



VALUE

Tourism Sector Activity

Achievement Highlights

VALUE Communications

February 2011

Highlights from two and a half years of activity and achievements within ASEAN's priority travel & tourism sector by the USAID | RDMA-funded VALUE Project.

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Introduction

In January 2011, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Tourism Ministers adopted the *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP): 2011-2015*, a five-year roadmap setting out the steps towards achieving more efficient, effective, and sustainable cooperation in regional tourism development, knowledge management, and marketing.

Their private-sector counterparts, the ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA), also took ownership of a new, more intuitive destination brand, *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth*, supported by a state-of-the-art consumer marketing website at www.SoutheastAsia.org. With these assets under ASEANTA control, the private sector can now more meaningfully participate in regional tourism marketing.

The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)'s Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) now boasts a more dynamic website, www.ExploreMekong.org, which supports the established regional destination brand *Explore Mekong*. It also enjoys better organized resources on its trade and development website, www.MekongTourism.org as well as a resurrected Mekong Tourism Forum, which brings public- and private-sector stakeholders together on an annual basis.

All of this and more was achieved over two-and-a-half years of diligent work within ASEAN's tourism sector by Task Order 4 (the VALUE Project¹), of the USAID-US State Department ADVANCE Program. The adoption of the ATSP by the ASEAN Tourism Ministers signaled the successful conclusion of the VALUE Project's tourism sector activity.



The White Sand Dunes at Mui Ne, Vietnam by "chookia"; the winning photograph from the hugely successful Southeast Asia Travel Photography and Writing Awards, which was a major element of the three-month launch campaign for *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* and www.SoutheastAsia.org.

¹ Up until July 2010, the VALUE Project was known as the ASEAN Competitiveness Enhancement (ACE) Project

Tourism

The VALUE Project's first quarter, March-June 2008, concentrated on the sectors and supply chains to be the focus of Project. In March 2008, a Nathan Associates team, working in the firm's Arlington, VA headquarters and supported by J.E. Austin staff, performed a desk study based on a set of four criteria: overall growth potential; potential for enhanced intra-ASEAN trade linkages; presence of dynamic transnational firms in the sector; and potential for link-building for the least-developed ASEAN economies. Five sectors – automotive, tourism, rubber-based products, health care products/services and electronics – passed the screen and were designated for a second stage of intensive field-based scrutiny.

A Nathan Associates Supply Chain Assessment Team arrived in Bangkok on March 28, 2008 to begin intensive field-based research. On the basis of insights gained, the Team proposed tourism – along with the pre-selected textiles & apparel sector – as the target for VALUE Project engagement. Automotive was proposed as a third reserve sector for Project attention. Tourism was by far the clear leader across the all selection criteria.

On June 13, 2008 the VALUE team led by newly-appointed Chief of Party (COP) R. J. Gurley presented the findings of the evaluation to USAID. The CTO (Mr. Chanyut Nitikitpaiboon at the time) approved VALUE's recommendation to move forward with tourism.

VALUE Project then conducted an initial sector evaluation in which it identified four areas of potential Project support in the tourism sector:

1. Collaboration with and support for the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office
2. Work force development
3. SME development
4. Regional and National Association development

To refine those areas, VALUE started work on a detailed assessment of the tourism sector to confirm identified constraints, outline regional initiatives, identify key strategy streams, and recommend specific project interventions. In July 2008, VALUE hired Regional Tourism Expert Mr. Peter Semone to undertake this assessment and begin initial work planning for the sector.

In July and August 2008, Mr. Gurley and Mr. Semone met with representatives of the ASEAN national tourism organizations (NTOs) that make up the six ASEAN working groups on tourism, as well as with Mr. Eddy Kresmeidi, the ASEAN Tourism Task Force Secretary at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, and Mr. Felix Cruz, President of ASEANTA. They also met Mr. Alfred Perdiguero, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s regional tourism officer. In late August, Mr. Gurley met with Ms. Christine Jacquemin, Project Coordinator of the MTCO, and later that year with the MTCO's newly-appointed Executive Director Mr. Mason Florence, to discuss potential VALUE support for the Office.

In virtually all the meetings undertaken during the detailed sector assessment, potential counterparts identified website development, content management, knowledge management, and marketing as top priorities for technical assistance. A quick review of the existing regional tourism websites and marketing campaigns confirmed the need for improvement in these areas.

In early November 2008, VALUE submitted its first draft tourism activity proposal to USAID, outlining recommended areas of intervention at regional, sub-regional, and national levels. VALUE recommended 20 specific interventions in four core themes: destination branding and marketing, knowledge management, human resource development, and tourism product development. The major interventions proposed were at the ASEAN level.

VALUE also sent the draft proposal to the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force, ASEANTA, and USAID/Cambodia to invite their feedback. USAID/Cambodia indicated that technical assistance to the Government of Cambodia should be through the bi-lateral USAID program. Therefore, VALUE dropped national-level assistance from the proposal.

By the end of 2008, the VALUE scope of work in the tourism sector had taken shape, as follows:

I. Regional (ASEAN) Activities

Activity I – Destination Branding and Marketing

Activity II – Knowledge Management

Activity III – ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan: 2011-2015 (added at the ASEAN NTOs' request in July 2009)

II. Sub-regional (Greater Mekong Sub-region) Activities

Activity I – Destination Marketing

Activity II – Knowledge Management

The rest of this report will be organized along these lines.

