



**THE TWENTY FOURTH MEETING OF THE GMS TOURISM WORKING GROUP
Hoi An Town, Vietnam, 2 November 2009**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS (ABRIDGED)

The 24th Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG-24) was held in Hoi An Town, Vietnam on 2 November 2009. Representatives of the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) of the 6 GMS countries (Cambodia, People's Republic of China-Yunnan Provincial Tourism Administration, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam), the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), and development partners, namely, ADB, SNV, UNESCO, WWF, JICA, GTZ, EC's Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism Capacity Development Project, PIU-STDP/Quang Binh and other organizations (NESDB, Tourism Resource Consultants) attended. The Meeting was chaired by Mrs. Hoang Thi Diep, Vice Chairperson of Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, and co-chaired by Ms. Shireen Lateef, Director, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank. Main topics discussed at the Meeting included:

MTCO Executive Director presented a status report on the Explore Mekong Campaign which highlights the following issues:

- (i) The Responsible Tourism sub-site won the PATA Gold Award 2009 for Marketing Media website;
- (ii) Improvement of the website: plan to add a meta search engine, WEGO, alongside the original one powered by GenaresAsia on the marketing website, www.exploremekong.org. Content expansion and design enhancement of the website;
- (iii) Mekong Travel Yellow Pages: an electronic directory listing any active organizations in the tourism industry within the Greater Mekong Subregion. The publication will be available to view on-line and also download as a free PDF file on www.exploremekong.org. Free advertising space will be offered to each of the GMS NTOs;
- (iv) Refined designs of Explore Mekong logos as well as new slogan;
- (v) Adjusted deadlines for Mekong Photo Contest 2010: Entries will be accepted from 1 December 2009 to 15 March 2010. The final judgement is scheduled from 16 to 31 March 2010 and a travelling exhibition will take place from May through December 2010;
- (vi) GMS Song: in a different style to the existing GMS Song produced by ADB, a new GMS pop song was proposed to be composed and sung by the Subregion's popular singers;

- (vii) Detailed plan to revive the Mekong Tourism Forum in 2010 in conjunction with the 25th TWG in Cambodia, including plan to organize familiarization trips to promote the destinations within the subregion;
- (viii) Briefing on activities undertaken by Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports under the campaign "Visit GMS Years" during 2008-2009.

Following the presentation of the MTCO Executive Director, the Meeting concluded with the following decisions:

- ❖ The Meeting requested MTCO to provide more details on the booking engines to the NTOs and present a list of hotels registered on WEGO at the next meeting;
- ❖ The Meeting preferred the original logo to the three new redesigns which are more complicated in graphic details while the original one is simple and less detailed. The Meeting approved the new proposed slogan "Six Countries... One River". The Meeting asked MTCO to produce the Explore Mekong logo in a CD-Rom and send to NTOs to promote on their local materials;
- ❖ Regarding the Mekong Yellow Pages, the Meeting agreed in principle and asked the NTOs to collect contacts of establishments in their countries and send them to MTCO;
- ❖ The Meeting suggested that MTCO should prioritize its marketing activities, and focus on main activities such as the Mekong Tourism Forum;
- ❖ The Meeting agreed that the theme of the Mekong Tourism Forum in 2010 should be related to "Tourism opportunities along GMS Economic Corridors";
- ❖ The Meeting agreed to extend the Visit GMS Years until 2015, with Thailand being the host in 2012 and Lao PDR being the host in 2013. The Meeting also noted that Cambodia would consult with their Government regarding hosting the event in 2010;
- ❖ The Meeting approved MTCO's representation at the following regional events in 2010: ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF), PATA Adventure Travel and Responsible Tourism Conference, Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+), International Travel Expo (ITE), PATA Travel Mart (PTM) and China International Travel Mart (CITM).

In addition, the development partners were invited to deliver individual statements, particularly on their ongoing and planned interventions in support of the GMS Tourism Marketing and Development Agenda and the implementation of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. Then, each GMS country gave a progress report on the implementation of strategic projects under the Tourism Sector Strategy for which they take the leading role: (i) Progress Report on Mekong Tourism Development Project by Cambodia and Vietnam; (ii) Progress report on a) Golden Quadrangle Area b) Shangri-La-Tengchong-Myithyina Tourism Development Zone by PRC (Yunnan); (iii) Progress Report on GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project by Lao PDR & Vietnam; (iv) Progress report on the training project in the heritage sites by Thailand; (v) Report on World Ecotourism Conference 2009 held in Vientiane by Lao PDR; (vi) Presentation on a new proposed project on Training on Development and Management of Community-Based Tourism by Myanmar.

In light of the countries' progress reports, the Meeting agreed to:

- ❖ hold the subregional steering committee meeting for the GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project following each TWG meeting. The first will be held following the TWG-25 in March 2010. ADB requested MTCO to help coordinate and facilitate this meeting;
- ❖ send an official letter in support of the proposed project on "Promoting Responsible Heritage Tourism for the Greater Mekong Subregion" to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand.

Besides, the Meeting discussed about MTCO Administration issues and agreed upon the following issues:

- ❖ Thailand will collect the MTCO Executive Director evaluation by the GMS NTOs, and would forward the completed evaluation forms to ADB, as the neutral party for the evaluation. NTOs will submit their completed performance evaluation forms to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand by December 4, 2009.
- ❖ ADB informed the Meeting that French Government had decided to renew the contract of the previous Project Coordinator for another two years and the documentation was currently underway. The Project Coordinator will be based in the ADB's Cambodia Resident Mission. ADB will keep the NTOs updated of the contract signing with the Project Coordinator, who is expected to start in January 2010. Also, ADB will approach the French Government regarding the hiring of a local Development Assistant to provide secretarial assistance to the Project Coordinator.
- ❖ The NTOs did not support the recruitment of an additional person for marketing activities. The NTOs would consider hiring someone for a short-term, if activities required additional support, In such instances, MTCO was requested to prepare a specific TOR with proposed activities for approval by the NTOs prior to engagement.
- ❖ Due to insufficient information, the Meeting deferred the discussion on MTCO legal status to the next TWG meeting and tasked MTCO, with assistance of ADB and Thailand (MOTS and NESDB) to explore possible alternatives.
- ❖ The NTOs requested MTCO to (i) revise the proposed budget to reflect agreements reached on activities at the TWG-24; and (ii) prepare, for the next TWG meeting, a one-year in-house running costs (January-December 2009), including a list of action items for approval. The revised budget should be circulated by email to the NTOs. The one-year in house running costs and actions for approval shall be circulated in before the next TWG meeting.
- ❖ The Meeting deferred the decision on MTCO staff per diem rate and contract of MTCO Office Manager but it would be discussed by email later on.

Finally, MTCO Executive Director presented the GMS international tourists arrivals during January through September 2009, showing that PRC-Guangxi recorded a slight increase of 1.56% and Myanmar experienced an increase of 15% while Thailand and Vietnam still recorded a two-digit negative. Cambodia and PRC-Yunnan have not yet finalized the September's statistics. Lao PDR has not yet finalized the statistics from July to September. He also presented a draft Calendar of Tourism Events to take place in GMS countries in late 2009 and 2010. The Calendar is to be updated more regularly and be accessible online on both MTCO websites. Mr. Florence encouraged the GMS NTOs to submit any updates to contribute to the Calendar.

The GMS NTOs will convene in Cambodia in 2010; exact date and venue will be communicated later.

***Report prepared by Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office
For full report with appendices, please contact info@mekongtourism.org***