Concept Paper and Provisional Program

For

International Conference

On

Developing Sustainable and Inclusive Buddhist Heritage and Pilgrimage Circuit in

South Asia’s Buddhist Heartland

Dhaka, Bangladesh

27 and 28 October, 2015

Hosted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh

In collaboration with

UNited Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

As of Oct. 03, 2015
Synopsis

South Asia is recognized as the heartland of Buddhism and as such is of great interest to the world’s estimated 500 million Buddhists\(^1\) and increasingly to a huge non-Buddhist market from Europe and North America and other parts of the world. The countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka have long recognized the tourist potential of developing and promoting their ancient and living Buddhist heritage for Buddhist pilgrims as well as non-Buddhists with an interest in Buddhist ideas, culture and heritage. Although some efforts have been made to organize multi-country Buddhist circuits in the region, these have not developed as quickly as anticipated because of security and cross border concerns, limited private sector participation, concerns about the co-modification and protection of Buddhist heritage, and a continuing preference on the part of the countries to go it alone. As a result, the potential to better protect the Buddhist heritage, build larger and higher value markets, make greater contributions towards universal peace, and increase the contribution to socio-economic growth in the affected areas has yet to be fully developed. Given its potential to make major contributions to sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth, the time is ripe for the public and private sectors, Buddhist leaders, the academe, community-based organizations, civil organizations in the concerned countries and the development partners to work together to develop the full potential of these tourism circuits. The proposed Conference to be held from 27 to 28 October 2015 in Dhaka to be hosted by the Bangladesh Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism with the support of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) seeks to bring together the above actors to review the current situation in regard to the development and promotion of Buddhist tourism; discuss the key issues and barriers that need to be addressed to develop and market sustainable and inclusive Buddhist tourism circuits; and consider the elements of a roadmap for the sustainable and inclusive development of Buddhist tourism.

\(^1\)Pew Research Center 2010 Survey and Forecast, 2012. (www.pewforum.org)


**Background and Rational for the Conference**

South Asia—most notably Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka—has a rich, diverse and ancient ensemble of tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage landscapes. These include its ancient cultural heritage dating back over 5,000 years, the world’s highest mountains, some of the worlds’ largest coastal mangrove forests, diverse wildlife, and internationally recognized biodiversity hotspots. In this context, it is noted that the five countries have 47 UNESCO sites of which 35 are cultural sites. However, what makes the area globally unique is its recognition as the ancient heartland of Buddhism. The Buddhist heritage of the area has been recognized by UNESCO through inscription of 15 sites that include the birthplace of Lord Buddha at Lumbini in Nepal, the Sanchi and Bodh GyaMahabodhi Temple Complexes in Northern India, Sigiriya and the Sacred City of Kandy in Sri Lanka, and the Ruins of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur in Bangladesh.

As the heartland of Buddhism, South Asia is of great interest to the world’s estimated 500 million Buddhists and increasingly to non-Buddhists from Europe and North America and other parts of the world. Studies of the market interested in Buddhism belief and culture indicates that aside from a large number of pilgrims dedicated to visiting the sacred shrines of Buddhism and to walk in the footsteps of Lord Buddha, there is also a large untapped market interested in the history, iconography, and art associated with Buddhism found in important temples, monasteries and archaeological sites, as well as in the living Buddhism of Nepal, India, Bhutan and Sri Lanka and in related Buddhist religious studies, traditional healing, Himalayan spas, yoga practices and meditation retreats.

Although overall data on tourism motivated by Buddhist pilgrimage and interest in Buddhist culture to South Asia is not readily available, the size of the market is indicated by the large volume of visitors to key Buddhist sites. For example, Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha—a must visit for all Buddhist pilgrim tourists to South Asia—is forecast to receive around 1.2 million visitors in 2015 of which foreign tourists account got 17% and Buddhist pilgrims around 90% with an expected annual growth rate of between 10 and 15% over the next decade.