ASEAN Tourism

ASEAN Activity I – Destination Branding and Marketing

‘Feel the Warmth’ Alliance Prepares Private Sector for Five-Year Plan

While the ASEAN Tourism Ministers were formally adopting the USAID-sponsored five-year strategic plan at the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2011, in Phnom Penh, January 2011, ASEANTA unveiled its plans for the *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* tourism brand and website.

The Association officially announced its partnership with meta-search firm Wego to commercialize SoutheastAsia.org and manage the *feel the warmth* campaign. The alliance brings together ASEANTA’s travel & tourism industry network and respected imprimatur with Wego’s extensive ecommerce experience. It is expected to generate the revenues required to ensure the long-term sustainability of the new brand and website.



Southeast Asia: the brand.

Both *feel the warmth* and SoutheastAsia.org were developed for ASEANTA by the VALUE Project, in close consultation with the ASEAN NTOs. Wego and VALUE jointly developed the website’s travel search and trip planner functionality as part of a Global Development Alliance with ASEANTA.

ASEANTA is keen to leverage its new assets to build a working relationship with the NTOs. After thanking USAID and VALUE for successfully initiating and launching the new brand and website, ASEANTA Secretary-General Mr. Mohd Ilyas Zainol Abidin said: “Now that we have taken over, we would like to continue working with the ASEAN NTOs and see the tagline used more regularly.”

The Association’s newly-elected President Ms. Yanti Sukamdani is sure *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* has a bright future. “We will discuss funding with the ASEAN NTOs at the next ASEANTA meeting in Bangkok in March [2011],” she said.

The ATSP adopted by the ASEAN Tourism Ministers at the 2011 Forum recommends greater participation by the private sector in the marketing and promotion of the ASEAN region. ASEANTA’s new tourism brand and website offers a commercially viable platform upon which it can more meaningfully participate in regional marketing.



Southeast Asia: the website.

Building the Brand and Website

In October 2008, VALUE COP received a letter of support from ASEANTA President Mr. Felix Cruz for VALUE's draft tourism activity proposal, which recommended a new regional tourism marketing campaign and website using "Southeast Asia" as the destination brand and "ASEAN" as the parent brand and sponsor. Mr. Gurley subsequently accepted Mr. Cruz's invitation to speak at an ASEANTA Board Meeting in Macau. The Board unanimously agreed to collaborate with the Project.

Mr. Cruz joined Mr. Gurley at the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force meeting in Kuching, Malaysia in November 2008 to express ASEANTA's support for VALUE's tourism activity. The meeting was attended by senior representatives of the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (NTOs). Task Force Chairman Mr. Oscar Palabyab, also the Philippines' Deputy Undersecretary of Tourism, expressed his support for the Project. With endorsements from ASEANTA and the Task Force Chairman, the NTOs voted to support VALUE and ASEANTA's tourism destination branding and marketing program.

Mr. Gurley immediately convened a meeting between Mr. Cruz, Mr. Palabyab, and ASEAN Tourism Secretary Mr. Eddy Kresmeidi to discuss next steps for obtaining ASEAN's official support for VALUE's proposal. It was determined that ASEANTA, the ASEAN NTOs, and VALUE would sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and hold a press conference at the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) in Hanoi, Vietnam, January 2009. The counterparts also determined how to get the NTOs' support for the activity included in the ASEAN Tourism Ministers' Statement at the event.

On January 6, 2009 at the ATF in Hanoi, Mr. Gurley presented VALUE's work plan to the ASEAN NTOs, seeking their support. The meeting was co-chaired by Vietnam's Vice Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr. Tran Chien Thang, in his capacity as Chairman of the NTOs, and ASEAN Deputy Secretary General, Mr. Nicholas Tandi Dammen. The meeting concluded with Mr. Dammen's agreement that the NTOs would use "Southeast Asia" as the destination brand and "ASEAN" as the sponsor or parent brand of the campaign. It was agreed that Mr. Tran Chien Thang would formally witness the MOU between ACE and ASEANTA.

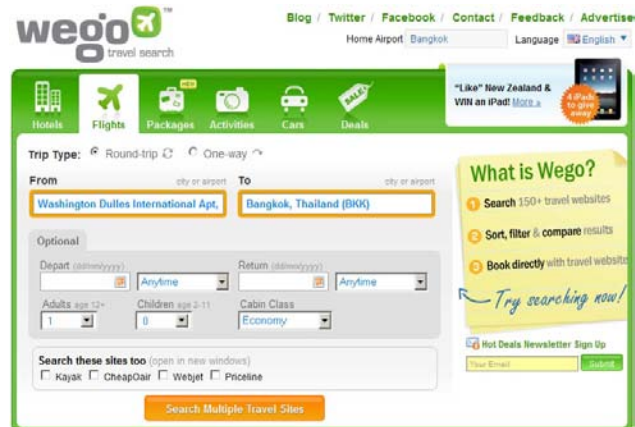


VALUE COP R.J. Gurley (left) shakes hands with ASEANTA Chair Felix Cruz at the MOU signing ceremony in Hanoi, Vietnam January 10, 2009. Behind are (L-R) ASEAN Cruise Task Force Chair Kevin Leong; ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force Chair Oscar Palabyab; Vietnam Vice Minister of Culture, Sports & Tourism Tran Chien Thang; USAID Vietnam Mission Director Frank Donovan; VALUE's David Gillbanks; and ASEANTA's Ikhwan Al-Rashid Abdul Rahman.

