

COOPERATION IN TOURISM

- This presentation aims to provide an overview of ADB's experience in supporting cooperation in tourism among the six GMS partner countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China)
- Lessons learnt from this experience will be valuable in assisting other subregions in promoting cooperation in tourism

THE COOPERATIVE FRAMEWORK

- The cooperative program commenced in 1993
- A working group on tourism was established; it identified priority areas and took up several projects under each (more details on the working group later)
- A supporting role was played by:
 - Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) – mainly in designing and organizing the annual Mekong Tourism Forum (more details on the Forum later)
 - World Tourism Organization (WTO) – in arranging funding for various schemes and in liaising with other agencies

THE COOPERATIVE FRAMEWORK (continued...)

- UNESCO – in advising on aspects related to heritage conservation
- ESCAP – in co-sponsoring working group meetings and in financing special studies
- ADB – by supporting the working group, the Mekong Tourism Forum, and by financing various regional technical assistance projects

MAIN AREAS OF WORK

- Promote the GMS as a unique tourist destination
 - This was the rationale for establishing the annual Mekong Tourism Forum
 - The Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) is designed to eventually spearhead the subregional marketing function
 - PATA supports AMTA in marketing
 - GMS country web sites are being interlinked
 - PATA has created an inventory of nature, culture, and heritage tourism opportunities in GMS
 - Destination seminars are being continuously planned and held under auspices of PATA

MAIN AREAS OF WORK (continued...)

- Develop and implement a GMS tourism marketing strategy
- Set up GMS chapters in major markets to facilitate promotion
- Product Development

- Mekong River Tourism Planning Study
- Village-based Tourism
- North-South Tourism Flows
- Facilitation of Travel
- Skills Development

THE MEKONG TOURISM FORUM

- Forum set up to be a focal point to promote the subregion as a tourism destination
- Five forums held since 1996 at Pattaya, Ho Chi Minh City, Kunming, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh
- Forums focus on product development issues
- Massive private sector turnout at forums to discuss product and policy issues with Government agencies, airlines, transport organizations, etc.
- Forums supported by ADB, ESCAP, PATA, and host country national tourism organization
- Forums to be made self-sustaining by incorporating a travel mart

THE WORKING GROUP ARRANGEMENT

- Comprises the official heads of the national tourism organizations of the individual GMS countries
- Supported by ADB and ESCAP who take turns to finance meetings of the working group (venue is rotated among the GMS countries)
- ADB, ESCAP, UNESCO, WTO, PATA are standing invitees to the meetings; selected tourism industry representatives are also invited as observers
- Agenda is drawn up by AMTA, who also prepare minutes
- Two officials from each country attend the meeting

WHAT THE WORKING GROUP DOES

- Basic function is to promote and market the GMS as a unique tourist destination
- Meets at least once a year, but usually twice
- AMTA has been set up as the coordinating agency to push the working group's agenda and plans on a continuous basis
- Destination Marketing – participation in the ASEAN Tourism Forum and PATA Travel Mart; and publishing of AMTA Newsletter thrice yearly
 - Production of specialist books, maps, posters
 - Product development, e.g. Buddhist circuit itinerary
 - Holding of seminars on tourism promotion, e.g. Seminar on Policy Development in the Cruise Shipping Industry

WHAT THE WORKING GROUP DOES (continued...)

- Subregional Events
 - Mekong Tourism Forum
 - PATA Travel Mart

- Ecotourism Fairs
- Training
 - Network of Asia-Pacific Education and Training Institutes
 - Tourism Management training programs
 - Other Training-of-Trainers programs
- Management of Natural and Cultural Resources
 - Sponsorship for Training Resource Managers in Conservation and Tourism
 - Ecotourism Training
 - Support from UNESCO in heritage conservation

WHAT THE WORKING GROUP DOES (continued...)

- Mekong River Tourism Infrastructure Development
 - ADB did planning study in 1998 alongwith a tourism industry seminar to generate support for the program
 - A project-preparatory technical assistance is under way to prepare an investment project
 - Six Mekong River segments have been identified for three phase development – each covers two or more GMS countries
 - Each segment has a number of projects - river travel facilities, road and airport upgrading, water and sanitation, and accommodation
- Facilitation of Travel
 - Development of itineraries for overland route journeys
 - Opening of new air routes

WHAT THE WORKING GROUP DOES (continued...)

- Organization of friendship caravans (Thailand-Lao PDR-Yunnan Province)
- Opening of international border checkpoints
- Expediting immigration, customs, and quarantine processes at airports and checkpoints
- Agreement on commercial navigation along the Mekong River
- Village Based Tourism
 - Promotion of this concept in the context of ecotourism and cultural conservation
 - Villages in each GMS country identified and strategies developed
 - Marketing of village-based tourism integrated in GMS marketing plans

WHAT THE WORKING GROUP DOES (continued...)

- GMS Tourism Flows
 - Flows from major gateways
 - Development of additional hubs and subhubs
 - Full subregional tourism circuits
 - Helps in designing and upgrading tourism development marketing strategies
- Marketing Task Force
 - Established within AMTA
 - Developed marketing tools including GMS logo, GMS website, and GMS travel trade manual

- AMTA to be developed into a professional regional marketing organization with support from the tourism industry and national tourism organizations

WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

- GMS is the fastest growing destination in the world today
- GMS countries have recognized the benefits of working together (joint marketing strategies; facilitation of travel and tourism; joint product development)
- Opening of borders has not only provided an impetus to tourism but also trade and commerce
- The growth in international tourism has impacted positively on the growth of domestic tourism

WHAT CAN BANGLADESH, BHUTAN, INDIA, AND NEPAL DO?

- Set up a working group at the official group – co-opt representatives of the tourism industry; international organizations (ESCAP, UNESCO, WTO); media
- Identify and evaluate the potential for cooperation in tourism through joint product development, joint marketing strategies, and joint investments in tourism infrastructure development – river-based tourism, Himalayan tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism would lend themselves to joint development given the relative comparative advantage of individual countries (equally, the diversity of attractions offered by the countries would provide a strong incentive for developing products that enhance a tourism experience)

WHAT CAN BANGLADESH, BHUTAN, INDIA, AND NEPAL DO? (continued...)

- Establish a thematic program of work (including studies); identify sources of funding; allot resources and responsibilities
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing an annual event, e.g. a tourism forum, tied to a major tourism event in the subregion and with tourism industry support – this will help focus on the subregion's potential
- Establish procedures for working group activities including review and monitoring of work program