The Buddhist culture, heritage and sites of the region have immense value, both inherent and as a source of public education, identity and pride. Their integrity and authenticity must be conserved to ensure that the universal values they represent are available to current and future generations. It is also evident that the responsible and sustainable use of natural and cultural assets in the development of Buddhism tourism can create employment opportunities, generate income, alleviate poverty, curb rural flight migration, promote product diversification and nurture a sense of co-existence and pride among communities and destinations.

The Buddhist heritage of the region has been promoted for tourism by the countries of South Asia

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3. Appendix 2: Overview Of Buddhist And Ecotourism Markets in Strategy and Road Map for Improving Tourism Connectivity and Destination Management of Cultural and Natural Resources In the South Asia Region. Asian Development Bank, 2011.
for many years. Most notable of these has been the promotion of the “In the Footsteps of Lord Buddha Circuit” by India that encompasses the four primary Buddhist destinations of Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar in India, and Lumbini in Nepal. Other proposals have also been put forward to promote circuits depicting the living Buddhism heritage in the Himalayan and Buddhist Art and Archaeology of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

In recognition of the potential of South Asia’s Buddhist heritage to attract pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike, promote universal peace, and provide inclusive economic opportunities for economically disadvantaged groups, in 2004, the five South Asian countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka agreed to cooperate under the South Asia Economic Cooperation (SASEC) framework to further develop the potential of Buddhist and ecotourism. The guiding document of the cooperation was the 2004 SASEC Tourism Development Plan (TDP) and subsequent design in 2008 and 2009 and implementation in 2010 onwards of the now US$ 150+ million South Asia Tourism Development Infrastructure Program in Nepal at Lumbini, Sikkim and Paharpur in Bangladesh. The program was designed to strengthen tourism access and destination infrastructure, improve protection of Buddhist heritage, and build the capacity of local communities to benefit from the Buddhist tourism value chain. In December 2011, the countries worked out an updated Strategy and Roadmap for Improving Tourism Connectivity and Destination Management of Cultural and Natural Resources in the South Asia Sub region between 2011-2015. This strategy envisioned developing and promoting South Asia’s unique Buddhist cultural and natural heritage landscape into well-developed, integrated, branded, sustainably managed and globally marketed circuits and destinations. To achieve this vision, the SASEC member states sought to:

1. develop sustainable and inclusive thematic multi-country Buddhist heritage and related natural and heritage circuits involving programs directed at safeguarding key Buddhist sites, promoting private sector participation in packaging, marketing and investment in facilities and services, developing support infrastructure, and improving access and connectivity in the circuits;
2. support sustainable development and marketing of the circuits involving programs directed at capacity building and knowledge and experience sharing, undertaking learning events directed at public sector officials, and harmonizing the collection of tourism statistics and data; and
3. undertake product development and marketing of thematic multi-country Buddhist heritage and related natural heritage circuits in global markets involving programs directed at private sector packaging, cooperative marketing and development and application of quality standards.

Of seven circuits/routes identified for development, the three top ranked circuits were: (1) the existing “In The Footsteps of Lord Buddha” Circuit; (2) a new “Himalayan Heritage Route” that links to the Lumbini area and includes other destinations in Nepal (Pokhara and Kathmandu Valley), Bhutan and in the Indian Himalayan states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh depicting ancient as well as living Buddhist heritage; and (3) the “Bangladesh Highway Heritage Route” that includes the great Buddhist monuments of Paharpur in Naogaon, Mahasthangarh in Bagura, Mainamati in Comilla, and birth place of great Buddhist scholar Atisha Dipankara at Bikrampur under Munshigonj.

