

Summary of Proceedings
52nd Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group
09:00-16:30, Tuesday, 21 November 2023
Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

Introduction

1. The 52nd GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-52) was held on 21 November 2023 in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. It was hosted by the Government of Myanmar and co-organized by the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & 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-online, People's Republic of China [PRC]-online, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam), MTCO, development partners and organizations including the ASEAN Japan Centre, GMS Secretariat and private sector. The list of participants is in **Appendix 1**.

Item 1: Opening Ceremony/Welcome Remarks

2. **Remarks from Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar.** On behalf of the host Government, H.E. Dr. Thet Thet Khine, Union Minister of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar welcomed in- person and online participants. She highlighted the crucial role of tourism development and cooperation in the broader economic development goals outlined in GMS Strategy 2030. She congratulated member states whose tourism industry has fully recovered and hoped that other member states, like Myanmar, will draw inspiration from them to work towards pre-pandemic levels. She expressed confidence that the 52nd GMS TWG meeting and MTCO Board meeting will yield fruitful outcomes that will contribute to a sustainable development of the tourism industry in the region and a competitive, balanced and sustainable development of the GMS in general. *A brief photo session with the Union Minister at the hall followed.*
3. **Remarks from the Chair.** Mr. Maung Maung Kyaw, Director General of Directorate of Hotels and Tourism, as Chair of the Meeting, expressed deep gratitude to all participants whether attending in-person or virtually. He assured everyone that despite the difficulties or challenges of meeting all in person, active engagement continues, and all are in the same page, moving together. He acknowledged the important points in the Union Minister's opening speech. He then called on MTCO Executive Director to give her opening remarks.
4. **Remarks from MTCO.** Ms. Dee Suvimol Thanasarakij thanked the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar for hosting the meeting and for the excellent arrangement and warm hospitality extended. She remarked that the beautiful and culturally rich Myanmar reminded of the diversity and uniqueness of the GMS region and that this working group meeting does

not only symbolize cooperation but also members' commitment to sustainable tourism development in the region. She emphasized that MTCO remains dedicated to promoting sustainable, inclusive and responsible tourism and that the group's collaborative efforts are important in shaping a resilient and sustainable tourism industry that benefits everyone. She looked forward to a productive discussion of the TWG activities, plans and joint projects with partners.

5. Copies of the opening remarks are in **Appendix 2**.

Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda and Business Arrangement

6. The Chair opened the floor for comments on the provisional agenda. No comments were received, hence the agenda was considered adopted as is. Copy of adopted agenda is in **Appendix 3**.
7. The representative from Myanmar briefed the meeting on the business arrangements concerning the venues and timings for lunch and dinner

Item 3: Report and Follow-up of Previous GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting

8. MTCO reported on the outcomes and corresponding follow-up actions of TWG-51 held in Cambodia. The report included: i) MTCO activities; (ii) country reports; (iii) progress of GMS Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project (TIIG Phase 2) in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam; (iv) ADB, ASEAN and China Ready updates; and (v) action items from TWG-51 meeting which were all done or continuously being done. Copy of presentation is attached as **Appendix 4**.
9. The Chair congratulated the countries and development partners for the accomplishment and good progress of reported activities. He opened the floor for comments and/or additional updates but hearing none moved to the next item in the agenda.

Item 4: MTCO Activities

10. MTCO reported its activities since the last GMS TWG meeting in April 2023 until now as follows:
 - i. Mekong Tourism Forum 2023 Survey Report: The event received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 93% satisfaction and 100% positive event rating. A significant 66% of attendees are definite about future attendance.

