International Conference

on

“Developing Sustainable and Inclusive Buddhist Heritage and Pilgrimage Circuit in South Asia’s Buddhist Heartland”

Bangabandhu International Convention Center (BICC), Dhaka, Bangladesh

27 and 28 October, 2015
1.0 Assistance in Organization and Holding of Buddhist Tourism Conference

1.1 Conference Concept

The underlying concept for holding the Conference was to take stock of the work already done by the Buddhist Heartland countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka under the South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) framework to further develop the potential of Buddhist heritage tourism in the sub-region. Although significant strides have been made under the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-sponsored SASEC framework and the related South Asia Tourism Development Infrastructure Program in Nepal at Lumbini, and Sikkim, and Paharpur in Bangladesh, much remained to be done to create 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. Although the SASEC program included the Mahasthan and UNESCO listed Paharpur monuments as playing a key role in the development of cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits, the full scope of Bangladesh's Buddhist tourism resources and the role these could play in the development of Bangladesh tourism had not been assessed.

In the above context, the immediate objectives of the Conference was to bring together the 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 was intended to:

a. Review the current situation in regard to the conservation, planning, development, marketing and impact of cross-border Buddhist tourism in South Asia.

b. 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.

c. 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.

d. Provide direction for the preparation of a road map for the sustainable and inclusive development of multi-country Buddhist circuits and routes.
1.2 Conference Program and Participants

The Conference program was designed to address the four objectives of the Conference by bringing together government policymakers, tourism officials, private sector tourism industry players in Asia, as well as civil society, Non-Government Organization (NGOs), community-based organizations, Buddhist leaders, Buddhist site managers, academia, research institutions, international development partners, UN organizations and the media. The full Conference concept paper and program are attached at Appendix B.

2.0 Proceedings of the Buddhist Tourism Conference

2.1 Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony, attended by over 500 participants, was officially opened by the Chief Guest, H. E. Sheikh Hasina, Hon. Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and preceded by welcome remarks by H.E. Khursheed Alam Chowdhury, Hon. Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh, a speech by H. E. Dr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of UNWTO, followed by welcome presentations by H.E. Muhammad Faruk Khan, MP, Hon. Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh, and H.E. Rashed Khan Menon, MP, Hon. Minister, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh. The UNWTO Secretary-General stressed the importance of tourism as a global force for peace and sustainable socio-economic development noting that South Asia’s shared Buddhist heritage provided a great opportunity for it to cooperate in the development of new cross-border tourism products that if carefully planned, could provide more sustainable and inclusive socio-economic opportunities, while contributing to improved understanding and peace within the region. Her Excellency the Prime Minister laid out the Government’s policy in regard to the sustainable development of tourism in Bangladesh and stressed the importance of regional cooperation in the development of strategic tourism resources such as Buddhist heritage. She identified Bangladesh as a key player given the scope and quality of its Buddhist heritage resources in the development of Buddhist heritage tourism, and used the occasion to launch “Visit Bangladesh Year—2016”.

2.2 Conference Sessions

The main Conference sessions commenced after the Prime Minister’s party left the ceremonial hall and involved around 350 delegates. Prior to the start of the first Conference Session, Mr. Xu Jing, Executive Secretary and UNWTO Regional Director for the Asia and the Pacific Region gave an introductory speech that set the context of the four plenary and one breakout session. He noted that in Session 1, the focus was introducing the scope of the opportunity and challenges in terms of planning, developing and marketing sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes. He noted that the following three simultaneous breakout sessions were designed to dig deeper into the challenges, opportunities and best practices in developing sustainable and inclusive cross-
border Buddhist circuits and routes, focusing on facilitating cross-border access and connectivity, ensuring sustainable and inclusive outcomes and packaging and marketing cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits/routes and products. He noted that the second plenary session was designed to identify the role of the government and the private sector in planning, developing and marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes and stressed that the public and private sectors would need to cooperate regionally to facilitate this role. He indicated that the third session was designed to explore some of the 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 as well as from Japan and Republic of Korea. Finally, he noted that the Fourth Session of the Conference was intended to provide guidance to the concerned regional public and private sectors on the planning, development, management and marketing of sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes. He concluded by advising that the UNWTO and its partners would be strongly interested in supporting the countries and private sector in the implementation of the development of Buddhist tourism circuit and route in the region and wished the delegates success in their deliberations.

The salient points of the main Conference sessions—Plenary Sessions 1 to 4 and Breakout Sessions 1 to 3—are summarized below and more detailed account of the proceedings is presented in Appendix C.

2.2.1 Plenary Session 1

The session sought to explore the concept of Buddhism tourism, its multi-country dimension, and what it takes to plan, develop and market cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes. In particular, the session sought to gather perspectives and guidance on: “why Buddhist tourism and the contribution it can make to peace, prosperity and sustainable environments is necessarily multi-country in character”; cross-border cooperation in the conservation of Buddhist heritage and culture, planning and development of cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in South Asia, cooperation in the marketing of cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in the public and private sector, and cooperation in assessing the socio-economic impact of cross-border Buddhist tourism.

The session was introduced by a keynote address by Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, UNWTO Advisor to the Conference in which he helped to define the scope of the market for Buddhist pilgrimage and heritage tourism, identified the Buddhist heritage resources in South Asia, indicated the spatial characteristics of the proposed multi-country Buddhist circuits and routes in South and Southeast Asia, and reviewed some of the earlier plans and ongoing projects aimed at supporting the development of sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes in the Buddhist Heartland countries of South Asia. He went on to review and evaluate the scope of Bangladesh’s Buddhist heritage pointing out that Bangladesh’s Buddhist heritage resources were on par with those of other Buddhist Heartland countries and that given developments of the Asian Highway and air connectivity improvements between Bangladesh and key Buddhist
country markets in Asia, that these could play a major role in the development of cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes in the region.

The keynote address was followed by presentation from six panelist resource persons:

a. **Dr. Heather Peters**, Senior Consultant, Ophidian Research Institute, Philadelphia, USA and Former Senior Consultant at Culture Unit, UNESCO Bangkok gave a presentation on perspectives on cross-border cooperation in the conservation of Buddhist heritage and culture. Dr. Peters noted that some of the main challenges to cooperation among countries were overcoming political and nationalistic biases, raising the economic priority for action, getting long-term commitments to achieve a result, moving away from traditional country-based project approaches and raising the capacity of human resources. She noted that the main role of the public sector was to provide the financial and human resources necessary for the conservation of Buddhist heritage and culture in coordination with other countries; and that the private sector should reinvest part of its profits in the conservation efforts. She gave a number of success stories of cross-border cooperation in the conservation of protected areas between Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh and noted that cross-border exchanges work best when countries can share and exchange knowledge, experience and expertise. She noted that UNESCO's approach to cross-border conservation programs involved improved site management, effective monitoring of carrying capacities and professional management of sites based on best practices could be adopted by the region. Finally, she noted that political will, the desire of local communities to work together, and availability of supporting development partners such as UNESCO are fundamental to successful cooperative approaches.

b. **Mr. Shahidul Alam**, Senior Project Officer, ADB, Bangladesh Resident Mission, Dhaka presented a paper on perspective on cross-border cooperation in the development tourism infrastructure in cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in South Asia during which he reviewed the ADB’s support to the development of cross-border Buddhist and natural heritage tourism in South Asia. He noted that the Bank had supported the formulation of a Tourism Development Plan for cooperation on Buddhist heritage and nature circuits among the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka that included proposals for specific project interventions in each country; provided technical assistance to design specific loan projects in Bangladesh at Mahasthan and Parapur, in Sikkim in India and provision of iconic information center and related tourist facilities and clean air transportation services at Lumbini—birthplace of Lord Buddha—as well as upgrading of the nearby Gautam Buddha Airport to international regional standard; and capacity building support to National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) to plan, develop and market cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes as well as site management support to site managers in the participating countries.
c. **Mr. Ashok Chandra Pokharel**, President, Nepal Association of Tour Operators, presented perspectives on cooperation in the marketing of cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in the public and private sector. Mr. Pokharel set out a number of necessary steps in the packaging and marketing the Buddhist Circuit: (i) establishing a working group which must be led by the tour operators where issues concerning travel facilitation, building tourist class infrastructure, etc. could be discussed and lobbied to the governments; (ii) assessing the state of readiness of circuits and routes – focusing on access, travel facilitation, product development to deliver experiential tour packages; (iii) developing a pilot circuit package encouraging support from NTOS – and looking for opportunities for community participation; (iv) creating marketing support structures including web-based marketing to gain critical mass; and (v) monitoring and evaluating the results of the pilot project and adjusting the subsequent circuit package and packages. He noted that this would require a PPP approach with the public sector addressing the main policy components.

d. **Mr. Mohammed Rafiquzzaman**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh presented the perspectives on cooperation in assessing the socio-economic impact of cross-border Buddhist tourism. Mr. Mohammed Rafiquzzaman noted that there were two existing platforms for tourism cooperation, i.e. SAARC and SASEC with the former mainly promotional in focus and the latter development and promotional orientated. He noted that the tourism component of SASEC while already substantial needs to be ramped up significantly. Within the framework of SASEC, he recommended that there was a need to: (i) establish a strong cooperation legal framework to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information by which research and development work can be undertaken; (ii) establish a common platform in data compilation and assessment and publishing the data for use of other countries as well as in the exchange of knowledge, intelligence, expertise for human resource development, and statistics for a holistic understanding of economic impacts; (iii) create circuits that will further promote cooperation; and (iv) create a research center which will centralize the collection of data regarding Buddhist tourism’s socio-economic impacts.

- **Mr. Faruque Hasan**, Director, Tour Planners Ltd and Tourism consultant, Bangladesh spoke on the topic of “Perspectives on developing heritage and Buddhist heritage tourism circuits”, began his presentation by noting that tour operators, being the main driving force in the development of the circuits, play a crucial role mobilizing support from the public sector and other organizations and community groups. Thus, it is vital that tour operators in the region create business-to-business partnerships focused on developing specific Buddhist tourism circuits and route products as this will be the main driving force in the development of the circuits. In
this context, he recommended that: (i) annual meetings between tour operators be arranged led by the government which may include the conduct of familiarization tours to encourage operation within the route for their product itineraries; (ii) a South Asia Tourist Visa (also Silk Road Visa) must be introduced and lobbied while focusing on areas for reciprocity; (iii) and simplification of immigration and custom checking practices – arguing that: “Traveling is a right, not a privilege”. Finally, in regard to Bangladesh, he recommended that the government conduct a major research program with international community support to unearth the Buddhist heritage present in the country, mobilize it for tourism, and bring benefits to the surrounding communities giving priority to the Mahasthangarh Paharpur (6 excavated out of 128 ancient ruins), Mainamoti (7 excavated out of 58 ancient ruins), and Birthplace of Atisha Dipankara and Vikrampuri Vihara sites.

- **Ms. Song Ok Chu** (Ms. Ken Myeong Beop), Professor of Buddhism, Nungin University of Buddhism, Republic of Korea and Member of Temple Stay Advisory Committee, Republic of Korea spoke on the perspectives on the prospects and approaches to marketing in the Korean market. Ms. Beop’s presentation focused on the approach to the development and operation of Korea’s highly successful Temple Stay program that is designed to help young Koreans to know about the traditional culture and spirituality of Buddhism, as well as experiencing the local environment and attractions while staying in a traditional Buddhist temple, and in the process learning about “true happiness”. The program was developed by Temple Stay Korea (TSK), and an NGO connected with Buddhism in the country. TSK prepared the way by concluding agreements with key government, local communities and private sector agencies to develop, package and promote the temple stay program. Ms. Beop noted that in 2014, around 1.4 million young people participated in the program and that participation had been growing steadily since 1999 when the program started. She also noted that there were many different types of temple stay packages ranging from scenic nature treks with temple stays to temple stay immersion based on particular Buddhist elements such as meditation, cuisine, etc. She stressed the importance of having a clear focus and a partnership approach in the success of developing programs such as the temple stay program and recommended this approach in the development of Buddhist heritage tourism in the Buddhist heartland countries.

The panel and plenary discussions noted that:

- The Korean model may be applied to the region – marketing but at the same time managing the programs in terms of visitor impacts to the sites and traditions; these are essential in developing in a sustainable manner.
The Temple Stay program is different from the traditional home stay programs as it is the monks who operate this; many participants enjoy their time with the monks and learning about the traditional experience.

- In certain areas, such as in Yunnan Province, China, tourism has overridden the religious pilgrimage value of the Buddhist sites and site managers, planners and developers should watch out for these and ensure that the correct balance is struck between them.
- Home stays are also avenues for cultural interaction with the communities by learning their traditions and local customs, and who are also very knowledgeable of the intangible heritage. Encouraging the development of home stay accommodations in the vicinity of Buddhist heritage sites will not only create additional sources of income in the community but also encourage entrepreneurship through production of vegetables and fruits in food outlets, local transportation services and handicraft production and sale.
- The youth of Asia (especially Japan, China and Republic of Korea) are searching for their roots in heritage and meaning and these are the themes that must be highlighted in packaging the Buddhist heartland.
- The ADB is a major supporter of the development of Buddhist heritage circuits – all the development projects are related to inclusive growth and poverty reduction; tourism projects are focused on enhancing infrastructure through conservation and road and rail connectivity and providing connection to community participation both in the area of building and conservation and involvement through livelihood. The current program of loan and grant project interventions should be expanded to other sites in the region based on a clearly defined selected circuit framework.

2.2.2 Breakout Sessions

The breakout component of the Conference sought to explore in more detail three of the key challenges to developing sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes, i.e. (a) facilitating cross border access and connectivity, (b) ensuring sustainable and inclusive outcomes, and (c) packaging cross border Buddhist tourism circuits/routes and products. The breakout groups were asked to identify the key issues and constraints; consider the point of view of the various proponents; and recommend practical approaches to facilitating access and connectivity, sustainability and inclusiveness, and packaging and marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes. The breakout session was divided into three groups based on the three discussion themes. The key findings and recommendations of each breakout group are summarized below and set out in more detail in the Summary of Proceedings of The Conference at Appendix C.

(a) **Facilitating Cross-Border Access and Connectivity**
The main objective of the session was to obtain better understanding of how to facilitate cross-border access and connectivity. In particular, the session sought to explore: “how to establish the right policy and regulatory framework in support of facilitating access and connectivity?”; “how to put access and connectivity policy and regulation on the tourism agenda of the NTOs?”; “how to prepare and put the private sector’s position to their respective Governments for improved access and connectivity?”; “how to encourage the opening of secondary international airports and flights along Buddhist circuits and routes—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) example?”; and “how to encourage the adoption of innovative approaches and technologies to facilitate cross-border movement of tourists along Buddhist circuits and routes?”.

