

Summary of Proceedings
53rd Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group
08:30-15:30, Tuesday, 23 April 2024
Lijiang, China

Introduction

1. The 53rd GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-53) was held on 23 April 2024 in Lijiang, People's Republic of China (PRC). It was hosted by Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of PRC, Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, the People's Government of Lijiang City, and Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), and co-organized by Lijiang Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism, and Network of International Culturalink Entities. It was attended by senior and mid-level officials representing the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) of the six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries (Cambodia, PRC, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand-online, and Viet Nam), MTCO, Asian Development Bank (ADB), development partners and organizations including the ASEAN China Centre and ASEAN Japan Centre. The list of participants is in **Appendix 1**.

Item 1: Opening Ceremony/Welcome Remarks

2. **Remarks from Chair.** On behalf of the host Government, Mr. Liu Haisheng, Deputy Director General of Bureau of International Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of PRC welcomed all delegates in Lijiang. He noted that GMS countries have maintained close cooperation and with joint efforts of all parties, good results have been achieved in promoting the GMS as a single destination. He cited the good progress in reaching final agreement on establishing GMS Tourism Office as an intergovernmental organization with legal status. He enjoined all to work together to promote the recovery of sub regional tourism industry and continuously strengthen cooperation in the tourism field.
3. **Remarks from ADB.** Mr. Steven Schipani, Principal Tourism Industry Specialist, ADB Water and Urban Development Sector Office commended the host and MTCO for creating a substantive and engaging program. He noted that TWG-53 meeting is an opportune time to consider new subregional tourism priorities and how they will be addressed in the new GMS Tourism Strategy 2030 in preparation for 8th GMS Summit of Leaders to be held in PRC later this year. As demonstrated in Lijiang, he emphasized that culture makes the GMS a special place and that protecting heritage resources is critical to achieving strategic GMS tourism objectives. He underscored ADB's commitment in helping the GMS achieve its tourism vision and strategic objectives together with other GMS development partners and private sector.
4. **Remarks from MTCO.** Ms. Dee Suvimol Thanasarakij appreciated the Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of PRC, Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, the People's Government of Lijiang City for hosting the meeting and for the warm hospitality extended to all delegates. She remarked that the

beautiful city of Lijiang, historic and renowned for its cultural heritage and breathtaking landscapes reminded of the incredible potential and vibrant spirit of the Mekong region. She looked forward to the creative ideas and joint effort that will emerge in the sessions leading to strengthened cooperation and collective advancement of tourism development in the region.

5. Copies of the opening remarks are in **Appendix 2**.
6. The Opening Ceremony was closed by group photo opportunities.

Item 2: Adoption of the Agenda and Business Arrangement

7. The Chair requested the meeting to review the provisional and opened the floor for comments/revisions on the provisional agenda. The agenda was considered adopted as is since no comments were received. A copy of adopted agenda is in **Appendix 3**.
8. PRC representative briefed the meeting on business arrangements for the day.

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

9. MTCO reported on the outcomes and corresponding follow-up actions of TWG-52 held in Myanmar. The report included: i) MTCO activities;(ii) country reports; (iii) strategic activities and regional collaborations. Copy of presentation is attached as **Appendix 4**.

Item 4: MTCO Activities

10. MTCO reported on the following TWG/MTCO activities covering the period from November 2023 to April 2024: (i) Digital Update (MekongTourism.com, Facebook and Instagram); (ii) Strategy Development (iii) Partnerships and Collaboration (MOU with the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), Asian Ecotourism Network (AEN), and Green Destinations (GD), Expedia, partnership with media to promote MTF 2024, Tourism Innovation Challenge with ADB and UN Tourism); (iv) Promoting Community-Based and Secondary Destinations; (v) Events and Forums; (vi) Digital and Media Initiatives (Memories in Mekong, online marketing and press releases, online campaign targeting at Chinese Market); (vii) Human Capital Development: Mekong Tourism Internship; (viii) Travel Facilitation (visa page added to website; and (ix) Other ongoing operational activities (Mekong Voices, Mekong Tourism Newsletter and Website and Social Updates).

11. Summary highlights were the following:

- **Mekong Community Charm:** A spotlight on the rich tapestry of local life, uncovering the unique cultural and natural gems that define each community. The objectives are 1.) to promote community-based tourism, and 2.) to engage local people in tourism for inclusivity. This series is hosted on MTCO website.