- ii. Mekong Tourism Internship Launch: The Mekong Tourism Internship program was introduced, offering numerous opportunities for aspiring professionals in the tourism sector. As of 7 Nov 2023, over 50 internship positions were listed
- iii. Mekong Voices Series: This initiative features bi-monthly dialogues with visionaries and changemakers, aiming to inspire and inform. Over 30 interviews have been conducted and published to date.
- iv. Mekong Hidden Gems: Focusing on lesser-known destinations, this project aims for equitable tourist distribution and sustainable practices, with two stories featured each month.
- v. "Memories in Mekong" Campaign: A culinary and adventure journey in collaboration with a renowned US influencer, inviting travelers to explore immersive experiences. The campaign has not ended yet. As of 7 Nov 2023, it boosted FB growth to 4.73K total fans (+2133%), 1.09K IG followers with 59.8K total impressions (+20,528%). So far, the campaign has far exceeded most of the KPIs. The campaign was developed not only to promote GMS tourism, but also to accommodate the GMS TWG's previous request to increase the number of followers on MTCO's FB page. The campaign will be completed in the next couple of days. The final report of the campaign will be shared with GMS TWG, once available.
- vi. Mekong Tourism Interactive Maps: Introducing the "Mekong Stories Map," a dynamic tool for crafting tailored travel experiences in the Mekong region.
- vii. Mekong Tourism Newsletter: A monthly publication highlighting sustainable tourism news, updates from GMS countries, and sustainable development initiatives.
- viii. Digital Presence & Outreach: MTCO maintains an active social media presence and regularly updates its website with news, articles, and publications.
- ix. Press Releases & Media Outreach: MTCO engages in global media outreach to promote its activities and prepares clipping reports for record.
- x. MTCO Executive Director's speaking engagements and industry events.

11. She also reported on other new TWG initiatives facilitated by the MTCO as follows:

- i. Development of the GMS Tourism Strategy 2030 where a special meeting of the TWG was organized on 10 October 2023 and final draft presentation is scheduled for TWG- 53 in (April) 2024;
- ii. Development of the Mekong Destination Standard for Sustainable Tourism Development which is an agenda item in collaboration with DASTA, Green Destinations (GD) and Trade Association of Asia Ecotourism Network (AEN); and
- iii. Preparation for Mekong Tourism Forum 2024. Said initiatives were to be taken up in detail as TWG-52 meeting agenda items 9 and 10 and MTCO Board meeting item 4, respectively. Copy of MTCO presentation is in **Appendix 4**.

12. The Chair appreciated the good progress of reported MTCO activities and looked forward to finalizing agreement on the establishment of MTCO as a legal entity to further strengthen its ability to undertake its functions and support TWG activities. He then opened the floor for comments and suggestions but hearing none moved to proceed with agenda item 5.

Item 5: GMS Country Reports

13. **Cambodia** reported that international tourism arrivals in 2023 increased by 52% with around 3.5 million visitors, compared to 2.3 million international visitors in 2022. They projected that by end of 2023 it will reach 4.5 million, a likely 96% increase from 2022 statistics. The number of domestic tourists for 2023 is projected to reach 16 million which is 15% growth rate from 2022. In terms of Cambodia top ten tourist markets, Thailand and Viet Nam ranked first and second, both in 2022 and 2023. In terms of tourism visa/entry policy, Cambodia informed that Business Visa (Visa Type E) is available for all countries through online application since January 6. 2023 and a new visa exemption agreement with Maldives was made effective on 4 May 2023. Visa exemption between Cambodia and GMS Countries remains the same but diplomatic and official from Lao PDR is for 90 days instead of the usual 30 days. International gateways to Cambodia increased with the Siem Reap Angkor International Airport officially opened on 16 October 2023 to cater to increasing travelers to Cambodia. Moreover, in 2024, border pass expansion in Siem Reap Province is being considered starting with Thai-Cambodian border. It was also noted that Cambodia's Tourism Development Strategy Plan 2023-2035 has been prepared with a vision of developing Cambodia's international culture and natural tourism destinations. Highlighted as among Cambodia's digital campaign initiatives for 2023-2024 is called "Every Day is A Wonder" promoted in Europe market and French speaking countries. In 2024, planned GMS tourism cooperation activities include participation in MTF 2024 and TWG-53 and 54 meetings, regaining cooperation on Southern Tourism Corridor with Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam and participate in international travel fairs and events organized by GMS countries.
14. **PRC** presented domestic tourism data for the first half of 2023 with 2.384 billion tourists and a revenue of CNY 2.3 trillion (\$325 billion). Both increased by 63.9% and 95.9%, respectively, from 2022 data for the same period. In addition, this year's golden week holidays (Sep 29-Oct 6), domestic tourists reached 826 million and generated revenue of CNY 753.43 billion representing an increase of 4.1 % and 1.5%, respectively, when compared with 2019 data. In terms of international tourism data, inbound tourists from 5 GMS countries for the first half of 2023 reached a total of 2.18 million. Further to entry policy updates reported in TWG-51 meeting, PRC added that as 11 May 2023 expedited customs clearance at port fully resumed and last 1 November, filling in of Exit/Entry Health Declaration Card is no longer required except those exhibiting symptoms of infectious disease. PRC also shared about their smart tourism development policy that started as early as 2011 when China National Tourism Administration proposed to lay the foundation for the development of smart tourism in 10 years. By 2022, the 14th Five-Year Plan on Tourism Development proposed the National Smart Tourism project to accelerate the construction of smart tourism attractions, improve smart tourism public services, enrich the supply of smart tourism products and expand the application of smart tourism. In 2023, PRC Ministry of Industry and Information and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism informed of eight measures to strengthen the collaborative innovation and development of 5G+ smart tourism. Smart tourism cases that were highlighted include the Duanmen Digital Gallery of the Palace Museum, "Yunnan at Your Fingertips" and Suzhou Tourism General Entrance. Tourism projects/events organized this year include China International Travel Mart, China-ASEAN Seminar on Smart Tourism Innovation and Development and 2023 Lancang-Mekong Tourist Cities Cooperation Alliance Conference to