On January 9, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers issued their Press Statement, which included an endorsement of the VALUE/ASEANTA MOU. The next day, Mr. Gurley and Mr. Cruz signed a MOU that outlined how VALUE and ASEANTA would work together to design and launch a new branding and marketing campaign for regional tourism. Mr. Thang signed the MOU as a witness in his capacity as the Chairman of the ASEAN NTOs, as did USAID/Vietnam Mission Director Mr. Frank Donovan. Also on stage participating were Mr. Dammen, Mr. Palabyab, and Mr. Kevin Leong, Chairman of the ASEAN Cruise Working Group. The MOU signing and press conference, during which ASEAN Deputy Secretary General Dammen publicly expressed the ASEAN Secretariat's support for the campaign, generated significant media coverage.

Earlier, in November 2008, VALUE's Knowledge Management & Communications Specialist Mr. David Gillbanks met with Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Vice President-Operations Michael Yates to discuss opportunities for collaboration. A career consultant, Mr. Yates expressed interest in working with the VALUE project to develop the *ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy & Plan*. His strong background in marketing, branding, and development in the tourism industry made him an excellent candidate. With Mr. Yates' contract with PATA at an end in December 2008, and the MOU with ASEANTA signed at the ATF in January 2009, VALUE engaged Mr. Yates to research a new regional tourism brand and marketing plan in consultation with ASEAN and ASEANTA.

Soon after ATF, VALUE commenced discussions with Wego.com, a tourism meta-search firm based in Singapore, to include its airlines, hotels, tours and other online booking services on a new website that would serve as the hub of the new marketing campaign. Positioned as Asia Pacific’s leading travel meta-search portal, Wego.com had more Southeast Asian content than its competitors based outside the region. It was determined that Wego’s technology would solve the major problem of the older Visit ASEAN Pass campaign. Not only was there limited distribution of the Visit ASEAN Pass via travel agents, consumers were also unable to book it online. Wego agreed to send representation to the ASEANTA Board meeting in Pattaya, Thailand in April 2009, to support VALUE’s presentation.



Wego’s meta-search technology promised supplier-neutral access to a wealth of Southeast Asian travel

By the end of March 2009, Mr. Yates and the Project had completed a draft *ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategy & Plan* centered on a new brand *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth*. The proposed brand and strategy was based on desk study of secondary research, plus primary research consisting of industry surveys and interviews with stakeholders throughout the region conducted by Mr. Yates. The document was circulated among ASEANTA’s board members and ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force members in advance of their respective April meetings.

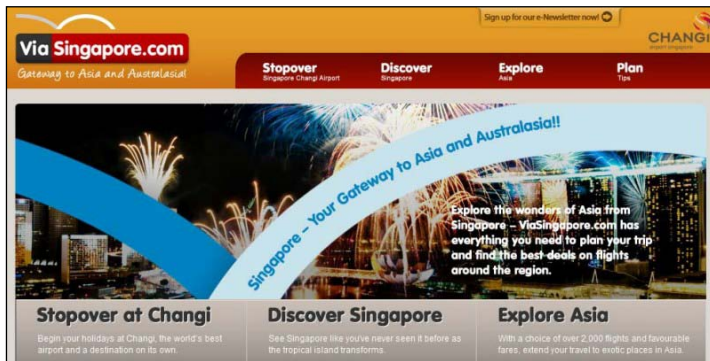
On April 25, Mr. Yates and Mr. Gurley presented the draft Plan to the ASEANTA Board. Mr. Ross Veitch, Chief Product Officer of Wego.com, and Mr. Krismeidi also participated. ASEANTA expressed strong support for the draft strategy. Three days later, Mr. Gurley and Mr. Yates presented the draft to the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force at its meeting in Myanmar. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Palabyab. The Task Force was impressed with how much work had been done in developing the strategy since the ATF in January, and more importantly, with the result. The Task Force gave the strategy a positive reception and review.

Both ASEANTA and ASEAN Task Force liked the proposed brand, *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth*. Everyone felt it captured the warmth of Southeast Asia’s people, hospitality, culture, and climate. They also liked Wego’s web technology proposal. Based on comments from both groups, Mr. Yates revised and finalized the Plan by June 2009.

VALUE sponsored an online tournament to develop a new logo for the *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* brand. VALUE received 369 submissions, from which five were shortlisted and presented to ASEANTA members and the NTOs for a vote. A branding professional then developed full brand guidelines for the winning logo—a sun image with 10 rays representing the 10 ASEAN countries.

On July 25, 2009, Mr. Gurley gave a progress report to the ASEANTA Board, which unanimously voted for the implementation of VALUE’s new marketing strategy and plan. At the center of the endorsed plan was SoutheastAsia.org, a consumer marketing website equipped with Wego’s meta-

search technology and an integrated interactive map and travel planner that would allow consumers to research, plan, and book multi-destination trips within the region.



SoutheastAsia.org RFP winner Qais Consulting had developed the award-winning ViaSingapore.com.

