



GMS TOURISM MINISTERS' MEETING
Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 9 January 2009

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 Ha Noi, Viet Nam, on 9 January 2009. Senior officials from the GMS National Tourism Organizations (NTOs), the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), and development partners including the Asian Development Bank, French Embassy, European Union, Netherlands Development Cooperation (SNV), and GTZ, and US-supported ASEAN Competitiveness Enhancement Project also attended the meeting. The meeting was held in conjunction with the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2009 and ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Meeting. A list of participants appears in [Appendix 1](#).

Agenda Item 1: Welcome Remarks

2. H.E. Mr. Tran Chien Thang, Deputy Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, extended his warm welcome to all the participants. He stated that while tourism has drawn greater attention from the governments of the GMS countries and international organizations, the world's tourism industry in general and that of the GMS in particular are facing a number of severe challenges, especially from the impact of the global economic crisis and climate change. Concerted efforts and closer partnerships are needed from the GMS member countries to address these challenges. The GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting is an appropriate platform for the tourism leaders of the subregion to review the progress of implementation of programs and projects, discuss solutions to overcome current difficulties, and consider new guidelines for priority cooperation to sustain tourism as a driving force for socio-economic development and contribute to the peace, stability and prosperity of the subregion. As Chairman of the Meeting, he expressed in behalf of the GMS Tourism Ministers sincere thanks to the ADB, the Government of France, and international organizations and donors for their valuable support and cooperation to the GMS tourism sector.

3. In his remarks, Mr. Ayumi Konishi, Country Director, ADB Resident Mission in Viet Nam, expressed his appreciation to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, for organizing and hosting the Meeting. He cited the tourism sector as an important component of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program, given its demonstrated capacity and potential as an instrument for reducing poverty and promoting broad-based economic growth in an environmentally sustainable manner. The GMS Leaders have emphasized the need for a subregional approach to sustainable tourism development and to promote the subregion as a single destination, while protecting its natural, historical, and cultural heritage, and mitigating negative social and

environmental impacts. Mr. Konishi recalled the directives from the Third GMS Summit held in March 2008 that called for the (i) strengthening of the sustainable management of natural and cultural tourism sites; (ii) promoting the joint marketing of tourism in the subregion; and (iii) strengthening of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO). He pointed out that the tourism sector in the GMS countries faces serious challenges from the adverse effects of the evolving global economic turmoil. The current situation calls for closer cooperation, particularly in promoting the GMS as a single destination, for which domestic and intra-regional tourism present increased opportunities for a much larger market. He urged the GMS countries to intensify coordinated tourism and marketing efforts, improve access to tourism sites and infrastructure, facilitate the movement of tourists to and within the GMS, and promote private sector participation. In this regard, ADB continues to provide financial and technical support to priority subregional initiatives including a recently approved GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project amounting to \$20 million comprising \$10 million grant to Lao PDR and \$10 million soft loan to Viet Nam, and an ongoing Mekong Tourism Development Project for Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam.

4. Copies of the welcome remarks appear in Appendix 2.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of Agenda

5. The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda, copy appears in Appendix 3. The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Tran Chien Thang, and co-chaired by Mr. Ayumi Konishi.

Agenda Item 3: Report by Chairman of GMS NTOs Meeting

6. Mr. Pham Quang Hung, Director of International Cooperation for VNAT, in behalf of the Chairman of the GMS NTOs Meeting, briefed the Ministers on the outcome of the preceding NTOs Meeting, including (i) signing of MTCO Executive Director Contract with Mr. John Mason Florence as the new full-time MTCO Executive Director starting 7 January 2009 until 6 January 2011 (renewable); (ii) agreement to 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) extension of the contract of MTCO office manager for 1 year from 1 February 2009 to 31 January 2010; (iv) agreement to maintain the current location of the MTCO in Bangkok; (v) appreciation of MTCO's achievement for having organized workshops with support from ADB and France to develop detailed project proposals for presentation at a donors' conference in 2009 to mobilize resources as well as developing the mekongtourism.org website into a regional knowledge platform to support a sustainable GMS tourism development; (vi) appreciation of MTCO's effort to develop a new website www.exploremekong.org dedicated to GMS tourism marketing activities; and (vii) decision for the new MTCO Executive Director to prepare within 4 weeks his work plan for 2009-2010 for consideration and endorsement by NTOs. A copy of his summary report is in Appendix 4.

