Inaugural Remarks
by
H.E. Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Tourism and Sports
at the 24th Joint Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and the UNWTO Commission for South Asia
3 May 2012,
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Excellency, Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, UNWTO
Mr. Zoltan Somogyi, Executive Director of UNWTO,

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Royal Thai Government, I would like to extend my warm welcome to all delegates to the beautiful and culture-rich city of Chiang Mai and I am also very honored to preside the Opening of the “UNWTO High-Level Regional Conference on Green Tourism” today.

Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand and UNWTO have been working closely for many years. Thank you for all great supports and contribution to Thailand’s Tourism industry.

The World Tourism Organization is organizing the UNWTO High-Level Regional Conference On Green Tourism in conjunction with the 24th Joint Commission Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for South Asia and the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, in order to introduce the main findings of the recent UN research on tourism as a green economy sector and highlight the main challenges and opportunities facing the public and private sector. The conference also aims to present national experiences on how sustainable development of tourism and green economy can go hand-in-hand with sustaining economic development in Asia and the Pacific.
Green Tourism, the theme of this year’s conference, reflects contemporary issues of global as well as regional interest. In 2011, 980 million tourist arrivals were recorded worldwide, and as past experience and UNWTO statistics have shown, this steady growth is set to continue. In 2012, 1 billion tourists are expected to cross international borders.

The rapid growth and development of both international and domestic travel and tourism sectors bring significant challenges: Energy intensive transportation is increasing the non-renewable energy dependence of tourism and is contributing 5 per cent of global greenhouse emissions. As well as this, water consumption, waste management, loss of biodiversity and effective management of cultural and natural heritage areas are significant sustainability-related issues for a green tourism industry.

The UNWTO High-Level Regional Conference on Green Tourism invites experts in the field, academics, ministers and country representatives to discuss how a green economy can contribute to sustainability, what challenges exist, and how progress might be made together.

In line with the global awareness of the impact of climate change, travelers are becoming increasingly conscious of their ecological “footprint”. They are willing to pay more for “green” options, as sustainability is becoming an essential part of their daily lives. Hence, we are making conservation and preservation issues very much part of our promotions, such as by highlighting ecotourism products, boutique hotels, health and wellness facilities and the Royal Projects.

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), has continuously promoted sustainable tourism through the concept of the Seven Greens, which encourages Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among operators. We collaborate with various partners to identify interesting options for eco-friendly travel.
We promote products that show a clear commitment to sustainability, such as the Green Hotels, recognize such products through a biannual awards scheme and encourage destinations to all forms of environmental and preservation activities at the destination level.

New initiatives like the Seven Greens project and Tourism Awards are being specifically designed to ensure that the local management of the industry remains as powerful and effective as global marketing efforts.

TAT’s Seven Greens program provides a conceptual framework and establishes practical guidelines for carefully balancing tourism promotion and a healthy, sustainable environment. It facilitates the formation of strategic partnerships and provides a cooperative framework for the implementation of green initiatives in the following seven areas.

Just a few days ago, at the PATA annual conference in Kuala Lumpur, the Greens Concept won the PATA Grand Award 2012 in the Environment category. The judging committee hailed it as “a comprehensive environmental concept for sustainable, green tourism in Thailand.”

This year Thai government announces “Miracle Year of Thailand” initiative, a mega-campaign to celebrate the birthdays of members of the Thai Royal Family by highlighting the many aspects of the Kingdom that make it such an appealing destination for foreign visitors. The campaign is marked by events highlighting the Royal Projects, Thai cultural events, traditional celebrations, popular regional tourist destinations, world-renowned Thai cuisine, Muay Thai, and the art and science of Thai massage.

Thailand has a strong emphasis on the preservation of Green Environment and Sustainable Tourism Industry for all well wishers who visit Thailand. I will be very pleased to work even more closely with UNWTO to mark Green and Sustainable Tourism to the world.
Last but not least, I hope all of you have a wonderful stay and a successful meeting in this Miracle Year of Thailand, and once again thank you for your kind continued support for Thailand’s tourism industry.

Thank you very much and Sawasdee krub