- **Mekong's Easy Getaway:** Discover the hidden treasures nearby the busy tourist hubs. This initiative was launched 1.) to promote the secondary destinations, 2.) to alleviate overcrowding in busy and popular tourist attractions, and 3.) to extend period of stay. This series is hosted on MTCO website.
- **Visa page:** MTCO is adding a visa section on the website, as per the previous meeting recommendations, and will update it every 6 months.
- **MOU signed with DASTA, Asian Ecotourism Network (AEN) and Green Destinations (GD).** As approved by MTCO Board, the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), together with the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), Green Destinations (GD), and the Trade Association of Asian Ecotourism Network (AEN) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on promoting sustainable tourism certification for destinations in Asia with a focus on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).
- Related to the above MOU, MTCO together with the representatives from the GMS Member Countries attended the 5-day workshop, organized by DASTA, on the Development of Sustainable Tourism Certification Program for Destinations in the Context of Asia with a focus on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) on December 6th – 10th, 2023 in Bangkok. This is followed by the Pilot Testing for one week in Luang Prabang on 11th-17th Dec 2023.
- **MTCO ED conducted a site inspection for the MTF 2024:** On February 5-8, 2024, MTCO Executive Director visited Lijiang for a site inspection, in preparation for the Mekong Tourism Forum, which will take place on April 23-25, 2024 in Lijiang, China. Ms Dee had the productive meetings with the organizing team from Lijiang Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism and various hotels.
- **MTCO ED Joined the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2024 in Lao PDR:** MTCO Executive Director, Ms Dee Suvimol Thanasarakij, joined the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Lao PDR during 22-26 January 2024. She participated in the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (ASEAN NTOs) Meeting, where she presented MTCO work progress as well as proposed potential areas for collaboration.
- **MTCO Joined Mekong Institute's Project Advisory Committee (PAC) on Creative4Mekong:** MTCO Executive Director joined the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and attended the inception meeting to kick off the project, "Promoting Creative Industry for Heritage Tourism Development in the Mekong Region (Creative4Mekong). The Meeting, conducted by Mekong institute (MI) and participated by industry stakeholders from both public and private sectors in the Mekong countries, was held online on April 3, 2024.

- **Social Media Campaign “Memories in Mekong”** ran in Oct – Nov 2024, successfully exceeded all KPIs, resulting in the significant growth of public interest in GMS tourism.
- The development of **GMS Tourism Strategy 2030**: MTCO has been working closely with ADB as the GMS Secretariat and Mr. Peter Semone the consultant in developing the GMS Tourism Strategy 2030. This also included organizing the online consultation with private sector on 9th Jan 2024, and the Special Meeting of GMS TWG on 19 March 2024 to brainstorm the strategy.
- The **Training for Trainers for Enhancing Digital Skills in Women in CBT**: MTCO has been trying to make this project happen, by finding partners. Appreciated ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC), Lao PDR and ADB for considering implementing this project with MTCO. We aim to have participants from CLMVT countries.
- **Mekong Tourism Forum 2024**: MTCO has worked closely with China to organize the MTF2024 in Lijiang. To promote the event, MTCO released a press release, partnered with international media partners to feature MTF on their online channels for more than one month. MTCO also coordinates with the host country in organizing the photo exhibition on “GMS Tourism Cooperation” as a part of the event.
- **Extraordinary Travel Festival**: MTCO is one of the partners of the Extraordinary Travel Festival, which is a gathering for accomplished, avid, and adventurous travelers from across the globe. The event will be held in Nov 2024 in Bangkok.

12. Copy of MTCO presentation is in **Appendix 4**.

13. The Chair appreciated MTCO report and proceeded to Item 5 since there were no questions or comments from the floor.

Item 5: GMS Country Reports

14. **Cambodia** reported that international tourism arrivals by end of 2023 has reached 5.45 million an increase of 136% compared to 2.3 million international visitors in 2022. These also generated tourism receipts of \$3,080 million. Compared with 2019, 2023 figures are still lower but it is projected that by 2025, tourism in Cambodia has recovered with selected tourism indicators surpassing pre-pandemic levels. In terms of domestic tourists, this reached 18.7 million surpassing the 16 million projections at the start of the year and represents a 35% growth rate from 2022 statistics. In terms of Cambodia top ten tourist markets, Thailand and Viet Nam ranked first and second, in 2022 and 2023 but what is noteworthy is that PRC tourists which ranked third, increased by 413% from 2022.