be held in December 2023 and official invitations are expected to be issued to GMS countries in a few days.

15. **Lao PDR**'s international tourist arrivals in January-September 2023 increased by 285% with around 2.5 million compared to 0.65 million visitors in same period in 2022. Thailand, Viet Nam and PRC are the top 3 tourism markets of Lao PDR. Domestic tourist arrivals reached 1.4 million in January- September 2023, still lower than pre-pandemic levels but has been increasing since 2022. Lao PDR has been implementing bilateral visa exemption for ASEAN member states, Russia and Mongolia for 30 days (Myanmar, 14 days). Unilateral visa exemption is also enforced for ordinary passport holders of countries like Japan, Luxembourg, Switzerland and South Korea. Over 150 countries may also apply for Lao E-visa in 3 simple steps. In terms of national tourism strategies, Lao PDR is guided by the Tourism Development Plan 2021-2025, Destination Laos Tourism Marketing Plan 2022-2023, and Chinese Visitor Welcoming Plan 2023-2025. Smart tourism in Lao PDR is at an initial stage starting with use of digital tools for tourist attraction audio tour, transportation and payment system applications. Highlighted among their smart tourism implementation were: (i) audio tour in 7 languages at Buddha Park; (ii) QR code translator at the National Museum of Luang Prabang; (iii) Kokkok Move mobile app on transportation in Laos for tourists; (iv) Xanh SM Laos EV taxi booking service; and (v) LCR payment application to conveniently purchase Lao-China railway ticket. Lao PDR key tourism projects in 2023-2024 include: (i) ASEAN Tourism Forum to be held on 22-27 January 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR; (ii) Visit Laos 2024 where 14 national activities and 65 provincial activities are being prepared for tourists to choose from; (iii) participation in various International travel exhibition such as ITB Berlin, ITE HCMC and China International Travel Mart; (iv) Lao-Cambodia TIIGP2 Exchange Visit 6-9 December 2023 in Champasak Province; (v) Visa policy development such as expand countries with visa exemption to facilitate targeted international tourists; (vi) enhanced community-based tourism (CBT) and homestay in cooperation with Thailand for the Ban Nayang Tai CBT in Luang Prabang; (vii) promote and implement ASEAN and national level tourism standards; and (viii) China Ready training of trainers in 2024 proposed for PRC support.
16. **Myanmar** shared various tourism data and noted that the industry started to recover in 2022. For (January to October) 2023, international tourist arrivals reached 1.025 million, an increase of about 339% from 2022 figures. Domestic tourist arrivals also increased from 5.78 million in 2022 to 8.06 million in (January to October) 2023. Tourism spending or revenue had a significant increase from \$249.13 million in 2022 to 557 million in 2023. It was reported that entry policy for international travelers is regularly updated by the Ministry of Health and travelers can search the latest information in the website <https://www.mohs.gov.mm>. Current entry points to Myanmar include the 3 international airports (Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw) and some border crossing points shared with China, Thailand and India. Tourist visa on arrival for Chinese and Indian citizens have been made available since 30 August 2023 as a 1-year pilot project in accordance with COVID-19 rules of the Myanmar Ministry of Health. E-Visa for GMS countries' nationals can also be secured online since 20 May 2022. Myanmar participated and will continue to participate in international travel fairs to promote Myanmar tourism especially to their top markets which include China, Japan, Russia and India. Myanmar is also implementing its 5-year Tourism Strategy Road Map and they have been promoting at least 14 tourist destinations across the country. Among Myanmar's tourism digital initiatives include development and maintenance of several Myanmar tourism webpages and

social media accounts. In terms of GMS tourism cooperation 2023-2024, Myanmar proposed two projects under the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) and sought development partners support to implement said projects. Moreover, Myanmar has been implementing the Establishment of Tourism Research Center under the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Fund 2021 (18 months since 2022) which produced Myanmar tourism statistics report among others.