Agenda Item 4: Report on Current Activities Done by MTCO

4.1. Report on Tourism Development Activities

7. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, MTCO Project Coordinator, reported on the outcomes of workshops organized in 2008 to jumpstart the implementation of priority projects under the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. The workshops covered (i) tourism and biodiversity conservation; (ii) pro-poor tourism with focus on the development of private partnerships with local communities; and (iii) GMS tourism corridors. A fourth workshop on the topic of HRD with a focus on vocational training course for SMEs will be organized in February 2009. The detailed project proposals arising from the workshops will be presented at a donors' conference to be organized in early 2009 by MTCO and ADB. She also presented the relaunched mekongtourism.org website meant to serve as a knowledge platform to disseminate information, and encourage and facilitate sustainable development and responsible tourism. Ms. Jacquemin echoed the sentiments expressed earlier by Mr. Konishi concerning the need for greater GMS tourism cooperation to address risks and carefully manage GMS tourism for which governments, private sector, development partners, academe, and communities all have an important role to play. A copy of Ms. Jacquemin's presentation is in [Appendix 5](#).

4.2. Report on Tourism Marketing Activities

8. Mr. John Mason Florence, MTCO Executive Director, presented to the Ministers a Mekong Tourism Marketing Update. He demonstrated the content and navigation features of the new Explore Mekong consumer and marketing website www.ExploreMekong.org. The website is cross-linked with the Mekong Tourism institutional website at www.MekongTourism.org and features the latest Mekong news, event news and resources. Content tabs allow users to explore sites on Mekong destinations, people and society, "Frontiers" section designated for pro-poor tourism development, maps, user generated video clips uploaded on YouTube and Explore Mekong Channel, among others. MTCO is also developing a detailed Explore Mekong Events and Festivals calendar and a guide to various activities available in the subregion. A copy of Mr. Florence's presentation appears in [Appendix 6](#).

Agenda Item 5: Remarks by GMS Tourism Ministers

9. H. E. Dr. Thong Khon, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia, appreciated the achievements of the GMS Tourism Working Group and congratulated the new MTCO Executive Director on his selection. In the face of the global economic downturn which impacts on regional tourism, he encouraged efforts on subregional and intraregional joint promotion and facilitation of travel such as visa exemption, use of border pass, trans-boundary tourist transportation, low-cost couriers, creation of new border-crossing gateways, as well as improving service quality and hospitality of officers at border posts. Development of community-based tourism, ecotourism, and nature-based tourism which contribute to poverty alleviation in line with responsible tourism that responds to climate change were also emphasized. While Cambodia experienced double-digit tourism growth in the past years since the '90s, the economic downturn in 2008 has slowed tourism growth to about 5.48% with total arrivals of 2,125,465. The Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia has developed strategic plans to mitigate and

overcome this impact. He expressed his thanks to ADB and the French Government for their support to tourism development in the GMS and institutional strengthening of MTCO, and appealed to all development partners to continue their support and assistance for sustainable tourism development in the GMS.

10. Hon. Mr. Zhu Shanzhong, Director General, National Tourism Administration, People's Republic of China, stated that GMS tourism cooperation has become one of the most successful aspects in the portfolio of subregional cooperation. He expressed PRC's active support to the work of the new MTCO Executive Director and looked forward to a chance for him to do a technical visit to Yunnan and Guangxi Autonomous Region. PRC will continue to contribute to GMS tourism cooperation which has reached a critical stage of development and needs more support from ADB, whose guidance, coordination, and support are indispensable to the success of GMS tourism cooperation. PRC will strengthen cooperation with the other countries, ADB, and other international organizations concerned, and give support to Yunnan and Guangxi to implement the cooperation plan.