The session was led by Mr. Sunil Chopra, Area Manager for Asia-Pacific, International Air Transport Association (IATA), Singapore, and supported by a panel of reactors comprising Ms. Gitanjali Chaturvedi, Senior Social Development & Tourism Specialist, World Bank (WB), New Delhi, India; Dr. Aparup Chowdhury, Chairman, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation; Mr. Hossain Khalid, President, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) Bangladesh; and Mr. Shahid Hamid, Chairman, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Bangladesh Chapter. The salient conclusions and recommendations of the session were:

- The main barriers to cross-border facilitation are connected with factors such as uneven development between the countries and sovereignty issues, entrenched bureaucratic formalities for crossing borders, lack of resources, knowledge and expertise among the concerned agencies, and insufficient involvement of the private sector to lobby the case for facilitating cross-border movements by tourists.

- There is a need to study the sensitivities of the different stakeholders in each country to better understand the problem of addressing cross-border facilitation issues, to bring them together, and to get the message across not only about cross-border facilitation but also that the sites within the circuits are safe, secure and welcoming for visitors.

- The public sector plays a key role in providing access and connectivity to markets through the development of air, road and rail infrastructure and making it easier for these markets in moving across borders along selected Buddhist tourism circuits or routes. Developing secondary international airports and introducing electronic visas and single clearance border systems as in the Greater Mekong Subregion are strategies that could be adopted by the Buddhist Heartland countries.

- A key need is for the public sector to deliver within set parameters and time frames, a program of cross-border facilitation based perhaps on an agreed pilot circuit or route.

- Education and training is essential to build the expertise in tourism and hospitality while meeting the market’s demand requirements. Private sector and training institutes may take the lead in this area but may need
public sector and development partners’ support to make up for the shortfall in capacity to pay for tourism education and training.

- Marketing and promotion should highlight cross-border Buddhist tourism products that are authentic such as staying in temples for accommodations, with the encouragement of domestic tourism as a first step. This will help to highlight the benefits of facilitating cross-border tourist movements in selected circuits and routes.

(b) **Ensuring Sustainable and Inclusive Outcomes**

The main objectives of the session were to develop a better understanding of what it means to develop and operate sustainable and inclusive Buddhist tourism circuits and routes. In particular, the session sought to answer the following questions: “what are some of the key challenges in ensuring sustainable and inclusive Buddhist tourism circuits and routes?”; “what is involved in ensuring that Buddhist tourism circuits and routes are developed and operated on a sustainable and inclusive basis?”; “what are the benefits of having sustainable and inclusive Buddhist tourism circuits and routes?”; and “what might be done to improve cooperation and collaboration among the participating countries in Buddhist tourism circuits and routes to ensure more sustainable and inclusive outcomes?”.

The session was led by **Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal**, Development Strategist, Consultant of WB and International Finance Corporation (IFC), Republic of Korea, and supported by: **Mr. Mohiuddin Helal**, CEO, Industry Council for Tourism and Hospitality (ISC), Bangladesh; **Mr. Shahid Hussain Shamim**, CEO, Ajiyer Fair Trade Tourism CBT, Bangladesh; **Mr. Shahidul Alam**, Senior Project Officer, ADB participated as Reactor; and **Prof. Sufi Mostafizur Rahman**, Professor of Archeology, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, Dhaka. The main conclusions and recommendations of the session were:

- Conservation of the heritage sites in the selected circuits is the top priority. The conservation process should follow well-defined UNESCO guidelines based upon delineation of specific circuits and routes agreed by the participating countries.

- The resourcing of conservation and related site management is a challenge that can only be addressed by a multi-stakeholder approach, i.e. country heritage conservation organizations working in partnership with development partners such as UNESCO, UNWTO, ADB, WB, and other multi-lateral and bilateral development partners and NGOs.

- The visitor experience at Buddhist heritage sites needs to be broadened to include learning about Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist health and wellness systems, meditation, temple stays, etc. Visitors should also be given the opportunity to take part in the conservation process as an activity encouraging increased length of stay and more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.
Community interaction is key; an inventory and a plan must be made in each part of a selected circuit to clearly delineate where and how they can participate. Community participation is often complicated by the fact that the surrounding communities may not be Buddhists. This could be addressed through special efforts in raising awareness of the value of the Buddhist heritage as a factor in the socio-economic development of their community and to creating a sense of motivation for its conservation.

Tourism stakeholders, particularly the tour operators must be adequately prepared in terms of heritage knowledge and skills training.

(c) Packaging and Marketing Cross-Border Buddhist Tourism Circuits/Routes and Products

The main objectives of this session were to better understand the following issues: “what are some of the main challenges to packaging and marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in the Buddhist heartlands?”; “who are involved in addressing these challenges in the private and public sector and what are their role?”; “what are some examples of practices and lessons that could be applied to packaging and marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in the Buddhist heartlands?”; and “what could be done to address these challenges to packaging and marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes?”.

The session was led by Mr. Ashok Chandra Pokharel, President, Nepal Association of Tour Operators, and supported by: Mr. Mario Hardy, CEO of PATA; Mr. Masud Hossain, Managing Director, the Bengal Tours ltd and Director of Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB); Ms. Daw Khin Than Win, Director, Ministry of Tourism and Hotels, Myanmar; Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia, Spain; and Dr. Kumi Kato, Professor of Wakayama University in Japan. The main conclusions and recommendations of the session were:

- While Bangladesh’s experience in packaging Buddhist heritage tours, and to a lesser extent that of the other Buddhist Heartland countries, shows that there is basic accessibility, the problem remains in the support infrastructure, political commitment and promotional budgets in product formulation.
- In terms of providing the necessary infrastructure and environment for the development and operation of tourist facilities and services, the key players are the government, development partners, NGOs, and tourism stakeholders – these must work together to undertake short-term and long-term goals related to selected cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes.
- Experience in Myanmar indicates strong focus on training human capital (local guides) and its close relationship to international channels has led it to benefit from sub-regional cooperation programs based on its Buddhist heritage.
• The potential benefits of developing and marketing Buddhist heritage circuits and routes are well illustrated by the case of the St. James Way covering Galicia, Spain as well as France and other European countries. In the Galicia component of the ‘Way’, Camino tourism has: prevented the hollowing out of villages and towns by giving valuable economic opportunities to young people; helped restore, conserve and revitalize traditional tangible and intangible culture through adaptive re-use of otherwise disused and dilapidated historic farm and village buildings and structures; and created strong public-private partnerships that have kept the route highly regarded in its markets.

• Master plans providing guidelines in the development of the route helps as it maintains its sustainability agenda.

• Large sums of money will no longer be required for marketing and promotional purposes once people recognize the quality of the experience provided in the route; the strongest and most effective way of promotion will be through people.

• In Japan, research is very rigorous which enables it to study its markets very closely and design the programs accordingly. More market research is required in developing cross-border Buddhist tourism packages in the Buddhist Heartland countries.

• New mobile technologies must be tapped to extend promotions in various channels while enabling visitors to have a better on site experience using electronic-based interpretation tools.

• There is a need to assess more carefully the benefits that the surrounding community may achieve by engaging in their component of a Buddhist circuit to gather support and help which protect the sites and the program itself.

• Creating unique experiences along the circuit is essential to differentiate the circuit or route package and to maximize market penetration, length of stay and expenditure in the different segments of the circuit.

• Although the Buddhist heartland governments are in the process of negotiations, the easing of restrictions for cross-border travel has been slow and there is a need to find a way to fast-track this process—possibly based an agreed pilot circuit or route. The formulation of the pilot circuit could be private sector led and then taken to the concerned countries for adoption, planning and implementation.

2.2.3 Plenary Session 2

The session focused on the Government’s Role in facilitating the planning, development, and marketing sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes with the overall objective of identifying the role of the government and the private sector in these areas. In particular, the session sought to clarify the role of the Government in planning and investment to
facilitate: (i) cross-border access and connectivity; (ii) providing the necessary supporting infrastructure such as airports and roads; (iii) undertaking site protection and management; (iv) supporting private sector investment in related transportation services as well as accommodation, restaurant, leisure and recreation, tour operation and guiding; and (v) supporting the marketing of the circuits and routes.

The session was led by Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, CEO of BTB and Conference Chairman, Bangladesh Ministry of Civil Aviation noted that Bangladesh was blessed with numerous Buddhist heritage sites, but the story is yet to be fully developed. A general lack of coordination between public and private sector representatives, a lack of agreements to undertake efforts to improve infrastructure, and identification and improvement of products was necessary. He noted that over the years, Bangladesh tourism has grown slowly, and that the overall set of opportunities are yet to be realized. The presence of overlapping mandates between governments and government agencies in the development and preservation of heritage sites poses a threat to their conservation and sustainable use going forward and it is therefore important to address these issues before moving much further. He noted that country commitments to regional initiatives led by various agencies (e.g. South Asia Growth Quadrangle, SASEC, SATIDP, etc.) should be maximized following the guidelines and practices set under the SASEC Tourism Development Plan (supported by ADB), i.e. interventions that are based on systemic identification of tourism products; integration of sub-regional and national products; alignment of SASEC tourism approaches to UNWTO principles; and where the NTOs and their co-agencies in government of the countries are given clearly defined responsibilities to implement the guidelines. To successfully facilitate the development of the Buddhist circuits, he recommended that the following activities must be undertaken: (i) Planning – should span short-, medium- and long-term, and emanate inclusive and holistic approaches while strictly following guidelines and timelines in undertaking work; (ii) Technical and financial assistance – tapping agencies such as UNWTO for expertise and technical assistance both in planning and implementation, including financing; (iii) Protection and Conservation – increasing local awareness for co-management and streamlining of government mandates in the management of sites; (iv) Cross-border Connectivity – establishing a cross-border Motor Vehicle Agreement in the Asian Highway to maximize overland connectivity; and (v) Marketing and Promotion – must embody an inclusive approach; and the challenge is to create a distinctive Brand for global identification of the circuit.

The keynote address was followed by presentation from the following panellist resource persons:

- **Mr. Monwara Hakim Ali**, BTB, gave a presentation on the challenges to the public sector in participating in marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes. Ms. Ali noted that all countries recognize the potential for growth contribution of the tourism sector which on average, based on World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) surveys, is about 7 percent globally. However, for Bangladesh to get full benefit from tourism, it must
be marketed more effectively than it has. She noted that this could be achieved by focusing on a specific set of products including country and multi-country Buddhist heritage circuit/route products involving: (i) establishing through market research, a well-defined and unique brand image; (ii) carefully selecting correct positioning modes; (iii) focusing on “idea-based” product development; (iv) spreading and encouraging greater awareness about heritage, history, and culture; (v) undertaking effective and efficient advertising including use of digital marketing approaches; (vi) controlling brand guardianship; (vii) highlighting a global acceptability standard approach; (viii) professionalizing the management of the movement of tourists – adoption of technologies to ease tourist movement; (ix) establishing effective networks of harmonious cooperation between sectors; and (x) introducing a wide range of travel packages showcasing regional approaches. She emphasized most importantly the need to establish dynamism between involved groups to take the challenge of marketing the circuit as one to benefit the entire tourism sector of South Asia.

- **Mr. Yuji Iida**, Deputy General Manager, Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA), gave presentation on perspectives on marketing Buddhist circuit and routes to the Japanese Market noting that in Japan, pilgrimage tours are undertaken which focus on studying the culture and history in the Edo Era. The modern version of visits to religious places in Japan includes annual visits to shrines and ancestors graves. He noted the importance of school trips for high school students that comprises a huge market where they visit many world heritage sites as part of their educational experience. Finally, he pointed out that apart from pilgrimage and school tourism, Japanese tourists also undertake heritage visits, and are interested to study their culture and history regardless of religion. He noted that there are many parallels between the Buddhist heritage and pilgrimage routes in Japan and South Asia. However, there has been much greater government support to developing the necessary infrastructure and superstructure in support of Buddhist tourism than he noted in South Asia. Moreover, the South Asia Buddhist experience is necessarily more than single country focus—unlike Japan—leading to cross-border cooperation challenges that were more difficult to address.

- **Mr. Mohammad Shafiquel Alam**, Former Director General, Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh gave a presentation on perspectives on the role of government in supporting the development of archaeology as part of the Multi-Country Buddhist Heritage Circuits and Routes. Mr. Alam noted that in Bangladesh, the Archaeology Department is the lead agency for the preservation of heritage (its management, conservation and promotion) and that it is currently responsible for 451 cultural heritage sites. He noted that the sites along the corridor in the western region of Bangladesh possess significant cultural value and provides a potential circuit – defined as “Bangladesh Heritage Highway” circuit referred to earlier in Session1. He noted that it was imperative to have a road map to establish guidelines and timelines in the preservation, conservation,
interpretation and management of the sites in Bangladesh and the related cross-border circuit along with necessary research to estimate the economic and financial viability of managing the sites for tourism – this would provide better support in lobbying for additional budget for continuous management support.

In summary, the session agreed that the Government plays a critical role in the planning and investment to facilitate cross-border access and connectivity, providing the necessary support infrastructure such as airports and roads, undertaking site protection and management, supporting private sector investment in related transportation services as well as accommodation, restaurant, leisure and recreation, tour operation and guiding, and supporting the marketing of the circuits and routes. Whilst this role is especially critical at the country level, it was also noted that given the cross-border nature of Buddhist heritage, there was also a need for the participating countries to cooperate through mechanisms such as SASEC that could lay out the necessary road map for coordinated action based on designated circuits.

2.2.4 Plenary Session 3

The objective of the session was to identify what should be done to address the opportunities and challenges, using best practices and lessons from Europe and Asia in developing and marketing sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes. In particular, the session aimed to throw light on the lessons learned from the way in which the Saint James Way was developed for tourism in Europe, and other routes such as the Silk Road Route in Asia. At the end of the session, it was envisaged that public and private sector participants would have a better idea of the way forward in developing and marketing Buddhist circuits and routes in Asia.

The session was led by Ms. Maria. Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia, Spain, discussed the 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. Ms. Pita noted that in the St James Way, tourism has provided a great stimulus to an otherwise stagnating economy generating enormous capacity for growth both in tangible and intangible wealth with tourism contributing 11.1 per cent in GDP and 11.2 per cent of total employment in the regions traversed by the St. James Way. Moreover, it has become a strategic factor for socio-economic and territorial development due to the volume of businesses involved and its capacity to stimulate less-developed areas leading to territorial rebalancing and stabilization of communities. She noted that The St James Way comprises 8 routes traversing more than 100 municipalities in Galicia and that attracts a wide variety of tourists from devout pilgrims to those seeking a contemplative experience in a congenial natural and cultural setting. One highly valued characteristic of the Way is the issuance of a “pilgrim’s passport” and “Compostela” or an official certificate of completion for their route.
Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, noted that to strengthen the Way of St. James, the Government of Galicia took steps for the revitalization, conservation and stimulation of the sites and attractions along the Way; developed and implemented programs for maintenance, restoration and improvement – keeping the way passable at all times; and instituted the management and upgrading of a hostel network and to include high quality heritage farm accommodations to maintain quality of offerings. She noted that the development and management of the Way of St. James is encapsulated in a Master Plan which focuses on 8 areas. The ongoing development of the Way gives the region a global presence and serves as a source of cultural and economic stimulus with positive impact in territorial rebalancing, job creation, and revenue generation, and drives a new service-based economy which is consciously monitored to account the carrying capacity of the Way.