15. In terms of tourism visa/entry policy, Cambodia informed that required visa may be obtained on arrival or online. International gateways to Cambodia are increasing with ongoing

construction of another two new international airports to be completed in 2024: These are: (i) Techo International Airport; and (ii) Dara Sakor International Airport.

16. Cambodia updated that their 2023-2024 priority international tourist markets are: ASEAN, PRC, Japan, Korea, India and Europe. Cambodia reiterated its vision, objectives and initiatives under its Tourism Development Strategy Plan 2023-2035.
17. Aside from participating in the TWG meetings and Mekong Tourism Forum in 2024 and 2025, other key GMS Tourism Cooperation activities planned for 2024-2025 is organization of CLV-DTA 2020-2025 Working Group Meeting in July 2024 among Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam and the establishment of a working group for the Development of Triangle Area 2025, Vision 2030.
18. **PRC** updated that domestic tourists reached 4.89 billion by end of 2023 with corresponding tourism receipt of CNY 4.9 trillion (\$680 billion). Both increased by 93% and 141%, respectively, from 2022 data for the same period. In addition, domestic tourism for the 2024 Qingming Festival Holiday (April) was recorded at 119 million tourists and revenue of CNY 54 billion representing an increase of 11.5% and 12.7%, respectively, when compared with 2019 data. In terms of international tourism data, inbound tourists reached 82 million while outbound tourists were at 87.6 million. These are only a little over half of the figures in pre-pandemic 2019 but the recovery trend is showing a lot of improvement.
19. On PRC entry policy updates, it was reported that as of December 1, 2023, a new version of PRC Foreign Permanent Resident ID was officially launched which enabled foreign permanent residents facilitate purchase of travel tickets, hotel bookings and access to communications and financial services. PRC added that as 11 January 2024 five new measures to facilitate entry of foreigners to PRC were implemented including relaxed conditions for foreign nationals applying port visas and as of 23 April 2024, PRC achieved comprehensive mutual visa exemption with 24 countries including some the other 5 Mekong countries, particularly using diplomatic /service passports.
20. PRC also shared about their smart tourism projects like the Beijing Central Axis Application for World Heritage Tour Guide and the Old Town of Lijiang 5G + Smart Tourism Pilot project. On regional cooperation initiative, the Lancang-Mekong Tourist Cities Cooperation Alliance's founding conference is planned to be held in June 2024 in Chongqing, PRC to experience the development of modern new Chongqing for 6 to 8 city members to conduct tourism promotion.
21. **Lao PDR's** international tourist arrivals by end 2023 reached 3.4 million, an increase by 423% compared to 0.65 million visitors in 2022. Thailand, Viet Nam and PRC are still the top 3 tourism markets of Lao PDR. Domestic tourist arrivals reached 1.9 million by end of 2023, still lower than pre-pandemic levels (2016-2019) but has been increasing since 2022.
22. Lao PDR reiterated the bilateral visa exemption they are implementing 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.

23. In terms of national tourism strategies, Lao PDR is guided by the Tourism Development Plan 2021-2025 which envisions to develop, promote and manage cultural, historical and agricultural tourism to a high standard in a green and sustainable manner to enable regional and international integration and become a leading economic driver that will help lift people out of poverty in accordance with the government policies.
24. Highlighted as among smart tourism application in Lao PDR are: QR code translator at the National Museum of Luang Prabang; audio tour with 7 languages at Buddha Park; and LCR payment application to conveniently purchase Lao-China railway ticket.
25. Lao PDR key tourism projects in 2024 include: (i) Visit Laos 2024 where 14 national activities and 65 provincial activities are being prepared for tourists to choose from; (ii) Visa policy facilitation to attract targeted international tourist segments; (iii) enhance cooperation and exchange between public and private sectors of Lao PDR and Thailand by organizing exchange program or consultative meetings on tour package development, tourism management regulations, standards as well as exchange lists of legal tour operators in both countries; (iv) enhanced community-based tourism (CBT) and homestay in cooperation with Thailand for the Ban Nayang Tai CBT in Luang Prabang and Mueng Fueng District, Vientiane; and (v) promote and implement ASEAN and national level tourism standards.
26. **Myanmar** reported that international tourist arrivals reached 1.284 million, an increase of about 450% from 2022 figures. Domestic tourist arrivals also increased from 5.78 million in 2022 to 10.62 million by end of 2023. Tourism spending or revenue had a significant increase from \$249.13 million in 2022 to \$717 million in 2023. Myanmar's top 3 tourist market for 2023 is PRC, Thailand and Korea.
27. In terms of entry policy for international travelers, Myanmar updated that purchase of health insurance and submission of health declaration form is no longer required. 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. Myanmar is implementing its 5-year Tourism Strategy Road Map and their strategies include: (i) sustainable, responsible and inclusive tourism development; (ii) quality tourism assurance; (iii) destination management and development; (iv) destination planning and branding; (v) smart tourism ecosystem and digital infrastructure and (vi) human resource capacity and strengthen skills and knowledge.
28. Among Myanmar's smart tourism initiatives include guest list management system which is a paperless digital initiative; and tourist movement information system to facilitate the group package tours.