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5 See ADB South Asia Tourism Development Infrastructure Program
district of Bangladesh as well as the Sundabans linked to the Asian Highway connecting to India and Nepal to the north and Myanmar to the South. In addition, the countries also identified a living Buddhist heritage circuit in Sri Lanka linked by air to the “In the Footsteps of Lord Buddha circuit in northern India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Although significant strides had been made under the Asian Development Bank funded US$ 150+ million South Asia Tourism Development Infrastructure Program in Nepal at Lumbini, Sikkim and Paharpur in Bangladesh, much remains to be done to work in a cooperative framework to address barriers in facilitating the movements of tourists across borders in the multi-country Buddhist circuits and routes, raise the quality of tourist facilities and services, promote investment in related infrastructure and tourist facilities, encourage greater private sector participation, and undertake cooperative marketing of these circuits and routes.

**Objectives of the Conference**

The immediate objectives of the Conference is to bring together industry leaders, policy makers and market participants as well as relevant stakeholders in an open dialogue to discuss the issues and set directions for preparing a road map for the sustainable development and promotion of cross border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes in South Asia. Specifically, the Conference is intended to:

1. Review the current situation in regard to the conservation, planning, development, marketing and impact of cross border Buddhist tourism in South Asia.
2. Discuss the key issues and barriers that need to be addressed to facilitate the development and promotion of sustainable and inclusive multi-country Buddhist tourism circuits and exchange information on best practices and approaches to developing and marketing multi-country tourism circuits.
3. Discuss the roles of government, the private sector, civil society, community-based organizations, and development partners in the sustainable development and promotion of multi-country tourism circuits.
4. Provide direction for the preparation of a road map for the sustainable and inclusive development of multi-country Buddhist circuits and routes.

**Conference Participants**

The conference is intended to bring together government policy makers, tourism officials, private sector tourism Industry players in Asia, as well as civil society, NGOs, community based organizations, Buddhist leaders, Buddhist Site Managers, Academia, Research Institutions, International Development Partners, UN Organizations and the Media.
Provisional Program

26 October 2015

0900-1800: Arrival of Hon. Ministers, Secretary General of UNWTO and other delegates.

1400 - 2100: Registration

1930: Welcome reception: Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka --hosted by Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB)

27 October 2015

0800-1700: Registration

0900-0945: Welcome Remarks and Opening Ceremony

* Welcome Address by the Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh

* Speech by H E Secretary General of UNWTO, Mr. Taleb Rifai

* Speech by the Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh

* Speech by Hon. Minister, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh

* Speech and Inauguration of the conference and Declaration of ‘Visit Bangladesh Year-2016’ by the Chief Guest Hon. Prime Minister, the People’s Republic of Bangladesh

0945- 1015: Tea/Coffee Break.

1015 – 1030: Special Address

Mr. Xu JING, Director of Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO): Why regional cooperation in tourism planning, development and marketing promotes peace and understanding and brings more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

1030-1200: Plenary Session 1: Developing and Marketing sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist circuits and routes: Are the Countries with the potential for developing and marketing these ready to work together?

Moderator: Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. Tourism and Hospitality Advisor to UNWTO.
**Keynote Speaker:** Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. Tourism and Hospitality Advisors: What it takes to plan, develop and market cross border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes.

**Designated Panelists:**

1. **Dr. Heather Peters,** Senior Consultant at Culture Unit, UNESCO Bangkok: Perspectives on cross border cooperation in the conservation of Buddhist heritage and culture.
2. **Ms. Elma Morsheda,** Representative, Bangladesh Resident Mission, ADB, Dhaka: Perspectives on cross border cooperation in the development tourism infrastructure in cross border Buddhist circuits and routes in South Asia.*
3. **Mr. Ashok Pokharel,** President, Nepal Tour Operators Association: Perspectives on cooperation in the marketing of cross border Buddhist circuits and routes in the public and private sector.
4. **Mr. Md. Rafiquzzaman,** Additional Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh: Perspectives on cooperation in assessing the socio-economic impact of cross border Buddhist tourism.
5. **Mr. Faruque Hasan,** Tourism Consultant, Bangladesh: Perspectives on developing heritage and Buddhist heritage tourism circuits.
6. **Ven. Myeong Beop,** Buddhist Practitioner in Korea: Perspectives on the prospects and approaches to marketing in the Korean market

**1200-1230:** Open Forum Discussion Moderated by Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. Tourism and Hospitality Advisors and UNWTO Advisor.

