



**TWENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE GMS TOURISM WORKING GROUP (TWG-27)
Pakse, Champasak, Lao PDR, 26 May 2011**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

1. The 27th Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG-27) was held in Pakse, Champasak, Lao PDR on 26 May 2010, attended by the representatives of the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) of the six 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), development partners including ADB, SNV, France, New Zealand, and UNWTO. A copy of the List of Participants is in [Appendix 1](#).

Agenda Item 1: Opening Session

2. In his opening remarks, H.E. Vang Rattanavong, Vice Chairman, Lao National Tourism Administration, welcomed all participants and invited everyone to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of former TWG colleague from Cambodia, Mr. Ruos Sam Ear, who passed away a few days ago. He said that the objective of TWG-27 was to review the activities agreed at TWG-26 held in Jinghong, PRC on the implementation of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy, the status of the Subregional Joint Marketing Program and the Tourism Development Program, and share GMS country project reports/updates. Despite many challenges like natural disasters and political instabilities which have affected the tourism industry, the number of tourist arrivals in the GMS has continued to increase which signals a bright future for the tourism industry. He stressed the need for MTCO to persistently improve coordination, and for the countries to implement and closely monitor the agreements reached in each TWG meeting and to promptly address challenges that may arise. On behalf of LNTA, he expressed his thanks to ADB for its generous support to tourism activities, and to the GMS countries and MTCO for their efforts in developing innovative tourism products to attract increasing number of tourists into the GMS.

3. Mr. Chong Chi Nai, Country Director, Lao Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank, recalled the unanimous endorsement by the 3rd GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting held in January 2011 of the findings and recommendations of the mid-term review of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy (TSS) and implementation road map for 2011 to 2015. Going forward, the GMS Tourism Working Group has been tasked by the Ministers to pursue a revised spatial strategy that promotes the development of thematic multi-country tour circuits linked to the iconic Mekong River, and accelerate the implementation of 3 consolidated strategic programs. These strategic programs focus on tourism-related human resource development, development of pro-poor sustainable tourism, and subregional marketing and product development. ADB is pleased to be an active partner in promoting tourism promotion and development in the subregion. The ongoing ADB-financed Sustainable Tourism Development Project in Lao PDR and Viet Nam is making good progress towards improving the environment at urban and natural sites, building skills and capacity among public officials, local communities and tour operators, and strengthening equitable partnerships

between government, communities, and the private sector. He looked forward to the Mekong Tourism Forum's sustained momentum for many years to come as well as the strong public and private sector support that the event has generated since its revival in 2010.

4. Mr. Mason Florence, Executive Director, MTCO, echoed the expression of appreciation for the Lao Government's kind arrangements for hosting TWG-27 and the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011 in Pakse. He mentioned an article that appeared in the National Geographic magazine which listed Champasak as one of the world's top 50 travel destinations that should not be missed.

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

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda

6. The Meeting was chaired by H. E. Vang Rattanaavong of the Lao National Tourism Administration, and co-chaired by Mr. Chong Chi Nai, ADB.

7. The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda, copy in [Appendix 3](#).

Agenda Item 3: Business arrangements

8. Mr. Florence informed the participants about the arrangements for the TWG-27 meeting, lunch and reception hosted by the LNTA, the Closed Meeting of the MTCO Board later in the afternoon, and opening ceremony of the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011 the following day. The TWG-27 meeting was held in plenary. Secretariat support was provided by the MTCO and the GMS Secretariat based at ADB.

Agenda Item 4: Report and follow-up of the 26th GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting, 24 November 2010, Jinghong, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, PRC

9. Representative of PRC briefed participants on the highlights and follow-up actions on items discussed at TWG-26 held in Jinghong, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, PRC, on 24 November 2010, as follows:

- TWG-26 reviewed the implementation of the TSS being coordinated by MTCO, particularly the progress of the (i) Marketing Program and (ii) Tourism Development Program.
- TWG-26 also discussed and gave initial comments on the findings and recommendations of the mid-term review of the TSS which covered situational analysis, progress review and lessons learned, new directions for a road map covering 2011-2015, and implementation and monitoring arrangements. The findings and recommendations of the mid-term review were subsequently endorsed by the 3rd Meeting of the GMS Tourism Ministers held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in January 2011.

