



THE 25th MEETING OF ASEAN TOURISM MINISTERS 19 January 2022

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

1. The 25th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers (25th M-ATM) was held on 19 January 2022 in Sihanoukville, Kingdom of Cambodia. The Meeting was chaired by the Kingdom of Cambodia, and the Republic of Indonesia as the Vice-Chairman. The 25th M-ATM was preceded by the Preparatory Meeting of the ASEAN National Tourism Organisations (NTOs) and other Senior Official Meetings with Dialogue Partners.

2. With the theme “ASEAN – A Community of Peace and Shared Future”, the Meeting focused its discussion on the development of the tourism sector since the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic hit the region early 2020. The Meeting shared information on the impact of COVID-19 that affected ASEAN Member States and exchanged views on the way forward for the region to recover. The Meeting noted that based on the preliminary figures of 2021, the tourism sector continued to suffer declines in tourism receipts by approximately 94.33 per cent¹ and a sharp decline in international arrivals by approximately 90.03 per cent², with average hotel rate occupancy of 27.45 per cent³ even as ASEAN Member States vaccination programme has enabled domestic travel.

3. Despite the challenges posed in 2021, the Meeting commended the active role of the ASEAN National Tourism Organisations (NTOs) and the Committees and Working Groups in ensuring that the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP) 2016-2025 and other key plans are implemented according to the adjusted timeline. The Meeting was pleased to note that the tourism sector has adapted and pivoted to new business models so as to ready itself to bounce back strongly to recapture growth. In this regard, the Meeting highlighted the importance of expediting the implementation of the Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism, which was endorsed in September 2021. The Meeting encouraged the ASEAN NTOs and its subsidiary bodies to continue strengthening cooperation and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders including other ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, the private sector, ASEAN Dialogue/Sectoral Dialogue/Development Partners and the community in order to contribute towards the recovery of the tourism sector more comprehensively.

Reopening ASEAN Tourism

4. The Meeting agreed to announcing the gradual reopening of ASEAN Tourism during the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) 2022 held on 19 January 2022 in Preah Sihanouk city and congratulated the Chair of the 25th M-ATM for guiding the development of the Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan for ASEAN Tourism and the ASEAN Guidelines on Hygiene and Safety for Professionals and Communities in the Tourism Industry. The Meeting noted that the progressive resumption of travel, in accordance with each ASEAN Member State’s current travel policies and regulation, and COVID-19 situation, is subject to the respective ASEAN

¹ Based on available data from 8 ASEAN Member States

² Based on available data from 9 ASEAN Member States

³ Based on available data from 9 ASEAN Member States

Member States' health protocol, current travel policies and regulations and current COVID developments. The Meeting emphasised the special focus on supporting tourism Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and promoting equal opportunities in order to enhance jobs for local communities, particularly for women, youth, minorities as well as vulnerable groups. The Meeting also highlighted the need to take advantage of digital technology to boost tourism workers' capacity and capability through reskilling and upskilling so as to ensure relevancy for a post pandemic landscape.

5. The Meeting endorsed the outcome of the finalisation of the updating and reviewing of ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals (ACCSTP) under the ASEAN MRA-TP Work Plan 2019-2023.

6. The Meeting emphasised the need to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration across the ASEAN Community Pillars to effectively and comprehensively address recovery actions and programmes, as well as harmonise policies and guidelines to speed up tourism recovery and stimulate growth. In this regard, the Meeting tasked the ASEAN NTOs to further explore possible contribution to the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan, which was adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 37th ASEAN Summit in November 2020.

7. The Meeting endorsed the ASEAN Guidelines on Hygiene and Safety for Professionals and the Communities in the Tourism Industry, which covers 8 tourism and tourism-related sectors, namely, accommodation, restaurants, facilities, spa and wellness, ecotourism/community-based tourism, travel and tour operation, theme parks and convention centres. The Meeting also endorsed the ASEAN Safe Travel Stamp, which may be utilised by tourism industry players to assure travelers of hygiene and safety standards. In this regard, the Meeting encouraged ASEAN Member States to develop clear policies and regulations to implement the Guidelines and application of the safe travel stamp to raise the competitiveness and attractiveness of ASEAN as a preferred tourism destination. The Meeting also expressed its appreciation to Australia who supported the development of the Guidelines through the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Programme Phase II.

8. The Meeting endorsed the second edition of ASEAN Community-Based Tourism Standard, and strongly encouraged ASEAN Member States to consider applying the Standard to their respective community-based tourism/eco-tourism sectors in order to provide consistent benchmarks.

9. The Meeting endorsed the Guidelines on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for ASEAN Tourism Professionals under the work plans of the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals, and encouraged ASEAN Member States to apply the RPL mechanism where relevant, to increase the number of certified tourism professionals in the region.

10. The Meeting endorsed the Phnom Penh Declaration on Transforming ASEAN Tourism to be submitted to the 40th ASEAN Summit for adoption.

11. The Meeting commended the work of the Ad Hoc Task Force on the Operationalisation of the ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework (ATCAF) and also looked forward to the operationalisation of ATCAF following its adoption by the 29th Meeting of the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC) on 2 August 2021. The Meeting appreciates ATCAF, which serves as a foundation for expanding beyond essential business and official travels, and therefore, tasked the ASEAN NTOs to build on this framework and adapt it for leisure travel.

