



Draft Summary of Proceedings

51st Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG-51)

25 April 2023, 8:30 am-12:30 pm, Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia

Introduction

1. The 51st GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-51) was held on 25 April 2023 in Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia. It was hosted by the Government of Cambodia and co-organized by the Cambodia Ministry of Tourism, and the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO). It was attended by senior and mid-level officials representing the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) of the six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries (Cambodia, People's Republic of China [PRC] via videoconference, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam), MTCO, development partners and organizations including the ASEAN Japan Centre, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and private sector including China Ready. The list of participants is in Appendix 1.

Item 1: Opening Session/Welcome Remarks

2. **Remarks from Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia.** On behalf of the host Government, Dr. Chuk Chumno, Director General of Tourism Development and International Cooperation, Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia, warmly welcomed all delegates to TWG-51, which provides a platform for stakeholders in the subregion's tourism sector to showcase the progress of tourism recovery and stimulate greater travel within the GMS. He remarked on the improvement of the tourism sector and the rapidly growing number of visitors. He wished for everyone's good stay in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, and looked forward to the successful outcomes of the meeting.
3. **Remarks from ADB.** Ms. Jyotsana Varma, Country Director, Cambodia Resident Mission, ADB, thanked Cambodia Ministry of Tourism for hosting TWG-51 and chairing the discussions. She highlighted two lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to (i) make tourism more resilient and (ii) foster inclusive digital transformations, two priorities that feature prominently in the GMS COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan and all GMS countries' national tourism recovery plans. She recognized collective GMS efforts toward tourism recovery. She also reiterated ADB's commitment to assist GMS countries address lingering pre-pandemic challenges together with other GMS development partners and the private sector and help tourism entrepreneurs and workers gain the digital skills needed to access new economic opportunities. She also presented ADB's work to become Asia and the Pacific's climate bank with its target to mobilize \$100 billion by 2030 to help the region adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

4. **Remarks from MTCO Executive Director.** Ms. Dee Suvimol Thanasarakij thanked Cambodia for hosting the meeting and welcomed everyone to TWG-51 and the Mekong Tourism Forum. She provided an overall picture of GMS Tourism in 2022 indicating that while tourism in the region is recovering, doubling the number of tourists recorded in 2021, it is still at 63% of pre-pandemic levels. She remarked on the forecasted strong growth of visitor arrival in GMS countries in 2023, with the lifting of travel restrictions throughout GMS, including the People’s Republic of China and key tourism markets, as well as the anticipated recovery of the airline sector. However, she cautioned that challenges continue, and underscored actions undertaken by tourism destinations to pursue climate change related initiatives. She highlighted MTCO’s actions to promote sustainability in the tourism sector through amplifying the voices of sustainability tourism leaders or role in the Mekong Region, and invited everyone to the upcoming MTF, where conversations will revolve around the theme “Rethinking for Resilience and Digitalization.”
5. Copies of the opening remarks are in Appendix 2.

Item 2: Adoption of Agenda and Business Arrangement

6. The Chair of the 51st TWG meeting opened the floor for comments on the provisional agenda. No comments were received. The agenda was adopted. Copy of adopted agenda is in Appendix 3.
7. The host announced business arrangements for the TWG meeting, the ensuing closed MTCO Board Meeting and the Welcome Dinner Reception.

Item 3: Report and Follow-up of the 50th GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting

8. MTCO reported on the outcomes of TWG-50, including: (i) update of country reopening after COVID-19 (including policies, activities and progress); (ii) government support programs for tourism businesses and public-private marketing efforts; (iii) experiences, good practices, issues and challenges in tourism reopening; and (iv) proposed initiatives that GMS member countries can do together to accelerate tourism recovery. Copy of presentation is attached as Appendix 4.
9. The Chair congratulated the countries and development partners and opened the floor for comments and/or additional updates but hearing none moved to the next item in the agenda.

Item 4: Country Reports

10. The Chair introduced the next session on country reports to focus on four key areas: (i) key 2020-2022 tourism statistics (international and domestic visitors, tourism spending and employment), tourism visa/entry policy updates, and prioritized markets in 2023; (ii) smart tourism/digital initiatives to improve tourism management and marketing, may be national or in selected destination; (iii) 2-3 key GMS tourism cooperation activities

planned in 2023; and (iv) any other items NTOs may wish to include. Each country was reminded to keep their report within 10 minutes.

