



**GMS TOURISM MINISTERS' MEETING
Bangkok, Thailand, 21 January 2008**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

1. The Ministers of Tourism of the 6 GMS countries (Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam) met in Bangkok, Thailand on 21 January 2008. Senior officials from the GMS National Tourism Organizations (NTOs), representatives from the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), and development partners including the Asian Development Bank, the Governments of France, GTZ, and Japan, the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), UNESCO, UNESCAP, UNWTO ST-EP Foundation, and PATA also attended the meeting. The meeting was held in conjunction with the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2008 and ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Meeting. A list of participants appears in [Appendix 1](#), and a copy of the Agenda appears in [Appendix 2](#).

Opening Session

2. H. E. Dr. Suwit Yodmani, Minister of Tourism and Sports, Kingdom of Thailand, extended his warm welcome to all the participants and expressed his thanks to the ADB for its strong support to the tourism cooperation framework. He also acknowledged the support that key development partners have provided to sub-regional cooperation. He proposed the holding of a Visit the GMS Year in 2009 and looked forward to getting the support from the other GMS countries to the proposal.

3. In his remarks, Mr. Arjun Thapan, Director-General, Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank, noted that sub-regional cooperation in the tourism sector has put the GMS firmly on the world's tourism map and is contributing to the realization of the vision and goals of the GMS Program. He mentioned the major programs and initiatives under the tourism sector that the ADB has supported in collaboration with key development partners. He congratulated the GMS Tourism Working Group for successfully steering tourism cooperation to an unprecedented level of maturity. He noted that the decisions of the Ministers' Meeting with regard to the Tourism Marketing Plan and the Tourism Development Plan are important inputs to ongoing preparations for the Third GMS Summit to be held in Vientiane, Lao PDR in March 2008.

4. Copies of the statements made at the opening session appear in [Appendix 3](#).

Meeting Proper

5. The meeting was chaired by H. E. Dr. Suwit Yodmani, Thailand, and co-chaired by Mr. Arjun Thapan, ADB.

Overview of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy

6. Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero, Senior Economist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB, gave an overview of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. The Strategy aims to “develop and promote the Mekong as a single destination, offering a diversity of good quality and high-yielding sub-regional products that help to distribute the benefits of tourism more widely; add to the tourism development efforts of each GMS country; and contribute to poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable development, while minimizing any adverse social impacts.” It covers 7 strategic programs and 29 priority projects (13 spatial projects and 16 thematic projects), with a total estimated cost of US \$429.9 Million, with infrastructure representing US \$361.3 million. A copy of his presentation is in [Appendix 4](#).

Tourism Marketing Plan

7. Mr. Peter Semone, Senior Adviser, MTCO, presented the Tourism Marketing Plan covering the period 2008-2011. The Plan was developed in consultation with a Private Sector Advisory Group (PSAG) and communicated widely among private and public sector stakeholders in the seven GMS destinations. In addition, country missions were undertaken for consultations with representatives of respective NTOs and private sector entities.

8. The Plan aims to provide strategic advice and direction on how to advance the MTCO’s marketing agenda in two specific areas: (i) institutional development and management of the MTCO as the lead agent for marketing GMS tourism; and (ii) marketing implementation plan recommending specific marketing-related actions to be undertaken by the MTCO in the short (2008), medium (2009) and long (2010-2011) term. The Plan outlines 3 key marketing objectives for the MTCO in the short and medium terms, including: developing and strengthening sub-regional institutional capacity to market the sub-region as a single destination; enhancing sub-regional product development and product quality; and enhancing the promotion of the sub-region as a single destination. Mr. Semone emphasized that the Plan should be treated as a living document and should be continually revised and updated. The Plan requires a budget of about US \$700,000 proposed to be funded by the NTOs and the private sector. A copy of Mr. Semone’s presentation appears in [Appendix 5](#).

Tourism Development Plan

9. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, Project Coordinator, MTCO, recalled the earlier decision of the TWG to focus the actions of the MTCO for the next 2 years on a selected number of projects. Toward this end, the MTCO Project Coordinator was requested to carry out a prioritization exercise. The Tourism Development Plan embodies a 2-year action plan presented to the TWG at its meeting in Vientiane in December 2007. The projects under the plan have been divided into 3 categories: short-term (2008-2010), medium-term (2008-2012), and longer-term (2010-2015).