Positioning ASEAN as a Single Tourism Destination by 2025

12. The Meeting took note of the progress of the seven strategic action programmes under the updated ATSP 2016-2025, and welcomed the recommendations to reprioritise the implementation of the ATSP 2016-2025 following the recent development and trends in the region. The identified new priority programmes include: (i) adoption of measures and initiatives to support the digitisation of ASEAN Tourism; (ii) strengthening the data and information network; and (iii) activities to promote connectivity and travel facilitation to and within the ASEAN.

13. The Meeting encouraged ASEAN Member States, along with the private sector, to strengthen collaboration in marketing and promoting the region's tourism offerings, especially as travel resumes globally. In view of this, the Meeting applauded the launch of ASEAN's new Visit Southeast Asia tourism brand through a refreshed logo and tagline "A Destination for Every Dream", to capture the warmth, resilience and sense of fun and adventure that are emblematic of the Southeast Asia region and peoples. Through this new branding, ASEAN will continue to market Southeast Asia as a single destination, and raise awareness of the region's incredible diversity of offerings that travellers could rediscover once borders reopen around the world

14. The Meeting recognised that the hiatus in cruise-related activities is an opportunity to bring together relevant agencies to work towards a sustainable recovery of the cruise sector which brings clear benefits to destinations across ASEAN. ASEAN Tourism has been working closely with ASEAN Member States to promote the adoption of a consistent, harmonised safe cruise standard across all Southeast Asian ports, which is critical for safe resumption of ports-of-call in the region. The Meeting further acknowledged the Cruise Tourism Work Plan 2022 that includes the joint ASEAN marketing initiatives at the annual Seatrade Cruise Global 2022 in Miami, United States.

15. The Meeting noted the progress of the Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) Work Plan 2019-2023, and encouraged the ASEAN NTOs to place emphasis on implementing activities that will enhance the capacity and capability of the Tourism Professionals through various capacity building projects and programmes. The Meeting noted the progress of the signing of the Protocol to Amend the MRA-TP and looked forward to the ratification of the Protocol at the earliest time so as to enable the further inclusion of the ASEAN Competency Standards for Spa Professionals into the MRA-TP.

16. The Meeting noted the Report on the Viability Study of the Regional Secretariat to Implement the MRA-TP and its recommendations contained therein prepared by the MRA-TP Consultant. The Meeting took note of the development progress of Competency Standards and toolboxes for the ASEAN Competency Standards for MICE and Event Professionals, which cover 32 job titles with 86 New Competencies Standard (55 MICE and 31 Event). The Meeting also noted that in conjunction with the 10th anniversary of the MRA-TP, the ASEAN NTOs are engaging the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) to undertake a Comprehensive Study on the Implementation of the MRA-TP: Enhanced Mechanism for Tourism Professionals with the key objective to ensure that the MRA-TP is relevant in view of the shifting trends and recent global developments in the tourism industry. In this connection, the Meeting looked forward to the assessment and recommendations of the Comprehensive Study by the end of 2022 as a Priority Economic Deliverable of Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022.

17. With regard to the implementation of the Pakse Declaration on ASEAN Roadmap for Strategic Development of Ecotourism Clusters and Tourism Corridors, the Meeting welcomed the follow-up activities to implement the declaration which aims to provide equitable distribution of tourism benefits to emerging and rural tourism destinations, among others.

Enhancing ASEAN Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism

18. The Meeting reiterated that it is in the reopening phase that the foundations of the sustainable tourism and green economy shall be laid, and that it should take priority right after preserving lives and livelihoods, and highlighted the importance of efforts to foster sustainability and green growth as ASEAN shifts its policy focus towards a resilient, competitive, resource efficient, inclusive and carbon-neutral tourism sector.

19. The Meeting took note of the progress of the implementation of the three strategic action programmes to ensure that ASEAN tourism is sustainable and inclusive, namely in the following areas: (i) upgrade local communities and public-private sector participation in the tourism value chain; (ii) ensure safety and security, prioritise protection and management of heritage sites; and (iii) increase responsiveness to environmental protection and climate change. The Meeting further encouraged the ASEAN Member States to actively engage their local stakeholders, including the private sector at the community level to contribute to the development of tourism in the region.

20. The Meeting commended the work towards the development of a study on sustainable tourism in ASEAN within the context of a post-pandemic recovery, through the support of ERIA. The Meeting further noted that the Study provides a systematic approach towards the development of a framework and list of policy recommendations to promote sustainable tourism in the region. The framework is expected to fill the knowledge gap and raise awareness among ASEAN Member States to better understand the importance of sustainability in the tourism sector, particularly in implementing a common framework or approach. In this regard, the Meeting also welcomed the inclusion of the Framework on Sustainable Tourism Development in ASEAN in Post-COVID-19 Era as a Priority Economic Deliverable of Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022.

21. The Meeting also noted the outcomes of the Special Video Conferences of the ASEAN Tourism Crisis Communication Team (ATCCT) on COVID-19 held on 24 June 2021, particularly the positive reception to the dedicated COVID-19 webpage on the ASEAN Tourism website, which provides updates on travel restrictions and quarantine information.

22. The Meeting recalled the Phnom Penh Declaration on a More Sustainable, Inclusive, and Resilient ASEAN Tourism that was adopted in 2021 as the collective commitment for closer collaboration between ASEAN Member States as well as with relevant international organisations and tourism stakeholders to achieve a sustainable, inclusive and resilient ASEAN Tourism sector, including the use of technology solutions to support sustainable tourism in ASEAN. In conjunction with this, the Meeting also endorsed the Phnom Penh Declaration on Transforming ASEAN Tourism with a view to reinforce regional efforts in restoring and building confidence for travel resumption as well as to promote the ASEAN Tourism transformation especially towards inclusivity and fair and equal competition.