**1230 - 1240:** Concluding remarks by the moderator Mr. Ludwig.

**1240-1400:** Working Lunch and “Idea Capsules” by Experts

**1245-1305**  
**Idea Capsules 1:**

**Mr. Mario Hardy,** Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Asia Travel Association: Digital transformation—Implications for developing and marketing sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist circuits and products.

**1305-1330**  
**Idea Capsules 2:**

**MR. Jens Thraenhart,** Executive Director, Mekong Tourism Coordinating Organization: Marketing Mekong Tourism
1400-1530: **Breakout Sessions: Challenges, opportunities and best practices in developing sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist circuits and routes**

**Break Out Session-1: Facilitating Cross Border Access and Connectivity:**

*Moderated by Mr. Sunil Chopra, Area Manager for Asia-Pacific, IATA, Singapore*

**Research Partner: IATA**

**Reactors:**

1. Ms. Gitanjali Chaturvedi, Tourism Specialist, World Bank, India
2. Dr. Aparup Chowdhury, Chairman, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation/Md. Nasir Uddin, Director (Commercial), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (Government Tourism corporation which is facilitating and operating some motels, hotels, restaurants and others in the country)
3. Mr. Anders Jonsson, Project co-coordinator Southeast Asia Regional Program, OECD
4. Mr. Shahid Hamid, Chairman, PATA Bangladesh Chapter

**Break out session-2: Ensuring sustainable and inclusive outcomes:**

*Moderated by Mr. Milton Hyunsoo Kal, Development Strategist, Consultant of IFC & WB*

**Reactors:**

1. Mr. Mohiuddin Helal, CEO, Industry Council for Tourism &Hospitality, Bangladesh
2. Mr. Shahid Hussain Shamim, CEO, Ajiyer Fair Trade Tourism, Community based Tourism, Bangladesh (CBT expert)
3. Ms. Elma Morsheda, Representative, Bangladesh Resident Mission, ADB, Dhaka
4. Prof. Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, Professor of Archeology, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka
5. Mr. Fayzul Latif Chowdhury, Director General, National Museum, Bangladesh

**Break out Session-3: Packaging cross border Buddhist tourism circuits/routes And products:**

*Moderated by Mr. Ashok Pokharel, President, Nepal Tour Operators Association*

**Reactors:**

1. Mr. Mario Hardy, CEO, PATA
2. Mr. Masud Hossain, Managing Director, The Bengal Tours Ltd (One of the leading Tour operator company of Bangladesh) and Director of Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB)

3. Mrs. DawKhin Than Win, Director, Ministry of Tourism and Hotels, Myanmar

4. Madame Nava Dominguez of Xunta de Galicia

5. Dr. Kumi Kato, Professor of WAKAYAMA University in Japan: Perspectives on the way in which Buddhist tourism is packaged in Japan and its implications for multi-country Buddhist circuits and routes:

Research Partner: Mr. Ashok Pokharel, President, Nepal Tour Operators Association

1530 -1545 Coffee/Tea Break

1545 -1645 Plenary Session 2: Governments’ Role in facilitating the planning, development and Marketing sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist circuits and routes.

Moderator: Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. Tourism and Hospitality Advisor to UNWTO.

Keynote Speaker: Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh/Chief Executive Officer (Additional Secretary), Bangladesh Tourism Board.