11. **Cambodia** reported that in 2022, international tourism arrivals increased by 1,058.6%, with around 2.3 million visitors, compared to less than 200,000 international visitors in 2021. International tourism receipts were worth \$1.42 billion, or 3.6% of GDP. This year Cambodia expects 4 million tourists as host of the 32nd Southeast Asian (SEA) Games on 5-7 May 2023 and ASEAN Para Games on 3-9 June 2023. Top ten markets include Thailand, Viet Nam, the People's Republic of China, and Lao PDR, with the highest being Thailand. Domestic tourists in 2022 increased by 198.8% to around 13.9 million. Cambodia noted that it is welcoming cruise ship travelers entering international ports through its visa type D, which allows them to stay in Cambodia for 5 days, and a new visa exemption agreement with Maldives effective 4 May 2023. For Visit Cambodia Year 2023, Cambodia is prioritizing the ASEAN and ASEAN plus 3 (PRC, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) for international arrivals. The country has rolled out the digital campaign, "Every Day is a Wonder," with the MoT launching a [website](#), as well as hosting the sports games mentioned earlier. On key GMS cooperation activities, Cambodia hosted TWG-51 and this year's MTF, and will participate in the upcoming TWG-52. For 2024, Cambodia plans to strengthen cooperation on Southern Coastal Tourism Corridor, with Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and join the action plan on Women Empowerment in CBT/CBET among CLV countries.
12. The **PRC** delegation joined the meeting via videoconference and expressed appreciation to the host, MTCO, and ADB for making possible their online connection to the meeting. PRC reported that for domestic tourism, there were around 2.530 billion tourists in 2022, which earned them a revenue of RMB 2.04 trillion. PRC categorized COVID-19 as a "Category B" disease, cancelled quarantine requirements, but continue to require a PCR test within 48 hours before departure in January 2023. Beginning March 2023, the PRC has allowed entry to foreigners with valid visas issued before 28 March 2020, and resumed validity of port visas and visa free policies. PRC also started accepting visa applications beginning March 2023. Regarding outbound travel, PRC rolled out pilot operation of outbound group tour for PRC citizens to select countries in February and March and resumed the operation of inbound group tours and travel package businesses by travel agencies and online travel enterprises nationwide at the end of March. PRC presented the digital initiative "Yunnan at Your Fingertips," as well as the applets' China-Laos Railway Tour Applet and Traveling in Northeast Thailand Applet. PRC discussed key projects in 2023: (i) Lancang-Mekong World Heritage City Dialogue Conference, to be held in September 2023 (TBC) in Leshan, Sichuan, and the (ii) Lancang-Mekong Joint Tourism Promotion, to be implemented from July to October 2023.
13. **Lao PDR's** international tourist arrivals in 2022 totaled around 1.3 million visitors— 73% less than 2019. However, comparison of tourist arrivals between the 1st quarter of 2023 and the 1st quarter of 2020 showed that tourism is bouncing back by around 80%. Tourism markets in 2019 and 2022 remained similar with Asia Pacific leading Lao PDR's visitors. GMS tourist arrivals picked up in 2022 with more than 1.1 million visitors, making up about 80% of international travel arrivals for the year. The Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) launched several smart tourism and digital

initiatives with the private sector that facilitates travel, such as 8booking.biz, Lao-China Railway application, Audio Tour for Buddha Park, and Lao Bus Navi. These are available in multiple languages. MICT is also introducing online submission for licenses for tourism businesses. Several tourism cooperation initiatives that are bolstering the sector: the Laos-China railway; the launch of the Fuxing bullet train; and the Destination Laos Tourism Marketing Plan for 2022-2023. It was noted that the 2-year tourist marketing plan is in contrast to pre-pandemic 5-year marketing plans, owing to the pandemic's changing market. Lao PDR also developed a Chinese Visitor Welcoming Plan for 2023–2025, which is being translated to English, and will be shared by Lao PDR once translation has been completed. Other key activities in 2022 include the Laos Travel Safe program, and the successful Community-based Tourism workshop with CLMV countries, supported by ASEAN Japan Centre and ADB. Lao PDR committed to supporting the destination management network, private sector at the national level, and target provinces participating in B2C in neighboring countries. Lao PDR is set to coordinate with Cambodia for a sports event in Champasak.