The keynote address was followed by presentation from the following panellist resource persons:

- **Dr. Heather Peters**, Senior Consultant, Ophidian Research Institute, Philadelphia, gave a presentation on protecting Buddhist values in cross-border Buddhist circuits noting that it is important to convey respect to the core values of Buddhism when preparing and visiting Buddhist heritage sites giving examples from Thailand, Lao PDR and China on ways to conduct oneself in a temple or shrine. In regard to the protection of Buddhist values, she noted that this must be undertaken collectively by the communities, Buddhist organizations and related institutions, local authorities, guides, and visitors themselves. She noted that the main threats of tourism to Buddhist values preservation were caused by: (i) a lack of respect and discipline from both visitors and guides; (ii) lack of information factored by communication issues; (iii) over-commercialization of sites which minimizes the real function of the site which is the spiritual function; (iv) ignoring the communities’ rituals and customs; and (v) lack of awareness and implementation of a carrying capacity-based approach to site management. In terms of the main mechanisms needed to protect Buddhist values in cross-border Buddhist circuits, she identified the following as important: (i) establishing General Codes of Conduct for visitors and practitioners (including setting out specific rules for treatment of specific values of sites) and ensuring effective information dissemination (different languages); (ii) developing language training for monks to be able to directly convey codes of conduct; (iii) training of tour guides to enable them to enforce the codes of conduct, e.g. adopting the UNESCO model; (iv) using successful examples such as Balinese communities clearly enforcing rules on their dress code, acceptable behaviour, and limitations and expectations through clear signage and direct communication; (v) adopting general and specific indicators to measure level of protection with special attention on evaluating carrying capacity, which must be regularly monitored by site managers and communities; and (vi) establishing clear
demarcation between public and private spaces, as well as rituals intended for monks/communities only.

- **Mr. Taufiq Rahman**, Director of TOAB and Secretary General of PATA Bangladesh, addressed the issue of marketing and packaging cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes. He noted that the Buddhist culture, heritage and sites of the region have immense value, both inherent and as a source of public education, identity and pride; and that the integrity and authenticity of these cultural assets must be conserved to ensure that the universal values they represent are available to current and future generations. He indicated that UK-based tour operators already operate cross-border tours which begin in Bangladesh and connect to India and Bhutan, etc. since 2003. He noted that in the region, Dhaka is relatively well-connected in terms of air connectivity to several central areas in the Buddhist heartland and that land transport services through bus and rail are also available. Nevertheless, he noted that the major challenges to building the circuits were: (i) the threat of terrorism and people to people conflicts – civil and external wars between the SAARC nations, including political instability and communal riots; and (ii) impact (both perceived and real) of natural calamities such as earthquakes, typhoons and climate change. Finally, he put the following suggestions for the attention of the government: (i) visa activation e.g., SAARC Visa similar to that done in ASEAN; (ii) providing incentives to encourage and invest in tourism product and service development particularly in accommodations, F&B, transport facilities and services; (iii) allocating budgets for marketing and promotion; and (iv) activation of responsible tourism initiatives concerning community awareness and participation, and providing livelihood opportunities.

- **Mr. Yuji Iida**, Deputy General Manager, Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA), Japan, discussed the issue of meeting market expectations and requirements based on the Japanese experience. Mr. Iida noted that the Japanese appreciation of Buddhist heritage goes beyond just belief; and that it is important that the assets possess cultural values as this stimulates Japanese markets to make contribution to the preservation of the sites and collaborate with the local communities for the maintenance of the site. He noted that the Japanese public and private sector are the ones that created practical plans for sustainability with greater importance put in the maintenance of heritage sites for the revitalization of local areas. He noted that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) had been involved in the preservation and restoration of Myanmar’s Bagan’s Buddhist heritage beginning 2015 which includes support by sending Japanese tourists to stimulate tourism, as well as human resource trainings focused on educating how to conduct promotional activities for Japanese markets. He noted that JICA was helping Myanmar to gain international recognition for its World Heritage designation which is believed to increase the overall value of the site. He
noted the role of the NGOs such as the (European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR)—a public and private sector grouping) which provides a strong network for information-sharing through their website as well as being involved in working for promoting preservation, and sharing benefits, might be a relevant approach to the Buddhist circuit and route situation in South Asia.

- **Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal,** Development strategist and Consultant of IFC and WB Group, presented a model approach to ensuring sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist tourism outcomes based on experience from India. He identified what he termed a typical Buddhist Circuit Development Curve with distinct phases. In the initial development phase, most of the businesses involved fall well below the investment breakeven point and as such do not recover their investment making it unfavourable to engage in. At this stage, most of its markets are devout pilgrims (non-growth markets). However, as amenities improve, devotees will follow suit along with an increasing number of culture tourists thus moving the business model to the break even phase. Finally, once the greater travelling market – those interested in the culture and heritage and seeking experiences – becomes involved, the model moves to profitability. He noted in relation to Bangladesh, however, that the challenge is to create a reason for devout Buddhist pilgrims to visit Bangladesh in order for the larger groups to follow suit.

### 2.2.5 Plenary Session 4

The main objective of the session was to set directions for preparing a roadmap for the planning, development and marketing of sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes in South Asia. The session was led by **Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder,** UNWTO Advisor and Moderator and involved two components: (a) brief comments by the attending Ministers and heads of country delegations; and (b) the panel session on setting directions for preparing a roadmap for the planning, development and marketing of sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits and routes in South Asia.

### (a) Ministerial and Heads of Delegation Remarks

**H.E. Top Sopheak,** Deputy Minister of Tourism of Cambodia noted that the Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to promoting sustainability through tourism development projects in conjunction with international cooperation and partnership with development partners such as the ADB and that tourism in Cambodia focuses highly on cultural and natural heritage sites. Based on Cambodia’s experience, he noted that peace, safety and security are very important tools for tourism development; otherwise it will be difficult to build up tourism arrivals. He stressed the importance of all religions in the world working together to build up their common heritage. He noted that Cambodia in the past had been destroyed by war, but since it has been able to translate and convey the country’s state of renewed safety and security to the world, it now receives about 9 million tourists annually.
H.E. Abdul Bari Jahani, Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism of Afghanistan noted that Afghanistan possesses rich remnants of civilization – crossroads of the conquerors that in the past attracted a large tourism flow. However, civil war, invasion and regional conflicts over the last four decades, has brought much of its ancient heritage to the ground including its ancient Buddhist heritage assets (Buddhist cities, temples, and statues). Nevertheless, Afghanistan is working with international agencies and foundations to secure its ancient heritage so that its value can be used in the recovery of its economy and for the future generations of Afghans. Already, Bamiyan—the location of the famous Buddhist alcoves—has been designated is the capital city of SAARC in 2015 and as the centre of Islamic Civilization under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). He noted that once the current security issues are worked out, Afghanistan may once again become a hub for tourism in the region, and in that promise, the country remains hopeful for the future.

H.E. Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuk, Minister of Economic Affairs of Bhutan noted that Bhutan believes in the economic model/development philosophy of Pursuit of Happiness – through sustainable, inclusive, and green economies. In this context, the Buddhist heritage circuit is very important to Bhutan as it mirrors the core values of its philosophy. He noted however, that Buddhism is more than just a religion in Bhutan, but is a way of life– and as such it considers this dimension as key in developing the full potential of the Buddhist circuits to benefit through working together. He advised that Bhutan is a special place as the Buddhism principles, ways of life, and values, remain vibrant up to this day which are not only held in museums or temples or other structures but in the day-to-day lives of its people. To date, tourism comprises the second largest revenue generator for the country's economy (after hydropower) and is the largest job provider of the country. Employment in tourism is special as jobs are not transferable but are anchored where tourism originates. He noted that there is a lot of hope and optimism for the outputs of the Conference as South Asia is the source through which Buddhist values are propagated throughout the world, and from which all humanity can benefit to embrace it. He noted that it is natural that all must collaborate for shared prosperity and that the Royal Government of Bhutan is in full support of the agreements of the Conference.

H.E. Tin Shwe, Deputy Minister of Hotel and Tourism of Myanmar noted that success in any endeavour including the development of cross-border tourism circuits and routes comes through the 8 Noble Truths, i.e. through having: (i) the Right view; (ii) Right thought; (iii) Right speech; (iv) Right livelihood; (v) Right endeavours; (vi) Right mindfulness; (vii) Right concentration; and (viii) Right action, and noted that collaboration must be made through the Buddhist way in order for the initiatives to be successful. He noted that the main objectives should be to address accessibility, the provision of accommodations, and provision for amenities, and when the visitor comes, to ensure that they have a high quality experience to reap the attendant benefits.

H.E. Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, Minister, Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand noted that whilst the bomb explosion in Bangkok in August 2015
affected the overall confidence in Thailand, the strong support from its main tourism markets helped Thailand to bounce back quickly. She noted that the world has changed – with too many things that cannot be controlled – but stressed that tourism and friendship can bring the world back together. The Minister noted that the main aim for Thailand is to develop in a sustainable way by enforcing the “Middle Way” or striking a balance between the business, social-community, and environmental aspects of development; focusing on wealth distribution by spreading income from tourism to the remote communities and agricultural sectors; and developing pride in cultural heritage through grooming the people to learn and appreciate the core values of the country through Buddhist local heritage. The Minister noted the following existing initiatives in Thailand that are in place for the development of Buddhist tourism: (i) holding Buddhist Holidays Tourism; (ii) encouraging Holy Places Tourism; (iii) organizing special interest tours such as the Holy Temples/Sacred Places by Zodiac, meditation tours, and tours that enable guest to seek the meaning of life, spirituality, and peace; (iv) developing working women Tourism; and (v) encouraging Thai Pilgrimage to India. She has also noted that Thai Pilgrimage programs are now in the works of including Bangladesh and Bhutan in the regular pilgrimage practice. The Minister noted that Buddhism can do many things to help people and in the same way bring in tourists; and more than sharing benefits in terms of revenues, the challenge is to share the principles for successful collaboration.

H.E. Shri Vinod Zutshi (AIS), Secretary, Ministry of Tourism of India noted five major roles of government in facilitating cross-border circuits: (i) providing political will and government policies where large amounts of money are allocated to improve amenities in the Footsteps of Lord Buddha route – these are supported by pro-tourism and pro-Buddhist conservation policies; (ii) developing the necessary Infrastructure covering access and visa regime, connectivity, conservation and maintenance, and tour services, facilities and amenities including last mile connectivity, guides, information, activities; (iii) encouraging the provision of Hospitality Services by the private sector – accommodation of tourists of good quality by first building an enabling environment for hospitality investments from all over the world to later create more hospitality services; (iv) undertaking Promotion and Marketing to make people know that the place exists which could be undertaken by establishing presence through various agencies and networks; and (v) promoting Cooperation amongst Nations through establishing effective linkages of Buddhist heritage. Finally, he called upon all stakeholders to take part in the development of the circuit, but noted that it was of paramount importance for everybody to collaborate to understand the full potential of the circuit i.e. make it a preferred destination regionally and internationally.

Mr. Kapila Jayasekara, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism of Sri Lanka noted that Buddhist tourism is one of the main initiatives in developing tourism in Sri Lanka and that cross-border connectivity leads to more sustainable relationships among countries, but can also lead to the greater spiritual relationship among all Asians. In this context, he extended Sri Lanka’s support
to the initiatives to develop cross-border tourism circuits and routes in the region.

**Mr. Li Qianguo**, Director of China National Tourist Office noted that of the 48 UNESCO World Heritage Listed sites of China, five monuments are Buddhist heritage-related indicating that Buddhist tourism is a significant player in China tourism. He also noted that while the sale of Buddhist pilgrimage packages to India are currently meagre at this point, it is expected to grow as improvements in the heartland's tourist transportation and superstructure capacity increases. He also stressed the importance of international cooperation and collaboration to strengthen the relationships among the countries in developing the proposed circuits.

**Mr. Tran Dinh Thanh**, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam noted that tourism in Vietnam is not as developed as that of Singapore and Thailand’s but that it also has a number of Buddhist sites and pagodas in the country that are important and have the capacity to attract international tourists. He noted that not very many international tourists go to Vietnam specifically for Buddhist tourism but that more domestic tourists undertake visits to Buddhist sites – occasionally, and mostly during festivals. He noted that Vietnam already cooperates with other countries and experts from (such as UNESCO, Japan, Republic of Korea and China) for the protection and conservation of its temples and pagodas and that of the total number of around 1,000 sites, 18 percent have been developed since 2014.

As noted by the Moderator in summing up the Ministers and heads of country delegation remarks, Government plays a key role in the development of cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes covering connectivity, accessibility, infrastructure, tourism education and training, and conservation. The Moderator concluded with the hope that the messages of the Conference will be carried back the respective governments, and that going forward, the countries will be able to build a substantial global destination built around the Buddhist heritage not only in the heartland but in Asia as a whole.

**Panel Discussion**

The panel discussion was introduced with a keynote address by Dr. Bikiron Prasad Barua, professor of Chittagong University and Buddhist leader of Bangladesh, followed by a panel and plenary discussion on the main elements of the roadmap. Dr. Barua noted that Bangladesh is a land of Buddhist ancient heritage. It was a Buddhist country during the Pala dynasty (750-1165 A.D). As Pala kings were all Buddhists, it is quite natural that Buddhist monasteries and institutions were developed. Bangladesh has a large range of ancient Buddhist monuments as well as a growing living Buddhist heritage that has great potential for the development of tourism. Whilst the ancient Buddhist heritage sites have already been discussed, some of the more important living Buddhist sites include the birth place of the great saint scholar Atisa Dipankar Sri gyan at Bajrajogini in
Munshiganj District; the Two Jadis in Bandarban district; the Rajban Vihara (Monastery) in Rangamati District; Sima Vihara (Monastery) and 100 feet lying Buddha Statue at Uttar Mithachara Meditation Center at Ramu in Cox's Bazar District; and the recently built monasteries at Mahasaddharama Village Aburkhil, Raozan, in Chittagong. These offered the opportunity to host temple stay tourism along the lines found in the Republic of Korea. He stressed the opportunity that the development of a major Buddhist centre celebrating birth place of the great saint scholar Atisa Dipankar Srigyan at Bajrajogini in Munshiganj District would bring and called for support from the government to facilitate entry visas, the private sector to invest in tourist facilities and services, and for stronger community participation. In conclusion, he noted that: (i) as South Asia is the heartland of Buddhism, we should give emphasis to developing a Buddhist circuit network between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka through discussion at the Government levels; (ii) the private sector and civil society need to be involved for sustainable and infrastructure development of the ancient Buddhist sites especially in Bangladesh; (iii) a committee, should to be formed to look after the management and conservation of the ancient and present sites in Bangladesh. In the committee a Buddhist representative should be included; (iv) budget allocations must be adequate if pilgrims are attracted and for the state to be financially benefitted; (v) a marketing strategy needs to be developed to project the circuits on the world stage; (vi) an inter-Ministerial network needs to be established to address transportation facilities, accommodation and site development etc.; (vii) security and safety of the tourists and tourist spots must be ensured by the respective Ministries; (viii) a communication network on tourism needs to be developed among the above five countries; (ix) tourist guides should be more educated so far as tour is concerned with languages expertise; and (x) there is a need for a sincere commitment to develop the Buddhist heritage project which will definitely enhance the socio-economic conditions of the related localities and foreign currency earning by the country as a whole.

