



## **THIRD MEETING OF THE GMS TOURISM MINISTERS**

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 17 January 2011**

### **SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

1. The Ministers of Tourism of the six GMS countries (Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam) met in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 17 January 2011. Senior officials from the GMS National Tourism Organizations (NTOs), and representatives from the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) and development partners including the Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, French Embassy, UNDP, and Spanish Embassy also attended. The meeting was held in conjunction with the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2011. A list of participants appears in Appendix 1.

2. The meeting was chaired by H. E. Dr. Thong Khon, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Secretariat support was provided by the MTCO with the assistance of the GMS Secretariat based at the Asian Development Bank.

#### **Agenda Item 1: Welcome Address**

3. H.E. Dr. Thong Khon, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia, extended his warm welcome to all the participants of the GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting which Cambodia is hosting for the first time. He noted that GMS remains one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in the world today and is contributing greatly to the creation of jobs and the overall economic growth of the subregion. He emphasized that the countries, together with development partners and the private sector, must continue to strengthen their collaborative efforts. Noting that the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy (TSS) for 2006 to 2015 has reached its half-way point and following the completion of a comprehensive mid-term review of the strategy, he stressed that tourism must continue to remain one of the priority sectors of the GMS Program in order to contribute to poverty reduction, as well as protect the subregion's precious natural and cultural assets. He then declared the meeting open.

4. The Ministers of Tourism of the other GMS countries also gave brief statements in alphabetical order.

#### **PRC**

5. H.E. Mr. Lin Shan, Director General, China National Tourism Administration, PRC, noted that PRC has taken an active role in several subregional cooperation mechanisms and noted

that the GMS Program is the most successful one that PRC has participated in. Improved friendships among the member countries and a sincere spirit cooperation, especially in tourism, have contributed to poverty reduction and sustainable tourism development. CNTA has attached high importance to GMS tourism cooperation and participated in many activities in the tourism sector in order to achieve the objective to increase regional economic integration.

### **Lao PDR**

6. H. E. Mr. Somphong Mongkhonvilay, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office and Chairman, Lao National Tourism Administration, stated that Lao PDR has actively participated in GMS tourism cooperation and mentioned the ADB-financed Sustainable Tourism Development Project which is supporting community-based tourism development in more than 10 provinces, and helping to contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth. Lao PDR is pleased to be chosen as the venue of the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011 to be held in Pakse Champasak Province in May 2011.

### **Myanmar**

7. H. E. U Soe Naing, Minister for Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar, noted that under the GMS Economic Cooperation Program, member countries have made steady progress towards greater connectivity, improved competitiveness, and greater sense of community. In the tourism sector, the countries have been upgrading the capacity and skill of tourism personnel, improving tourism infrastructure, and facilitating the movement of tourists into and within the region. He expressed appreciation for the GMS NTOs' collective efforts, the concrete support provided by ADB and other development partners, and the efforts of the MTCO in coordinating the implementation of projects. He emphasized the need to promote the parallel development of the tourism sector in all the member countries to support the promotion of the GMS as a single destination and achieve the goal of the TSS. He looked forward to the consideration by the Ministers of the TSS mid-term review and proposed road map for the next 5 years.

### **Thailand**

8. H. E. Mr. Chumpol Silapa-archa, Minister of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, stated that Thailand appreciates the efforts of the GMS countries and related organizations to develop sustainable tourism in the subregion. While the GMS has a variety of tourism resources (natural and ecotourism, cultural and historical tourism, and man-made tourism), promoting the GMS as a single destination is not easy without the cooperation of member countries. Human resource development is an important issue for sustainable tourism development. Thus, Thailand is hosting, among other training activities, a Training on Community-based Tourism for Myanmar on 22-29 January 2011 in Chiang Mai Province. Thailand is also undertaking sustainable tourism development projects including plans to set up a tourism route linking Thailand, Lao PDR, and PRC in the near future.

### **Viet Nam**

9. H. E. Mr. Ho Anh Tuan, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Sports, Culture and Tourism of Viet Nam, noted that the GMS has bounced back impressively from the impact of the global economic crisis. The year 2010 was a successful year for Viet Nam's tourism industry with a record of more than 5 million international arrivals or 34.8% higher than that of 2009. Endowed with huge natural and cultural tourism potentials, the subregion could achieve better results in

terms of tourist arrivals. GMS NTOs need to further strengthen cooperation and utilize the subregion's potential to develop and diversify high quality tourist products in order to meet tourists' demands, and facilitate tourist destination promotion. MTCO should enhance tourism promotion coordination, while NTOs should accelerate bilateral, trilateral or quadrilateral cooperation among GMS member countries. He expressed appreciation for the technical and financial assistance from ADB and other development partners for priority projects and looked forward to their continued support to help realize the objectives of the GMS TSS in the remainder of its implementation period 2011-2015.

