

ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan: 2011 - 2015

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In 2009, the Special Working Group on ASEAN Tourism Integration made a decision during its 9th Meeting in Phnom Penh to prepare the new ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) for 2011 – 2015 to achieve the overall goals of the ASEAN Community in 2015. The Philippines, Chair of the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force, was responsible for the coordination of the overall ATSP development. A consulting team from the College of Innovation, Thammasat University, Thailand served to support the development of the plan. The plan was developed over a 12-month period in order to allow for sufficient analysis as well as consultations.

The preparation of the strategic plan was a complex process. Stakeholder consultations were held in 10 countries. These consultations which were organized by the National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) in large part reflected the widespread views and interests within the tourism industry. In addition, the consulting team had meetings with the 10 countries and ASEAN Secretariat to present the plan development progress and receive feedback on a regular basis.

The ASEAN Member States are entering a very exciting period of development in the ongoing evolution of the regional community. It is recognized that there are a wide range of issues to be considered within the community. This strategic plan has been designed to complement these priorities while emphasizing tourism as an important element of the community.

There is now increased awareness of the power of tourism as a tool for development and change. Poorly planned and managed tourism can have negative impacts on the host communities and their environment. However, with the increased sophistication of the Member States there is now every possibility that tourism can in fact help deal with many poverty and social issues as well as act as a strong supporter of heritage and natural conservation. In some cases tourism must be seen as transformative in its ability to bring about change and to achieve a wide range of social, cultural and economic goals. This has been well recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization as well as others. It is important therefore that this plan be seen not simply as a document concerned with increasing international arrivals into the region but one that seeks to meet a number of societal goals.

Developing any strategic plan is a time-consuming and complex process. However, the task has been a very positive one given the willingness of all of the major stakeholders to contribute positively to its development. Tourism unlike some other areas of activity is an industry of industries embracing very large multinational corporations and small locally

owned businesses in a wide range of activities. Public-sector tourism planning and development requires the cooperation and input of international organizations, national governments with their many partners impacting tourism right down to the local government level. It also has a ripple effect in a wide number of areas of human endeavor many of them within the informal sector. The plan has attempted to incorporate all of these concerns.

Throughout the planning process a wide number of recommendations were made. Using a consensual process of decision-making priorities were carefully examined and determined. This plan therefore contains but a small part of a larger set of activities and actions that were proposed. Throughout the process the emphasis has been on identifying realistic initiatives that have a high possibility for success.

Given the rapidly changing global environment and especially that of tourism this strategic plan must be seen as a living document. Recent history has shown that any plan must be able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and driving forces. It is stressed that the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) regularly update the plan in order to ensure that it stays relevant as a tool for guiding actions and investment.

The plan provides a balanced set of actions and activities based on a vision that is felt to provide the right level of guidance and direction to the ongoing activities of the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (NTOs). The vision put forward in the strategic plan is as follows:

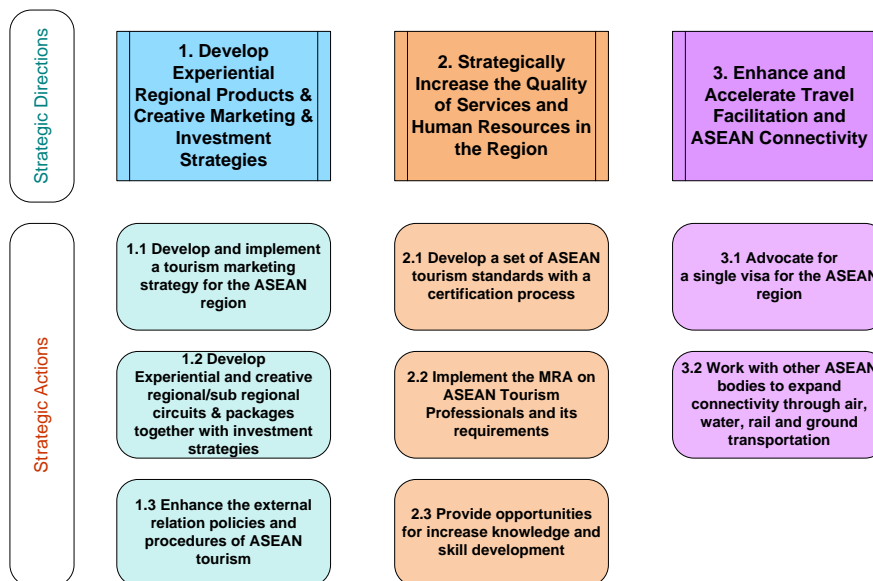
“By 2015, ASEAN will provide an increasing number of visitors to the region with authentic and diverse products, enhanced connectivity, a safe and secure environment, increased quality of services, while at the same time ensuring an increased quality of life and opportunities for residents through responsible and sustainable tourism development by working effectively with a wide range of stakeholders.”

Based on the vision and discussions throughout the ATSP development process the following three strategic directions have been developed as presented in the following diagram. These strategic directions form the basis for establishing competitive and sustainable tourism in the region.

- 1) The development of experiential and innovative regional products and creative marketing and investment strategies
- 2) Increasing the quality of human resources, services and facilities in the region
- 3) Enhancing and accelerating travel facilitation and ASEAN connectivity.