10. Ms. Jacquemin explained the process and the criteria used (country priorities, current status of the projects, feasibility, and sustainability) in arriving at the prioritization of the projects under the Tourism Sector Strategy, as well as the main activities planned

under each category/phase. The selection of projects was done in close consultation with the NTOs, key development partners, and other stakeholders. She emphasized that the Plan's success depends not only on the TWG, but also on the active participation and support from the main actors of tourism development in the GMS, namely, the governments, private sector, and development partners. The Plan will be evaluated regularly and readjusted, depending on available funding resources. In 2009, another 2-year plan will be developed. A copy of Ms. Jacquemin's presentation appears in Appendix 6.

Discussion

11. The representative of the French Government reaffirmed his government's continuing support to the GMS countries on such areas as sustainable tourism development, tourism human resource development, and conservation of cultural and natural heritage sites, among others.

12. The representative of the UNWTO ST-EP Foundation noted the intangible goods arising from tourism development. She mentioned the forthcoming meeting of the Foundation's Board during which she will discuss GMS tourism cooperation, hopefully with the assistance of an invited GMS TWG representative. She looked forward to having the Foundation fund some of the small projects under the Tourism Sector Strategy.

13. H. E. Dr. Thong Khon, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia, expressed his support for the 2 plans and emphasized the need for the countries to work more closely to implement the priority projects under the Tourism Sector Strategy. He encouraged the mobilization of additional support from the development partners. He stressed that more should be done in HRD and Product development, and that there should be a country representative within MTCO.

14. H.E. Dr. Du Jiang, Vice Chairman, China National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China, expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to share views with the other GMS countries and his government's continuing commitment to further deepen sub-regional cooperation in the sector to develop regional projects.

15. H. E. Mr. Somphong Mongkhonvilay, Minister and Chairman of the Lao National Tourism Administration, Lao People's Democratic Republic, noted the substantive progress that has been achieved in sub-regional cooperation in the tourism sector which has benefited the country tremendously. He expressed support for the 2 plans and emphasized the need to conserve the natural heritage sites as well as the biodiversity of the sub-region. He also suggested that another GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting be held in the near future. He stressed the fact that the ADB/ MTDP apart from all the projects undertaken, raised awareness at the higher state level on the important role that tourism can play.

16. H. E. Brigadier General Aye Myint Kyu, Deputy Minister of Hotels and Tourism, Union of Myanmar, emphasized sustainable tourism development in the sub-region and noted that the GMS countries shared the same identity and common natural resources. He noted that continued support from the development partners is critical and looked

forward to more support being provided to Myanmar. He invited all to visit Myanmar and enjoy the warm hospitality of its people.

17. Mr. Pham Quang Hung, Director, International Cooperation Department, National Tourism Administration of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, designated representative of the Minister, expressed support for the 2 plans. He acknowledged the achievements of the MTCO but emphasized that the MTCO needs to play a more proactive role in implementing the Strategy and action plans, as well as in mobilizing support from the development partners. He also expressed support for the proposed Visit the GMS Year and noted the need for the GMS countries to work harder for more substantive achievements to celebrate the year. He also supported the holding of the GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting on a regular basis in conjunction with the ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Meeting.

18. The Meeting unanimously agreed to endorse the Tourism Marketing Plan and the Tourism Development Plan.

Adoption of Joint Ministerial Statement

19. The Ministers adopted the Joint Ministerial Statement as it appears in Appendix 7.

20. The Ministers noted that the decisions arising from their meeting will serve as inputs to the preparations for the Third GMS Summit to be held on 30-31 March 2008 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

Press Conference

21. The Minister of Thailand joined his counterparts from other GMS countries and the ADB in the press conference immediately following the meeting.

Concluding Session

22. The Chairperson expressed his thanks to all the participants for their valuable inputs to the meeting. In turn, the participants expressed their appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for the warm hospitality and efficient arrangements made for the meeting. The participants also expressed thanks to the ADB for its assistance in organizing the meeting.