The panel reactors comprising Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, CEO Of BTB and Conference Chairman Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal, Development Strategist, Consultant of WB and IFC, Republic of Korea., Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia, Turismo de Galicia, Mr. Ashok Pokharel, Nepal Association of Tour Operators, and Mr. Xu Jing, Programme for Asia and the Pacific noted that the next steps for the implementation of the Roadmap for Buddhist Tourism in South Asia should involve:

a) Establishing a cross-border tourism-working group (TWG) based on a combination of public and private sector and development partner organizations willing to participate in a pilot project to develop one cross-border Buddhist tourism circuit or route.

b) Selecting a pilot circuit or route for cooperative development within which the stakeholders should:

i. work to improve services and facilities for quality-based Tourism;
ii. improve training and capacity building with emphasis on tour guide training;
iii. make an inventory of the sites and evaluating the sites;
iv. develop new tourism sites based on sound heritage management and conservation – invitation of experts from abroad;
v. develop and improve connectivity and transportation infrastructure;
vi. benchmark the sites, assess and evaluate the needs and potentials of the sites; and
vii. Apply the right examples and practices that are relevant to the situation.

It was noted that the region's tour operators could take the lead in recommending and surveying the pilot circuit and related product offering, and that they could play a key role in the development and promotion of single multi-country routes by: (i) working with the government in improving the quality of service of tourist facilities; (ii) convening and working together with the rest of the region’s tour operators; (iii) packaging culture and heritage with experiential activities; (iv) adopting integration strategies rather than competitive strategies with regard to the development of the Buddhist heritage tourism in the region; (v) undertaking promotions through tri-media: television, movies, etc.; arranging visiting journalism program and motivating the writers; (vi) bringing the Buddhist theme to different travel fairs; (vii) undertaking multi-level development planning to build capacity; and (viii) organizing a regular Conference to monitor the roadmap of the activities.

Overall, the government, private sector, media, local communities with the support of the development partners should create a group to coordinate the development and promotion of the Buddhist circuit together.

2.3 Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony was presided over by the Chief Guest: Mr. Rahsed Khan Menon, MP, Hon Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh who thanked the delegates on behalf of Bangladesh Government and reiterated Bangladesh's intention to pursue the outcome of the Conference. Dr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary General, UNWTO then gave his closing remarks where he pointed out that much had been achieved by the Conference. He noted that the Conference had provided a clear path for the development of multi-country Buddhist heritage tourism circuits and routes and that it was now up to the Buddhist Heartland countries to work together to develop the opportunity, and congratulated the Minister and senior management of the tourism sector of Bangladesh in taking the lead in holding the Conference.

The Secretary General’s closing remarks were followed by the presentation of the Conference summary and recommendations by Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, CEO of BTB and Conference Chairman. In his summary, he noted that in the first session dealing with developing and marketing of sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes, the delegates learned about
the significance of South Asia's Buddhist heritage and its enormous potential to create globally recognized cross-border tourism circuits and routes. He pointed out that delegates also learned that Bangladesh, given its own ensemble of ancient and living Buddhist heritage, can be a major player in the development of these circuits. He advised that to tap this enormous opportunity, the countries of the Buddhist Heartlands will need to cooperate and work together both at the public and private sector level to address the barriers and challenges facing the task of reconnecting, packaging and promoting our ancient Buddhist heritage. He noted that while much has already been done with the support of organizations such as the ADB, there remained much to do to facilitate cross-border access and connectivity, ensure sustainable and inclusive development and to package and market cross-border Buddhist tourism products.

The Chairman noted that “The Idea Capsules” over the luncheon on the first day presented delegates with some new ways of looking at how we should approach the packaging, marketing and promoting the multi country Buddhist heritage circuits and products—particularly in the application and use of digital marketing strategies. He also noted that the breakout sessions examined in more detail what would be involved in facilitating cross-border access and connectivity, ensuring that development is sustainable and inclusive, and packaging and promoting cross-border Buddhist tourism products. It was noted that there was a need to ramp up policies and infrastructure to make it easier for Buddhist circuit travellers to travel to the circuit from their country and to move seamlessly between the countries on the circuit. The Conference also indicated what it takes to achieve a sustainable outcome in terms of the protection and conservation of the ancient and living Buddhist heritage, the development and operation of visitor facilities and services, and how to include otherwise marginalized communities. Finally, the Conference provided guidance on the products that should be offered by the circuit noting that this would need to be more than just sightseeing but also experiential in order to attract large potential markets and that we will need the cooperation and support of the private sector to package and promote these.

The Chairman noted that the second plenary session showed that government plays a key role in implementing the policies that will facilitate cross-border movements and infrastructure, protecting and conserving and presenting Buddhist heritage, and in partnership with the private sector, provide umbrella promotion to present the Buddhist circuits to global markets.

The third plenary session identified some best practices from Europe and Asia in addressing the challenges of developing sustainable and inclusive Buddhist circuits and routes. In particular, much was learned from the European experience with the Saint James Way while equally much was learned from similar examples in Japan and Republic of Korea with its Temple Stay programs.

In the final plenary session on the main components of a road map to develop, package and promote sustainable and inclusive Buddhist circuits and routes, the Chairman noted the importance of having a research-based approach to product development (especially experiential products) and marketing, removing
barriers to cross-border access and facilitating connectivity, protecting and conserving Buddhist heritage, bringing local communities into the tourism economy created by the circuits and sites, ensuring that the development of tourist facilities and services is socially and environmentally responsive, and organizing the basis for undertaking cooperative promotion campaigns.

Finally, the Chairman put the following recommendations to the Conference delegates, that:

- The governments, private sectors, local community representatives, academe and the media in the Buddhist heritage countries in South Asia create a working group to formulate and implement a road map for the development and promotion of sustainable cross-border Buddhist heritage circuits and routes.
- That the assistance of the multi-lateral development partners be sought to support the countries in undertaking policy reforms, infrastructure and capacity building initiatives under the road map.
- That regular Conferences and forums be held to communicate the road map to its publics and report on implementation progress.

The delegates voted unanimously to adopt the Chairman’s Summary and Recommendations at the end of which Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir thanked the delegates and closed the Conference which was followed by a Press Conference and a Networking Lunch.
Appendix A:

Concept Paper and Program

for the

International Conference

on

“Developing Sustainable and Inclusive Buddhist Heritage and Pilgrimage Circuit in South Asia’s Buddhist Heartland”

Bangabandhu International Convention Center (BICC), Dhaka, Bangladesh
27 and 28 October, 2015

Hosted by
Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh

in collaboration with

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Synopsis

South Asia is recognized as the heartland of Buddhism and as such is of great interest to the world’s estimated 500 million Buddhists¹ 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 tourism 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 do 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 contribute more to sustained inclusive 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 development partners to work together to fully develop these tourism circuits. The proposed Conference to be held from 27 to 28 October 2015 in Dhaka, to be hosted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism of Bangladesh with the support of the 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 in the countries.

¹Pew Research Center 2010 Survey and Forecast, 2012.(www.pewforum.org)
Background and Rationale 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 world’s 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, 35 of which 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 the 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 (SompurMohavihara) 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. \(^2\) 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. \(^3\)

Although overall data on tourism motivated by Buddhist pilgrimage and interest in Buddhist culture to South Asia are 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 for 17 percent and Buddhist pilgrims around 90 percent with an expected annual growth rate of between 10 and 15 percent over the next decade. \(^4\)

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 Buddhist tourism can create employment opportunities, generate income, alleviate

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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. ADB, 2011.
\(^4\) Lumbini Development Trust, 2014.
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 for many years. Most notable of them 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 of 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 SASEC framework to further develop the potential of Buddhist and eco-tourism. The guiding document of the cooperation was the 2004 SASEC Tourism Development Plan (TDP) and subsequent designs in 2008 and 2009, with 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

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5 See ADB South Asia Tourism Development Infrastructure Program
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 AtishaDipankara at Bikrampur under the Munshiganj district of Bangladesh, as well as, the Sundarbans 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 have been made under the ADB funded US$ 150+ million South Asia Tourism Development Infrastructure Program in Nepal at Lumbini, and 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 the industry leaders, policy makers and markets’ 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-borderBuddhist 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-borderBuddhist 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.
Program

Conference Venue:
Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), Sher-E-Bangla Nagor, Agargaon, Dhaka.

26th October 2015 (Monday)

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

1400-2100: Registration at all officials’ hotels

1730-1900: Speakers and panellists meeting at Meghna Room, Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, Dhaka.

1930: Welcome Reception and dinner: Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, hosted by BTB.

27th October 2015 (Tuesday)

0800-1700: Registration for the participants at Carnival Hall, BICC, Dhaka.

0900-10:30: Welcome remarks and Opening Ceremony at “Hall of Fame”, BICC, Dhaka.
- Welcome address by Mr. Khurshed Alam Chowdhury, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh.
- Speech by H.E. Dr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of UNWTO
- .
- Speech by Mr. Muhammad Faruk Khan MP, Hon. Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh.
- Speech by Mr. Rashed Khan Menon MP, 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, Her Excellency. Sheikh Hasina, Hon. Prime Minister, the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.
1030:10:45: Tea Break at Harmony Hall, sponsored by Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI)

10:45-11:00: Introductory speech (Carnival Hall)

**Mr. Xu Jing**, Director of Regional Program for Asia and the Pacific, UNWTO: Why regional cooperation in tourism planning, development and marketing promoted peace and understanding and brings more sustainable and inclusive outcomes

11:00-12.30: Plenary Session 1(Carnival Hall):

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. And tourism and hospitality advisor to UNWTO.

Keynote speaker:  **Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder**, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. tourism and hospitality advisor to UNWTO: What it takes to plan, develop and market cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes.

Designated panellists:

1. **Dr. Heather Peters**, Senior Consultant, Ophidian Research Institute, Philadelphia, USA and Former Senior Consultant at Culture Unit, UNESCO Bangkok: Perspectives on cross-border cooperation in the conservation of Buddhist heritage and culture.
2. **Mr. Shahidul Alam**, Sr. Project Officer, ADB, Bangladesh Resident Mission, ADB, Dhaka: Perspective on cross-border cooperation in the development tourism infrastructure in cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in South Asia.
3. **Mr. Ashok Chandra Pokharel**, President, Nepal Association of Tour Operators: Perspectives on cooperation in the marketing of cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in the public and private sector.
4. **Mr. Mohammad 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**, Director, Tour Planners Ltd and Tourism consultant, Bangladesh: Perspectives on developing heritage and Buddhist heritage tourism circuits.
6. **Ms. Song Ok Chu (Ms. Ken Myeong Beop)**, Professor of Buddhism, Nungin University of Buddhism, Republic of Korea and member of Temple stay
Advisory Committee, Seoul, Republic of Korea: Perspectives on the prospects and approaches to marketing in the Korean market.

1230-13:00: Open forum discussion moderated by Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. And tourism and hospitality advisor to UNWTO.

13:00-13:10: Concluding remarks by the moderator Mr. Ludwig G Rieder.

13:10-14:00: Working lunch and “idea capsules” by experts at Harmony Hall.

13:15-13:30: Idea Capsulation 1:  
Mr. Mario Hardy, Chief Executive Officer, PATA: Digital transformation---Implications for developing and marketing sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and products.

13:30-13:45: Idea capsules 2:  
Mr. Jens Thraenhart, Executive Director, Mekong Tourism Coordinating Organization, Thailand Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports: Marketing Mekong Tourism.

14:15-15:45: Breakout Sessions:

Challenges, opportunities and best practices in developing sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes.

Breakout Sessions-1(Carnival Hall): 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, Senior Social Development & Tourism Specialist, WB, New Delhi, India.

2. Dr. Aparup Chowdhury, Chairman, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

3. Mr. Hossain Khalid, President of DCCI Bangladesh.

4. Mr. Shahid Hamid, Chairman, PATA Bangladesh Chapter.
Breakout Session- 2 (Media Bazar): Ensuring sustainable and inclusive outcomes:

Moderated by Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal, Development Strategist, Consultant of WB and IFC, Republic of Korea.

Research Partner: Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal, Development Strategist, Consultant of WB.

Reactors:

1. Mr. Mohiuddin Helal, CEO, Industry Council for Tourism and Hospitality (ISC), Bangladesh.
2. Mr. Shahid Hussain Shamim, CEO, Ajiyer Fair Trade Tourism CBT, Bangladesh.
3. Ms. Elma Morsheda, Senior Project Officer (Urban Infrastructure development), Bangladesh Resident mission, ADB, Dhaka (Instead of Ms. Elma Morsheda, Mr. Shahidul Alam, Sr. Project Officer, ADB participated as Reactor)
4. Prof. Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, Professor of Archaeology, Jahangir Nagar University, Savar, Dhaka.

Breakout Session- 3 (Windy Town): Packaging cross-border Buddhist tourism circuits/routes and products:

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

Reactors:

1. Mr. Mario Hardy, CEO of PATA.
2. Mr. Masud Hossain, Managing Director, the Bengal Tours ltd and Director of Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB).
3. Ms. Daw Khin Than Win, Director, Ministry of Tourism and Hotels, Myanmar
4. **Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director**, Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia, Spain.

5. **Dr. Kumi Kato**, Professor of WAKAYAMA University in Japan

Research partner: **Mr. Ashok Pokharel**, President, Nepal Association of Tour Operators, Nepal.

15:45-16.00: Tea Break at Harmony Hall.

16:05-17:05:

Plenary Session 2 (Carnival Hall):

**Governments’ role in facilitating, 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: **Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir**, Chief Executive Officer (Additional secretary), BTB, Ministry of Civil aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh and PATA Board Member.

Designated panellists:

1. **Ms. Monowara Hakim** Ali, Member of the Governing Body of BTB: Challenges in marketing cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes in south Asia

2. **Mr. Yuji IIDA**, Deputy General Manager, JATA, Japan: Perspectives on marketing Buddhist circuits and route to the Japanese market.