In August 2009, VALUE issued a request for proposals to several web development firms. By September, ACE had selected and contracted Singapore-based Qais Consulting to build SoutheastAsia.org. Qais had previous experience integrating Wego technology into highly successful websites, such as Changi Airport's ViaSingapore.com, which won a Webby honor.

Content development for SoutheastAsia.org came along briskly in the months leading up to the January 2010 soft launch and March 2010 campaign launch. In November 2009, VALUE Marketing & Content Manager Scott Holmes met with representatives of Lonely Planet to discuss potential cooperation on the SoutheastAsia.org website. The parties signed an agreement under which Lonely Planet would provide SoutheastAsia.org with country profiles for all ten Southeast Asian destinations plus points of interest content for some 8,000 attractions and activities across the region. Mr. Holmes also managed a content budget with which he was able to source original contributions from professional freelance travel writers.

Meanwhile VALUE brokered a technology partnership and Global Development Alliance (GDA) between ASEANTA and Wego. The GDA covered the further development of Wego technology to add trip planning and interactive map functionality specifically for SoutheastAsia.org. Wego would contribute half of the trip planner's development costs as in-kind support. The firm would also host and maintain SoutheastAsia.org on its state-of-the-art servers. ASEANTA and Wego would split the click-through and advertising revenue generated via the trip planner technology. USAID and VALUE received significant press coverage following the official announcement of the GDA in December 2009. The press release was picked up and run by more than 20 print and online publications both regionally and globally in early 2010. On January 7, 2010 the *Bangkok Post* ran a feature article on the VALUE Tourism Activity based on an interview with Mr. Gurley.



L-R: VALUE Project COP R. J. Gurley, Wego CEO Martin Symes, and ASEANTA Chairman Felix Cruz sealed a Global Development Alliance (GDA).

Launching the Brand and Website

In December 2009, after a competitive selection process, VALUE signed an agreement with Qais Consulting, the site developer, to manage the US\$250,000 three-month launch marketing campaign for SoutheastAsia.org. The campaign would be activated during the global launch of the new brand and website at ITB Berlin – the world’s biggest travel trade show – which would take place March 10-14, 2010. VALUE also signed agreements with several merchandise firms to develop collateral for distribution at ATF Brunei in January 2010 and at ITB. To handle media relations and media events for *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth*, VALUE also engaged a Bangkok-based tourism public relations firm, ScottAsia Communications.

At an ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force meeting in the lead up to ATF, ASEANTA President Felix Cruz gave a progress report on the partnership between VALUE and ASEANTA. He also formally requested to meet with the ASEAN Tourism Ministers to secure their endorsement for the new strategy. The Task Force agreed to include ASEANTA on the Ministers’ agenda at ATF. Mr. Palabyab, on behalf of the Philippines Department of Tourism, also offered *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* free booth space at ITB Berlin to support the launch of the consumer marketing campaign.

On January 26, 2010 at ATF in Brunei Darussalam, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers announced their official support for the new campaign. This followed Mr. Cruz’s presentation to them during a closed-door meeting earlier in the week. The next day, ASEANTA and VALUE soft-launched the new *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* brand and website. More than 40 regional and international trade journalists attended the press conference. An American journalist stated that she had spent the morning navigating the website and proclaimed it “fantastic”. The brand and website received a tremendous amount of positive news coverage following the press conference.



L-R: VALUE COP R. J. Gurley, ASEANTA President Felix Cruz; and CAT CEO Rohizam Md Yusoff signed a Global Development Alliance (GDA) at ITB Berlin, March 2010.

There are thousands of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the ASEAN tourism industry. Only a small number have an online presence. As the Wego meta-search technology generally provides listings for companies with established web strategies, VALUE investigated approaches and platforms that would allow smaller travel agents with no existing online presence to target SoutheastAsia.org web traffic. VALUE met with the Malaysian-based Creative Advances Technology (CAT) about including its Standard Online Tourism Architecture

(SOTA) platform into the SoutheastAsia.org website. SOTA offers a cost-effective means for travel & tourism SMEs to promote themselves on the internet and receive online bookings. VALUE held discussions between ASEANTA, CAT, and Wego to ensure that all of SOTA’s tourism SMEs will be searchable on SoutheastAsia.org and to establish a viable cost and revenue-sharing structure.

During the second week of March 2010, ACE, ASEANTA, and ASEAN jointly launched the new *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* consumer marketing campaign and the SoutheastAsia.org website at ITB Berlin—the world largest travel and tourism trade show. Philippines Undersecretary of Tourism Mr. Edu Jarke officially launched the campaign and website on behalf of the ASEAN NTOs; ASEANTA, CAT, and VALUE signed a GDA; Mr. Gurley announced the start of the online marketing campaign; and ASEANTA President Felix Cruz introduced the Southeast Asia Travel Photography and Writing Awards contest.

Arguably the most successful element of the launch campaign, the Southeast Asia Travel Photography and Writing Awards, delivered about three quarters of all “page views” on the website during the first three months. The Awards had two objectives: to raise awareness of *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* and SoutheastAsia.org, and deliver a deep pool of Southeast Asia-related articles and images to supplement the website’s professionally-produced content. By the end of the campaign, the Awards had generated 2,916 photo entries and 154 article submissions, many of which were of a very high standard.