29. In terms of GMS tourism cooperation 2023-2024, Myanmar reiterated seeking support for two projects under the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) namely: Publication of the Tourism Promotional Materials and Enhancing the tourism related MSMEs of GMS countries through digitalization.
30. Myanmar also informed of their ongoing project 'Making Tourism more Sustainable on Cultural Heritage Destinations in Post Pandemic (Bagan)' with support from Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Fund 2023. An activity of the said project is a 4-day seminar in June 2024 and GMS countries are invited to participate.
31. **Thailand** presented key tourism statistics for 2023. International tourist arrivals reached 28 million which is an increase of 154% from 2022 level. Domestic tourists were recorded at 249 million which was an increase of 28% from 2022 level. Tourism receipts or revenue was at 1.2 trillion Baht or about 35 billion USD. PRC topped the ranking in terms of number of GMS countries visitors to Thailand and the number has been increasing (across all GMS countries) from 2022 as a sign of being in recovery phase. In terms of Thai tourists visiting GMS countries, Cambodia is the top destination in 2023. Thailand's tourism industry created 4.4 million jobs which is estimated to be 11% of total jobs created in Thailand in 2023.
32. 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 March 2024. Moreover, 74 new flights and 12 new routes were added expanding overall seat capacity of air travel to and from Thailand.
33. Thailand highlighted a very important initiative of Prime Minister Srettha entitled "Ignite Thailand" which comprise of 8 visions to boost Thailand as premier global industrial hub as follows: (i) tourism hub; (ii) wellness and medical hub; (iii) food hub; (iv) aviation hub; (v) logistics hub; (vi) future mobility hub; (vii) digital economy hub; and (viii) financial hub. The initiative adopts a new 'Up Level, Add Story, Create Value' concept that will enhance every step of the tourist journey across all touchpoints. The presented 5 strategies and Soft Power activities to carry this Ignite Thailand Initiative.
34. Updates on Thailand's smart tourism/digital initiatives were the following: (i) Thailand Traveler Safety (TTS) system was launched to provide protection and coverage for foreign tourists; (ii) Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Intelligence Center serves as the data hub accessible to tourism business operators that can provide service, such as policy information on tourism promotion and data analysis, analysis in tourism in Thai; (iii) TAT website called Thailand Remote.work which promotes Thailand as destination for remote workers identifying co-working and living spaces in Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Phang-nga, and Phuket.
35. Thailand also shared key GMS tourism cooperation activities planned in 2024-2025 as follows: (i) Thailand Travel Mart Plus 2024 (5-7 June, Phang-nga, Thailand); (ii) 54th Tourism

Working Group and MTCO Meeting; (iii) Integrative Collaboration Project on Linking Mekong River Tourism; and (iv) ASEAN Self-drive tourism.

36. **Viet Nam** reported that for 2023, international tourist arrivals reached 12 million, 70% recovered from 2019 pre-pandemic level. Three GMS countries namely China, Thailand and Cambodia are among the top 10 tourist source markets of Viet Nam. Domestic tourists in 2023 reached 108 million which exceeded the target of 102 million and represents an increase of 7% when compared to 2022 level.
37. For visa policy updates, a more variable visa policy is being implemented in line with Viet Nam Prime Minister's instruction in February 2024 to continue simplifying entry and exit procedures in the country, first through administrative reforms like automation solution to handle the procedure for a foreigner to enter including facial recognition electronic passport. Secondly, pilot issuing visa on arrival with on-site personnel approval for international tourists. Another is market segment high-end tourists and retirees with high spending ability and offer a variety of new tourism products to suit tourists' demand. Some new Viet Nam tourism products include adventure awareness like golf tourism apart from sea tourism, eco-tourism, culture and heritage tourism.
38. Viet Nam shared its focused tourism areas from the north down to the south, among others were the following: Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Quang Ninh, Ha Noi and Hai Phong, Hue, Da Nang Quang Nam Thanh Hoa, Ho Chi Minh City, Phu Quoc, Binh Thuan and Mekong Delta. Main tourism activities in 2024 which is Viet Nam visit year include: Flower festival in Dong Van Karst Plateau, Carnaval Ha Long 2024, 30 April, Hai Phong Food tour, Hue festival throughout Floating market and Cruise in Mekong Delta.
39. It was highlighted that digital transformation is a key measure that helps develop sustainable tourism in Viet Nam. Several applications were developed at all levels of government for the purpose of online management as well as e-commerce. Each province of Viet Nam has its own website to promote tourism and connect with various websites or with big and small tourism companies.
40. Copies of country reports/presentations are in **Appendix 5**.
41. A morning coffee break followed before proceeding to the next agenda item.