3. **Mr. Mohammad. Shafiqual Alam**, Former Director General, Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh: Perspectives on the role of government in supporting the development of archaeology as a part of the multi county Buddhist heritage circuits and routes

17:05-17:30: Open Discussion
17.30-17:40: Concluding remarks by the moderator Mr. Ludwig G Rieder.

**Adjournment of the day 1 of the Conference**

17:40-18:15: Networking Break

1930-2130:

Dinner preceded by cultural program hosted by the Hon. Minister for civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh in honour of the participants at Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC).

Venue: Celebrity Hall, Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), Dhaka.

**28 October 2015 (Wednesday)**

0900-1000:

Plenary Session 3 (Carnival Hall):

**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 advisor to UNWTO.

Keynote speaker: Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia, Spain- St James’ way

Designated panellists:

1. **Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal**, Development Strategist, Consultant of IFC and WB: Ensuring sustainable and inclusive cross-border Buddhist tourism outcomes.

2. **Dr. Heather A Peters**, Senior Consultant, Ophidian Research Institute, Philadelphia, USA and Former Senior Consultant at culture unit, UNESCO Bangkok: Protecting Buddhist heritage values in cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes.
3. **Mr. Taufiq Rahman**, Director of TOAB and Secretary General of PATA Bangladesh Chapter: marketing and packaging cross-border Buddhist circuits and routes.

4. **Mr. Yuji IIDA**, Deputy General Manager, JATA, Japan: Meeting market expectations and requirements.

10:00-10:15: Tea Break at Harmony Hall

10:15-10:35: Open discussion

10:35-10:45: Concluding remarks by the moderator **Mr. Ludwig G Rieder**.

10:45-11:45:

Special Session for all Ministers and Head of Delegations (Carnival Hall):

**Speeches by All participating Tourism Ministers from Bhutan, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Afghanistan and Head of Delegations from India, Vietnam, China, and Sri Lanka.**

Moderator: **Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder**, Chairman, Asia Pacific Projects, Inc. tourism and hospitality advisor to UNWTO.

1145-1230:

Plenary Session 4 (Carnival Hall):

**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 advisor to UNWTO.

Designated Panellists:


1. **Dr. Bikiron Prasad Barua**, Ex- professor of Chittagong University and Buddhist leader of Bangladesh.
2. **Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir**, CEO of BTB and PATA Board Member.

3. **Mr. Milton Hyun Soo Kal**, Development strategist and Consultant of IFC and WB.

4. **Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti,** Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia, Spain.

5. **Mr. Ashok Pokharel**, President, Nepal Association of Tour Operators.

6. **Mr. Xu Jing**, Director of Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific, UNWTO.

12:30-12:50: Open Forum Discussion

12:50-12:55: Concluding Remarks by the Moderator, **Mr. Ludwig G Rieder**.

12:55-13:10: Closing Ceremony (Carnival Hall):

- Chief Guest: **Mr. Rahsed Khan Menon**, MP, Hon Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh.
- Closing Remarks: **Dr. Taleb Rifai**, Secretary General of UNWTO.
- Adoption of the Chair's summary: **Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir**, CEO of BTB.
- Thanks given by: **Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir**, CEO of BTB


13:40-14:30: Working Lunch at Harmony Hall.

End of the sessions of the Conference.

**29 October 2015 (Thursday)**

Complimentary Technical Tour (for International Participants)

Option-01(29 October 2015): Day long
Dhaka city-tour including Buddhist settlements.

Option-02 (29 October 2015): Day long

Dhaka- Bajrojogini, Munshigonj, Residence of Atish Dipankar, great scholar of Buddhism of the world, -Dhaka and some other Buddhist temple of Dhaka city.

Option-03 (29 October 2015): Day Long

Dhaka-MoinamotiShalban Bihar, Comilla-Sonargaon, Panam city (old capital of Bengal)-Dhaka.

Option-04 (28 & 29 October 2015): 2 Days Long

Dhaka-Paharpur Buddhist Monastery (Sompura Mahavihara)-Mohasthangarh citadel-Dhaka.

End of the Program
Appendix B: Summary of Proceedings of the Conference

PLENARY SESSION 1

Topic: Developing and Marketing Sustainable and Inclusive Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes
Moderator: Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, UNWTO

Keynote 1: Mr. Ludwig Rieder, UNWTO

- Asia’s Buddhist Heartland is a broad region, of which some are already well-developed (e.g. Footsteps of Lord Buddha and Lumbini complex).
- The opportunity is to develop and implement new ways of working together and contribute towards building the sustainable and inclusive agenda of the UN.
- Statistics provide of the total number of practicing Buddhists in the world and the young travelling markets from East Asia, the Americas and Europe, the target market would have made about 193 million outbound trips in 2013, but only 0.27 percent have visited the Buddhist heartland in the same year
  - Note: Young travellers (Gen X&Y) are important as they are looking for experiential travel.
- Low market penetration is mainly due to:
  - Disconnection of the ancient heritage – separation due to national borders.
  - Site access – urban areas have developed away from the sites.
  - Conservation and interpretation and visitor information – archaeology have not been completed; no full analysis of the heritage.
  - Community participation – there is an intolerant approach in understanding religion and culture; must involve communities to become stewards of preservation
  - Packaging – not only archaeological but also intangible components – showcase music, arts, festivals, health and wellness concepts of the Buddhist philosophy.
  - Leadership – private sector initiatives; creation and mobilization of a regional tourism organization not only comprising private sector but also development partners and maximize dialogue.
- Addressing the immediate causes will increase market penetration sevenfold, benefits of which can pay-off largely in terms of socio-economic impacts.
• Possible routes can be built within the circuit, and of interesting opportunity is building a route using river-ways.

• Its Buddhist heritage assets may be grouped into three clusters: the Bogra Cluster, the Munshiganj-Comilla Ancient and Living Buddhist Heritage; and the Chittagong-Cox’s Bazar cluster.

• Assessment of potential of Buddhist heritage in Bangladesh:
  o Sites are on par with most of the other parts of the heartland
  o Less connected than other countries to the main markets in East Asia (by air).
  o Road access is unsuitable for international tourists in terms of driving safety.
  o Site protection and interpretation, as well as visitor support facilities are limited.
  o Packaging of products does not highlight intangible elements.
  o Community support mechanisms can be further improved.

• Road map for realizing the value:
  o Cluster evaluation of Buddhist heritage assets (tangible and intangible).
  o Consider one cluster as a pilot to plan, implement and monitor and evaluate the results.

Panellist 1.1: Dr. Heather Peters, Ophidian Research Institute
Topic: Perspectives on Cross-Border Cooperation in the Conservation of Buddhist Heritage and Culture

• Challenges to cooperation in the conservation of Buddhist heritage:
  o Politics & nationalism – agree to promote the trans-boundary circuits (already happening).
  o Economics (prioritization) – could be met through creative partnerships with multiple sectors, including international foundations such as UNESCO.
  o Time constraints – requires long-term commitment.
  o Traditional project model is single country, single site.
  o Lack of expertise and human resources – innovative training programs outside of regular educational system.

• The public sector’s main role in conservation is to contribute through funding and identify need for expertise (UNESCO, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation of Cultural Property (ICCROM)) and NGOs

• Meanwhile, the private sector must re-invest/donate a part of their profits back to conservation efforts (e.g. gate fees, etc.), and also tap private sector-led foundations.

• Success stories of cross-boundary cooperation:
Cooperation in conservation of protected areas (Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh).
Small-scale cooperation also practiced in educational institutions and monasteries in Yunnan to preserve Buddhist art and temple restoration projects.
Cross-border exchanges work best when countries can share and exchange knowledge, experience and expertise.

- Conservation programs are three-fold:
  - Better management of sites – adopt UNESCO's management tools and principles and share it with the community for preventive preservation.
  - Monitoring Carrying Capacities.
  - Professional conservation of the sites – developing joint programs by tapping the expertise of other countries to train local managers/professionals.

- A number of very good opportunities to cooperate, but it comes down to political will and the desire of the communities to work together; agencies and organizations stand ready to facilitate and provide their experience in conservation efforts.

Panelist 1.2: Mr. Shahidul Alam, ADB Dhaka
Topic: Perspectives on Cross-Border Cooperation in the Development of Tourism Infrastructure in Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes in South Asia

- Cultural and historical Buddhist heritage in the region spans 5,000 years of ethnic heritage and intangible assets.
- Tourism in the region is constrained due to limited access and connectivity and destination infrastructure, lack of heritage information and interpretation, weak protection and management of assets, and inadequate community engagement.
- Between 2001 and 2008, ADB has provided regional tourism development assistance in South Asia among which is the SATIDP amounting to a total of 89.9 million USD.
- The commitment is to promote the development and conservation of Buddhist heritage towards becoming a globally-branded sustainable destination, with the following priority programs:
  - Inclusive development of thematic multi-country circuits through PPPs and development of tourism infrastructure.
  - Capacity building and knowledge sharing for sustainable tourism development including training and building a sharing platform.
Marketing and product development – packaging using themes.

● In Bangladesh, the SATIDP focuses on developing high-yielding tourism circuits and destination, conservation of heritage assets, improving interpretation, and enhancing linkages of tourism to local communities.
  ○ The physical component of the project includes both conservation works of heritage sites and civil works/tourism infrastructure.
  ○ The tourism component of the project includes product development and marketing, awareness programs to local communities, pilot schemes for micro-finance, and building partnerships between public and private sector.

Panelist 1.3: Mr. Ashok Pokharel, Nepal Association of Tour Operators
Topic: Perspectives on Cross-Border Cooperation in the Marketing of Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes in the Public and Private Sector

● Recommended steps in the packaging and marketing the Buddhist circuit:
  ○ Establish a working group which must be led by the tour operators where issues concerning travel facilitation, building tourist class infrastructure, etc. could be discussed and lobbied to the governments
  ○ An assessment of the state of readiness of circuits and routes must be undertaken – must improve on access, travel facilitation, product development – experiential travel
  ○ Developing a pilot circuit package encouraging support from NTOs – and looking for opportunities for community participation
  ○ Create marketing support structures including web-based marketing to gain critical mass
  ○ Monitor and evaluate the results of the Pilot Project

Panelist 1.4: Mr. MD Rafiquzzaman, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism
Topic: Perspectives on Cooperation in Assessing Socio-Economic Impacts of Cross-Border Buddhist Tourism

● There are 2 platforms so far developed in subregional cooperation: SAARC and SASEC
  ○ SAARC – tourism initiatives confined to promotional activities through the development of the tourism portal.
  ○ SASEC – tourism initiatives in 5 countries focused on projects and programs in assessing socio-economic impact of tourism.
  ○ But these are substantial and could be further improved.

● Recommendations for cooperation:
  ○ There is a need to establish a strong cooperation legal framework to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information by which research and development work can be undertaken.
For a common platform in data compilation and assessment and publishing the data for use of other countries
The exchange of intelligence, expertise human resources, and statistics for a holistic understanding of economic impacts.
The creation of the circuits will form an avenue for the creation of cooperation.
A research center which will centralize the collection of data regarding Buddhist tourism’s socio-economic impacts.

- The initiatives may be undertaken through the SASEC program.

Panelist 1.5: **Ms. Song Ok Chu**, Temple Stay Republic of Korea

**Topic: Perspectives on the Prospects and Approaches to Marketing in the Korean Market**

- Templestay was first introduced in 2002, but has been on-going since the 60s.
- Templestay is a program that is undertaken to know about the traditional culture and spirituality of Buddhism, as well as experiencing the local environment and attractions while staying in a traditional Buddhist temple.
- In 1999, retreats were no longer exclusive to practicing Buddhists but also the general public.
- Originally launched to augment demand for accommodation but also meet the demand for authentic cultural experiences.
- It is now an iconic experience in Republic of Korea which focuses on providing relaxation and leisure for both locals and tourists, with the ultimate goal of finding “True Happiness”.
- In 2014, there were more than 1.4 million people who participated in Templestay and increasing constantly; participating temples are also increasing.

- **Marketing Strategies:**
  - Improving the facilities – ensuring standards are met in terms of space provided, quality of facilities.
  - Diversifying programs – tailor-fitting programs based on the characteristics of participants “Freestyle Templestays”.
  - Improved services – designation of language-proficient personnel, training and education of monks and staff members, multi-lingual promotional materials.

- **Cost-effective Marketing Approaches**
  - Entered MOUs with government agencies, schools and banks to add into their programs for youth/employees.
  - Running “Templestay Week” co-hosted by the government.

Panelist 1.6: **Mr. Faruque Hasan**, Tour Planners Ltd.
Topic: **Perspectives in Developing Cross-Border Heritage and Buddhist Circuits and Routes in Bangladesh**

- In order to improve Business to Business (B2B) communication and cooperation among tour operators in the region, tour operators, being the main driving force in the development of the circuits, must believe in the motto, “Together we grow”.
- **Suggestions:**
  - Annual meetings between tour operators may be arranged by the government; familiarization tours (FAM-Trip) could also be undertaken to encourage them to include the route in their tour itineraries.
  - South Asia Tourist Visa (also Silk Road Visa) must be introduced and lobbied for reciprocity.
  - Simplification of immigration and custom checking practices – “Traveling is a right, not a privilege” the governments must understand this.
  - Bangladesh government to conduct a hectic international campaign to unearth the Buddhist heritage present in the country
    - MahasthangarhPaharpur (six excavated out of 128 ancient ruins).
    - Mainamoti (Seven excavated out of 58 ancient ruins).
    - Birthplace of AtishaDipankara and VikrampuriVihara.

**Panel Reactions:**

- The Korean model may be applied to the region – marketing but at the same time managing the programs in terms of visitor impacts to the sites and traditions; these are essential in developing in a sustainable manner.
- In certain areas, tourism eats out on the religious experience in pilgrimage (in Yunnan); developers must watch out for these.
- Monetizing the product comes from the perspective of shifting from raw pilgrimage to expanding to interested travelers who can spend.
- Pilgrims will arrive no matter what; but for tourism, it will benefit communities more to expand the market for which it must be considered opportunities to lengthen stay of visitors by enriching the experience which may include the Templestay program.
- The Templestay program is different from the traditional homestay programs as it is the monks who operate; many participants enjoy their time with the monks and learning about the traditional experience.
• Homestays are also avenues for cultural interaction with the communities by learning their traditions and local customs, and are also very knowledgeable of the intangible heritage.
• The youth of Asia are searching for their roots in heritage and meaning and these are the themes which must be highlighted in packaging the Buddhist heartland.
• The ADB are major supporters of the development of Buddhist heritage circuits – all the development projects are related to inclusive growth and poverty reduction; tourism projects are focused on enhancing infrastructure through conservation and road and rail connectivity and providing connection to community participation both in the area of building and conservation and involvement through livelihood.