[Ctrl] + [left mouse click] to see the monthly and overall winners of the Travel Photography and Writing Awards

The marketing campaign for *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* finished at the end of June. Google Analytics indicated a positive growth during the three-month campaign, which predictably fell away after the campaign ended. The exercise was valuable in demonstrating to ASEANTA and the ASEAN NTOs what was possible for the new brand. VALUE set up Twitter and Facebook pages for the campaign. At the end of June 2010, the Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/wwwSoutheastAsiaorg/112977028713664> had 554 “likes”, and the Twitter account at <http://twitter.com/warmthofseasia> had 139 “followers”. During the three-month campaign, Facebook had become the largest single source of visitor traffic to SoutheastAsia.org; from links posted on the Facebook page, and especially as Award contestants encouraged their friends to vote. Visitors referred from Facebook also stayed longer on the website and visited more pages, on average, than visitors from most other sources.

Throughout the launch phase and in the months following, VALUE continued to upgrade, optimize and enhance SoutheastAsia.org and to push messages out to SoutheastAsia.org’s web community onsite and via online social networks. The independent seomoz.org credits the new Southeast Asia tourism website with a higher “domain authority” score than the much older ASEAN tourism website at asean-tourism.com. Domain authority measures the number of quality pages that link to a site, and the ways in which they do so. Authority and trust in a domain is an important factor in search engine rankings. As a result, the site consistently ranks in the top five listings of organic Google searches for “Southeast Asia” and similar. The older asean-tourism.com, on the other hand, was unsighted. In May 2010, VALUE added a “Travel Deals” section to SoutheastAsia.org. This consolidates the region-wide product offerings of CAT’s SOTA members, and offers an opportunity to sell banner space, thus broadening the potential revenue source for ASEANTA.

For much of third quarter 2010, VALUE focused on the transition and sustainability plan for the *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* brand and website. The VALUE team determined that direct private-sector involvement in commercializing the campaign and website was more likely to deliver a sustainable outcome for ASEANTA, with or without NTOs' financial or in-kind support. The VALUE COP held discussions with ASEANTA, CAT, Qais, and Wego.com about a plan under which ASEANTA would partner with one or more of these companies. CAT, Qais, and Wego all presented proposals for commercializing and managing the SoutheastAsia.org website in partnership with ASEANTA. On October 30, 2010 the ASEANTA board selected Singapore-based Wego as its commercial partner. ASEANTA will continue to work with CAT to ensure small- and medium-sized travel agents feature on the website. VALUE considers this an optimal solution for a smooth, successful, and sustainable transition of VALUE's tourism activity to ASEANTA.

In November 2010, VALUE engaged VERO PR, a public relations firm with an office in Phnom Penh, to produce *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* posters and banners and coordinate their display and distribution at ATF 2011 in Cambodia. Representing VALUE's final activity in the tourism sector, the ATF 2011 campaign's simple objective was to reinforce *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* as "ASEAN's new tourism brand". As host of the event, the Cambodia Ministry of Tourism included the *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* logo on the ATF 2011 website www.atfcambodia.com as well as posters, banners, collateral, and merchandise distributed at the event. To be hosted by Indonesia, the ATF 2012 website www.atfindonesia.com also features the new brand.



VALUE produced banners and delegate bag inserts for the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2011 to reinforce the message among industry stakeholders that *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* is ASEAN's new tourism brand.

Thus VALUE concluded its ASEAN destination branding and marketing activity confident that:-

- 1) ASEANTA is equipped with the appropriate assets and commercial partnerships to more meaningfully work with the ASEAN NTOs on regional marketing initiatives, and
- 2) ASEAN NTOs will more likely partner with its private-sector counterparts at ASEANTA on regional marketing initiatives.

ASEAN Activity II – Knowledge Management

NTOs Endorse VALUE Knowledge Management Plan

The development and launch of SoutheastAsia.org provides the ASEAN tourism industry—ASEANTA and the ASEAN NTOs working together—a common platform to market to consumers. Previously, ASEAN’s tourism marketing websites included both trade and government-related content alongside consumer-oriented content, which confused target audiences. And updates to the tourism section of the ASEAN Secretariat website were sporadic at best. Similarly, ASEANTA’s website included consumer-oriented content alongside information for its industry members. Now with a dedicated consumer marketing website managed by commercial partners under ASEANTA and ASEAN NTO guidance, ASEANTA can focus on serving the needs of its trade members on ASEANTA.org, while the ASEAN Secretariat can focus on servicing its Task Forces, NTOs, and Ministers at ASEANsec.org.

During the first half of 2009, VALUE prepared a knowledge management plan for the ASEAN NTOs. To support the plan, VALUE developed a demonstration “wiki” website for the ASEAN NTOs to use to share information and progress on cooperative activities. The wiki would allow ASEAN Secretariat’s tourism officer, Mr. Krismeidi, to organize and present important information and knowledge assets in a more timely and effective manner than was previously possible. It would also allow the representatives of the ASEAN NTOs and Task Forces to pool the deliberations, recommendations, feedback, and outcomes of meetings related to the *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan: 2011-2015*. Mr. Krismeidi liked the concept and placed it on the agenda of the July 23, 2009 Communications Task Force meeting in Phnom Penh.