14. **Myanmar** stated that the country has opened to international visitors in May 2022. International arrivals in 2022 reached 233,487, 78 % increased than 2021. In tourism spending, Myanmar earned \$249 million in 2022, up from 2021's \$30 million. Domestically, tourism decreased by about 20% from 2021 to 2022. GMS travelers made up a significant portion of Myanmar's visitors in 2022, with Thailand and PRC among the top visitors. Most trips undertaken in Myanmar are for business purposes. The majority of visitors in 2022 were foreign independent travelers (FIT) 93% and package tours (PT) 7%. Myanmar continues to require visitors to present vaccinated documents or a negative RT-PCR test 48 hours before arrival for those who have not been fully vaccinated. Myanmar has several digital activities, such as disseminating on major social media and websites. Myanmar will host the next TWG meeting in November 2023. Myanmar seeks cooperation of MTCO and member countries to implement two project proposals under the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) 2023-2025 as follows: "Publication of the Tourism Promotional Materials" and "Enhancing the tourism related MSMEs of GMS Countries through digitalization."
15. **Thailand** presented key tourism statistics from 2020 to 2022. In 2022, there were 11.15 million international visitors, compared to 6.7 million in 2020. Spending in 2022 is also up at 1.08 trillion THB (around \$32 million), compared to 0.79 trillion THB (around \$23 million) in 2020. Domestic visitors increased to 202 million in 2022. Thailand presented the Tourist Visa that allows tourists to stay for a period not exceeding 60 days. Thailand also extended stay duration for tourists under visa on arrival, visa exemption scheme, and bilateral agreement during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023, in consideration of the pandemic. For public health measures, Thailand no longer requires proof of vaccination and health insurance, except for countries that require travelers to show negative RT-PCR test before departure from Thailand. For priority markets in 2023, Thailand is encouraging domestic travelers to travel 365 days to emerging destinations especially during weekdays to distribute tourism income. Thailand's smart tourism and digital initiatives include the (i) TAT's Digital Action Plan 2023-2027, which plans digital technology development in line with the country's reform policy, (ii) e-learning for tourism businesses focusing on increasing their marketing skills, (iii) Thailand Connex platform connecting tourism operators with online travel agencies (OTAs) of Thai startups and

OTAs operating around the world, (iv) carbon footprint database for hotels and accommodations project, (v) Thailand Tourism Directory, which provides tourism information in the form of big data and available in Thai, English, and Chinese; and (vi) Tourism Intelligence Center, which collects information related to tourism sector from government agency and private sector and uses the information for data management planning and creating the country's tourism development policy. Key cooperation planned include the Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2023 and workshop on sustainable development goals for tourism professionals in the GMS. Thailand also helped promote MTCO on www.tourismthailand.org. For Tourism recovery, Thailand aims to tap into these forms of tourism: creative, MICE, sports, medical and health and wellness, and connectivity.

16. **Viet Nam's** report showed the impact of COVID-19 closures due to the pandemic. With the reopening in 2022, tourism is gradually picking up. The international arrival number for the first quarter of 2023 was 2.7 million, which is close to the 3.4 million total number of international arrivals for 2022. For 2023, Viet Nam aims to have 8 million visitors. Domestic visitors in Viet Nam went up with more than 101 million visitors in 2022, exceeding the 85 million domestic visitors from 2019. Viet Nam aims to maintain and/or improve these numbers for 2023. Viet Nam is proposing new visa policies with the aim of extending the validity of e-visas to 90 days and the duration of temporary residence at the border gate for people under visa exemption categories to 45 days. These proposals will be submitted to the Parliament for approval. They unveiled plans for Visit Viet Nam 2023. Smart tourism initiatives are geared toward developing digital communication channels on social media and the website for promotion. They also built digital platforms for tourism businesses and management information, online shopping, etc. One example is the Vietnamese Card Smart Travel Card, a project between Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism and the Department of e-Commerce, and Digital Economy, Ministry of Industry and Trade, which enables tourists to make non-cash payments for tourism activities. Viet Nam will host several cooperation activities this year, including the International Travel Expo 2023, and a campaign for Visit Viet Nam Year 2023: Binh Thuan - Green Tourism Comes Together, to accelerate Viet Nam tourism recovery with several events planned on a national and international scale.
17. Copies of country reports/presentations are in Appendix 5.
18. The Chair lauded the applet developed by PRC for encouraging onward travel to the GMS and congratulated the success of GMS cooperation as evidenced by visitors in Lao PDR, and Lao PDR and China for cooperation in opening the railway. On domestic visitors in Thailand, he noted the 2022 numbers showcased the strength of domestic visitors. He lauded the promotion of travel during weekdays. For TTM+ 2023, he asked member states to give a response. On the planned workshop on SDG in GMS countries, countries will wait for the invitation which can be disseminated via MTCO. He also thanked Thailand for promoting MTCO, and encouraged all GMS Member Countries to also feature MTCO logo on their promotional channels, such as website and social media platforms.
19. No comments were received on the country presentation and updates. Chair moved to the next agenda.

