

TRANSLATING THE “ASEAN ADVANTAGE” THEME INTO A SUSTAINED SELF-PROPELLING PROGRAM

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AREAS OF COVERAGE

- I. The Policy Issues that are imperative to empower and propagate the ASEAN Advantage Tourism Program on a region-wide basis at various levels viz., political, business, cultural, educational and social sphere.
- II. The institutional structures that have to be put in place to insure the continuity of policy initiatives beyond person-centered leadership which while necessary, nonetheless has to be perpetuated through the longevity of institutional and social structures.
- III. The hard infrastructures that are not just desired but more presumed as given if we are to talk of a “seamless” movement of ASEAN tourist/visitors within ASEAN (intra-ASEAN) and the rest of the world....ASEAN-India/China.....ASEAN-EU.....ASEAN-Middle East.....ASEAN-Russia/CIS/Eastern Europe.....ASEAN-North & South America.

I. POLICY ISSUES - Political/Governance Level

1. For the ASEAN Advantage to take of as an honest-to-goodness long-term program, ASEAN needs to immediately put in place and empower an ASEAN Tourism Council, composed of ten (10) representatives (council members) from each of the member nations plus three (3) designated private sector tourism and tourism-related practitioner recommended by the majority of the ten council members. For the more regular month-to-month meeting of the ATC, an Excom be formed representing at least six (6) of the ten (10) members, plus one (1) private sector representative.

The council can meet every quarter to be held at different member country venue, whereas, the ATC Excom will meet at least bi-monthly to take care of the month-to-month agenda at hand.

The ATC will lay-out the various implementing action programs in tourism and tourism-related activities such as:

- ASEAN Amazing Race Program
- ASEAN Eco-tourism Program
- ASEAN Surfing and other water- sports Program
- ASEAN Volcano Discovery Program

- Tour de ASEAN for pedal and motor bikes Racing
 - ASEAN Cruise (similar to the Mediterranean/Caribbean and similar tour packages)
 - Or a BIMP-EAGA sub-region cruise variation
 - ASEAN Car Rally/Off-Road Race Program
2. ATC to conduct regular meetings/workshops to discuss, monitor, refine or revise certain on-going programs to acclimatize and adjust to the current needs and concerns of the times like health scare and security matters.
 3. There should be an “ASEAN Tourism Champion” who could well be the concurrent Chairman of the ASEAN Tourism Council with a 2 year fixed term but rotating to other member countries. Hence, we can adopt the “flying Geese formation“ where the strongest take the initial lead then replaced in succession by the next most able member. He or she should carry the equivalent title of “Minister”.
 4. Work towards the establishment and issuance of an AAP Personal Card to support the incentive mechanism of the various AATP that ATC has designed and operationalized. This can also serve as an additional identity card to the ASEAN member holder containing home country address and passport details for quick reference. This could serve as alternate identity card for any inter-island travels within the country visited.
 5. Representation with an ASEAN perspective in each member country’s banking and international finance policies/laws especially those that touch on regional trade, commerce and taxation. This is important in breaking down barriers that obstruct the free flow of business and commerce amongst ASEAN country members as an operating regional community.
 6. Need to provide some meaningful incentive programs through ATC policy directives such as 30-50% discounts on “ASEAN Week”, “ASEAN Month” and “ASEAN Day” programs as is appropriate. Collaborate with IATA/PATA/UNDP and other similar international organization where synergies can be derived.

Where possible, provide tax or tariff incentives for whatever tourism programs the ATC may declare as priority promotion to advance the AA theme. (1-2 year time-frame)

7. The ATC should have regular communication and interaction with other equivalent global organizations like IATA/UN/APEC/EU/CAFTA to insure that ASEAN Tourism is in step with the rest of the world in matters of travel and tourism at the regional and sub-regional level. This initiative should be ongoing and immediate.
8. Establish and promote a Tourism Summit bi-yearly to encourage greater and higher levels of interaction amongst member countries to be hosted on rotating basis with all ten (10) member countries. (1-2 year time frame)
9. Pledging of commitment by member countries to the budget requirement of the AAP Institutions that will be responsible for the various initiatives that will be carried out. (Immediate time frame)
10. Support a reciprocal "Open-Sky" policy for landing rights and privileges of member flag carriers and the now emerging Low Cost Carrier (LCC) which have been robust in the last three years among member countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and more recently, the Philippines. This should be initiated immediately with a 1-2 year period of adjustment and preparation.
11. Unified Visa application and issuance by ASEAN Member Country. What is issued by one is honoured by all policy. This will strengthen the solidarity of ASEAN as one geographical, economic and political block much like the EU is. (Target is within 1-2 years)
12. Information campaign program to announce and promote the various AAP that the ATC will launch and implement. This should cover tri-media format of advertising and promotion to cover maximum ground.
13. ASEAN should form its own equivalent of an "Interpol" to weed-out and police the region of undesirable criminal elements or organizations.

II. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

1. We have mentioned above the creation of the ASEAN Tourism Council as a distinct fully operational office within the ASEAN Secretariat as the supreme governing body for any and all matters pertaining to tourism in ASEAN. As such, it will assume some quasi regulatory function to enable it to pursue such programs drawn up for all member countries to implement. It will also carry out, on a region-wide basis, the promotion of such programs promulgated and approved by the majority of the ATC.
2. In this regard, ATC can designate junior/youth delegates at the individual member countries university level to assure maximum awareness and understanding of ASEAN tourism initiatives for AAP.
3. Establish an ASEAN Desk/ASEAN Kiosk in all member countries major international airports and inter-representations with member countries local tourism boards or council.
4. Cultural and Educational Activities that will promote the ASEAN ADVANTAGE THEME. Intensify ASEAN Inter-Cultural programs amongst member countries. Existing activities have been lacking in vigor due perhaps to lack of support and budgets from member countries. This is where individual member country's financial commitment will spell the difference of either a lack lustre program or a highly energized sustained regional activity.
5. At the Educational Level, establish special ASEAN scholarship programs in its field of expertise in the tourism service industry, hotel/resort management, second or third language learning programs, airline and aircraft maintenance proficiency courses. Educational exchanges in the Arts, Entertainment and Music, Culinary Arts so unique to the ASEAN Region. Prop-up the ASEAN Desk in International Book Fairs that is dominated by mostly western world literature. Continued support to existing awards programs like the Magsaysay Award that in many ways promote the ASEAN Region's social and economic concerns including journalism, film-making, applied sciences, and indigenous arts, painting, and music.

III. THE HARD INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

1. Tourism growth will more and more be essentially fed by the international airports of member countries. It is obvious that the member country with the most modern, fully equipped, expansive and inter-modally connected with other modes of transport like expressways, light rail systems, traditional rail systems for cargos, modern ports nearby (40-60 km radius) will attract the greater number of tourist within ASEAN and outside ASEAN.
2. For US and EU markets special concerns on security and safety will have to be put-in-place to conform with their respective comfort levels for such concerns. In this regard, some regional cooperation and mutual assistance program among member countries can accelerate region wide compliance to current safety measures required by Europe and the US.
3. International seaports also have to be of global standard to be able to accommodate such large cruise vessels as Queen Mary, Carnival Cruise ships, and its equivalent customs and immigration rules may be specialized for ASEAN member countries to facilitate and encourage an increasing flow of tourist traffic intra-ASEAN. Of critical importance is the need for night time navigational aids system if we are to develop the ASEAN regional cruise traffic in the South China Sea, Java Sea, Andaman Sea, and Banda Sea.
4. Primary hotels and accommodation facilities must be present to allow for the inflow of tourists. Standards must be set and followed to assure an acceptable level of appearance and safety to visiting tourists. They must be accessible to the modern mode of electronic bookings and search via the internet. Rates should also be openly established to prevent unscrupulous practices of "hostage pricing" and the like. Move towards an ASEAN Seal of Excellence in Housekeeping and Quality. Thailand has its "Orchids" ratings, Indonesia its "Diamond" ratings, and Singapore and the Philippines "Star" category ratings, perhaps there is need to harmonize these ratings on a region wide ASEAN basis.

These needs are even more critical in the secondary category dwellings and accommodation facilities which are not covered by the international standards of excellence, safety and security.

5. Other transport support services and facilities like taxis, buses, shuttle service to and from international airports and seaports, local fast ferries, ships and ethnic modes of transport like jeepneys of the Philippines, tuktuk of Bangkok, outriggers in Indonesia, Philippines,

and Malaysia – all must carry a minimum of safety and hygiene standards that will not discourage repeat business from foreign tourists. So not just exotic ASEAN but also safe ASEAN for all.