Agenda Item 5: Implementation of GMS Tourism Sector Strategy

5.1 Sub-regional Joint Marketing Program

- 5.1.1 Progress Report on Explore Mekong Campaign**
- 5.1.2 Update on Calendar of Future GMS Tourism Events and MTCO Preparation**
- 5.1.3 Presentation of MTCO/Mekong Media Clippings for November 2010 to April 2011**
- 5.1.4 Preparations for Mekong Tourism Forum 2011**

10. Mr. Florence, MTCO, reported on the progress of activities related to the Explore Mekong Campaign, including the production of collaterals (t-shirts, caps, coffee mugs, etc.). The Lao version of GMS travel map has been printed and ready for distribution at the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011; the full GMS version is being prepared for distribution to the countries, giveaways, and for sale in order to recoup part of the printing cost. The Explore Mekong website has been improved and reorganized with new content.

11. Mr. Florence reported also on his participation in several GMS and international travel fairs and speaking engagements held in different venues in the subregion and in Europe, with sponsorship from some of the organizers. He plans to attend a number of events lined-up for June 2011-January 2012. He noted that the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2012 will be held in Indonesia in January 2012, and since Indonesia is a non-GMS country, the possibility of MTCO's participation and putting up a booth is under consideration. He briefed the meeting on preparations done over the last several months for MTF 2011, including media promotion arrangements. MTF 2012 is planned to be held in Chiang Rai, Thailand, back-to-back with TWG-29, in June 2012; planned activities include a GMS Travel Fair, photo exhibition, cultural performances local food festival and pre- and post-tours/caravans. Several media overland familiarization trips have been arranged from Viet Nam and Cambodia to Pakse and will be reported on at the MTF 2011 the following day.

Discussion:

12. Myanmar appreciated MTCO's efforts to produce collaterals and other promotional materials and requested Mr. Florence to provide samples of these items for the GMS delegations to bring home and show to higher authorities.

13. Mr. Steven Schipani, ADB, inquired about MTCO's follow-up action on one of the recommendations of the TSS mid-term review concerning the need to revitalize private sector support to MTCO's marketing and promotion efforts. Moving forward on production of new collaterals, he suggested that MTCO should consider sourcing collaterals from the GMS community producers to help the subregion's supply chains. Concerning the Explore Mekong website, Mr. Schipani inquired if there has been a systematic evaluation/survey on how effective it is, the number of users, etc. Regarding MTCO's attendance in international events, Mr. Schipani inquired on the extent to which these events have helped to catalyze external support for MTCO's marketing and development programs.

14. Mr. Florence responded that MTCO's coordination with the private sector has been on a one-on-one basis, and not on the basis of a formal MTCO-private sector advisory group. There are many private sector groups and MTCO would need to consult them about the possibility of moving towards a formal private sector advisory group arrangement. Regarding the sourcing of collaterals, he agreed that MTCO should be doing more by sourcing items from local supply chains and communities – but noted that cost is a serious consideration. On the Explore Mekong website which is still being populated with content, MTCO has statistics showing increase in traffic, but Mr. Florence agreed on the need to undertake a survey to gauge the website's effectiveness. He stated that his attendance in various international events has benefited the GMS in terms of giving it exposure to foreign markets and establishing contacts.

15. In response to Viet Nam's query on whether NTOs' assistance is needed for local arrangements regarding the familiarization trips, Mr. Florence responded that assistance is requested in facilitating border crossing formalities, organizing special local events, and facilitating contact with local private sector and media.

Required follow-up actions:

16. Following are items requiring MTCO's follow-up actions:

- MTCO to provide GMS delegations samples of collaterals produced to bring home and show to higher authorities;
- MTCO to source collaterals/materials from GMS community supply chains;
- MTCO to exert efforts towards revitalizing private sector engagement and support to MTCO's marketing and promotion including the establishment of a formal private sector advisory group; and
- MTCO to conduct a serious study/survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the Explore Mekong website.

17. A copy of Mr. Florence's report is in Appendix 4.

5.1 Development Program

18. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, MTCO Project Coordinator, presented her Project Development Report covering the period November 2010-May 2011.