Item 5: MTCO Activities

20. MTCO reported on activities over the past 7 months. The following were among the updates provided:
21. The [new website](#) was launched in February 2023, following a year of preparation and ADB support. MTCO discussed the website's new look and features, including integration of the MTF and brand-new contents. Ms. Thanasarakij thanked the GMS countries for contributing their time to review the website and giving feedback for further improvement. She thanked Thailand for incorporating the MTCO website in the TAT website and requested other member countries to also put the MTCO logo website in their promotional collaterals.
22. Implementation of the GMS Tourism Recovery Communication Plan has been completed and all the action points were accomplished. Key action points are continued, such as the dissemination of a monthly newsletter. The newsletter has shifted its focus on sustainable tourism initiatives in the region.
23. The social media campaign "Mekong Postcard" was highly successful, with MTCO reaching and surpassing set KPIs for social media.
24. The MTF 2022 was successfully held last year. Feedback survey indicated that 92% of the delegates were satisfied/very satisfied with the event and 90% would recommend it to their friends and colleagues. She congratulated Viet Nam, and also thanked Cambodia for the hard work and arrangements for this year's MTF. She invited everyone to visit the Sustainable Tourism Exhibition organized for this year's MTF to support and foster SMEs and social entrepreneurs and sustainable tourism businesses in the region.
25. MTCO's work plan for the year and planned projects were discussed. Delegations were urged to inform the MTCO on any relevant activities so that these can be promoted by MTCO. She acknowledged the support of media who featured the MTF 2023 banner at no cost on their websites, discussed the proposed project "Training for Trainers: Enhancing Digital Skills for Women on Tourism Communities in CLV countries", as well as invited partners to collaborate in implementing the project.
26. Copy of presentation is attached as Appendix 6.
27. The following are the comments received from countries:
 - Cambodia expressed appreciation for MTCO for the promotion of Mekong Tourism in Cambodia in 2023 via the website, and for tools such as the MTCO communications plan, social media channels which are key distribution channels inspiring domestic and international travelers. Cambodia encouraged MTCO to further continue working with GMS countries to promote tourism in existing social media channels and media partners, as well as to link Cambodia MoT website.
 - PRC appreciated MTCO initiatives in promoting GMS as a single destination. He stated that with the leadership of new director, MTCO has made a lot of progress, including updating the website and promoting destinations through

different platforms. PRC encouraged MTCO to continue doing these initiatives and pledged that China will continue to provide assistance.

- Lao PDR complimented the MTCO Secretariat for their excellent job and expressed full support.
- Myanmar acknowledged MTCO activities, particularly the website and the communications plan. With regards to the joint tourism project RIF 2023-2025, they reiterated 2 projects for 2025 as indicated in country report. They requested MTCO to seek and get financial assistance from relevant development partners at the same time. They also sought ADB's suggestion and assistance for the projects.
- Thailand thanked MTCO for their hard work in implementing activities and projects on the GMS tourism sector. These activities and projects will create a strong impact on the subregion. They noted that there are two MTCO accounts on Facebook. The old one has more than 2000 followers, while the new one has 200+ followers. They suggested informing countries that MTCO has a new Facebook account and suggested closing down the old one.
- Viet Nam thanked MTCO for all their work.