10. In his statement, Mr. Putu Kamayana, Country Director, ADB Resident Mission in Cambodia, noted that the ADB has been an active partner of the GMS countries in harnessing the potential of the tourism industry to contribute to poverty reduction in the subregion. Since the establishment of the GMS Tourism Working Group in 1995, ADB has provided about \$55 million in grants and loans, and over \$3.15 in technical assistance for the GMS tourism sector, including the completed Mekong Tourism Development Project and the ongoing Sustainable Tourism Development Project which have supported many components of the TSS. These investments in the tourism sector have been complemented by financing and technical assistance that ADB has provided to other sectors which have cross-cutting linkages with tourism, such as those on transport infrastructure, environmental management, and human resource development. ADB recognizes the invaluable assistance that other development partners have provided to tourism programs and activities of the individual member countries and looks forward to the further expansion of these partnerships in the future. Mr. Kamayana underscored the significance of the Tourism Ministers' Meeting in the context of the ongoing preparation of a new GMS Strategic Framework for 2012-2022 wherein the tourism sector is expected to continue to play an important role as the GMS countries embark on new frontiers of cooperation in the next decade.

11. Copies of the welcome and opening remarks are in Appendix 2.

## **Agenda Item 2: Consideration of the Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> GMS NTOs Meeting**

12. Mr. Tith Chantha, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia, and Chairman of the 3<sup>rd</sup> GMS National Tourism Organizations' Meeting held the previous day, presented a summary report covering the following items:

- Revival after a hiatus of 5 years of the Mekong Tourism Forum held on 7-8 May 2010 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and plans for the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011 to be held on 27-28 May 2011 in Lao PDR, back to back with the 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG-27);
- Report of the 26<sup>th</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting held in December 2010 in Jinghong, Xishuangbana, Yunnan Province, PRC, which reviewed the progress of implementation of the priority tourism marketing and development programs, and considered the draft report of the Mid-Term Review of the TSS;
- Unanimous endorsement by the NTOs of the findings and recommendation of the revised report of the TSS Mid-Term Review and road map for the remainder of the implementation period covering 2011-2015, for the consideration of the GMS Tourism Ministers; and

- NTOs' decision to extend the contract of the MTCO Executive Director Mr. Mason Florence for one year covering the period 7 January 2011 to 6 January 2012 with the same duties and responsibilities and remuneration as per his original contract.

13. The Ministers adopted the Summary Report of the NTOs' Meeting (copy in [Appendix 3](#)).

**Agenda Item 3: GMS Tourism Sector Strategy Mid-term Review Report and Road Map for 2011-2015.**

14. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, MTCO Project Coordinator, presented a summary report of the Mid-term Review of the TSS, which was done with financial assistance from ADB. The findings and recommendations of the Mid-term Review were discussed initially at the 26<sup>th</sup> TWG Meeting, and comments from the GMS countries have been incorporated in the revised report. As mentioned earlier, the GMS NTOs' meeting held the previous day reviewed the revised report and unanimously endorsed its findings and recommendations, as well as the proposed road map for the remainder of the implementation of the TSS covering 2011-2015 for the consideration of the GMS Tourism Ministers. The road map would pursue a revised spatial strategy that focuses on the development of thematic multi-country tour circuits linked to the Mekong River Tourism Corridor. Resources would be focused on the implementation of three consolidated strategic programs in the priority Mekong segments and subregional tour circuits, namely: tourism-related human resource development, marketing and product development, and pro-poor sustainable tourism development.

15. The Ministers agreed to endorse the revised report of the Mid-Term Review of the TSS and the Road Map for 2011-2015 (copy in [Appendix 4](#)). The Ministers expressed appreciation to ADB for its assistance in the preparation of the report, and noted that this would be taken into account in the preparation of the new GMS Strategic Framework for 2012-2022.

**Agenda Item 4: Other Matters**

16. No other matters were discussed.

**Agenda Item 5:**

- **Date and Venue of the Next Meeting**

17. The Ministers noted that discussion on the date and venue of the 4<sup>th</sup> NTOs' and GMS Tourism Ministers' Meetings had been deferred to TWG-27 in May 2011.

- **Preparations for Mekong Tourism Forum 2011**

18. The Ministers noted with appreciation ongoing preparations being made by Lao PDR for the Mekong Tourism Forum 2011 planned to be held on 27-28 May 2011 in Pakse, Champasak, Lao PDR, with the theme "Destination Mekong: The Making of a New Star". MTF 2011 will be held back to back with TWG-27 and Sustainable Tourism Development Project Steering Committee Meeting.

## **Agenda Item 6: Consideration and Adoption of the Joint Ministerial Statement**

19. The Ministers considered and adopted their Joint Ministerial Statement, copy attached in Appendix 5.

## **Agenda Item 7: Closing Session**

20. The Meeting requested MTCO to circulate the Draft Report/Summary of Proceedings of the Tourism Ministers' Meeting to the GMS countries as soon as possible for adoption on a no-objection basis.

21. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the other GMS Tourism Ministers and all the other participants for their valuable inputs to the Meeting. In turn, the participants expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for the warm hospitality and efficient arrangements made for the meeting. The meeting also expressed thanks to the MTCO and ADB for their technical and secretariat support.