5.1.1 2011-2015 GMS Tourism Sector Strategy – New Road Map

19. Ms. Christine Jacquemin recalled that the findings and recommendations of the GMS TSS Mid-Term Review were unanimously endorsed by the 3rd Meeting of the GMS Tourism Ministers held on 17 January 2011 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The refocused tourism strategy adopts a spatial inclusive approach that integrates soft components with infrastructure work; consolidates the 7 strategic programs into 3, and the 13 priority zones into 7; and focuses on the Mekong River as the core priority area articulated around thematic circuits that link natural and cultural heritage/destinations. The Road Map covering 2011-2015 emphasizes 3 strategic programs: (i) tourism-related human resource development; (ii) pro-poor, sustainable tourism development; and (iii) subregional marketing and product development. It covers the following priority zones: (i) Mekong River Discovery Trail; (ii) Mekong Karst Lands; (iii) Mekong by the Sea; (iv) Mekong Tea Horse Trail; (v) Mekong Heritage Trails; and (vi) In the Steps of Shiva and Lord Buddha. She presented the details of proposed priority activities under the Road Map.

5.1.2 Tourism Development Network Meetings

20. Ms. Jacquemin stated that the tourism development network aims to initiate a platform of exchange on tourism development, stimulate synergies and complementarities, foster collaboration among development partners and/or public-private partnership, identify common issues and pending areas of work, and gather information for effective monitoring by MTCO of TSS implementation. Network meetings have been organized and some are planned by MTCO in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam, in collaboration with some development partners. Consequent to these meetings, fact sheets and project details have been posted on the mekongtourism.org website.

5.1.3 Mekong Tourism.org website

21. Ms. Jacquemin reported on improvements done on the website which now has a new design and includes new sections on development projects, business opportunities for private investors – particularly SMEs, tourism statistics, and a comprehensive resource knowledge center on sustainable tourism development in the GMS as an invaluable source of Information. She expressed her thanks to the GMS countries for facilitating the continuous flow of information that go into the website.

5.1.4 E-Guide to Mekong Responsible Tourism

Ms. Jacquemin presented the newly revamped E-Guide to Mekong Responsible Tourism which will now cover all GMS countries and has been given its own domain name to facilitate exposure and access to travellers using the internet. She is working to have the guide available not only in English but also in French as this is a French funded project. She mentioned that the Asean Japan and Asean Korea center have announced during ASEAN Tourism Forum in January that they would support the translation of tourism website. Ms Jacquemin asked the countries whether they would agree to endorse such a request.

5.1.5 Presentation on Status of Priority Programs of the Refocused GMS Tourism Sector Strategy

22. Ms. Jacquemin reported that several tourism projects (mostly national projects) are underway in GMS countries with funding from various development partners, including those related to (i) Tourism and Biodiversity under Phase 2 of the Environment Operations Center/Biodiversity Corridor Initiative (Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam); (ii) Pro-poor Tourism (ADB/JFPR project in KampongThom, Cambodia, EU Environmentally Sustainable Tourism project in Vietnam, Sustainable Tourism Development Project in Lao PDR and Viet Nam funded by ADB, and a NZaid project in 5 provinces in Lao PDR); (iii) HRD (ILO in Viet Nam, AFD in Cambodia, Lux Development in Lao PDR, STDP components in Viet Nam and Lao PDR); and (iv) Corridors (STDP in Lao PDR and Viet Nam supporting EWEC and NSEC tourism components, and projects on SEC). Thailand organized and financed a community-based tourism (CBT) training program for Myanmar on 23-28 January 2011, while France organized a training of middle level officials in Cambodia on sustainable tourism for development on 21-25 February 2011.

Discussion:

23. Cambodia remarked that AFD's support to the establishment of a tourism school is still pending on feasibility study being conducted now and that alternative sources of funding are being explored, including Japan, Switzerland, and Korean Polytechnic Institute.

24. In response to a query from the Co-Chair, Ms. Jacquemin clarified that the 2 websites (Mekongtourism.org and the Responsible Tourism E-guide) are linked.

25. Cambodia inquired about steps being taken by MTCO to put in place a mechanism for implementing the refocused tourism strategy and Road Map. Ms. Jacquemin responded that a lot of work needs to be done to implement the Road Map, and that the design of projects and implementation arrangements are to be done on a project-by-project basis with the support of the GMS countries, ADB, and other development partners.

26. PRC requested MTCO's assistance in having the mid-term review and Road Map translated into Chinese. Ms. Jacquemin suggested that the summary (short version) of the review could be translated, rather than the long version.