**BREAKOUT SESSION 1**

**Topic:** Facilitating Cross-Border Access and Connectivity  
**Moderator:** Mr. Sunil Chopra, Asia Pacific IATA

**Keynote Speech 1:** Mr. Sunil Chopra, IATA-Asia Pacific

• There are about 500 million Buddhists interested in traveling, and hence comprise a large potential market; Out of the top 5 Buddhist markets, 4 countries are directly connected via air to Bangladesh
• There is great opportunity for Dhaka to become a gateway for Buddhist circuits; stakeholders must think of connecting it directly to Bodh Gaya where most Buddhist travelers go.
• Key factors that need to be addressed to facilitate cross-border access and connectivity in Bangladesh:
  o **Awareness** – must establish various avenues to disseminate information, including tapping tour operators/travel agencies.
  o **Activities** – more than meditation and visiting sites, other activities must be available for both religious and non-religious Buddhist travelers.
  o **Branding and Promotion** – must highlight Bangladesh’s uniqueness and sense of place by ‘developing, selling, conceptualizing, and communicating’.
  o **Access and Connectivity** – seamless entry and movement of visitors, especially at the Dhaka airport which is potentially a hub.
  o **Business Environment** – stimulate growth by providing tax advantage to all tourism enterprises engaged in providing services to Buddhist assets; Public-Private Partnerships.
• Bangladesh needs to invest in infrastructure to build its access and connectivity and its circuits, as well as accommodation and safety as the core components to tourism growth.

• Opportunities from cross-border Tourism Cooperation:
  o Joint promotion and branding.
  o Development of cross-border attractions
  o Sustainable Tourism development.

• Challenges for Cross-Border Tourism Cooperation:
  o Imbalance / Uneven development / Sovereignty.
  o Formalities crossing borders.
  o Lack of resources and expertise.
  o Insufficient involvement of the private sector.

• There must be joint promotion and cooperation to successfully establish and operate the circuits.

Reactor 1.1: **Ms. Gitanjali Chaturvedi**, WB New Delhi, India

• Six (6) challenges which should be addressed ‘outside the box’:
  o **Branding and promotion** - research must be made to retrace and verify the authenticity of the Buddhist story and promote the circuit using the story; also must look at broader markets besides pilgrims and consider everybody interested in the history of the subcontinent as potential markets.
  o **Visas** – creation of multiple entry visas for multiple countries; push for the electronic facilitation of visa applications.
  o **Connectivity** – must also look at extending the tourist season by improving last mile tourism access and making itineraries flexible and convenient.
  o **Lodging** – land regimes and seasonality keep the supply for lodging very low; but noted to have great potential for hotels, homestays, and B&Bs.
  o **Business environment** – easing the local system, taxation, to encourage local entrepreneurship.
  o **Security** – the region must work to improve perception for safety and security for travelers; garnering support from locals through pro-poor tourism.

Reactor 1.2: **Dr. Aparup Chowdhury**, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation

• **Issue 1**: Developing a clear and concise position on what needs to be done and the benefits of doing this among the NTOs.

• NTOs have to take leading roles in coordination with other departments and ministries in facilitating cross-border access and connectivity:
o Relaxation of visa and border formalities.
o Create cross-border tourist movement facilities.
o Create policy resolutions supporting operations in the tourism sector – providing autonomy in decision making, increased budget, capacity building.
o Concordant coordination among the relevant ministries and departments.
o Create proper awareness of local people – strengthening sense of ownership and sense of belongingness especially for the surrounding communities (community-based tourism).
o Create alternative livelihood based on heritage sites and cross-border circuits.
o Ensure soft bank loan and/or tax holidays to encourage tourism entrepreneurship.

- Benefits from undertaking the above include: delivery of smooth and seamless travel to tourists, generation of revenues, jobs, and livelihood for locals, promotion of local arts and handicrafts, increased awareness for the preservation and conservation of heritage assets, and women empowerment.

**Issue 2**: Strengthening the capacities of NTOs to address these issues with their government counterpart agencies.

- To ensure the development of cross-border connectivity, NTOs must be strengthened by:
  o Being provided regulatory authority by reducing its bureaucratic entanglement.
  o Having appointed sufficient and efficient manpower to carry out activities.
  o Ensuring private sector presence in all kinds of policy formulations and project implementations.
  o Creating a space for tourism expert to contribute to NTOs.

- **Issue 3**: Cooperating, collaborating and coordinating action with NTOs in the concerned countries.

- Coordinated actions are needed on the following issues:
  o Developing accessibility to the heritage sites by improving the last mile connectivity for all kinds of vehicles;
  o Improving other infrastructural tourist facilities such as lodging and travel services, including communications and waste management facilities.
  o Providing quality, authentic facilities and services such as local guiding and site information, food and beverage, home stay services, etc.
  o Ensuring systematic visitor management at the sites.
Developing local community involvement through organizing local cultural programs.

Reactor 1.3: **Mr. Hossain Khalid**, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry

- Recognize that political will is very important; the development of the Buddhist circuits is highly public sector-driven while the private sector has very little stake.
- The opportunity is present (the market, the sites) but the tapping and development of these are not moving fast enough; hence the possibility to losing to another destination.
- If there is no yield, then the private sector is not going to make interest; the business has to be sustainable.
- The government must engage into more Public-Private partnerships in tourism to fast-track the work.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Improve/package tours with temple stays
  - Creation of Center for Excellence in Buddhism - learning about the religion; inviting the Dalai Lama to deliver a talk as an annual event to get the attention of the world.
  - Investment in Old-Age Homes – Chinese, Japanese markets.
  - Encourage domestic tourism.
  - Revive the SAARC Visa and simplify the processes.

Reactor 1.4: **Mr. Shahid Hamid**, PATA Bangladesh Chapter

- The one thing that is needed is political good will, the other is private sector participation.
- There are substantial infrastructure requirements that need to be addressed including energy, transportation, communications and tourism – the private sector can bring additional financial resources to enable cross-border infrastructure through PPPs.
- **Key issues:**
  - Access and connectivity issues – cross-border facilitation must be simplified, expansion of international and domestic air services, and activation of rail services.
  - Lack of quality hotel accommodation.
  - Undeveloped tourist experience – lack of visitor information, wayside amenities.
  - Unstructured marketing – fragmented marketing strategies among countries.
- Weak organizational and HR capacities – lack of law, shortage of skilled workers.

- The private sector may undertake the following:
  - Undertake research to assess the benefits (i.e. economic impacts, linkages, impacts to the poor communities) of facilitating circuits to support policy recommendations.
  - Lobby for the adoption of policies and regulations focused on visa facilitation, PPPs, relaxation of policies for FDIs and tax systems, etc.
  - Holding fora with key stakeholders to generate an agreement regarding the improvement of tourism public infrastructure, tour products and packages, tourism services, private sector commitments to marketing and promotion, and mechanisms for greater sub-regional cooperation.

Conclusions:
- There is a very urgent need to study the sensitivities of the communities and the people and to bring them together to get the message across and iterate that the sites are safe and secure welcome for visitors.
- The key need for the public sector is to deliver within set parameters and time frames; must take advantage of time.
- Education is very essential to build the expertise in tourism and hospitality while meeting the market’s demand requirements; private sector and training institutes may take the lead.
- Marketing and promotion should highlight products that are authentic such as staying in temples for accommodations; domestic tourism should also be encouraged as a first step.

BREAKOUT SESSION 2

Topic: Ensuring Sustainable and Inclusive Outcomes
Moderator: Mr. Milton Hyun SooKal, WB and IFC, Republic of Korea

Keynote Speech 2: Mr. Sunil Chopra, WB and IFC

- Three levels of intervention that are in place for the development of tourism:
  - Policy and regulatory framework – government.
  - Institutional development – institutions.
- There is a general bias to introducing policy interventions rather than enabling institutional arrangements, whereas private sector interventions fall in between, in providing interventions for tourism development; but
converting comparative advantages to competitiveness and sustainability requires efficient institutions to translate policy measures into programs.

- Bangladesh’s Buddhist circuit’s competitiveness is more or less the same as in other countries:
  - Bare historical heritage - sites generally possess heritage values but lack sufficient infrastructure.
  - Unsophisticated visitors – majority of the visitors are pilgrims who do not spend outside of their scope.
  - Poor quality and service.
  - Few choices – limited offerings, inadequate connectivity thus sites are packaged in rivalry rather than cooperation.

- The Buddhist circuit experiences several issues in a vicious cycle:
  - Stagnant visits > Unstable sales > Increasing costs of operation > Concept weakens >

- The seven major causes are: limited markets served, security concerns, inconvenience in connectivity, low awareness, global recession, lack of local supply, and inability to meet demands for higher quality (with the exception of global recession, all of the causes may be addressed through improving infrastructure, policies, etc.)

- In order to position the development of tourism as sustainable, inclusive, and pro-poor, programs in the following areas must be implemented:
  - Improving Tourism – connectivity, access, services, safety, visitor management, interpretation, developing destinations.
  - Improving Communities – building skill and service capacities and enabling local leadership and community spirit or new mind set, improving productivity/business social enterprises.

- The number of visitors do not directly imply the level of economic impact being received from tourism; not many tourists stay overnight in areas such as Rajgir - Visitors must be given reasons to stay and spend.

- Most Buddhist sites in the circuit have insufficient infrastructure and amenities – marketable to devout pilgrims who visit the sites regardless of quality, but are not likely to pay higher; hence, private sector is not interest to invest due to low yield.

- Profits are made and investors will only come when more sophisticated travelers (who demand quality and are willing to pay more) visit the sites (model: Bodh Gaya).

Reactor 2.1: Mr. Mohiuddin Helal, Industry Council for Tourism and Hospitality – Bangladesh
• Key challenges in ensuring sustainable and inclusive Buddhist tourism circuits and routes are:
  o Improving cross-border Buddhist circuit/route connectivity.
  o Providing a range of products and services as well as unique offerings (opportunity: health & wellness, local crafts, visitor activities beyond the sites).
  o Raising the standards of tourist facilities, services and products, including skills development.
  o Increasing the range and supply of accommodation facilities and services (homestay and temple stays).
  o Improving visitor information and interaction with tourists (suggestion: increase the number of multi-lingual guides, creation of information knowledge center).
  o Integrated planning and provision of site and vicinity facilities and infrastructure (including the formulation of a master plan and involvement in the Global Buddhist Community on development and operation).

• Benefits of having sustainable and inclusive Buddhist tourism circuits and routes:
  o Good standard of connectivity will be established among the countries.
  o An inclusive stakeholder group will be developed for small- and medium-scale entrepreneurship.
  o Sustainable education will be fostered within gateway communities near site.
  o Improved linkages between the developed and less developed sites in the circuit resulting to harmony in tourism flows and development.

• Suggestions to establish sustainable and inclusive Buddhist circuits:
  o Adoption and implementation of sustainable development standards such as those of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria (GSTCC).
  o Operating within sites’ sustainable carrying capacity for improved protection as well as create and support more local jobs and income opportunities.
  o Fostering strong community awareness.
  o Improving cooperation and collaboration among countries through joint product development initiatives, cooperative marketing strategies, improved transportation connectivity, and streamlined visa systems.

• Application of sustainable development and operations at the sites:
  o Aside from the archaeological elements of the site, developers/operators must also bank on the intangible heritage value
of the circuit for a unique spiritual experience (living Buddhist practices).
- Must embody sustainable practices through channeling renewable energy and waste management systems.
- Community engagement through trainings, product conceptualization and implementation, use of local produce, etc.
- Preparation and use of inventory, visitor feedback, and monitoring and evaluation system.

Reactor 2.2: Mr. Fayzul Latif Chowdhury, National Museum – Bangladesh
- Bangladesh has ample opportunity to be a part of the Buddhist pilgrimage circuits in the region.
- It will have several competitive advantages as part of the Buddhist circuit:
  - Proximity between sites
  - Cox’s Bazar – host of a vibrant Buddhist community.
  - As a small country, not difficult to travel across places (land, air).
  - Bangladesh can learn from the experience of other countries.
- While the museums are not currently packaged for Buddhism, some 700 Buddhist sculptures and relics in possession of the National Museum can be converted into a gallery as a part of the circuit.
- With continued public sector intervention, similar projects in improving product offerings focused on Buddhism may come into place with support from the private sector.

Reactor 2.3: Mr. Shahid Hussain Shamim, Ajiyer Fair Trade Tourism Bangladesh
- Main challenges to engaging local communities in the tourism value chain created by the presence of major attractions such as Buddhist monuments and sites
  - Inadequate infrastructure and accessibility.
  - Lack of quality accommodations.
  - Low skill and expertise levels.
  - Unstructured marketing.
  - Managing expectations (directed to communities).
  - Other challenges – dealing with conflicts, micro-organizations are limited.
- Approaches that the countries along designated Buddhist circuits and routes could take to bring about more inclusive outcomes:
  - Formulating correct policy.
  - Investing in the circuits.
  - Promoting the sites and circuits.
Other initiatives (closing the gap, capitalizing on existing facilities, and developing year round utilization.

Reactor 2.4: Mr. Nilan Cooray, ADB South Asia Tourism Infrastructure Development Project

- The Buddhist sites mean differently among different market groups: hence, the challenge is how to come into common ground without compromising each other’s values.
- Key challenges in promoting the Buddhist circuits:
  - Provision of destination infrastructure – must value all aspects (e.g., intangible/spiritual values, archaeological settings, site integrity) within the true limits of the heritage sites.
  - Setting the carrying capacity - not just the physical but the overall balance between tourism and pilgrimage – prioritization.
  - Site management and accessibility.
  - Branding and promotion (suggestion: highlight history of intellectual scholarship through its Buddhist monasteries rather than just pilgrimage).
  - Re-establishment of spiritual ambience.
  - Story-telling and knowledge sharing (spanning both archaeological and religious knowledge appealing to the appropriate markets) and developing programs showcasing Buddhist rituals.
  - Community participation – Islamic communities surrounding the Buddhist sites must be engaged to propagate respect among each other’s heritage.
  - Lack of cooperation among countries in promoting the circuit – must establish themes within the circuit for visitors to have variety.
- Approaches to improve cooperation:
  - Need to create and mobilize a regional body to standardize destination infrastructure, storyline, presentation and information.
  - Cooperation with development partners to finance projects for the development of sites and infrastructure.
- A centralized funding system must be established in order to secure that the benefits of the heritage would be directed to the surrounding communities and the continued conservation and maintenance of the sites.

Reactor 2.5: Dr. Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, Jahangir Nagar University

- Proposed developments must be written down into a master plan to concretize agreements.
- In all aspects, Bangladesh has very rich Buddhist heritage sites – archaeological and carbon dating missions have discovered evidence of high
value heritage/historical sites including Buddhist complexes lined with stupas and viharas resembling “University Towns” within the cities.