Many of these policy programs initiatives will be of a long-term nature but initial impetus has to be provided now to reap the benefits in the succeeding years up to 2010 which WTO/ASEAN has set as ultimate target date for the final breakdown of tariff barriers and a more efficient regional and sub-regional economic integration. The ASEAN Advantage Tourism Program (AATP) should be viewed and approached as a lead opener and gateway facilitator to this 2010 target. Trade and commerce are greatly enhanced and propelled when the entry point of travel and tourism have been smoothed and softened to visitor-friendly levels.

It is in this light that this paper is presented to our ASEAN leaders to address these initiatives with more vim and vigour in its funding support, institutional permanence, perseverance and more political resolve than before.

PRIVATE SECTOR VIEWS ON ASEAN TOURISM STRATEGY PAPER

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I. POLICY ISSUES

- a) There is a lack of resolve on the part of the officials of ASEAN to institute sanctions on erring or non-compliant members as regards policy issues either on matters affecting tourism or basic issues such as human rights and democratic principles. (From Singaporean delegates/attendees)
- b) Lack of firmness of resolve or perhaps political will to truly implement an "open-sky" policy that would certainly catapult ASEAN Tourism traffic to greater heights closer than the levels of the Americas and Europe where traffic is at much higher levels viz., Europe 401 MM, Americas 112 MM, Asia Pacific 119 MM, ASEAN estimated 50 MM less than 50% of the Asia-Pacific traffic. (Reference 2003 WTO statistics). (From Philippine attendees)
- c) Lack of focus on urgent priority policy guidelines to encourage the growth and expansion of ASEAN Tourism traffic such as perhaps a unified Visa processing/acceptance amongst member countries. A unified policy stand on anti-hijacking/terrorist acts on both air lanes and sea lanes of the seven (7) seas bounding the ten (10) member countries.

In this regard, increase mutual cooperation in the regional policing of known criminal and/or terrorist groups/persons or organizations that pose a threat to air and sea travel to the region. This could be extended to other areas that could be more pro-active than re-active in matters of security. A freer flow or exchange of security threat matters/information to facilitate prevention/intervention by proper authorities of each member matters all within the confines of existing military or defence treaties each may have.

Encourage mutual cooperation in hardware/software and training facilities to more effectively deter the further growth of piracy, kidnappings and other forms of criminal acts that discourages potential tourists from entering the shores of the ten-member nations either by sea and/or air.

- d) Pursue and implement greater standardization of quality, of categories, of safety and of hygiene in primary, secondary and even local tertiary type of hotels, resorts, inns and dwellings for easier understanding and better comfort levels of incoming foreign tourists.

This standardization will also be for bridging the great divide between the high-end up-market tourists from first world countries and the more adventurous mass market type tourists that are expected to carry the critical mass of the ASEAN tourism traffic that is expected to raise the volume levels closer to the 100 million level in the next decade.

- e) “Putting money where the mouth is” as far as implementation of the various programs of creating a consciousness of an “ASEAN BRAND” in all of the ten member nations. Allocate meaningful budgets proportionate to the financial status and size of the member country. The first six and the second four type of funding size per member country. Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia are one. Then the second four: Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

Such funding commitment can now finance a more vigorous and sustained awareness, PR/communication and active marketing program to promote a truly ASEAN-wide tourism coverage in the likes of the EEC/European Community—a ten nation but one community theme. Even pursue and implement the ASEAN hotel chain in all the ten member countries which will underscore the need to integrate now more concretely the “ASEAN BRAND” beyond the confines of rhetoric and pronouncements. Time to “walk the talk” on ASEAN after forty years of kicking around. Time to spill over the advantages that some, e.g., Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia had employed over the late comers or late movers line Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Brunei in regard to tourism.