27. Mr. Schipani underscored the need to raise awareness about the benefits of CBT especially for rural and disadvantaged areas. He raised concern about the frequent changes done in the Explore Mekong website, Mekong tourism website, and responsible tourism website, and stressed the importance of maintaining continuity in the messages, brand, and logo. He recognized the contributions of the country assistance programs to tourism development, and mentioned the assistance extended by PRC and Thailand by way of scholarships to other GMS countries, a number of which are in the tourism sector. Moving forward, MTCO can continue to work towards mobilizing assistance from the countries and donors. Regarding translation of the responsible tourism guide to other languages, he suggested that MTCO could prepare a letter of request to the ASEAN-Japan Center and other prospective donors. Mr. Schipani inquired about what additional support MTCO would require moving forward.

28. Mr. Florence responded that more resources are needed for marketing and promotion, and that a legal status for MTCO is a fundamental necessity. With limited staff complement, (3 staff members currently on board), MTCO would need continued and increased budgetary support to be able to accomplish more.

29. Concerning the request of Ms. Jacquemin to get a letter of approval from the tourism board to be submitted to the ASEAN Korea and ASEAN Japan center for the translation of the Mekong responsible tourism e guide, Viet Nam shared their experience with the ASEAN tourism promotion program and suggested that the Chairman of the TWG meeting sign the letter to development partners on behalf of the other GMS countries, instead of each of them. It was decided that MTCO will prepare the letter send it to the countries for approval on the current practice of no objection and once approved will be sent to his H.E. Vang Rattanavong as the current chairman.

5.1.5.1 GMS Child Protection Issues: Child Safe Network

30. Ms. Jacquemin introduced the Child Safe Network and sought the help of GMS governments and development partners in supporting and facilitating the network's work in raising awareness among travellers regarding child protection issues including children's vulnerability to physical, sexual and psychological violence; forced prostitution; forced labor, i.e. begging; illegal adoption, trafficking and exploitation; diseases, including HIV and STDs; poor health, hygiene and nutrition; gang involvement; and drug use. The ChildSafe Network is an international network of individuals who are concerned with the protection of marginalized children who, very frequently, work and live on the streets, through referrals to immediate child support and social services, and campaigns to educate travelers on child-safe tips.

Discussion

31. Cambodia raised concerns about some of the terminologies (e.g., "forced prostitution") used in the Network's pamphlet which have sensitive and legal implications, the very high statistics on street children cited for Phnom Penh, and the way in which some NGOs resort to distorted information in order to maintain funding from donors.

32. PRC appreciated Ms. Jacquemin's presentation and stated that child-safe tourism is an important issue for the country. It was recalled that at TWG-26 held in Jinghong, there was a presentation by an NGO on trafficking associated with the tourism sector.

33. Ms. Jacquemin clarified that the figures cited in the Network's pamphlet do not refer only to Cambodia, and agreed that some terminologies might be awkward but that she was convinced that the organisation in charge would be happy to hear the suggestions from MoT of Cambodia who actually already endorsed the brochure and the program. She stated that the Network is a social enterprise and not an NGO, and that its campaign is aimed at making travellers become more aware of the consequences of their actions.

34. Representative of New Zealand remarked that trafficking is an important issue in the GMS, and the New Zealand government supports work to address this issue through the COMMIT process, and encourages coordination among the agencies involved in the COMMIT and the ministries of tourism in the GMS countries.

35. Myanmar suggested the sharing of information on mechanisms to address child protection issues in the tourism industry.

36. SNV commented that in small villages where there are no NGOs operating, some tourists give stuff like candy to children. The giving of candy and money should be discouraged; instead, if tourists

would like to help, they could donate pens and books through the tour guide and/or the village chief, rather than giving away items directly to the children.

37. Cambodia noted that depending on the local culture, it is important to look at how people value such gifts, and suggested that donation to a community fund might be more acceptable.

38. The Chair remarked that the issue is a concern not only of the tourism sector but also of the social affairs ministry of the government, and that the root causes of children who work and live on the streets are poverty and negative circumstances in the family.

