



MEDIA RELEASE

4 February 2013

ASEAN Tourism Ministers meet to accelerate regional cooperation

A more robust intra-ASEAN travel is seen to happen in the future as the ASEAN tourism leaders convened at this year's ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) in Vientiane, Lao PDR from 18 – 24 January 2013.

The ATF is a cooperative regional effort to promote the South East Asian region as a single destination providing a valuable opportunity for policy makers, administrators, tourism officials, and tourism entrepreneurs to share their views, experiences, and lessons on tourism development.

With an overall theme of, *ASEAN: Hand-in-Hand, Conquering Our Future*, tourism leaders agreed to accelerate the implementation of the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) towards building an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015, and identified new measures for expanding the contribution of tourism in ASEAN economies. The forum brought together over 1,800 delegates including tourism officials from ASEAN and its dialogue partners (China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Russia), buyers, sellers, and media representatives from around the world.

The latest updates on the ATSP as reported during the ministerial meetings listed down the following key strategies: the timely implementation of the ASEAN connectivity work plan to spur seamless access within and beyond ASEAN; the Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) to facilitate mobility of tourism professionals; the agenda on ensuring the quality of tourism through improved services, establishment of security and safety online resources, standardization, and workshops; implementation of the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy and "ASEAN for ASEAN activities"; and the development of an ASEAN Ecotourism Strategic Plan.

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Ramon R. Jimenez, Jr. shared, "We are pleased to see member countries seriously working on the implementation of the various plans and agreements. The focus on marketing the region as one destination demands a lot of internal work in order to stitch together a beautiful tapestry of diverse

tourist attractions, culture, and history. It can be done as each country has been tasked to take the lead to fast track these various measures. The Philippines has started the initiatives on air connectivity, and we will play a major role in pushing the sustainability agenda.”

The ASEAN market contributes only 8.78% of the total visitor arrivals to the Philippines for 2012. Singapore (7th) and Malaysia (10th) remain the only two ASEAN countries that have made it to the top 10 markets of the Philippines. “With improved access, we will be able to grow our share and see significant movement from other ASEAN markets. It is critical to double our efforts at improving air connectivity, but at the same time move decisively to make sea travel a more viable entry alternative,” Tourism Secretary Jimenez said.

In the ATF 2013 Travel Exchange (TRAVEX) exposition held from 22-24 January at the Lao International Trade Exhibition and Convention Centre, the 207 square meter Philippine pavilion was the only structure with a second-level receiving area and was abuzz with business-to-business meetings between buyer and seller delegates. “Rather than have separate booths, having one large pavilion projects better visual impact; facilitates better coordination, networking, and logistics sharing; and more importantly presents a united front,” Assistant Secretary Benito C. Bengzon, Jr. explained.

The private sector contingent included representatives from the following sectors: hotel and resort properties (Amorita Resort, Boracay Regency Group, Bluewater Resorts, Boracay Grand Vista Resort and Spa, BE Resort Mactan Cebu, Crimson Resort and Spa, Hotel H2O, Movenpick Hotel, Pearl Farm, Plantation Bay, Shangri-La Mactan Cebu, Traders Hotel, Waterfront Hotel and Casino), travel and tour companies (Annset Holidays, Baron Travel, Trips Travel, and Uni Orient Travel & Tours), airline company (Philippine Airlines), and congress organizers (Philippine International Convention Center).

The TRAVEX is a trade-only mart that showcases the world's largest contingent of ASEAN destination products and facilitates the region's promotion internationally. The exhibition was participated by almost 500 booths, with 1500 buyers and sellers from across the globe.

The press briefing was also attended by close to 90 media practitioners representing international travel publications, broadcast companies, and news wires. Assistant Secretary Bengzon presented the country's plans and latest developments, and was later joined by Undersecretary Daniel G. Corpuz and Assistant Secretary Rolando Canizal during the open forum. Majority of the questions focused on air connectivity, marketing, and product development.

“The DOT is happy to receive the same enthusiasm from the travel trade for this year’s participation in ATF. We thank our partners for their joint initiatives, and we will continue to seek their support, and hopefully encourage a bigger contingent up to the country’s hosting in 2016,” Tourism Secretary Jimenez enthused.



Philippine Department of Tourism Secretary Ramon R. Jimenez, Jr. (second from left) with other ASEAN Tourism Ministers.



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