Item 6: ADB Program Updates

42. Mr. Schipani informed of ADB's GMS Tourism Assistance Program including new commitments, ongoing sovereign projects, 2024-2027 pipeline, private sector initiatives and knowledge and innovation. He also provided some GMS Program Updates particularly about the following: broadening engagement with the private sector, 8th GMS Summit of Leaders

indicative deliverables, and the GMS Regional Investment Framework, particularly for the tourism pipeline. A copy of his presentation is in **Appendix 6**.

Discussion

43. The floor was opened for discussion particularly on the following items: 8th GMS Summit of Leaders Tourism deliverables, GMS RIF updating and other issues that the TWG may raise. The following were the comments and responses provided:

- Cambodia appreciated ADB's assistance in preparing the new GMS Tourism Strategy 2030 and supported the proposal to include the new Tourism Strategy as an 8th Summit deliverable for notation. Cambodia will inform and request its top leader regarding the possibility of signing on the side the MOU on the establishment of MTCO as a legal intergovernmental institution.
- Lao PDR will also report to its Leader the proposed 8th Summit tourism deliverables for notation and/or signing for consideration.
- Myanmar indicated that they support the proposal to include the GMS Tourism Strategy 2030 in the 8th Summit deliverables for notation subject to its readiness or state of finalization.
- Viet Nam appreciated ADB's long standing support to GMS tourism development particularly that of Viet Nam. Regarding the new Regional Investment Framework which is now a three-year rolling pipeline of GMS projects, it was observed that the current pipeline of projects is more of single country projects. Given that regional multi-country projects have been proven to be good practice in GMS cooperation, they proposed that more multi-country projects be developed especially investment projects that will enhance infrastructure facilities.
- In response to Viet Nam, ADB highlighted that RIF projects may be a single country project with regional dimensions and spillover benefits to another country, especially those in border areas. Viet Nam's point was well taken and is important. ADB fully supports the idea of including more regional multi-country projects in the GMS RIF. It not only widens the benefits but the financing possibilities as well. In ADB for example, there are additional funding facilities available for projects with regional cooperation dimensions.

Item 7: Report of PRC, Thailand and Lao PDR for the Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF) 2024, TWG-54 and TWG-55 +MTF2025

44. **PRC** gave an update on business arrangements for the Mekong Tourism Forum 2024 kick off the following day with a plenary session and breakout panel discussions in the morning and technical field visits in the afternoon. With the theme *Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel*, they expect to be enriched with evolving landscape of the travel industry

and discover how the industry is adapting post-pandemic, uncover market shifts and learn innovative strategies.

45. **Thailand** informed that the 54th Tourism Working Group Meeting and MTCO Board Meeting will be hosted by them in November this year. The exact dates and venue will be announced soon.
46. **Lao PDR** confirmed that they will host the Mekong Tourism Forum 2025, TWG-55 and MTCO Board Meeting on 6-8 May 2025 in world heritage town of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. A short video was played as an invitation to MTF 2025.
47. The Chair opened the floor for questions but hearing none moved to the next agenda item.