39. Upon invitation by the Chairman, representatives of development partner agencies gave their respective statements, as follows:

40. Representative of New Zealand thanked the TWG for the opportunity to listen to the presentations and discussions. Tourism is an important sector for New Zealand which is supporting ecotourism development in Cambodia and community-based tourism in Lao PDR. New Zealand looks forward to learning more about the GMS tourism program.

41. Representative of SNV informed the meeting that they are phasing out their tourism programs not only in Asia but also globally. SNV is phasing out in Lao PDR in 2011, and in Cambodia and Viet Nam in 2012. Nonetheless, they hope that the programs they have initiated would continue with funding from other donors.

42. Representative of French Embassy in Laos shared information on France projects in Lao PDR, including support France have been carrying since 1996 to protecting and preserving heritage in Luang Prabang, currently focusing on intangible heritage, definition of a larger buffer zone and the building of a drainage system; A cultural project at Vat Phou mainly focused on temple renovation but with some tourism component such as the development of a cultural heritage tourism management plan with new interpretation material for the museum and guide training; and an ecotourism program in Khamouanne province with the illumination of Konglor cave and the development of interpretation materials, guide training and etc. He mentioned these projects are funded mainly by the regions of France, with co-funding from the ministry of foreign affairs.

43. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the development partners for their significant contribution to tourism development, which is contributing in turn to overall socio-economic development, and looked forward to their continued support.

44. Copies of presentations and reports under this agenda item are in [Appendix 5](#).

Agenda Item 6: GMS Country Project Updates

6.1 Update by Cambodia

45. Cambodia reported that tourist arrivals in 2010 reached 2.5 million, representing an increase of 16% compared to 2009, with average length of stay of 6.45 days, accounting for 65.74% hotel occupancy, and generating tourism receipts amounting to \$1.7 billion. It is projected that by 2015, Cambodia would receive 4.5 million international tourists, rising to 7 million by 2020. Top source markets in 2010 were Viet Nam, ROK, PRC, Japan, U.S.A., France, U.K., Thailand, Australia, and Taiwan-China. There are 19 international checkpoints and international border checkpoints, and visa on arrival is provided to tourists, except in Preah Shinanouk International Seaport where visa is provided upon request. In addition to 2 international airports, 1 domestic airport, 1 international sea port, and 1 international port, Cambodia has 6 border checkpoints with Thailand, 1 with Lao PDR, and 8 with Viet Nam. Cambodia has tapped funding from the Japanese Government (Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction) through ADB for a project on "Improving Market Access to the Poor in Central

Cambodia, Sambo Prey Kuk”, with a budget of \$1.9 million. The project agreement was signed in April 2011 between the Royal Government of Cambodia’s Ministry of Tourism and ADB. On cross-border cooperation and facilitation of travel for tourists, an inter-ministry working group on travel facilitation of Cambodia undertook study visits to experience the implementation of the road transportation agreement between Thailand and Lao PDR at Vong Tao international border check point in Champasak Province in December 2010; and between Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam along the EWEC (Danhsavan and Savanaketh international border checkpoint) in April 2011.

6.2 Update by PRC

46. Representative of Yunnan, PRC, reported that in 2010, international tourist arrivals including cross-border one-day trip reached 6.628 million person-time, representing an increase of 14.7% compared to 2009; international tourist arrivals (overnight only) reached 3.29 million (+15.7%); domestic tourist arrivals (including one-day-trip) reached 138.37 million person time (+15.09%); and domestic tourist arrivals (overnight only) reached 76.32 million person time (+13.44%). Yunnan Province has 13 national level ports (including 2 airports, 2 river ports, 1 rail port and 8 land ports), 7 provincial level land road ports. Of these, 1 connects with Lao PDR, 4 with Viet Nam, and 11 with Myanmar. At Hekou(Laocai) port and beginning January 2011, a new policy has been carried out, allowing border passes for all Chinese tourists, resulting in a 47% increase in Chinese tourists that visited Viet Nam for the 2011 spring festival. With regard to TSS projects, Yunnan has launched a tourism website in English which is linked with those of the other GMS countries. Following completion of 2 cross-border travel routes plans (for Golden Quadrangle Area – Development of the Tourism Potential of the North-South Economic Corridor, and Shangrila-Tengchong-Myitkyina Tourism Development Zone), Yunnan has published a Guidebook on Transnational Travel Routes, e-edition also accessible in the website. In the Golden Quadrangle Area (GQA), tourism investments have increased covering hotels, and shopping, entertainment, and convention areas (Examples: Xishuangbanna International Tourist Holiday Resorts Zone project amounting to CYN15billion; Luang Prabang Xishuangbanna Hotel in Northern Lao PDR amounting to CYN25 million). A Kunming-Vientiane High-speed Railway Project (part of the Pan-Asia Railway system connecting Kunming to Singapore) was approved by the Lao PDR Congress in December 2010, construction started in April 2011 and will finish in 2015. Around 50% of Thai tourists enter China through GQA by bus, airplane, or yacht (reaching 30,670 in 2010, +41.79%). A Thai tourism promotion conference was held in Kunming in May 2011. ADB is supporting an Environmental Strategic Assessment for GQA, and a workshop is planned in Kunming in late May 2011.