VALUE presented its knowledge management plan to the Task Force. The plan called for consolidating ASEAN tourism-related information on three dedicated websites: a business-to-business (B2B) site operated by ASEANTA at ASEANTA.org; a business-to-consumer (B2C) website, SoutheastAsia.org, to be developed by VALUE under its ASEAN destination branding and marketing activity; and a government-to-government (G2G) “wiki” site to facilitate knowledge sharing and greater collaboration among the ASEAN NTOs.

The NTOs enthusiastically endorsed VALUE’s suggestions.

ASEAN Activity III – ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan: 2011 – 2015

ASEAN Tourism Ministers Adopt Five-Year Strategic Plan

ASEAN Tourism Ministers formally adopted the *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP): 2011-2015* at their 14th annual meeting, January 17, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Sponsored by USAID's VALUE Project, the ATSP replaces ASEAN's *Roadmap for the Integration of the Tourism Sector* which expired in 2010.

The ATSP's vision for 2015 is that ASEAN will be able to provide more authentic and diverse products, enhanced connectivity, a safe and secure environment, and higher quality of services to increasing numbers of visitors to the region. At the same, the plan seeks to raise the quality of life and the number of opportunities for ASEAN residents through responsible and sustainable tourism development that includes the input of a wide range of stakeholders.

The VALUE Project hired a team from the College of Innovation at Thailand's Thammasat University, led by esteemed tourism academic Dr. Walter Jamieson, to develop the ATSP. The team travelled the region extensively to consult with public- and private-sector stakeholders.



Chairman of the ASEAN Tourism Ministers Dr. Thong Khon of Cambodia, and Co-Chair Mr. Jero Wacik of Indonesia, show off the newly-adopted *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2011-2015* at the Ministers' joint press conference in Phnom Penh, January 17, 2011.

Chair of the 14th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers and Cambodia's Minister of Tourism, H.E. Dr. Thong Khon, said: "We wish to acknowledge the very generous support of USAID in the development of the strategic plan." He said the plan was "realistic, action-oriented, attuned to global realities, and designed to ensure that the ASEAN region can continue to be a successful tourism destination".

In a joint statement, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers stressed the need for "effective and on-schedule implementation" of the plan. They asked the ASEAN NTOs to work with relevant ASEAN bodies in areas such as transport, immigration, and foreign affairs on measures to facilitate travel in the region. The adoption of the ATSP by the Tourism Ministers successfully concludes the USAID VALUE Project's program of activities in ASEAN's priority travel & tourism sector.

Developing the Plan

On February 25, 2009 VALUE participated in a special meeting of the ASEAN Tourism Marketing Task Force chaired by Mr. Palabyab of the Philippines. In the morning, Mr. Gurley and Mr. Yates presented an update on VALUE's ASEAN destination branding and marketing activity. The afternoon session was dedicated to VALUE's ideas on the organizational and funding structure required to effectively implement a new campaign. The two key components posited by VALUE were the creation of a marketing research group and a destination marketing organization. Both are critical

components of most regional destination marketing efforts (the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and Europe, etc.), as well as most national tourism campaigns. ASEAN has neither. This discussion sowed the seed for an informal request by Mr. Palabyab for VALUE's sponsorship and oversight of the development of the ATSP.

Mr. Gurley subsequently met with Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) President and CEO Greg Duffel to discuss possible collaboration with PATA and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Both Mr. Duffel and UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai confirmed that their organizations would be willing to join the effort. ASEAN Secretariat's Eddy Krismeidi invited the VALUE, PATA, and the UNWTO to join an ASEAN Tourism Integration meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on July 22, to discuss the ATSP, whereupon the NTOs formally requested that VALUE take the lead in organizing and managing its development. The NTOs asked that PATA and UNWTO support VALUE through the provision of research, data, and policy recommendations.



Dr. Walter Jamieson led the Thammasat team.

In September 2009, VALUE signed an agreement with the College of Innovation at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand to research the ATSP. Led by Dr. Walter Jamieson, the Thammasat University team joined VALUE at the October NTO meetings in Manila. Dr. Jamieson and his colleagues observed and solicited input from each of the Task Force meetings. Over three days, each of the six task forces held special sessions on issues to be addressed in the ATSP.

At the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Brunei, January 25, 2010, the ASEAN Tourism Ministers publically endorsed the draft framework for the ATSP. The Ministers expressed their appreciation to the U. S. Government and to the VALUE Project. Following the Ministers' endorsement, the Thammasat team traveled throughout ASEAN to consult with key public and private tourism industry stakeholders to get input and buy-in for the strategic plan. By March 2010, the team had completed and submitted a "Strategic Directions" document to the Philippines Department of Tourism (as Chair of the strategy committee) for review and comment.

In April 2010, the Thammasat team spent a week in Singapore with the various ASEAN NTO task forces reviewing the strategic directions of the draft ATSP. Comments from each of the six task forces and a special working group set up for the ATSP were broadly positive. The Thammasat team subsequently completed the draft ATSP and distributed it to the NTOs for their review before further NTO meetings in Lombok, Indonesia, in June 2010. In August and September 2010, VALUE worked with Dr. Jamieson to ensure that the marketing component of the ATSP reflected ASEANTA's core concern that the ASEAN NTOs would support, both financially and in-kind, a private sector-led regional destination marketing strategy, namely *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth*.

VALUE and the Thammasat consultants subsequently attended the ASEAN Tourism Task Force Meetings in Pattaya, Thailand in October. At the top of each task force agenda was a last chance to review and amend their respective sections of the ATSP before it was due to be put to higher-level ASEAN NTOs and Ministerial meetings at the ATF in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, January 2011, where it was ultimately adopted.



