

FIRST EAST ASIA CONGRESS

DEVELOPING TOURISM FLOWS

Tourism is not only a major economic driver in East Asia, it also creates opportunities for, and enhances the knowledge of, travellers within the East Asia community. In 2001, Asean recorded 18.2 million intra-Asean tourists (with Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia recording the most number of tourist arrivals in the Asean region) and it is hoped that this figure will double in the coming years. Susan Teoh reports on Session 6 "Developing Tourism Flows" held on 5 August 2003.

The development of growth triangles, a form of economic co-operation, helped to promote tourism flows, said Pacific Asia Travel Association (Pata) Business Development Director Stephen Yong.

He described growth triangles as economically complementary, have geographic proximity and have well-developed physical infrastructure. They can be established at a low cost and form a protection group against trade blocks from other parts of the world.

He named six growth triangles or growth areas in Asia: (1) the Southern China Growth Triangle (China-Hong Kong/Macao-Taipei); (2) the Johore-Singapore-Riau, Indonesia Growth Triangle; (3) The Tumen River Delta (China-Russia-North Korea); (4) Greater Sub-Mekong Region (five countries in Southeast Asia); (5) East Asean Growth Area (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines); and (6) Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle.

He said the Southern China



Stephen Yong focused his presentation mainly on the activities of the Pacific Asia Travel Association.



Tunku Iskandar Tunku Abdullah concentrated on tourism flows in Asean countries.

Growth Triangle registered more than 3.5 million travellers moving between Hong Kong and China each year. The airports in those areas are

THE PACIFIC ASIA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

The role of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (Pata) since its establishment 52 years ago has been to look into the problems, issues and prospects of tourism and travel. Pata has three objectives: (1) promote the movement of travel; (2) protect the industry by understanding the capacity of tourists and preventing mass movement; and (3) position the industry with regards to the levels of tourism that exist, that is, high, medium or low.

Pata also looks into the various forms of economic co-operation within the Pacific Asia, ensuring that there is free flow of products, people and capital. The establishment of

various organisations, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and their policies, will affect tourism flows.

Other forms of regional co-operation among Pata members, as given by Stephen Yong, include: (1) information and data sharing; (2) comparative studies; (3) technical assistance; (4) development of models and tools for planning, assessment and management; (5) human resource development programmes; (6) public/private sector meetings; and (7) general networking and communications. – *By Susan Teoh*

designed to cater for such large numbers. For example, Guangzhou airport can cater for 45 million people, Hong Kong airport, 35 million, and Macao airport, 6 million.

Second presenter Tunku Iskandar Tunku Abdullah, Secretary General of the Asean Tourism Association (Aseanta) said it was only in 1981 that tourism was focused on the Asean region when the first Asean Tourism Forum in Malaysia was held in Genting Highlands. The meeting involved public and private sectors and the 10 Asean member countries would each have a chance, on a rotational basis, to head each successive meeting. He said initially two

problems were encountered when trying to promote Asean as a single tourist destination: (1) disparate financial support for joint programmes; and (2) the unpreparedness of the private sector, which was not geared for such joint efforts. It was only in 1991 that this forum was transformed into an association of the major Asean members, now known as Asean Tourism Association (Aseanta), and modelled after Pata.

A number of factors greatly affected tourism flows in Asean countries. These included the financial crisis, the 9/11 tragedy, the Bali bombing, government travel advisories against travel in certain countries in Asean, the US/Europe economic slow-

down, airline bankruptcies and capacity reduction and the SARS epidemic. In efforts to counter these setbacks and to encourage tourism flows, Aseanta introduced various schemes and promotions, such as: the Asean Circle Fare, Asean Air Pass, Asean Hotel Pass, Visit Asean campaigns, intra-Asean promotion and Asean “Hip-Hop” air and hotel pass. Government funding was provided for such promotions.

He saw intra-Asean travel as helping to strengthen the economies of the Asean countries. With economic growth in this region, Asean will be able to play an active role in East Asian tourism promotion.

One major point of

discussion was how to promote the youth travel market. Suggestions ranged from instituting student exchange programmes, to disseminating information about budget accommodation, youth hostels or campsites, discounts for youth travel and entry fees to tourist sites or museums.

Some countries, such as Malaysia, have student exchanges where foreign students are adopted by local families and they get a taste of local life. This programme could be promoted among Asean countries.

Pata had, in fact, acknowledged the potential of youth travel and had already established the Pata Young Tourism Professionals (Pata YTP) to look into this aspect.

The impact of the 9/11 tragedy in the United States and the SARS epidemic on tourism in East Asia and SARS, itself, were discussed. In fact, immediately after these two incidents, intra-regional (Asean) travel accounted for 60 per cent of the tourist trade. Pata, in a bid to promote and attract western tourists because they tend to stay longer in one place and to help raise the occupancy rates in hotels, launched the Project Phoenix campaign recently and encouraged travel agencies to come up with new tourism packages to attract European and Americans to travel to this part of the world. ●

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