6.3 Update by Lao PDR

47. Lao PDR reported that in 2010, there was a total of 2.5 million tourist arrivals (+25%), with average length of stay of 4.5 days, and generating revenues of \$381.6 million. Major source markets are Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Americas, and Africa and the Middle East. Lao PDR has 4 international airports, 8 international border checkpoints with Thailand; 1 with Cambodia, 7 with Viet Nam, and 1 with PRC. On project updates, Lao PDR is now implementing the ADB-funded Sustainable Tourism Development Project; a Luxembourg Development Cooperation-supported training center project in Vientiane; and a NZaid project on community-based pro-poor project in selected provinces and capacity building for LNTA.

6.4 Update by Myanmar

48. Myanmar reported that in 2010, international tourist arrivals reached 791,505 (+4%), majority of which came from Thailand and PRC. Other major source markets besides Asia (PRC, Japan, ROK, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, and India) are West Europe, North America, Oceania, East Europe, Middle East, and Africa. Myanmar shares a long border with Thailand and Yunnan Province of PRC. Overland entry is permitted for Thai and Chinese tourists with border passes and to third party tourists with visa at designated checkpoints along the Myanmar-PRC and Myanmar-Thailand borders. Tourists with valid passports and visa can leave by air from Yangon which is the main entry

point to Myanmar. Myanmar has 5 border checkpoints with PRC, and 4 with Thailand. Myanmar has signed an MOU with PRC to facilitate the movement of tourists through the border checkpoints; however, PRC has suspended it since September 2009. Myanmar recommends that PRC allow these check points to be used also to permit entry of tourists from other neighboring countries and calls on PRC to relax restrictions in these points. Upon Myanmar's request, Thailand organized, with MTCO's assistance, a training workshop on community-based tourism held in Chiang Mai in January 2011, where 28 participants from Myanmar learned theoretical and practical techniques, followed by awareness programs on CBT. Myanmar expressed thanks for the support provided by Thailand and MTCO, and looked forward to receiving further assistance from development partners on CBT.

6.5 Update by Thailand

49. Thailand reported that in 2010, international tourist arrivals reached 15.9 million (+12.63%), a positive sign that the country's tourism industry has recovered strongly from the economic downturn and political unrest in the past 2 years. The largest source market was from the East Asia region (8.1 million, +15%), with positive growth rates also of arrivals from South Asia (+20.4%), Middle East (+17.6%), Africa (+13.8%), Europe (+9.4%), and Oceania (+7%), but with slight decrease of 1% in the Americas. In 2010, Thailand generated more than \$18 billion in tourism revenues, with \$7.4 billion coming from the European market. The Asian market is topped by Malaysia, followed by PRC, Japan, South Korea and India. International tourist arrival to Thailand has been growing because of the country's strong marketing strategy and the increased connectivity among the neighboring countries to various new and emerging tourist destinations. Thailand believes that the GMS Tourism Sector 2011-2015 Roadmap will promote sustainable tourism in the subregion with increasing quantity and quality of visitors. Thailand also reported on the Tour of Mekong 2010, a mountain bike marathon race covering Thailand, Lao PDR, PRC, and Viet Nam, organized by the Tourism Authority of Thailand on 4-16 December 2010, and aimed at attracting athletes and quality tourists from European and Scandinavian markets, and introducing new activities to stimulate travel to Northern Thailand and neighboring countries. In August 2011, Thailand is hosting a workshop on Southern Economic Corridor and letters of invitation will be sent shortly to the GMS countries. On the proposed project on tourism heritage training, financial support is being requested from UNESCO Headquarters through UNESCO Thailand, and specific details will be informed to TWG members later.