11. H. E. Mr. Somphong Mongkhonvilay, Minister and Chairman of National Tourism Administration of Lao People's Democratic Republic, cited tourism as one of the flagship programs of the GMS and a vital sector that commands improved cooperation. He congratulated the GMS countries for their efforts in developing the tourism sector, notably, the establishment of the MTCO to coordinate tourism cooperation and promote GMS tourism destinations, services and facilities. Lao PDR has been closely coordinating with other GMS countries, particularly in line with the principles of 6 countries – one destination, and 3 countries (CLV)-one destination. He cited the need to further simplify border crossing procedures along the economic corridors. To complement the existing good arrangement with Viet Nam and Thailand, Lao PDR will work more closely with Cambodia and PRC through the Emerald Triangle on integrated tourism development. He reiterated the importance of tourism and biodiversity and expressed concern over the destruction and exploitation of protected areas in pursuit of development, community-based pro-poor tourism to benefit the poor, integrating tourism development with infrastructure development particularly along the economic corridors, and vocational training for tourism SMEs to upgrade tourism services and standards. He expressed his thanks for ADB's support to the GMS Program.

12. H. E. Mr. Aye Myint Kyu, Deputy Minister of Hotels and Tourism, Union of Myanmar, stated that out of the 28 tourism development projects, Myanmar is participating in 21. Now that MTCO has a new Executive Director, Myanmar expects more progress in project coordination and to benefit from the marketing and product development activities which will boost tourism networks in the subregion. Myanmar places high value on the progress of the priority projects and looks forward to their progressive implementation together with other GMS countries and with the coordination of MTCO.

13. H. E. Mr. Chumpol Silapa-archa, Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Sports of the Kingdom of Thailand, reaffirmed the commitment of the Government of Thailand in supporting GMS cooperation. He was pleased that tourism marketing and development strategies have been on the agenda of senior officials and are being carried out successfully. He was delighted that selection of a new Executive Director of MTCO has

been done transparently in Thailand and wished the Executive Director success. He looked forward to a more dynamic and diversified implementation of marketing and development activities in the tourism sector in 2009. He thanked the French Government and ADB for their support to the tourism sector and expressed appreciation to the other GMS countries for their participation in the countdown activities initiated by Thailand for the launch of Visit GMS Years 2009-2010.

14. On behalf of the delegation of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Mr. Pham Quang Hung, Director of International Cooperation for VNAT, reiterated Viet Nam's full support and commitment to GMS tourism cooperation. Viet Nam was pleased that MTCO has a new Executive Director and urged MTCO to maintain closer cooperation with GMS NTOs, donors, development partners, and private sector and to help mobilize additional technical and financial resources to implement projects under the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. He underscored the need for concerted collaboration and for more support and assistance from international organizations and development partners in the face of the global financial crisis and economic recession. Viet Nam appreciated Thailand's initiative on Visit GMS Years 2009-2010 and invited the GMS NTOs to join the "Mekong Japan Cultural and Tourism Days" to be organized on 17-21 September 2009 in Can Tho City in the central southern province of the Mekong Delta. Viet Nam proposed that high-level consolidative mechanism such as the GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting be maintained to periodically give sound and timely guidance to address emerging issues.

Agenda Item 7: Adoption of Joint Ministerial Statement

15. The Ministers adopted the Joint Ministerial Statement as it appears in [Appendix 7](#).

Closing Remarks

16. The Chairman expressed his thanks to all the participants for their valuable inputs to the Meeting. In turn, the participants expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam for the warm hospitality and efficient arrangements made for the Meeting. The Meeting also expressed thanks to the MTCO and GMS Secretariat for their technical and secretariat support.