Vision:
 By 2015, ASEAN will provide an increasing number of visitors to the region with authentic and diverse products, enhanced connectivity, a safe and secure environment, increased quality of services, while at the same time ensuring an increased quality of life and opportunities for residents through responsible and sustainable tourism development by working effectively with a wide range of stakeholders.

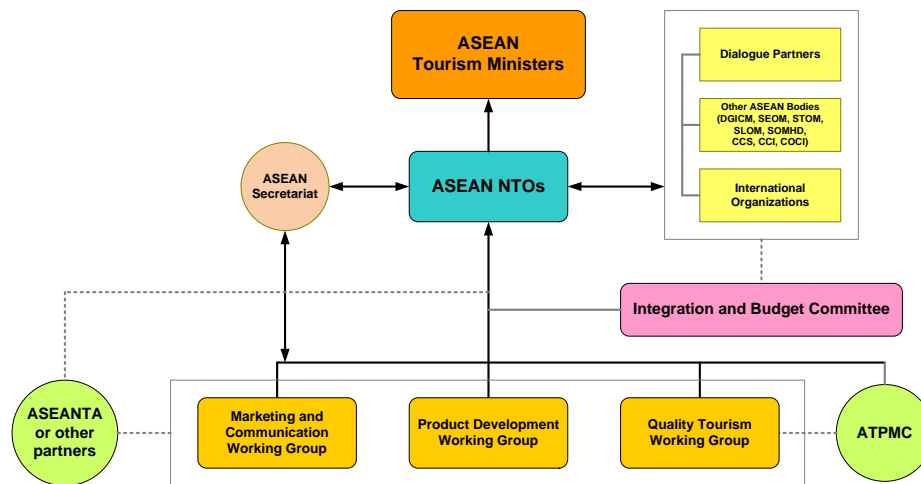
Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Development
 All strategic directions and actions in the ATSP are guided by responsible and sustainable tourism principles recognizing the significant role that tourism plays in poverty reduction, climate change, gender and minority issues, capacity building, cultural preservation and natural conservation.



Regional Vision and Strategic Directions

The strategic directions have been carefully crafted in order to align with the problems and opportunities that have been identified in the planning process together with the need to meet the overall goals of the ASEAN community. Each of these strategic directions has a series of actions and activities. It is clear that there is an urgent need to continue to effectively position the region within the world tourism economy. Without a strong strategic marketing plan together with the necessary resources it will be difficult for the incredible opportunities that now exist within the region to be realized. There can be no doubt that high quality human resources are essential to maintaining the excellent reputation of the region. As visitors become more demanding so must the standards of human resource development continue to develop. An increasingly sophisticated visitor demands high levels of facilities with an increasing concern for responsible and green operations and facilities. Finally and most importantly without a concentrated effort to increase the ease of traveling both into the region and within the region the full potential of Southeast Asia as a tourism destination cannot be realized.

There were recommendations for realigning and restructuring the way that the ASEAN tourism cooperation functions in order to achieve economies of scale and to make best use of scarce resources. Based on a wide ranging consultation and discussion process a new structure is presented in following diagram.



ASEAN Tourism Cooperation Organizational Structure

The major changes to the present structure involved reducing the number of the previous Task Forces and forming three working groups and one committee including:

- Marketing and Communication Working Group
- Product development Working Group
- Quality Tourism Working Group
- Integration and Budget Committee

The working groups will be responsible for the overall guidance of the ASEAN NTOs. Task forces can be set up when required to accomplish a task set by the working groups. The Task Forces will have limited life spans and will be disbanded as soon as the task they have been assigned has been realized. It is hoped that this realignment will enable the ASEAN tourism cooperation to become ever more effective in guiding tourism in the region.

It is important to stress the need for effective cooperation with other stakeholders including present dialogue partners (Japan, Korea, China), other ASEAN bodies, the private sector and also international organizations (PATA, ADB, World Bank, UNESCO, UNESCAP, Mekong Tourism Coordination Office, UNWTO, WWF, Child Wise, and Green Globe etc.).

One of the limiting factors in achieving the full potential of the regional cooperation structure has been the lack of resources. While Member States allocate large amounts of money to develop and promote their products and support that effort with sophisticated bureaucracies the ASEAN NTOs are vastly under resourced. The ASEAN Secretariat is highly efficient and devoted but simply has too few resources to support present activities let alone the directions being put forward in this plan.

Tourism is too important an activity not to receive sufficient funding to help achieve the region's goals and objectives. It is proposed that the present allocation by each Member State be substantially increased in order for the plan to be implemented. It is not realistic to expect that the directions identified above can be accomplished with the present very low rates of funding. Developing this model will require that the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) put into place the legal and regulatory framework and the institutional infrastructure that will allow ASEAN to effectively fund its regional tourism initiatives.

The plan is realistic, action oriented, attuned to the global realities and designed to ensure that the ASEAN region can continue to be a successful tourism destination. It must be remembered that within the Asian region many large countries are devoting significant resources to positioning themselves as competitors to Southeast Asia. The strategic plan if implemented will allow Southeast Asia to be a strong competitor within the global tourism environment.