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JOINT MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Preamble

1. We, the Tourism Ministers from the six GMS countries, namely, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Lao People's Democratic Republic, Union of Myanmar, Kingdom of Thailand, and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, met in Bangkok, Thailand, on 21 January 2008. We are pleased to be joined in our discussions by the Director General of the Southeast Asia Department of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and representatives from other development partners, international organizations as well as the diplomatic corps.

2. The tourism sector is one of the priority sectors under the GMS Economic Cooperation Program and continues to offer significant opportunities for socio-economic development. (We note the statement by the Second GMS Summit that the continued growth and development of the tourism sector is essential to poverty reduction). Now that physical infrastructure linking the GMS member countries are largely developed, tourism has become one of the indispensable instruments for achieving our collective aspiration for poverty eradication, sustainable development and well being of our peoples.

Achievements

3. We are pleased with the continuing positive outlook for the tourism sector in the Subregion. We have noted that annual tourist arrivals in the GMS have more than doubled from about 10 million in 1995 to about 24 million in 2007, with corresponding increase in tourism revenues. Clearly, we need to manage these large increases in tourism arrivals and revenues so that the pattern of growth is more equitable, environmentally sustainable and sensitive to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, particularly women and ethnic communities, and contributes substantially to poverty reduction and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

4. We commend the efforts of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG) for putting in place a GMS Tourism Sector Strategy that provides a solid framework for sub-regional cooperation in this important sector over the next decade. We support the goal of the Strategy "to develop and promote the sub-region as a single destination, offering a diversity of good quality and high-yielding sub-regional products that help to distribute the benefits of tourism more widely; add to the tourism development efforts of each GMS country; and contribute primarily to poverty reduction, gender equality and empowerment of women, and sustainable development, while minimizing any adverse impacts." We are eager to receive regular status reports from the TWG on the implementation of the Strategy.

5. We sincerely appreciate the financial and technical support provided by ADB towards the preparation of the Strategy as well as the implementation of some of its key priority programs and projects in collaboration with other development partners such as PATA, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UNWTO, SNV, NZAid, GTZ, etc.

6. The tourism sector in the GMS has indeed matured to a level that we can be proud of. We have established and continue to support with our own budgetary resources a Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) based in Bangkok to actively position and promote the sub-region as a single tourist destination and to coordinate the implementation of the key priority programs under the Tourism Sector Strategy. We sincerely appreciate the assistance of the French Government towards strengthening the staff of the MTCO by seconding a tourism specialist through ADB, to assist in coordinating and implementing the priority programs and projects.

Emerging Issues and Challenges

7. We can see excellent opportunities for the future of the GMS tourism sector with a growing level of physical connectivity to and within the sub-region, increased number of flights, and an increasingly vibrant tourism industry.

8. While substantial achievements have been made, there remain much more to be done in the face of many new challenges. We need to face up to increasing competition from other regional destinations due to increased globalization, issues of standards and pricing, imbalance in the distribution of benefits of tourism between and within the GMS countries, escalating energy costs, and the threat of transboundary diseases such as HIV/AIDS and avian flu, and impact of global climate change.

9. We need to look at innovative approaches to sustain and streamline the operations of the MTCO over the longer term to transform it into a self-sustaining institution that promotes the sub-region as a single destination, with the active participation and support of the private sector, and coordinates the implementation of the Tourism Strategy.

Our Commitment to Strengthen Sub-regional Cooperation in Tourism

10. In line with the GMS Leaders' pledge at the Second GMS Summit to support a more holistic and coordinated approach to tourism development, and in anticipation of the Third GMS Summit in March 2008, today we have formally endorsed the (i) the GMS Tourism Marketing Plan; and (ii) the GMS Tourism Development Plan. We commend the efforts of the MTCO in developing these guideposts for implementing the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy through realistic and feasible priority projects. We look forward to seeing the concrete and positive results of these initiatives for the benefit of the people of the sub-region.

11. We call on the TWG and the MTCO to mobilize the required financial, intellectual, and human resources and to further expand mutually beneficial partnerships with development partners, including bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, the private sector, and civil society to carry out these priority initiatives.

12. We look forward to further strengthening our partnerships with all relevant entities to ensure the continued development of the tourism sector in the GMS.

13. We express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting this First Meeting of the GMS Tourism Ministers, and the Asian Development Bank for the efficient organization of our meeting today.