Designated Panelists:

1. All participating Tourism Ministers/Head of delegations
2. Ms. Monwara Hakim Ali, Member of the Governing body of Bangladesh Tourism Board and renowned entrepreneur in tourism and hospitality sector of Bangladesh: Challenges in marketing cross border Buddhist circuits and routes in South Asia
3. Mr. Yuji IIDA, Deputy General Manager, JATA, Japan, Perspectives on marketing Buddhist circuits and route to the Japanese market.
4. Mr. Md. Altaf hossain, Director General, Department of Archeology, Bangladesh: Perspectives on the role of government in supporting the development of Archeology as part of the multi country Buddhist heritage circuits and routes:

1645- 1715 Open Discussion

1715 -1730 Concluding remarks by the moderator Mr. Ludwig.

Adjournment of the Day 1 of Conference

1730 -1800 Networking Break
1930: Dinner preceded by cultural performance hosted by the Hon. Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh in honor of the participants at the National Parliament House Premises/BICC (Venue to be confirmed).

28 October 2015

0900-1000 Plenary Session 3: Challenges, opportunities and best practices in developing and marketing sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist circuits and routes with best practice from the Saint James Way in Europe.

Moderator:

Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. Tourism and Hospitality Advisors and UNWTO Advisor.

Keynote Speaker:

Madame Nava Dominguez of Xunta de Galicia—St James’ Way

Designated Panelists:

1. Mr. Milton Hyunsoo Kal, Development Strategist, Consultant of IFC and WB: Ensuring sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist tourism outcomes.
2. Dr. Heather Peters, Senior Consultant at Culture Unit, UNESCO Bangkok: Protecting Buddhist heritage values in cross border Buddhist circuits and routes.
3. Mr. Toufiq Rahman, Director, Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh and Secretary-General, PATA Bangladesh Chapter: Marketing and packaging cross border Buddhist circuits and routes
4. Mr. Yuji IIDA, Deputy General Manager, JATA: Meeting market expectations and requirements.

1000-1015: Tea Break

1015-1045: Open Discussion

1045 - 1055 Concluding remarks by the Moderator Mr. Ludwig.
1100 - 1200: **Plenary Session 4:** Setting directions for preparing a road map for the planning, development and marketing of sustainable and inclusive cross border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes in South Asia.

**Moderator:** Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. Tourism and Hospitality Advisors and UNWTO Advisor

**Panelists:**
1. Dr. Bikiron Prashad Barua, Ex-Professor of Chittagong University and Buddhist Leader of the country
2. Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, CEO, Bangladesh Tourism Board and PATA Board Member
3. Mr. Milton Hyunsoo Kal, Development Strategist, Consultant of IFC and WB
4. Madame Nava Dominguez of Xunta de Galicia
5. Mr. Ashok Pokharel, President, Nepal Tour Operators Association
6. Ms. Elma Morsheda, Representative, Bangladesh Resident Mission, ADB, Dhaka
7. Mr. XU JING, Director of Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific

1200-1240: **Open Forum Discussion**

1240 - 1255 **Concluding remarks by the Moderator**

13.00-13.30 **Closing ceremony:**

**Chief Guest:** Mr. Rashed Khan Menon, MP, Hon Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh

**Closing remarks:** Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary General, UNWTO.

**Adoption of the Chair’s Summary**

**Thanks Given by:** Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, CEO, Bangladesh Tourism Board

13.30-1400: **Press Conference**

1400: **Working Lunch**

*End of the sessions of the conference*

**Note**

**Speakers are subject to change.**
29 October 2015

Complimentary Technical Tour (Optional):

Option-01 (29 October 2015):

Day long
Dhaka City Tour including Buddhist settlement.

Option-02 (29 October 2015)

Day long
Dhaka-Home of AtishDipanlar, Great Scholar of Buddhism of the world, Bajrojogini, Munshigonj-Dhaka city

Option-03 (29 October 2015):

Dhaka-MoinamotiShalban Bihar, Comilla-SonargoenPanam city (Old capital of Bengal)-Dhaka

Option-04: (28 & 29 October 2015):

Dhaka-Paharpur Buddhist Monastery (Sompura Mahavihara)-Mahasthangarh citadel-Dhaka

End of the program