ASEAN Tourism Ministers (or their representatives) join hands in unity at their meeting in Brunei Darussalam, January 24, 2010. The Ministers endorsed the draft framework for the strategic plan sponsored by USAID's VALUE Project.

Image courtesy of TTG Asia ATF Daily.

Key Reforms in the Plan

There are four significant reforms laid out in the ATSP that are designed to overcome shortcomings. They were identified by VALUE during its early tourism sector assessments and experienced by the Project throughout the course of its ASEAN tourism destination branding and marketing activity:

1. **Organizational Structure:** A major reform proposed by the ATSP is a reorganization of the structure and composition of the ASEAN NTOs meetings. For the past five years, the NTOs have worked under six task forces: marketing, cruise, standards, investment, manpower, and crises communications. The task force meetings would take place three or four times a year. NTOs would generally send the same representatives to each task force. They might participate in the marketing task force in the morning and standards task force in the afternoon. The individual representing the NTO generally did not have expertise in either marketing or standards. Nor would he/she have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their government. Often the NTO representative would be a junior officer who would not even have the opportunity to brief decision makers in their respective countries on the deliberations and outcomes of the task force meetings. Thus Ministers would sometimes be unaware of key decisions made by the task forces until the annual ASEAN Tourism Forum, at which point they may shoot down proposals and initiative. VALUE proposed in the ATSP that the organizational structure be drastically changed to one that was more closely aligned with the structure and objectives of the Plan. The ATSP recommends three working groups (Marketing & Communications; Product Development; and Tourism Quality) and one committee (Integration & Budget). The working groups and committee would be composed of individuals with expertise in those areas. (See pages 32 & 33 of the ATSP.)

2. **Funding:** The prevailing policy in ASEAN is that all countries must contribute equal dollar amounts to support tourism activities. The more prosperous countries claim that to contribute a larger amount would cause their poorer neighbors to lose face. However, NTO representatives of poorer countries who have spoken with Mr. Gurley believe in a contribution based on an equal percentage of a common indicator, be that tourism arrivals, annual tourism marketing budget, GDP or some other value. Through the ATSP, VALUE has been able to convince the NTOs that the current funding model is untenable. The task of developing a new, more equitable funding model is incorporated in the ATSP. (See section 6.2 of the ATSP.)
3. **Market Research:** Market research is essential to developing, updating, and implementing a regional marketing strategy. Yet, while the NTOs had six task forces, there was none dedicated to market research. Under the ATSP, market research will be responsibility of the Marketing & Communications Working Group, which will include representatives of the NTOs' research departments. The deliberations of the Working Group will inform regional tourism marketing plans. (See section 3.5.I of the ATSP.)
4. **A New Marketing Campaign and Destination Brand:** The ATSP incorporates and institutionalizes the new *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* marketing campaign, tagline, logo, and marketing website www.SoutheastAsia.org, which is controlled by ASEANTA. (See page 15 of the ATSP.) Significantly the ATSP also expressly acknowledges the need for the private sector to be involved in the planning and implementation of regional marketing campaigns.

GMS Tourism

GMS Activity I – Destination Marketing

MTCO Launches State-of-the-Art Explore Mekong Website

The re-launch of Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office's (MTCO's) consumer marketing website www.ExploreMekong.org took place January 19, 2011 at the ASEAN Tourism forum in Cambodia.



The new www.ExploreMekong.org.

Leveraging the conceptualization and development effort that had already gone into ASEANTA's SoutheastAsia.org, discussions between VALUE, MTCO, and Wego.com commenced in the final quarter of 2009. It was determined that a website similar to that planned for ASEAN tourism would be appropriate for the GMS. SoutheastAsia.org had the following features deemed useful for ExploreMekong.org: theme-based content to complement, rather than compete with, the destination-specific sites operated by member NTOs; a supplier-neutral meta-search engine and booking facility to allow users to choose from a wide range of airlines, accommodation, and tour packages; and an interactive map and trip planner to facilitate multi-destination travel planning.

In February 2010, the MTCO and Wego signed a GDA to incorporate Wego's meta-search technology into www.ExploreMekong.org. Similar to the GDA signed at the regional level between ASEANTA and Wego, revenues generated through the Wego booking feature would be shared equally between MTCO and Wego. VALUE set about rebuilding MTCO's www.ExploreMekong.org, engaging Qais Consulting to construct it using similar wireframes and theme-driven information



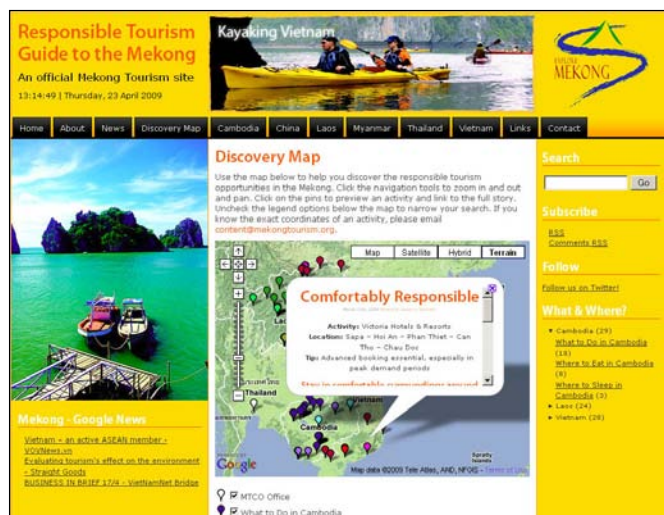
L-R: VALUE COP R. J. Gurley, MTCO Executive Director Mason Florence, and Wego CEO Martin Symes, shake on a GDA to upgrade MTCO's ExploreMekong.org.

architecture as they used for SoutheastAsia.org. Wego tweaked the SoutheastAsia.org trip planner to filter for the GMS destinations to be featured on the ExploreMekong.org website.