- Buddhist heritage sites are poorly maintained, so there is a need to improve awareness among communities; could be done by knowledge sharing.
- Recommendations:
  - Careful preservation of the sites to retain its heritage values.
  - Visa facilitation to enable markets to visit the sites.

Panel Conclusions:
- Conservation of the heritage sites is the top priority; visitors could also take part in the conservation process as an activity.
- Community interaction is key; an inventory and a plan must be made to clearly delineate where and how they can participate.
- Tourism stakeholders, particularly the tour operators must be adequately prepared in terms of heritage knowledge and skills training

Open Forum:

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<th>Question/Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Why is Myanmar not included in the circuit?</td>
<td>The circuit is designed following the Footsteps of Lord Buddha (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh)</td>
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<td>Policies in the context of sustainability must also highlight participation of the indigenous communities/minority groups (as most Buddhist communities are IPs)</td>
<td>Indeed, as social inclusion makes sustainability more complete</td>
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<td>What are the prospects of developing the newly found heritage sites across Bangladesh?</td>
<td>Continued research to verify the authenticity of the sites is on-going</td>
</tr>
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<td>How will the community benefit from tourism to the Buddhist heritage site in Bangladesh?</td>
<td>Research work should be undertaken; community will be involved through providing them jobs, local entrepreneurship, trainings, provision of support services</td>
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<tr>
<td>What approaches should be made in marketing the Buddhist products?</td>
<td>We need to develop the products first before we market; the sites must be ready before marketing; but it is necessary to also develop the marketing focus</td>
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**BREAKOUT SESSION 3**
Keynote Speech 3: **Mr. Ashok Chandra Pokharel**, Nepal Association of Tour Operators

- Packaging and marketing Buddhist circuits and route products:
  - Establishing a working group comprising the governments, tour operator’s associations, and community groups – main objective is to lobby for seamless travel experiences including common visas, integrated tourist infrastructure projects, etc.
  - Assessing state of readiness of select Buddhist circuits and routes – the inclusiveness factor needs to be strengthened to expand to other SAARC countries; by the time the Asian Highway is completed, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Thailand could be included as part of a “Grand Buddhist Circuit”.
  - Developing and marketing a pilot cross-border Buddhist circuit packages – itineraries must be tested focused on checking ground realities and tourist facilities and making recommendations for community involvement.
  - Creating marketing support – redevelop collaterals and web-based information to promote the circuit as a single destination and make available to tour operators to encourage development of new tours.
  - Monitoring and evaluating made through the working group with a fully-developed timeline.

**Reactor 3.1: Mr. Masud Hossain**, Bengal Tours Ltd.

- Bangladesh is carrying Buddhist heritage spanning more than 2,000 years
- Main heritage assets: history of presence of Gautama Buddha, King Ashoka, and Atisa Dipankar Srijana; and range of heritage sites including massive monasteries
- There are a number of national and interregional challenges:
  - Cross-border facilities.
  - Stakeholder cooperation.
  - Tourism infrastructure and services.
  - Political commitment to promote regional tourism (budget allocation).
- The three players involved in addressing the challenges are Government (enabler of tourism infrastructure), NGO (champion for community participation), and Tourism Stakeholders (investors and service providers)
- Following the experience of the ASEAN who have joint tourism initiatives, cooperation may be undertaken to promote the region in the aspects of...
marketing and promotion, market research, safety and security, and access and connectivity, the region can also:

- Create and implement a regional tourism development plan (10-15 year plan).
- Establish a Buddhist circuit development committee to lead the work for future prospects.

Based on current information, the following tour programs could be offered within the Buddhist circuit:

- India-Nepal-Bangladesh 18-day program.
- Myanmar-Bangladesh-Bhutan-Nepal-India 24-day program.
- Sri Lanka-India-Nepal-Bhutan-Bangladesh 23-day program.

These programs should be organized with master tour operators.

Reactor 3.2: Ms. Daw Khin Than Win, Ministry of Tourism and Hotels Myanmar

- Myanmar's approach to packaging and promoting its Buddhist heritage is through its markets.
- Myanmar is well-known for cultural tourism offerings including Buddhist heritage sites.
- Its Buddhist heritage sites are concentrated in Bagan, Mandalay, Yangon, MraukOo, and the ancient cities in Pyu (Halin, Beikthano and Sri Ksetra) which were very recently added into the new world heritage list.
- Myanmar's position in promoting Buddhist heritage products:
  - Tour itineraries are focused on the four main tourism sites (most tourist-ready).
  - Promoting Buddhist tourism by including it in all tourist packages.
  - A unique selling point is showcasing the “Buddhist Way of Life” providing spiritual experiences.
  - Ensuring that guides are trained and well-informed of the story and core values of the site.
- Myanmar’s experience in sub-regional cooperation:
  - In the Greater Mekong Subregion, Myanmar is a part of major multi-country tourism circuits and thematic events, and is a gateway of the middle path route for the culture, history and pilgrimage circuit between Myanmar and Thailand.
  - Cross-border visas are in place to facilitate the movement of tourists/visitors particularly pilgrimage tourism.
  - Has created website and brochures for promoting tourism.
- Heritage necklace – member countries must cooperate and also link its operators to make possible the creation of tour products and offerings and facilitate cross-border tourism circuits.
Reactor 3.3: **Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director of Promotion, Tourism of Galicia**

- Santiago, as well as Rome and Jerusalem, are the three Holy Cities for Catholics.
- The Camino de Santiago or the “St. James Way” has generated developed cultural, spiritual and social networks in Europe; and has become widely recognized as a World Heritage Site.
- Collaborations play an integral role in the planning and development of the Camino de Santiago:
  - Active participation in international channels provided avenues for the centralized protection of European cultural values, regular cooperative exchanges between the countries, development of cooperation programs, and collective research, promotion, and promotion of tourism and culture.
  - Linkages and cooperation with other cultural heritage and pilgrimage routes.
  - Continued collaboration and coordination with local administrations, states, and other organizations and communities or “public-private coordination” to facilitate maintenance of the sites, construction of lodging facilities, and standardization and improvement of service quality.
- The Master Plan of the Camino de Santiago is a management tool for the government and a road map which marks the guidelines required in the preservation and conservation of the site across the region, as well as ensuring quality experience for tourists.
- Marketing Efforts:
  - Promotion and communication activities are very diverse but word of mouth remains to be its most essential marketing tool.
  - It also has very strong linkages with national and international organizations (about 300 associations with 80,000 members) which aid in disseminating information about the route.
  - Several inbound travel agencies also organize packages specifically for religious groups.
- The St. James Way is not marketed for mass tourism but it is intended to be that way to ensure its sustainability; and its close collaboration with the public sector ensures that its continued preservation is well-supported in the long term.

Reactor 3.4: **Dr. Kumi Kato**, Wakayama University – Japan
Wakayama University is a national university of which tourism and pilgrimage is one of its priority research areas.

Three of Japan’s most established Buddhist heritage and pilgrimage routes are:

- Koyasan (Wakayama)
  - Notable to receive 1.4 million overnight stay visitors annually of which 20 per cent are international tourists.
  - Comprise a total of 130 temples of which half offer lodging/temple stays and provide unique experiences.
  - Packaged as a place of worship and meditation, spiritual learning, and a place for self-discovery).

- Kumano Kodo Ancient Way (Nara)
  - Collective term for six trails leading to three grand shrines of Kumano; 600 to 1,000-km in length, of which a part of it was nominated into the World Heritage List in 2004.
  - Showcases Volunteer Tourism as part of its preservation program; “conservation walk”.

- Shikoku Henro (Shikoku)
  - Connects 88 temples; focused on self-discovery and meditation.

There is very strong participation from the private sector who plays positive roles for preserving and fostering heritage.

Collaboration with the government, public organizations and travel agencies to spread awareness about sustainability.

Local communities’ participation in promoting sustainability include:

- Slow and people-focused tourism – communities are encouraged and supported to live in rural areas and promote sustainable living.

Reactor 3.5: Mario Hardy, PATA

- The importance of Public-Private Partnerships is highlighted – working together has been key in developing the pathways and making available the facilities and services, providing care and support throughout the journey.
- Sharing the stories is fundamental in developing the journey.
- The importance of providing unique and authentic experiences to the emerging market which is the new generation – think adventure, ecotourism, local community immersion.

### Open Forum:

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<td>How was Camino de Santiago developed</td>
<td>The economy it has been able to provide</td>
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<td>as it is today?</td>
<td>to locals in the countryside is very important to the government and hence, the continued strong support; keeping traditions and maintaining sustainability “Slow tourism” engages the people to stay with the communities and enjoy the experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit Bangladesh 2016 is upcoming. To what extent can the government relax its restrictions to welcome tourists in remote areas?</td>
<td>Tour operators share the problem of needing to ask for permission to bring visitors each time. There are same issues in Nepal but at this point there is no way but to simply live with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can organizations come forward to create linkage between tour operators in the region?</td>
<td>Yes, everything is possible. PATA Travel Mart is a regular avenue; depending on the number of operators willing to participate, a special meeting may be arranged For the GMS, it is about collaboration between sectors; a regular platform undertaken is the Mekong Tourism Forum where the private sector meets public sector and development partners. As a possibility, outputs could also be generated (e.g. regional marketing strategy, or an itinerary) An understanding of the challenges in the logistical and operational is necessary to be able to maintain service quality, expectations, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>On sharing the outcome of cross-border tourism, what are the considerations we have in developing these ideas?</td>
<td>Idea is to engage all four to six countries in operating the tour program/circuits, not just the two countries (India and Nepal); governments must sit together to ease issues</td>
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**Conclusions:**

- Bangladesh experience shows that there is accessibility but the problem remains in the infrastructure, political commitment and promotional budgets in product formulation.
- Key players are the government, INGOs, and tourism stakeholders – work together to undertake short-term and long-term goals.
• Experience in Myanmar indicates strong focus on training human capital (local guides) and its close relationship to international channels has led it to benefit from sub-regional cooperation programs.
• In Galicia, Spain, the St. James Way has impacted the local economy greatly in a long-term perspective; public-private partnerships have kept it highly regarded in the catholic pilgrimage settings.
• Master plans providing guidelines in the development of the route helps it maintain its sustainability agenda.
• Large sums of money will no longer be required for marketing and promotions purposes once people recognize the quality of the experience provided in the route; the strongest and most effective way of promoting will be through people.
• In Japan, research is very rigorous which enables it to study its markets very closely.
• Volunteer tourism for work in "soil replenishment" is an interesting activity for encouraging the sustainability agenda.
• New technologies must be tapped to extend promotions in various channels
• There is a need to also talk about the benefits the community may achieve in engaging in the Buddhist circuits to garner their support and help protect the sites and the program itself.
• Creating unique experiences is a much to differentiate.
• The governments are in the process of negotiations to ease restrictions for cross-border travel (provision of regional visas) – must be fast-tracked.

PLENARY SESSION 2

Topic: Government’s Role in Facilitating the Planning, Development, and Marketing Sustainable and Inclusive Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes
Moderator: Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, UNWTO

Keynote 2: Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism

• Bangladesh is blessed with numerous Buddhist heritage sites, but the story is yet to be fully developed.
• There is a general lack of coordination between public and private sector representatives, no motor agreements to undertake efforts to improve infrastructure, identification and improvement of products.
• Over the years, there has been slow growth for tourism in Bangladesh, but the overall sets of opportunities are yet to be realized.
• The presence of overlapping mandates between governments and government agencies in the development and preservation of heritage sites pose a threat.
• Commitments to regional initiatives led by various agencies (e.g. South Asia Growth Quadrangle, SASEC, SATIDP) must be maximized.
• SASEC Tourism Development Plan (supported by ADB) focuses on the following areas of intervention:
  o Systemic identification of tourism products.
  o Integration of sub-regional and national products.
  o Alignment of SASEC tourism approaches to UNWTO principles.
  o NTOs of the countries were given responsibilities to implement the guidelines.
• In order to successfully facilitate the development of the Buddhist circuits, the following must be undertaken:
  o **Planning** – should span short-, medium- and long-term, and emanate inclusive and holistic approaches; countries must strictly follow guidelines and timelines in undertaking work.
  o **Technical and financial assistance** – must not hesitate to tap agencies such as UNWTO for expertise and technical assistance both in planning and implementation, including financing.
  o **Protection and Conservation** – aside from physical protection, must also increase local awareness for co-management; government mandates in the management of sites must also be streamlined.
  o **Cross-border Connectivity** – establish a cross-border Motor Vehicle Agreement in the Asian Highway to maximize overland connectivity.
  o **Marketing and Promotion** – must embody an inclusive approach; and the challenge is to create a distinctive Brand for global identification of the circuit.

Panelist 2.1: **Mr. Monwara Hakim Ali, BTB**

**Topic: Challenges to the Public Sector in Participating in Marketing Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes**

• All countries recognize the potential for growth contribution of the sector which on average is about 7 per cent globally
• But for Bangladesh to fully benefit from tourism, it must market effectively. This could be made by:
  o Establishing a well-defined and unique brand image.
  o Carefully selecting correct positioning modes.
  o Focusing on idea-based product development.
  o Spreading and encouraging greater awareness on heritage, history, and culture.
o Effective and efficient advertising.
o Controlling brand guardianship.
o Highlighting global acceptability approach.
o Professionalizing management of movement of tourists – adoption of technologies to ease tourist movement.
o Establishing effective networks of harmonious cooperation between sectors.
o Introducing a wide range of travel packages showcasing regional approaches.

• Most important is to establish dynamism between involved groups to take the challenge of marketing the circuit as one to benefit the entire tourism sector of South Asia.

Panelist 2.2: Mr. Yuji Iida, Japan Association of Travel Agents
Topic: Perspectives on Marketing Buddhist Circuit and Routes to the Japanese Market

• In Japan, pilgrimage tours are undertaken which focus on studying the culture and history in the Edo Era.
• The modern versions of visits to religious places include annual visits to shrines and ancestor’s graves.
• School trips for high school students are also very huge markets where they visit many world heritage sites as part of their educational experience.
• Japanese tourists also undertake heritage visits, and are interested to study their culture and history regardless of religion.

