GMS NTO, and defray the costs of organization of meetings and workshops, while GMS countries will cover the cost of international air fare and other related expenses.

36. The Meeting proposed 2-3 December 2009 for the event. Viet Nam will discuss with Japan and confirm with TWG.

Agenda Item 9: Date and Venue of the Next Meeting

37. The Meeting agreed that the next TWG meeting (TWG-24) will be held in Viet Nam either in late November 2009 or back-to-back with the Mekong-Japan Culture and Tourism Days in early December 2009. Thereafter, the TWG meetings will be scheduled in Cambodia on the first week of June 2010, and PRC (Guangxi or Yunnan) in November 2010. Exact details will be determined and communicated later.

Closing Session

38. Dr. Sasithara expressed her thanks to the participants for their valuable contribution to the Meeting. She also expressed thanks to Ms. Lateef as Co-Chair, the MTCO, and the GMS Secretariat based at ADB for their technical and secretariat support. In turn, the participants expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government of Thailand for the warm hospitality and efficient arrangements made for the meeting.