28. Chair stressed the importance of the Facebook account. Suggested to promote and boost the new social media page to get more reach.

29. A brief photo session followed, and a short break was held.

Item 6: Asian Development Bank (ADB) Updates

30. Mr. Schipani, in his opening, emphasized that the results of GMS tourism cooperation and that emphasis on more sustainable tourism recovery is helping drive the rebound in international tourism.

31. He delivered a brief update on the 25th Ministerial Conference (MC-25), which was successfully held in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. He lauded the efforts of TWG in preparing the Regional Investment Framework 2025 (RIF 2025). The 16 projects worth over \$1 billion proposed by the working group were endorsed and published in the RIF 2025. He also highlighted that TWG has one of the first approved projects and TA in the RIF, the ***Guangxi Li River Comprehensive Ecological Management and Demonstration Project, Peoples Republic of China*** and [Southeast Asia Sustainable Tourism Facility](#).

32. He sought clarification from Cambodia on which projects Cambodia is seeking financing for, possibly from ADB or other development partners (projects #92 and #93, Tourism Infrastructure Development in the Emerald Triangle Development Area Project and/or Tourism Infrastructure Development in Green Triangle Development Area Project) Both include Lao PDR and Viet Nam. The clarification is timely since Cambodia is currently preparing their Country Partnership Strategy with ADB and pipeline of projects for the

year. ADB will share a 1-page project outline template with the Cambodia team to provide more information on the projects.

33. He stressed that ADB and other development partners value their relationship with TWG and the opportunity to help them meet their financing and knowledge needs and support them in implementing their national and international tourism plans. He discussed two ongoing approved projects—the Cambodia Community-Based Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Project; and the (CLV) Second GMS Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Projects. The 2023-2024 pipeline includes the (Lao PDR) Urban Environment Improvement Investment Project; (Viet Nam) Hoa Binh Tourism Infrastructure Development Project; and (Viet Nam) Lao Cai Sustainable Urban and Infrastructure Development Project. These follow the successful approach applied in the past, which combines Infrastructure investment, capacity development, and a regional cooperation component.
34. Mr. Schipani discussed the ADB Frontier Fund and TA facility. Through this non-sovereign investment fund, ADB can invest in growth-oriented SMEs produce goods and services to sell into national and regional tourism value chains. The fund will tentatively be launched in the 3rd quarter of 2023.
35. He discussed the Sustainable Tourism Hub Knowledge Initiatives, which includes support for the MTCO. He congratulated the MTCO for the website, the social media plan, and the proposed project on digitalization, women empowerment, and community-based tourism that aligns with new GMS strategies, such as the GMS gender strategy.
36. There are also a number of regional studies being undertaken, including a study on visa policies in the region to attract long-stay visitors, and a study on online short-term rentals, which have become a major player in the accommodation subsector.
37. He also discussed ADB's Technology Innovation Challenge (TIC). With the increase of digital initiatives among countries, TIC can help identify the type of technology to deploy as solutions.
38. Mr. Schipani also noted the sustainable tourism component for TA-6628 [Promoting Innovations in Regional Co-operation and Integration in the Aftermath of COVID-19](#), and underscored that there is an opportunity to prepare a scoping study for a cross-border tourism value chain support activity. Candidate study areas are in the East-West Economic Corridor.
39. Lastly, he discussed the preparation of the next GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Framework, to align the new strategy with the timeline of GMS-2030. The presentation underscored that the tourism sector is strongly aligned with new GMS-2030 priorities of digitalization, private sector, gender mainstreaming and environment sustainability. The updated sector strategy also aims to reflect the changing country situations and priorities following the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it should align with the GMS Tourism Results Framework indicators that are not covered in the current Strategy: (i) tourist arrivals, (ii) tourism dispersion, and (iii) adoption of regional tourism standards. He put forth that this could be a deliverable to be presented at the GMS Summit next year, which will be held in PRC. An outline has been prepared by the GMS Secretariat, in consultation with the national secretariats. ADB requested the TWG to comment on the

outline's indicative contents. ADB will follow up with the countries on this matter through the MTCO. Resources have been identified for consultants and workshops to prepare the next GMS Tourism Sector Strategy. There is also an opportunity to add new projects into the GMS RIF now and the ADB GMS Secretariat is working with GMS national secretariats on this. ADB's presentation is in Appendix 7.