Item 8: Partner Updates

48. Ms. Yaying Li, Deputy Director of the Education, Culture and Tourism Section of **ASEAN-China Centre (ACC)** presented ACC work progress in 2024 particularly those related to GMS Tourism development. ACC highlighted that to explore potential of ASEAN China tourism cooperation, it implemented activities in the first quarter of 2024, namely: (i) Co-hosted the Launching Ceremony of ASEAN-China Tourism & Culture Promotion 2024 (16-20 January, Hainan) where guest GMS countries had discussion on new ideas, industry activities and opportunities for better serving new demands and changes of tourism market to boost tourism traffic; (ii) Organized Familiarization Trip to Cambodia (12 to 17 March 2024) of a delegation of media and social media influencers to strengthen Cambodian tourism in the Chinese market (delegates published articles in various media platforms generated 45 million views); and (iii) participated in the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR (22-27 January) where ACC shared insights, practices and activities in promoting China Tourism cooperation.
49. Also presented are other future activities on ACC flagship projects as follows: (i) co-organizing familiarization trips to ASEAN member states including GMS countries (ii) Chinese language training and capacity building workshop for tourism practitioners of ASEAN (August 2024, online); and (iii) promoting tourism destinations through the China-ASEAN Expo Tourism Exhibition 2024 (September, China), China International Tourism Mart 2024, (November, China) and co-hosting or co-organizing tourism promotion events in China or ASEAN member states).
50. Copy of ACC presentation is **Appendix 8**.
51. Ms. Naoko Fujikawa, Senior Program Manager of Tourism Exchange Team of **ASEAN- Japan Centre (AJC)** first presented an overview of AJC which is dedicated to promoting trade involvement tourism. Then she updated on AJC's GMS tourism development related activities (accomplished and planned) which include: (i) Digital Skills for Green Tourism Enterprises, a 5-day training held in Hue, Viet Nam which was conducted in collaboration with Viet Nam

National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) and ADB that aimed to enhance digital skills for Tourism MSMEs; (ii) Laos Consumer Promotion Event held in Tokyo on 16 March 2024 in support of Lao PDR chairmanship of ASEAN Tourism Forum in 2024; (iii) Model ASEAN plus Japan where 72 select students from about 1000 applicants across ASEAN and Japan were gathered in Jakarta, Indonesia to provide an immersive learning experience about ASEAN and Japan relations; (iii) ASEAN-Japan Young Environmental Leaders Network (AJYELN) which is a dedicated mentorship and targeted training program that has equipped 36 young leaders, aged 15-18, with solutions to the plastic pollution crisis; (iv) Launched AJC's new official website with the theme of building bridges, connecting heart to heart and reflects lively atmospheres and diverse cultures of ASEAN and Japan; (v) Enhancing Digital Skills for Women in Tourism Communities in CLMV, planned for September 2024 in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, it is a training of about 20 participants from CLMVT public and private sector.; (vi) Sustainable Tourism: Best Practices Exchanges and Stakeholder Engagement in ASEAN and Japan, a 2-year project in response to results of ASEAN-Japan Tourism Ministers' special dialogues held in Tokyo in October 2023.

52. Copy of AJC presentation is in **Appendix 9**.

Discussion

53. The Chair appreciated ACC and AJC, and opened the floor for inputs, suggestions and requests to ACC and AJC. The followings were the interventions made:

- Viet Nam appreciated the very good support of ACC and AJC which helped Viet Nam tourism recover after COVID and looked forward to their continued support in the coming years.
- Myanmar thanked ACC and AJC for their assistance and looked forward to future cooperation/assistance especially in the area of human resources and product development as well as travel facilitation and information exchange under the CLMV/T or ACMECS cooperation.
- ADB congratulated ACC and AJC for their excellent initiatives. ADB will continue to cooperate with ACC, AJC and other ASEAN centres as well as with regional knowledge institutions for these capacity building programs on destination management and promoting digital technology adoption by micro-, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises. ADB encouraged the GMS Tourism Working Group to continue collaborating with MTCO and identify these training opportunities.
- MTCO also expressed gratitude to ACC and AJC for their presence in this meeting and looked forward to more collaboration opportunities with both. Particularly grateful to AJC for considering MTCO proposal on the training of trainers of Women in CBT. For ACC, MTCO is very keen to work with any of your activities especially training on China market given NTOs' request for trainings that will help capture the China tourist market in respective countries. GMS NTOs are very keen to have these trainings so that China visitors can be catered well better than before. Doing marketing and promotion in the China market to generate more awareness of GMS countries is also an area of collaboration for ACC's consideration.

54. The Chair opened the floor for any other matter (Agenda Item 9) that the TWG members would like to raise but hearing none, proceeded with his closing remarks.
55. The Chair remarked that the positive progress and gratifying achievements in GMS tourism exchanges and cooperation are attributed to the great support and sustained efforts of all meeting participants. GMS cooperation and exchanges will embrace a new chapter when we meet again in the next working group meeting. He thanked all speakers and delegates for their active participation and attention and declared the meeting close.

FINAL