Appendix 1: list of participants

Appendix 2: Copies of the Welcome and Opening Remarks

Appendix 3: the Summary Report of the NTOs' Meeting

Appendix 4: the revised summary of the GMS Mid-Term Review

Appendix 5: Joint Ministerial Statement



**THIRD GMS TOURISM MINISTERS' MEETING  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 17 January 2011**

**JOINT MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Preamble**

1. We, the Tourism Ministers of the six GMS countries, namely, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, met in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 17 January 2011. We were pleased to be joined in our discussions by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and representatives of other development partners, international organizations as well as the diplomatic corps.

2. Our meeting came at a particularly significant period, as the GMS countries wind down the second decade of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program and chart new long-term strategic directions for the 2012–2022 GMS Strategic Framework. Since its establishment in 1992 tourism has been one of the priority sectors under the GMS Program and an important driver of socio-economic development in the subregion. We recognize that if sustainably managed, tourism can be a powerful tool for poverty reduction, help accelerate the transformation of our recently completed cross-border transport corridors into genuine economic corridors, and support the protection of the subregion's precious natural and cultural assets.

**Progress and Key Accomplishments in GMS Cooperation in Tourism**

3. We are pleased that the GMS tourism sector has remained resilient in the face of the recent economic recession. Annual international tourist arrivals in the GMS have more than doubled from approximately 10 million in 1995 to over 26 million in 2009, with corresponding increases in tourism revenue. In 2010 and 2011 we expect to surpass the historic milestone of 30 million international arrivals due to improving economic conditions and the rise in intra-regional leisure travel. In the context of strong arrival and revenue growth we will redouble our efforts to promote patterns of development that are equitable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable in order to maximize tourism's contribution to poverty reduction and heritage protection.

4. We commend the efforts of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG), with the support of the Asian Development Bank, for having successfully completed a mid-term review of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy that assessed the achievements, challenges and lessons learned during the first five years of the implementation of the Strategy. We are pleased that distribution of international tourist arrivals among the GMS countries is becoming more equitable and tourism is lifting significant numbers of people out of poverty. Private sector participation and investment in the tourism sector has increased substantially at the subregional and country levels as indicated by strong growth in the numbers of micro, small and medium sized tourism enterprises and industry associations. Multi-sector subregional and national partnerships have been forged to prevent and mitigate the negative social impacts of tourism such as HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and the child sex trade.

5. We appreciate the sustained efforts of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) to market the GMS as a single tourism destination and note recent improvements to the MTCO GMS promotional website and web-based tourism knowledge center. We are pleased that the Mekong Tourism Forum was revived in May 2010 and held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and that the 2011 Mekong Tourism Forum will take place in Pakse, Champasak, Lao PDR. This important annual event is surely helping the Mekong brand to gain increased visibility in the global marketplace. National tourism human resource development plans are now in place in most member countries. Programs are underway to strengthen tourism vocational training institutions and build the capacity of tourism planning and heritage management officials. Pro-poor tourism activities involving community-based tourism and value chain interventions are being scaled up to allow poorer segments of society, in particular women and ethnic groups, to access and benefit from the tourism economy. Barriers to cross-border travel have been relaxed following implementation of the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption, and improvements have been made to visa on arrival facilities at major immigration checkpoints. There have been substantial investments in infrastructure that are facilitating easier access to tourist sites and improving environmental conditions in key destinations.

6. We sincerely appreciate the financial and technical assistance provided by our key development partners to support the implementation of priority programs and projects and look forward to their continuing support in the years ahead.

### **Challenges Ahead**

7. While substantial achievements have been made a number of challenges still need to be addressed. We must continue our efforts to improve access and protection infrastructure at natural and cultural tourism sites, strengthen human resources and tourism management systems, harmonize service standards, and further streamline immigration procedures. There is also a need to better protect vulnerable groups from the negative impacts of tourism and continue our efforts to spread the benefits of tourism more broadly. The subregional tourism industry must take steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change and promote more environmentally and socially responsible practices.

8. We have tasked the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG) to continue to explore innovative and practical approaches that could enable MTCO to transform itself into a self-sustaining entity and improve the effectiveness of its tourism marketing and coordination functions.

### **A Refocused GMS Tourism Sector Strategy and Road Map for 2011-2015**

9. Going forward, we have endorsed the recommendations of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy mid-term review and have asked the GMS Tourism Working Group to pursue a revised spatial strategy that focuses on the development of thematic multi-country tour circuits linked to the Mekong River Tourism Corridor. Priority programs in the 2011-2015 road map include tourism-related human resource development, marketing and product development, and pro-poor sustainable tourism.

10. We call on the TWG, MTCO, and our development partners including bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, the private sector, and civil society to continue to work together to support the subregional tourism agenda and help transform the GMS into one of the world's premier sustainable tourism destinations.

### **Conclusion**

11. As the GMS countries enter a new decade of cooperation and a new long-term strategic framework for cooperation is set in place beginning in 2012, we remain steadfast in our commitment for the tourism sector to contribute to the realization of the GMS vision of a prosperous, integrated, and harmonious subregion.

12. We express our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for hosting this third Meeting of the GMS Tourism Ministers and the country delegations and the representatives of MTCO, the Asian Development Bank, and other attendees for their active participation in our meeting today.