40. The co-chair added that under a 3-year rolling pipeline, countries have the option of preparing and planning new projects. Tourism is a very important sector right now, with economic growth rates being projected by ADB predicated on tourism growth. She encouraged involving private sector, tapping on Frontier fund, sovereign financing, and include components on digitalization.
41. The Chair appreciated the co-chairs suggestions, congratulated ADB for what it has done for all GMS countries and stated that Cambodia will work with the Ministry of Finance on the project pipeline for the upcoming year.

Item 7: GMS Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project (TIIG Phase 2)

42. **Cambodia** reported that the GMS Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth (TIIG) Project Phase II has run for around 79% of the agreed duration and overall progress of around 80%. Outputs 1, 2 and the PMA are on track and making good progress, while Output 3—which was impacted the most from COVID-19 pandemic measures, hindering face-to-face type of activities working with communities & provincial governments—is making good progress in catching up this year. Disbursement is healthy, project rating is on track. Cambodia's presentation is in Appendix 8. The report presented photos of ongoing constructions in Kep Landfill, Coastal Road, and Koh Tunsay Pier, which are under Output 1.

- Output 2 ASEAN Tourism Standards reported overall good progress of 75%. Cambodia now has a national framework at both the national and provincial levels. The project is on its way to achieving its targets and they expect to start accreditations for green hotel, homestay, clean city. Its next steps include conducting marketing and promotion activities for the Green Hotel Standard with the Cambodia Hotel Association to get more certifications, rolling out the remaining activities for Destination Management, and identifying Special Tourism Areas (STAR).
- On digitalization, provinces have adopted digital marketing plans. Festivals have been identified as another way to attract tourists – with a strong domestic market, demand for these kinds of offerings has increased.

43. **Lao PDR** reported that TIIG Phase II has run for around 65% of the agreed duration with overall progress of around 68%. Contract awards are at around 78% and disbursement is more than 50%. In terms of progress by output, Output 1 is at around 66%, output 2 at 83%, output 3 at nearly 54%, and project management at 87%. Delays on Output 3 due to COVID-19 are being resolved through a prioritized workplan to focus on key activities in target areas that will contribute most to the project outcome. The reported near

completion of Nakasang Don Det Done Khone Access Improvements and Vang Vieng has opened PPP opportunities. Copy of the presentation is in Appendix 9.

44. **Viet Nam** reported that TIIG Phase II in the country was ratified in June 2020, and the expected closing is June 2024. Copy of the presentation is in Appendix 10. Viet Nam shared that several challenges were encountered for Output 1, including complicated bidding procedures, Covid-19, land clearance, weather, material shortages (sand, stones, soil), and increase in fuel and material price. They are expected to request a loan extension.

- For Output 2, Viet Nam is implementing the ASEAN Tourism Standards (ATS) through measures such as translating the ATS into Vietnamese and designing manuals and implementing a training course attended by industry stakeholders. For ASEAN awardees, they went on examination trips to 9 provinces and cities and examined documents from 26 tourist suppliers. They also held conferences for experience sharing on metrics indicated in the ATS. Through experience sharing, they are looking into the possibility of creating a national framework.

45. Interventions:

- Lao PDR expressed their intention to share experiences on homestay development with Cambodia and Viet Nam. Lao PDR has been working with the private sector on quality local homestay development, which is based on industry need. Travelers prefer community-based tourism area to staying with families.
- Viet Nam noted that they have experience in developing homestay, as well. They noted advantages of homestays, such as benefiting communities and local products, and letting people experience the local lifestyle. Viet Nam shared that for homestays, they first establish standards for identified places and train families in rural areas on how to welcome tourists. Local authorities and tourism authorities are also trained to promote homestays. Homestays received an uptake during the pandemic, especially in mountainous areas. They expressed hope that there can be cooperation in this matter in the future.
- The Chair noted that CLV may consider forming a group on homestay activities and improving homestay standards. He also noted that ecotourism destination homestays turned a crisis to an opportunity.
- ADB encouraged taking forward identified PPP opportunities. ADB looks forward to providing advisory support for one model PPP in each country participating in the TIIG project. Mr. Schipani addressed a question regarding Design Monitoring Framework. As he noted project documents specify the number of enterprises that achieve ATS certification during project implementation should be monitored. He suggested the 3 countries to meet separately and agree on common approach to ATS results monitoring. He seconded the comment on homestay in Viet Nam, where there are thousands of homestays welcoming mostly domestic, as well as international tourists. He advised project teams that if they feel the need to adjust target and scope (with adequate justification), to work with the responsible ADB staff to adjust the project scope. He complimented the excellent presentations and the progress on TIIG Phase II.