6.6 Update by Viet Nam

50. Viet Nam reported that the Tourism Law that took effect in 2006 is being revised, the Tourism Development Strategy 2020 will be promulgated soon, and the Master Plan for National Tourism Development 2011-2020 is being revised. In 2010, Viet Nam received 5.04 million international tourist arrivals (+34.8%), generating \$4.9 billion in revenues. Main source markets are PRC, ROK, Japan, USA, Taiwan, Australia, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and France. Viet Nam projects to receive between 7-8 million international tourists by 2015 and plans a number of activities in order to achieve this objective, including launching a new tourism logo and slogan, boat racing, international tourism exhibition, and year-round festivals and celebrations.

Discussion:

51. Mr. Schipani thanked the countries for the comprehensive presentations, and acknowledged the support that the countries are providing to one another, e.g., training organized by Thailand for Myanmar on CBT. ADB is currently financing the STDP which is supporting a number of activities including training programs that allow participation by the other countries. He congratulated MTCO for organizing the various activities (familiarization trips, bicycle tours, etc.) aimed at promoting tourism destinations in the GMS, and encouraged the countries to utilize strategic environmental assessment in tourism planning. He mentioned the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management which is receiving support from a number of donors and supporting learning programs including tourism planning/management for GMS public officials.

52. Cambodia stressed the need to mobilize funding to implement the refocused TSS and Road Map, as TWG members cannot rely on country budgets. Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia need to work with the private sector in facilitating movement of vehicles and tourists from country to country. Between Cambodia and Viet Nam, travel of buses from one country to the other goes smoothly because of company-to-company arrangement. However, there is a need to resolve the problem with Thailand and Lao PDR through bilateral consultations with the Ministry of Transport to allow direct transport of tourists and make it easy for tourists to move from country to country. Cambodia also raised the issue of exorbitant visa fees being charged by border immigration police, some of who charge more than the prescribed rate, and who, on the pretext of being given incomplete documents, make travellers and bus drivers wait for long periods. Another issue is what governments could do to augment the low salaries of border officials (customs, border police, and immigration officers) in order to avoid corruption which gives a negative impression on tourists. The facilitation of the smooth movement of vehicles and tourists across borders is a continuing complicated concern, and there is need for concerned authorities in the countries, ADB and other development partners, to resolve the problem through the Joint Committee overseeing the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement, because of the negative impact on cross-border tourism.

53. The Chair concurred on the need for GMS countries to meet and resolve the problem with the involvement of the Ministries of Tourism and Transport.

54. The Co-chair mentioned that the problem is recognized by the GMS Transport group and that dialogue and consultations are ongoing to try to look at solutions. The Chair called on ADB to serve as middle-man to facilitate consultations in this regard.

55. Ms. Jacquemin suggested that the ADB-supported STDP project in Viet Nam has scope for exchange of experiences with other countries, and for sponsoring field trips to selected sites. She mentioned in particular that the example of work done by Konglor cave in Khamouane province could be very inspiring for Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park project. Dr. Ngoi responded that they will organize a training course which will allow participants to visit protected areas.

56. Copies of presentations under this Agenda Item are in Appendix 6.

Agenda Item 7: Preparation for MTF 2012 by Thailand (Host Country)

57. Thailand confirmed that they will host MTF 2012, back-to-back with TWG-29, in Chiang Rai which is celebrating its 750th anniversary. Specific dates will be advised by Thailand later. Thailand also informed the meeting that Chiang Rai will be featured at a dinner they are hosting on 28 May 2011 for MTF 2011.

Agenda Item 8: Date and venue of the next TWG meeting (TWG-28)

58. The Meeting agreed to hold the 28th TWG Meeting (TWG-28) in Myanmar. Myanmar will communicate the specific dates and venue to TWG and MTCO as soon as possible.

Agenda Item 9: Consideration and adoption of the report

59. The summary of proceedings will be prepared by the GMS Secretariat and MTCO. The first draft will be circulated by MTCO to the NTOs for comments as soon as possible.

Closing Session

60. The Chair, Co-Chair, and MTCO thanked all the participants for their active contribution and support to the success of the meeting.