Panelist 2.3: Mr. Mohammad Shafiquul Alam, Department of Archaeology Bangladesh
Topic: Perspectives on the Role of Government in Supporting the Development of Archaeology as part of the Multi-Country Buddhist Heritage Circuits and Routes

• In Bangladesh, the archaeology department is the lead agency for the preservation of heritage (management, conservation and promotion).
• It currently owns 451 cultural heritage sites.
• The sites along the corridor in the western region of Bangladesh possess significant cultural value and provide a potential circuit – defined as “Bangladesh Heritage Highway” circuit.
• It is imperative to have a road map to establish guidelines and timelines in the preservation, conservation, interpretation and management of the sites.
• Also necessary to research and estimate the economic and financial viability of managing the sites for tourism – this would provide better support in lobbying for additional budget for continuous management support.
PLENARY SESSION 3

Topic: Challenges, Opportunities and Best Practices in Developing and Marketing Sustainable and Inclusive Cross-Border Bhuddist Circuits and Routes with Best Practice from the Saint James Way in Europe

Moderator: Mr. Ludwig G. Rieder, UNWTO

Keynote 3: Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director of Promotion, Tourism Turismo de Galicia

- In Galicia, tourism has been a great stimulus for economy with enormous capacity for growth both in material and immaterial wealth; it contributes 11.1 per cent in GDP and 11.2 per cent of total employment in the regions traversed by the St. James Way:
  - It has become a strategic factor for socio-economic and territorial development due to the volume of businesses involved and its capacity to stimulate less-developed areas leading to territorial rebalancing.
  - Currently comprises 8 routes traversing more than 100 municipalities.
- Tourists take the way of St. James in their own pace and encounter unique opportunities to experience culture and learn about the heritage.
- One characteristic element of the way is the *credencial* or “pilgrim's passport” in which pilgrims enter their personal details and travel plans and are encouraged to gather stamps; this is used to record their visits within the route; they are then asked to present the passport in exchange of the “compostela” or an official certificate of completion for the route.
- Steps undertaken to strengthen the way of St. James focus on the following aspects:
  - Revitalization, conservation and stimulus.
  - Maintenance, restoration and improvement – keeping the way passable at all times.
  - Management and upgrading of the hostel network to maintain quality of offerings.
- The development and management of the Way of St. James is encapsulated in the Master Plan which focuses on eight areas.
- The ongoing development of the way gives the region global presence and serves as a source of cultural and economic stimulus with positive impact in territorial rebalancing, job creation, and revenue generation.
- It drives a new service-based economy which is consciously monitored to account the carrying capacity of the way.
Panelist 3.1: **Dr. Heather Peters**, Ophidian Research Institute

**Topic:** Protecting Buddhist Values in Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits

- It is important to convey respect to the core values of Buddhism when visiting the sites.
- There are ways to conduct oneself in a temple or shrine; these may vary from place to place but it is necessary to do some research prior to visiting the sites.
- Protection of Buddhist values must be undertaken by the communities, Buddhist organizations and institutions, local authorities, guides, and visitors themselves.
- Threats of tourism to Buddhist values preservation:
  - Lack of respect and discipline – both visitors and guides (imposing the rules).
  - Lack of information – factored by communication issues.
  - Over-commercialization of sites – minimizes the real function of the site > spiritual function.
  - Ignoring the communities – rituals must be respected.
  - Lack of awareness of carrying capacity.
- Mechanisms needed:
  - Establishing general codes of conduct for visitors and practitioners (also specific rules for specific sites) and ensure effective information dissemination (different languages).
  - Developing language training for monks to be able to directly convey codes of conduct.
  - Training of tour guides to enable them to enforce the codes of conduct (adopt the UNESCO model):
    - Successful example: Balinese communities clearly enforcing rules on their dress code, acceptable behavior, and limitations and expectations through clear signage and direct communication.
  - Adopting general and specific indicators to measure level of protection (with special mention on evaluating carrying capacity), and must be regularly monitored by site managers and communities.
  - Establishing clear demarcation between public and private spaces, as well as rituals intended for monks/communities only.

Panelist 3.2: **Mr. Taufiq Rahman**, PATA Bangladesh

**Topic:** Marketing and Packaging Cross-Border Buddhist Circuits and Routes
• UK-based operator (explore.co.uk) already operate cross-border tours which begin from Bangladesh to India and cross-over to Bhutan, etc. (operating since 2003).

• In the region, Dhaka is relatively well-connected in terms of air connectivity to several central areas in the Buddhist Heartland; land transport services through bus and rail are also available.

• Major challenges in building the circuits:
  o Terrorism and people to people conflicts – civil and external wars between the SAARC nations, including political instability and communal riots.
  o Battle against natural calamities – earthquakes, climate change.

• Suggestions for the attention of the government:
  o Visa Activation (SAARC Visa).
  o Tourism product and service development – accommodations, F&B, transport facilities, etc.
  o Allocation of marketing and promotional budgets.
  o Activation of responsible tourism initiatives – community awareness and participation, livelihood opportunities.

• 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.

Panelist 3.3: Mr. Yuji Iida, Japan Association of Travel Agents
Topic: Meeting Market Expectations and Requirements: Japanese Marketing

• The Japanese appreciation of Buddhist heritage goes beyond just belief; it is important that the assets possess cultural values.

• This stimulates Japanese markets to make contribution to the preservation of the sites and collaborate with the local communities for the maintenance of the site.

• The Japanese public and private sector created practical plans for sustainability:
  o Put greater importance in the maintenance of heritage sites for the revitalization of local areas.

• JICA has been involved in the preservation and restoration of Bagan’s Buddhist heritage beginning 2015.

• Includes support by sending Japanese tourists to stimulate tourism, as well as human resource trainings focused on educating how to conduct promotional activities for Japanese markets.

• International recognition as World Heritage increases the overall value of the site, and hence, steps for the inscription of Buddhist heritage has been in the works (February marked the first joint meeting of the UNTWO and UNESCO).
• An organization called the EICR (Council of Europe Cultural Routes) which provides a strong network for information sharing through their website; also involved in working for promoting preservation, sharing benefit.

Panelist 3.4: Mr. Milton Hyun SooKal, WB Group
Topic: **Ensuring Sustainable and Inclusive Cross-Border Buddhist Tourism Outcomes**

• Understanding the Buddhist Circuit Development Curve:
  o Most of the businesses in the Indian experience fall well below the investment breakeven point and as such do not recover their investment making it unfavorable to engage in; most of its markets are devout pilgrims (non-growth market).
  o As amenities improve, devotees will follow suit.
  o Greater traveling market – those interested in the culture and heritage looking for experiences.
• The challenge is to create reason for devout pilgrims to visit Bangladesh in order for the larger groups to follow suit.

**SPECIAL SESSION – MINISTERIAL PANEL**

**H.E. Top Sopheak**, Deputy Minister of Tourism Cambodia
• The government of Cambodia is committed to promoting sustainability through tourism development projects in conjunction with international cooperation and partnership with development partners.
• Tourism in Cambodia focus highly on cultural and natural heritage sites.
• Based on experience, it is noted that peace, safety and security are very important tools for tourism development; otherwise tourists will not arrive
• All religions in the world can work together to build the assets.
• Cambodia in the past has been destroyed by war, but it has been able to translate safety and security to the world, and now receives about 9 million tourists annually.

**H.E. Abdul Bari Jahani**, Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism Afghanistan
• Afghanistan possesses rich remnants of civilization – crossroads of the conquerors
• Afghanistan was once a popular tourist spot for its rich cultural heritage; but due to the unrest in the last 4 decades, most of the heritage were brought to the ground including its Buddhist heritage assets (Buddhist cities, temples, and statues)
• Once security issues are meted out, Afghanistan may once again become a hub for tourism in the region (i.e. Bamiyan is the capital city of SAARC and as the center of Islamic Civilization)
• Remain hopeful for the future

**H.E. Lyonpo Norbu Wangchuk**, Minister of Economic Affairs Bhutan

• Bhutan believes in the economic model/development philosophy of Pursuit of Happiness – through sustainable, inclusive, and green economies
• In this context, Buddhist heritage circuit is very important to Bhutan as also represent the core values of the religion.
• But Buddhism is more than just religion; it is a way of life.
• It is believed that there is greater potential to benefit from the heritage circuit through working together.
• Bhutan is a special place as the principles, ways of life, values, remain vibrant up to this day; not held in museums or temples or other structures but in the day to day lives of its people.
• To date, tourism is the 2nd largest revenue generator for the country’s economy (after hydropower); and is the largest job provider of the country
• Employment in tourism is special – jobs are not transferable; jobs are anchored where tourism originates.
• There is a lot of hope and optimism for the outputs of the Conference as South Asia is the source through which Buddhist values are propagated all throughout the world; all humanity can benefit to embrace it
• It is natural that all must collaborate for shared prosperity.
• Government of Bhutan is in full support of the agreements of the Conference.
• The experts need exactly what needs to be done to facilitate the cross-border movement of the people, product development, etc. – what is needed is to emanate political will and together undertake what needs to be done.

**H.E. Tin Shwe**, Deputy Minister of Hotel and Tourism Myanmar

• Success through the 8 Noble Truths:
  o Right view.
  o Right thought.
  o Right speech.
  o Right livelihood.
  o Right endeavors.
  o Right mindfulness.
  o Right concentration.
  o Right action.
• Collaboration must be made through the Buddhist way in order for the initiatives to be successful.
• Main objectives: Address accessibility, accommodations, and provision for amenities.
• When visitor comes, we must be ready to translate these into opportunities.
H.E. Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, Minister, Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand

- In August, the bomb explosion has affected the overall confidence in Thailand; tourism has helped Thailand to bounce back.
- The world has changed – there are many things that cannot be controlled – but tourism and friendship can bring us back together.
- Aim for Thailand is to develop in a sustainable way:
  - Enforcing the “Middle Way” or striking the balance between the business, social-community, and environmental aspects of development.
  - Wealth distribution – spread of income from tourism to the remote communities and agricultural sectors.
  - Pride of the cultural heritage – grooming the people to learn and appreciate core values of the country through Buddhist local heritage.
- Initiatives related to Buddhist tourism:
  - Buddhist Holidays Tourism – people are encouraged to travel to do merry-making.
  - Holy Places Tourism – (not just Buddhist) visit to a range of sacred places.
  - Holy Temples/Sacred Places by Zodiac – special interest tours to pay homage to the temples; Chinese and other Asian travelers follow this route.
  - Meditation – attracting people who have interest in Buddhist culture and seeking the meaning of life, spirituality, and peace.
  - Working Women Tourism – rejuvenating the spirit through meditation especially designed for women.
  - New Year Countdown – Buddhist prayer countdown (14,000 temples have joined with about 2 million people who participated in the countdown).
  - Thai Pilgrimage to India – now in the works of including Bangladesh and Bhutan to communicate the pilgrimage practice.
- Buddhism can do many things to help people and in the same way bring in tourists; more than sharing benefits in terms of revenues, the challenge is to share the principles for the collaboration to be successful.

H.E. Shri Vinod Zutshi (AIS), Secretary, Ministry of Tourism India

- 5 major roles of government in facilitating cross-border circuits:
  - Political will and government policies - large amounts of money are allocated to improve amenities in the Footsteps of Lord Buddha route – these are supported by pro-tourism and pro-Buddhist conservation policies.
  - Infrastructure – access and visa regime, connectivity, conservation and maintenance – (there must be a separate agency to focus on preservation) and tour services, facilities and amenities – last mile connectivity, guides, information, activities.
Hospitality Services – accommodation of tourists of good quality (Bangladesh needs to invest a lot – first, build an enabling environment for hospitality investments from all over the world and create more hospitality services).

Promotion and Marketing – make people know that the place exists; tour operations of Bangladesh must have presence through various agencies and networks.

Cooperation amongst Nations – linking Buddhist heritage (India and Bangladesh have excellent cordial relations).

- Call upon all stakeholders to take part in the development of the circuit; but of paramount importance is for everybody to collaborate to understand the full potential of the circuit – make it a preferred destination regionally and internationally.

Mr. Kapila Jayasekara, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism Sri Lanka

- Buddhist tourism is one of the main initiatives in developing tourism in Bangladesh.
- Cross-border connectivity leads to the sustainable relationship among countries, but can also lead to the greater spiritual relationship among all Asians.

Mr. Li Qianguo, Director of China National Tourist Office

- As of 2015, of the 48 UNESCO World Heritage Listed sites of China, five monuments are Buddhist heritage
- Sales from Buddhist pilgrimage packages to India are meager at this point but are expected to grow; infrastructure problems have caused the stunted growth.
- International cooperation and collaboration is needed to strengthen the relationships in developing the circuits.

Mr. Tran Dinh Thanh, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam

- Tourism in Vietnam is not as developed as that of Singapore and Thailand's.
- There are also a number of Buddhist sites and pagodas in the country (about 1,000 pagodas).
- Not very many go to Vietnam particularly for Buddhist tourism; more domestic tourists undertake visits to Buddhist sites – occasionally, mostly during festivals.
- Buddhist tourism in Vietnam has slowly been developing in the recent years.
- Cooperation with other countries and experts (UNESCO, Japan, Republic of Korea and China) are undertaken for the protection and conservation of the pagodas.
- Of the total number of sites, 18 per cent have been developed since 2014.
Conclusions:

- Government plays a key role and it plays in many ways a leading role in key areas:
  - Connectivity.
  - Accessibility.
  - Infrastructure.
  - Education and Training.
  - Conservation.
- Messages of the Conference will be carried back into the government and going forward, will be able to build a substantial global destination built around the Buddhist heritage not only in the heartland but in Asia as a whole.

**PLENARY SESSION 4**

Topic: Setting Directions for Preparing a Roadmap 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, UNWTO

Panelists:

4.1 **Mr. Bikiron Prasad Barua**, Chittagong University
4.2 **H.E. Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul**, Ministry of Tourism and Sports Thailand
4.3 **Mr. Akhtaruz Zaman Khan Kabir**, BTB
4.4 **Mr. Milton Hyun SooKal**, WB Group
4.5 **Ms. Maria Del Carmen Pita Urgoiti, Director of Promotion**, Turismo de Galicia
4.6 **Mr. Ashok Pokharel**, Nepal Association of Tour Operators
4.7 **Mr. Xu Jing**, Programme for Asia and the Pacific

Discussion Points:

- Next steps for the implementation of the roadmap for Buddhist Tourism in South Asia:
  - Creating and improving services and facilities for Quality-based Tourism.
  - Improving training & capacity building with emphasis on tour guide training.
  - Making inventory of the sites and evaluating the sites.
  - Development of new tourism sites based on sound heritage management and conservation – invitation of experts from abroad.
  - Developing connectivity and infrastructure.
  - Benchmark the sites, assess and evaluate the needs and potentials of the sites.
- Overall, finding the right example and pick up the right one not the best one.

- Role of tour operators in the development and promotion of single multi-country routes within the circuit:
  - Working with the government.
  - Improving the quality of service.
  - Convening and working together with the rest of the region’s tour operators.
  - Packaging culture and heritage with experiential activities.
  - Integration rather than competition.
  - Promotions through tri-media: television, movies, etc.; arranging visiting journalism program and motivating the writers.
  - Bringing the Buddhist theme in different travel fairs.
  - Multi-level development planning to build capacity.
  - Regular Conference to monitor the roadmap of the activities.

- The government, private sector, media, local communities have to make a group to create and develop and promote the Buddhist circuit together.