46. Chair urged CLV to consider ADB's advice, encouraged advancing the implementation of the projects and exchange of information among the 3 countries.

Item 8: Partner Updates

47. The **ASEAN-Japan Center (AJC)** gave an update about Japan's rising outbound tourism. In 2022, around 17% of Japan's outbound tourists went to the GMS. This year, countries can expect more tourists to come from Japan with border control measures to be lifted soon. Travel agencies are at present very busy responding to inquiries. Copy of the presentation is in Appendix 11.
48. AJC's programs in 2023 for the promotion of sustainable tourism include "Digital Skills for Green Tourism Enterprises: Training of Trainers," to be held in December 2023, co-organized by the VNAT, supported by ADB, with a scheduled follow-up activity in 2024; and the "Educational Travel Seminar for Japanese Travel Agencies and Educators" to be hosted by Japan Association of Tourism Agencies (JATA). This seminar will encourage schools to tap into ASEAN as a destination for educational travel. AJC will also hold a webinar on "How Japanese Youths View ASEAN Destinations and Sustainable Tourism," where they will discuss how to attract Japanese youth for tourism based on survey results. AJC also shared some findings, such as which social media channels Japanese youth prefer for tourism purposes (Instagram and Twitter).
49. Under programs for the promotion of responsible tourism, AJC launched a special website, "[50 Mindful Travel in ASEAN](#)." This is also in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation. AJC will also participate at the Tourism Expo in Osaka, where the Government of Japan will host the ASEAN-Japan special dialogue among tourism ministers. AJC also continues to promote ASEAN destinations online through a [website](#) and Instagram, where there has been 9-10x increase in engagement. AJC requested countries for information on destinations and products to be featured in their media.
50. Additionally, AJC with the ASEAN Foundation will also hold "Model ASEAN + Japan" where ASEAN and Japanese students will gather to role play to understand the decision-making process of ASEAN governance. This will be held in September 2023.
51. AJC expressed appreciation for 50 years of friendship and cooperation and pledged to keep promoting ASEAN Tourism to make the next 50 years a better one.
52. Chair congratulated AJC on the 50th year of ASEAN-Japan friendship. Thailand remarked that Japan is renowned for their world-famous hot spring or onsen and forest bathing, as well as in the development and management of these tourist sites. Thailand requested AJC to conduct a workshop or have a platform for knowledge sharing on the development and management of onsen and forest bathing.
53. **China Ready** presented how countries can better prepare and/or attract Chinese travelers after the pandemic. Copy of the presentation is in Appendix 12. In the introduction, Mr. Marcus Lee, CEO, China Travel Online and Founder of China Ready, stated that 100 million Chinese tourists are coming back this year, with money to spend,

and many countries in Southeast Asia are included in the list of approved countries to visit. He reported on 10 points. These are some of the highlights:

- China Market updates - PRC lifted travel restrictions in January 2023, in February and March, the first and second batch of group traveled for 20 initially approved and 40 additional countries, respectively. Many countries are doing roadshows and sales calls. What will peak has yet to be determined;
- Flight Connectivity – Mr. Lee presented projections by the China Civil Aviation Authority (CAAC). However, China Ready estimates indicated that by the end of 2023, flight levels will be 50% of 2019, instead of 80%;
- China Market Analysis – currently, the trend in tourism sector in the PRC is restructuring and recovery, as evidenced in sales calls to the top 15 largest tour operators in four major PRC cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong). While the Government of PRC’s official projection is 90-100 million Chinese outbound this year, the industry is more conservative in the number;
- China Ready, which began in 2022 and was launched in 49 countries, is not just a slogan or accreditation or training, but a program that progresses and updates with time and is connected to Chinese tourists. It provides the Chinese hospitality standard for the outbound travel market consisting of Audit, Training, Accreditation, and Product Development.
- China Readiness Scorecard measures a destination’s ability to receive PRC tourists based on the following metrics: destination audit, China Ready training, product development, stakeholders upgrade, market research, technology readiness. He also highlighted the Smart Travel Tourism System one software, an app developed by the Government and the private sector that aims to serve all the needs of PRC tourists, such as e-tour guide, route planning, and booking system.
- Union Pay is recognized by the China Ready program. Mr. Lee urged tourism stakeholders to accept UnionPay cards if they are to get accredited and promoted to the vast Chinese tourism market through the China ready program. The next level is to accept WeChat pay.
- Training Program - China Ready offers certification that gives a complete picture of what is needed to be product and service ready for Chinese visitors. This includes post-COVID-19 changes of Chinese tourist behavior and preferences.
- Destination Audit determines how the destination is ready for Chinese outbound tourists post-COVID-19. Accreditation by China Ready connects you to close to 5000 licensed China Outbound tour operators.

Item 9: Mekong Tourism Forum 2023

54. Cambodia, as host, updated the TWG on the Mekong Tourism Forum, which was expected to be held as scheduled. The MTF 2023 Agenda and the list of exhibitors for

the Sustainable Tourism Exhibition were included in the meeting materials. Copy of the presentation is in Appendix 13.

Item 10: Other Matters & Closing

55. The Chair opened the floor for any intervention as Other Matters and hearing none, proceeded with his closing remarks.

56. Action Points from the Meeting

	Action Item	By Whom	By When
1	MTCO will follow up with countries regarding new GMS RIF 2024-2026 projects and consolidate submissions for transmission to ADB by end May 2023	MTCO and GMS Member Countries	End May 2023
2	MTCO to follow up with countries to assess GMS TWG interest in developing a tourism-related Technology Innovation Challenge and inform ADB of decision by 30 June 2023.	MTCO and GMS Member Countries	30 June 2023
4	MTCO will collect comments on the new tourism sector strategy content outline and share them with ADB by 31 July.	MTCO in coordination with GMS Member Countries	31 July 2023
5	ADB is seeking clarification from Cambodia on the projects Cambodia is seeking financing for. Cambodia is requested to send the completed project information outline to ADB by 15 June 2023.	Cambodia	15 June 2023
6	ADB will follow up with Lao PDR and Viet Nam National Tourism Organizations regarding cross-border value chain studies in the East–West Economic Corridor by end May 2023.	ADB	31 May 2023
7	ADB will seek TA resources to support preparation of the new GMS tourism sector strategy in 2024. The updated strategy could be a deliverable to the next GMS Summit in Q3/4 2024.	ADB	31 July 2023
8	Lao PDR will share the Chinese Visitor Welcoming Plan for 2023–2025 with the countries once translation to English has been completed.	Lao PDR	30 June 2023

9	MTCO was requested by Myanmar to seek and get financial assistance from relevant development partners to implement two project proposals under the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) 2023-2025, namely “Publication of the Tourism Promotional Materials” and “Enhancing the tourism related MSMEs of GMS Countries through digitalization.”	MTCO in coordination with Myanmar	31 July 2023
10	Countries were asked to give a response to Thailand for TTM+ 2023 regarding the NTOs’ participation.	GMS Member Countries	9 May 2023
11	MTCO requested other member countries to include the MTCO logo website in their promotional collaterals.	GMS Member Countries	31 July 2023
12	GMS Member Countries were urged to keep MTCO updated on any tourism activities / development, so that MTCO can promote them on the website and newsletters.	GMS Member Countries	Ongoing basis
13	MTCO was asked to boost and inform countries of the new Facebook page and close down the old one.	MTCO	30 June 2023

57. The Chair congratulated everyone who participated in the TWG-51 meeting and remarked on the achievements amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The outcomes on existing issues have met everyone's satisfaction. Discussions will be continued in the TWG-52 meeting in Myanmar. He thanked everyone and concluded the meeting.

Presentations are available upon request.