17. **Thailand** presented key tourism statistics from 2019 to 2023. In 2023 (as of 2 September), international visitors doubled at 22 million compared to 11 million in 2022. For the last 5 years, China consistently topped the ranking in terms of number of GMS countries visitors to Thailand and number is increasing every year (across all GMS countries) from 2022 as a sign of being in recovery phase. In terms of Thai tourists visiting GMS countries, Lao PDR was the top destination for the last 5 years, followed by Cambodia, China, Viet Nam and Myanmar. Tourism visa and entry policy updates were also presented including a summary of countries and territories entitled for visa exemption & visa on arrival to Thailand as of 25 September 2023. The 3rd National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2027 of Thailand provides the direction on the country's priority tourism holistic development. This is coupled with the Master Plan under the National Strategy 2018-2037 which focuses on: (i) creative and culture tourism; (ii) business tourism; (iii) health, beauty and traditional Thai medicine tourism; (iv) maritime tourism; (v) regional cross-border tourism; and (vi) development of the tourism ecosystem. Highlighted as smart tourism/digital initiatives include: (i) TAGTHAI application, an online platform that provides travel-related services across all dimensions of the tourism industry; (ii) Tourist Police i lert u, an app linked to the Tourist Police 1155 Emergency Response Center where there are interpreters and translators ready to provide tourist assistance in other languages; (iii) Zero Carbon app, will help tourists monitor their carbon footprint generated by their activities and help provide travel routes and methods that are considered net zero tourism; and (iv) Sawasdee by AOT, provide information essential to inbound tourists about the 6 AOT airports, tourism and privileges. Thailand also shared key GMS tourism cooperation activities planned in 2023-2024 as follows: (i) Thailand Travel Mart Plus 2024 (2023 was held on 31 May-2 June); (ii) Cultural Heritage Route Development in GMS; (iii) Cruise Tourism Route within the GMS sub-region; and (iv) Workshop on SDGs for Tourism Professionals in GMS.
18. **Viet Nam** reported that for the first ten months of 2023, international visitors reached almost 10 million but is targeted to reach 13 million by end of the year. Three GMS countries namely China, Thailand and Cambodia are among the top 10 tourist source markets of Viet Nam. Domestic tourists for the first 10 months of 2023 reached 98.7 million but is target to reach 102 million by end of the year. For visa policy updates, new ones effective 15 August 2023 include: (i) E-visa: increased validity to 90 days with single and multiple entries applicable and grant to citizens of all countries and territories; (ii) unilateral visa exemption: increased the duration of temporary residence for people entering Viet Nam under unilateral visa exemption from 15 days to 45 days for all purposes. In 2023, Viet Nam continued to be recognized with international awards such as World's Leading Heritage Destination, Asia's Leading Tourist Board (4th time), Asia's Leading Destination (5th time) and Asia's Leading Destination for Nature. Viet Nam's national tourism strategy include key targets such as number of international visitors by 2025 and 2030. It targets to recover to pre pandemic (2019) levels of 18 million visitors by 2025 and 2030 targets will be reviewed and adjusted accordingly. Cited

target tourist markets, among others, are: ASEAN countries; Northeast Asia which includes China; Europe; North America; Oceania and Russia. Viet Nam major tourism products continue to be the following: beaches, nature-based, culture and city breaks. Some new products include adventure, wellness, family, luxury and golf tourism. In 2024, some key international events are to be held in Viet Nam. These are: (i) Viet Nam International Travel Mart to be held in Ha Noi, April 2024; (ii) Ho Chi Minh International Travel Exhibition in September 2024 and PATA Travel Mart in Phu Quoc Island. Next year too will be Visit Viet Nam year featuring Dien Bien Province.