Content management was never part of VALUE's commitment to the new ExploreMekong.org site. However, content from the award-winning micro-site *Responsible Tourism Guide to the Mekong* proved to be useful in populating the new website.

During the first quarter of 2009, VALUE KM/C Specialist David Gillbanks worked with the MTCO and a Thailand-based website developer to create a dedicated micro-site based on the content of the Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP) publication *The Guide to Responsible Tourism in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam*. By March 2009, VALUE had the new site uploaded onto MTCO's servers. The site offered travelers and development professionals alike an opportunity to comment on their experiences with featured operators, as well as make specific recommendations about other responsible tourism outfits throughout the GMS. The website featured its own RSS feed and Twitter account, and VALUE helped to promote the site through various social media channels.

After the site's launch MTCO Sustainable Tourism Project Coordinator Christine Jacquemin wrote to VALUE COP R. J. Gurley, "It [the website] is fantastic, excellent, very well done, pretty, informative, well structured. I'd really like to thank [VALUE] for providing MTCO with this support as I've been waiting that it goes online since the publication of this book and it was definitely worth waiting ... Our other websites now look very dull compared to this one ..."



On July 27, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) notified VALUE that the *Responsible Tourism Guide to the Mekong* had been judged as the 'Best in Class' in the Marketing Media - Web site category of the 2009 PATA Gold Awards. PATA wrote: "The judges were most impressed with the quality of your entry and, indeed, the overall high standard of entries submitted this year ... this year's awards attracted 236 entries from 120 organizations worldwide." On September 25, 2009 MTCO Executive Director Mason Florence collected the award at the PATA Gold Awards gala presentation luncheon at PATA Travel Mart.

The *Responsible Tourism Guide to the Mekong* website received plaudits from sustainable tourism experts.

The *Responsible Tourism Guide to the Mekong* website was absorbed into the new ExploreMekong.org and no longer exists in its original form.

GMS Activity II – Knowledge Management

VALUE Positions MTCO as an Authority on Mekong Tourism

Financial and planning support from the VALUE Project was instrumental in the welcome return of the Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF) to the industry events calendar. A Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) event, the MTF is the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)'s principal platform for



Minister of Tourism, Cambodia, H.E. Dr. Thong Khon, closes out a well-attended Mekong Tourism Forum.

public-sector, private-sector, and not-for-profit tourism industry stakeholders to meet and share information. After a hiatus of five years, the 11th MTF took place May 7-8, 2010 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. More than 200 delegates gathered to assess the opportunities arising from the new road corridors opening up in the GMS. Over the course of the two days, participants heard from the region's governments, businesses and non-government organizations. VALUE Project COP R. J. Gurley, who in January 2009 had initiated talks with the MTCO on resurrecting the event, addressed delegates during the opening session.

In initial meetings with the MTCO Executive Director Mason Florence in late 2008, it was agreed that VALUE would provide content updates and newsletter support for MTCO's trade and development website www.MekongTourism.org. In December 2008, VALUE KM/C Specialist David Gillbanks recommended and implemented a wholesale restructuring of MTCO's online trade and development knowledge assets in order to better connect them with their intended audience: NGOs, donor organizations, and public- and private-sector stakeholders. In addition, he refreshed the landing page with updates from the previous four months of MTCO's operations. VALUE also recommended that the MTCO upgrade its website to facilitate a move into social and collaborative media.

In February 2009, VALUE uploaded documents from the MTCO's human resources development workshop held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia to MekongTourism.org. Images from the event were featured on a Flickr-based photo-gallery and slideshow set up for the Office. This was to be repeated for other MTCO events. In addition, the ACE KM/C Specialist initiated further Mekong Tourism brand expansion onto professional networking website LinkedIn and sustainable tourism collaboration website The Good Travel & Tourism Wiki.

Throughout 2009 and into the first half of 2010, VALUE continued to engage in regular meetings with MTCO and provide content and knowledge management support for MekongTourism.org and its *Mekong Tourism Update* e-newsletter. The objective of all of these recommendations and interventions was to move the MTCO towards its intended position as an opinion-leader and authority on Mekong-region tourism. Mr. Florence has been vocal in his appreciation of VALUE's technical assistance throughout. The Project ended this activity in July 2010.

Conclusion

With the handoff of the *Southeast Asia: feel the warmth* brand and website to the ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA), the ASEAN Tourism Ministers adoption of the *ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan: 2011-2015*, and the development of a new destination marketing website for the Greater Mekong Sub-region, the VALUE Project has met the requests of ASEANTA, the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office, and fulfilled its objectives in the tourism sector.