II. INFRASTRUCTURE

- a) As mentioned, one major obstacle to the full realization of a full-blown ASEAN TOURISM milieu is the inadequacy of basic hotel and dwelling facilities to accommodate volume increase. This is true of places like the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. If at all, many tourist dwellings are not up to par with international standards in cleanliness/hygiene, safety and order and systems like reservations and payments. (Philippines/Singapore delegates)
- b) Need for a common acceptable definition of standards and ratings that is perhaps more ASEAN than European or American. All member countries have to agree and to abide by the accepted standards. This cannot just be a purely private sector arrangement or agreement. Government agencies have to accept and promulgate such mutual agreements amongst Tourist Operators in all its sectors: hotels, resorts, travellers’ inns, hostels; service operators including transport services (land, sea, and secondary transporters). (BIMP-EAGA attendees)

- c) Customs and immigration policies have to be transparent, consistent and clear-cut. Oftentimes, lack of transparency and consistency
- d) become areas of abuse especially amongst non-ASEAN travellers. (BIMP-EAGA delegates)
- e) Tariffs and rates of hotels/resort/hostels. As well as airline rates, both regular and the now popular LCCs that offer much lower budget fares have to be appropriately published and disseminated to all member county service and tour operators. Conversely, all legitimate tourist/services operators have to be accredited and graded to prevent unscrupulous or travel business scams from emerging especially when tourism expands and booms. An official directory has to be published by the ASEAN Tourism Board, as the highest tourism authority for the community of ten nations. (Philippines and BIMP-EAGA and Singaporean attendees)
- f) Emergency standard procedures for both medical and security matters have to be set and agreed upon to ensure an internationally acceptable level of response and attention. This will enhance the comfort levels of foreign tourists especially from the West. (varied participants, American/Australian)
- g) In regard to sea travel, especially for tourist cruise ships, certain infrastructural requirements were mentioned: (1) special berth for cruise ships, (2) adequate depth and water approach facilities, (3) navigational aids for night time travel manoeuvres. Oftentimes, outside of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, this is inadequate, thus hindering the greater expansion of ASEAN cruise programs like the Caribbean, Alaskan, and Mediterranean cruises which have become a reliable and steady volume-oriented segment of the world tourism market. The BIMP-EAGA sub-region could well benefit immensely from this untapped market. Currently, it is only Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand that have exploited this segment but still in a limited way since the potential is vast considering the kind of tourists that this segment caters to viz., the burgeoning “retiree” market that are swelling in most of the advanced developed countries of Europe, Japan, Korea, China and America, estimated at 400 million young retirees (45-59 yrs.) and 327 million older retirees (60 and above) based on 2006 figures. This is quite a potent segment if effectively tapped and the ASEAN region is a perfect match considering the inherent “caring character” of ASEAN members’ citizens, not to mention the conducive tropical climate of most of the ten member countries.
- h) The more extensive use of electronic information/communication technologies in the marketing, booking and settlements at all levels of tourism services from airlines to shipping, hotel bookings and

reservations, choice of destinations and satellite tracking for outdoor and adventure tourism that is also growing in popularity and traffic volume.

- i) Monitoring and standardization of the medical and wellness service tourism that is also becoming popular amongst the younger segment of tourist in point of lower-cost and boldness of treatment offered, like gender bender type of procedures otherwise not allowed in western home countries.
- j) ASEAN tourism should keep in-step with the level of intra-and international trade that have been growing in leaps and bounds through the 80's, 90's, and now the 21st century. Intra-Asia trade valued at US\$1.4 trillion and Asian international trade at US\$900 billion as of 2005. All the more, ASEAN tourism must be viewed as the twin sister of trade and commerce, perhaps preceding the latter than trailing behind.

III. SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study endorses the evaluation and findings of the April 26, 2006, World Bank sponsored Padeco Co., Ltd. Of Japan in regard to the greater integration of the ASEAN travel sectors such as the Visit ASEAN Program through a travel portal which would provide greater linkages between some 6,000 travel agencies within the Region. Continued support of ASEANTA as the premier private sector driven association that would nurture, espouse, promote, police, and recognize of deserving groups, companies, agencies and institutions that advances the ASEAN destinations/ASEAN Brand/ASEAN theme is regional tourism. There is a whole range of coverage here that seek to expand the current tourism play in ASEN such as ecotourism, adventure tourism, wellness tourism, and even medical tourism that caters to a growing retirees market estimated at 727 million worldwide as of 2006.

Commit more government funding into the various programs initiated by ASEANTA to enable it to sustain said activities as well as duly recognize the past years' effort of this private sector initiative so that truly this will become public and private sector collaboration to raise the level of volume, quality, multiplicity of destinations in this diverse region of ASEAN.

This financial comment by the ten member nations should extend towards the drastic improvement of basic infrastructures in hotels, in transport (Land, sea and air) as well as proper governance of travel policies and laws that tend to facilitate and smoothen the entry, movements, and exits of the foreign travelling tourist to and from the Region.