19. Copies of country reports/presentations are in **Appendix 5**.

Item 6: Travel Industry Update and Visitor Forecast (online presentation)

20. Mr. John Koldowski, MTCO special advisor, presented about international travel and tourism trends and outlook. Data and charts used were from UNWTO World Tourism Barometer latest issue, September 2023, particularly on international tourist arrivals which is defined as a foreigner who spends at least 1 night in the destination. The statistics indicate that we are not going to get back to 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels by end of 2023 but most likely in 2024. Also, it is noted that Asia Pacific is bouncing back more slowly than some of other destination regions of the world. He opined that this is not necessarily a negative development rather the slower recovery rate over the long-term may even be an advantage because the rushed recovery in other regions is bringing back some of the old problems. On the question, what is to be expected in the next few years, PATA data suggest that in 2024 under the medium scenario, almost all GMS destinations (no data for PRC Yunnan and Guangxi provinces) are predicted to surpass 2019 levels. Even under the severe scenario, the trend is improving, although the 2024 forecasts here still stayed at below 2019 levels because of the other ongoing world events such as the war, inflation or rising prices which still leads to recovery but at slower rates. Moreover, we have seen changes in the structure of international visitor arrivals across Southeast Asia where the majority of GMS countries are, particularly in terms of source markets. Pre-pandemic, Northeast Asia source markets, especially China, dominated arrivals into Southeast Asia but recently, this flipped and it is noted that the markets are still showing volatility. India, as one of two key source markets of GMS countries is moving strong. The volatility in the structure of source markets should be recognized and is something that GMS countries should adapt to. Addressing sustainability issues should also be mainstreamed and there is need to develop capabilities with generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) tools. He emphasized that the new normal is one where it's going to be consistently changing and more like constant disruptions with smaller periods of stability. To take appropriate action or take advantage of opportunities, he recommended that it is important to: (i) monitor data and trends ; (ii) articulate a purpose beyond profit; and (iii) create impact on societal level. A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 6**.

21. The Chair appreciated Mr. Koldowski's presentation and opened the floor for questions and/or comments but hearing none declared a lunch break before proceeding to the next agenda item.

Before moving to Agenda Item 7, the Chair opened the floor for comments on Agenda item 5-Country Reports but hearing none, proceeded to call on first presenter under Agenda item 7.

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

22. **Cambodia** gave an update on their implementation of TIIG 2. Overall progress is at 88.72% against elapsed time of 83.56%. Outputs 1,2,3 and Project Management Administration (PMA) are all on track and at 92.21%, 90%, 73.38% and 92.22% rates of progress, respectively. One of identified challenges under Output 2- ASEAN Tourism Standard is that the uptake of the Green Hotel Standard (GHS) is slower than expected but this is being addressed by creating a list of hotels and guesthouses and providing incentives and support to help businesses apply for the GHS.
23. **Lao PDR** shared that their TIIG 2 overall implementation progress (as of 30 September 2023) is at 75% against elapsed time of 73%. Some issues and solutions for some of the sub-projects under various outputs include: (i) non-operationalization of the O&M plan which is proposed to improve with better info dissemination; (ii) contractor's poor resource management and slow performance to which penalties will be introduced for delays incurred; (iii) dependent on contractor for O&M, and insufficient equipment which is proposed to be addressed by expediting equipment procurement and training on equipment operation; and (iv) delays due to COVID 19 for Output 3- Destination Management are being managed by prioritizing the activities that will contribute most to the achievement of target outcomes. Lao PDR also updated on the public private partnership (PPP) opportunities resulting from Output 1 completed or nearly completed subprojects like Nakasang port operation (carpark, toilet, ticketing office and e-vehicles) and Vang Vieng landfill operation (smart waste management).
24. **Viet Nam** reported that TIIG 2 implementation in the country has been ongoing for all three outputs. Following are some specific implementation progress of output 1 subjects in the 5 provinces covered: (i) Hoa Binh Province Tien pagoda access and environmental improvements is at 66.8% and expected to be completed in 2024; (ii) Nge An Province Cua Lo beach and Ru Gam pagoda access and environmental improvements at 15-17% (construction postponed in consideration of tourist season); (iii) Quang Binh Province Nhat Le-Long Dai river and road improvements is expected to start construction in December 2023 because of failed first bidding process; (iv) Quang Tri Province Cua Viet-Cua Tung beach access and environmental improvements at 21%; and (v) Thua Thien Hue Province Hue tourist piers improvements at 66.4 % and Da Bac access improvements at 58.7%. Implementation of outputs 2 and 3 in Viet Nam only started in 2022 and a number of capacity building activities and events were undertaken using Viet Nam government's counterpart funds. Regarding public-private partnerships (PPP) opportunities in output 1 subprojects, it sought ADB advice because current Vietnamese PPP law is limited to transport related projects but does not cover cultural activities or initiatives resulting from outputs of TIIG-2.
25. Copies of country presentations on TIIG-2 implementation progress is in **Appendix 7**.

26. Mr. Steven Schipani of the GMS Secretariat appreciated the country reports and recognized that a lot has been done since the last meeting. ADB is proud to be supporting the good progress that has been made in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam including the use of project resources to cooperate with other GMS countries on different cross-border initiatives and would support in principle the needed loan/grant extensions in some countries. Countries were advised to coordinate with ADB project officers to work on possible adjustments of results indicators, particularly target dates in view of changing market demand and delays caused by COVID-19. He raised that ADB was able to mobilize additional support from the Southeast Asia Sustainable Tourism Facility (TA6899) for PPP initiatives and ADB PPP experts will be following up with each country's project management team to help identify viable small-scale PPP options like concession, management and/or lease contracts. ADB will continue to work with GMS countries for a resilient and sustainable tourism development in the region.

27. The Chair opened the floor for additional thoughts and comments but hearing none moved to the next agenda item.

Item 8: Partner Updates (online presentation)

28. On behalf of the GMS countries, the Chair expressed appreciation of ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC) participation in TWG-52 and invited AJC representative to make her presentation. Ms. Naoko Fujikawa, Senior Program Manager of Tourism Exchange Team of AJC first presented on AJC overall vision, goals and strategies which include Goal 3 -Sustainable and responsible tourism. Notable Goal 3 objectives, among others, are: narrow the tourism development gap among ASEAN member states; increase the tourism industry capacity in ASEAN to attract Japanese travelers and cultivate sustainable tourism; raise Japanese travelers' awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism in ASEAN; and influence Japanese travelers' behavior to select sustainable tourism destinations in ASEAN. AJC activities presented include: (i) special website on 50 mindful travel in ASEAN in line with the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation; (ii) training of trainers on digital skills for Green Tourism Enterprises to be held in Viet Nam on 4-8 December 2023; (iii) Seminar on Educational Travel to ASEAN held last August and participated in by 100 travel agents and school representatives arranging students' educational trips abroad; (iv) Disseminated ASEAN tourism information by participating in Tourism Expo Japan held on 26-29 October 2023 in Osaka; and (v) continued online promotion of ASEAN charms to Japanese consumers through its various social media and ASEAN Travel website (and invited GMS countries to provide information on tourist destinations or products to be featured in their website). She added that the number of Japanese travelers to ASEAN is slowly recovering, still below pre-pandemic levels. Some of the cited reasons for hesitancy in traveling outside Japan include, weak yen, soaring prices of goods and services, and safe hygiene issues. Copy of AJC presentation is in **Appendix 8**.

29. The Chair opened the floor for inputs, suggestions and requests to AJC and following were the interventions made:

- Myanmar thanked AJC for all its initiatives in promoting sustainable tourism and responsible travel from Japan. Myanmar is keen to collaborate with AJC on certain

- initiatives to celebrate 50th years of ASEAN-Japan Centre cooperation and will continue to engage with AJC to seek approval of the 2 proposed national activities to be held in Myanmar.
- MTCO also expressed keen interest in collaborating with AJC in the future particularly for training of trainers of women-led community-based tourism (CBT) in Cambodia, Viet Nam and Lao PDR (CLV) and also potentially including Myanmar and Thailand for AJC's kind consideration. MTCO will be very pleased to work with AJC on other projects where MTCO shares common vision and goals, that is, promoting sustainable tourism.

30. Re Myanmar national activities proposals, AJC informed that it is already in the process of approving the projects and will give the response by the end of the month. As for the AJC's next fiscal year's plan which starts in April, AJC cannot confirm the plans at this time but assured that they remain committed in supporting capacity building activities especially of CLV countries and will be ready to discuss proposals very soon. A 20- minute coffee break followed before moving on to Agenda Item 9.

Item 9: Other Matters

31. The Chair opened the floor for any other matter that the TWG members would like to raise but hearing none, invited MTCO to proceed with her closing remarks.
32. MTCO thanked everyone for the fruitful discussions and sharing of a lot of progress in the activities of the TWG and our development partners. She looked forward to meeting again the MTCO Board members for the next day session.
33. The Chair acknowledged the successful completion of meeting agenda and thanked all for their active participation and valuable contributions to the meeting. He wished for the continued success of GMS tourism in the future and for everyone to be in good health and prosper in each endeavor.

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