

**ADB RETA 5771  
Poverty Reduction & Environmental Management in Remote Greater  
Mekong Subregion Watersheds Project (Phase I)**

**ECOTOURISM  
IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION  
Special Report**

By

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**CONTENTS**

- 1. Regional Report**
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Types of Tourism
- 1.3 Potential for Ecotourism
- 1.4 Constraints to Tourism
- 1.5 Revenues from Ecotourism
- 2. Country Surveys**
- 2.1 Cambodia
- 2.2 Lao PDR
- 2.3 Myanmar
- 2.4 Thailand
- 2.5 Viet Nam
- 2.6 Yunnan (Province of China)

**1. REGIONAL REPORT**

## 1.1 Introduction

This report is an independent component of the project. Its findings are based principally upon desk research that drew on recent trekking-type literature and articles, the Internet and informative material obtained from relevant governmental departments and NGOs. The report has been edited after readings by other project consultants.

Because changes in the application of tourism policy and the activities of travel operators change frequently (especially rules and prices) some information in this report may go out of date rapidly.

Nature tourism is a fast growing sector of the tourism industry. The countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) have long been famous for their cultural heritage sites but also have considerable potential for nature-related ecotourism. The geographical area they cover is vast. There are many aesthetically pleasing landscapes and areas of high scenic amenity and, on a global scale, high levels of biological diversity and endemism.

**The GMS is home to numerous minority peoples, who have their distinctive languages, cultures and specialised knowledge of the environments in which they live. This, in itself, can be a valuable asset to a developing ecotourism industry but care is needed to ensure that tourism does not adversely affect the lives of local people, to their detriment and that of sustained tourism.**

## 1.2 Types of Tourism

The term ecotourism was first used in the early 1990's. According to the Ecotourism Society (Wood, 1991), ecotourism is:

*'Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people.'*

Ecotourism is not the same as nature tourism. Nature tourism comprises a range of activities focussed upon wild lands and wildlife, including activities such as mountain biking, trekking, white-water rafting, bird watching, sport hunting, photographic safaris, mountaineering, orienteering, mule trekking, scuba diving and the sea-sun-and-sand types of vacation. Some activities may impact adversely upon the environments in which they are practised, and some forms of nature tourism have negative characteristics similar to those of mass tourism. They include unstable (often highly seasonal) sources of income, influenced by factors beyond the control of local people, which produce problems for investments (Boo, 1993). Nature tourism and ecotourism also require some basic infrastructure common to other forms of tourism, such as airports, lodging, sanitation and transportation. Health risks may exist in remote areas, necessitating development of facilities to provide first aid and cope with emergencies, including the possible need for medical evacuation.

Protected areas provide the most important bases for ecotourism. Most ecotourism is dependent upon the existence of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, forest parks and such-like. At global level, 79 per cent of protected areas in developed countries, and 45 per cent in developing countries (750 areas surveyed) have more than half of their areas open to tourism. For scientific work the figures are 80 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. Entrance fees average around \$5 although only about half the areas charge a fee (Giongo & Bosco-Nizeye, 1994); and surprisingly few areas charge fees for concessionaires who operate guided tours within them: 12 per cent of developing countries and 17 per cent of developed countries. Entrance fees and sales of informative materials produce revenue that can be ploughed back to support management costs although, in many countries, revenue goes directly to central government treasuries.

### Some recent tourism statistics for the GMS

Most tourism trips are undertaken for a range of reasons that include cultural, nature-related, historical and commercial purposes. Tourism statistics are largely dependent upon the travellers' self-definitions of their activities, a reason why ecotourism statistics are necessarily imprecise. Only by obtaining figures for arrivals at locations such as national parks and other protected areas can greater precision be obtained.

The growth of international tourism in recent years has been dramatic. The World Tourist Organisation (WTO) estimated that, during the 1990s, the flow of tourists in the Asia-Pacific region would grow at an annual rate of

some seven per cent—double the global average.

In an effort to advance its already well developed tourism industry, Thailand initiated its *Amazing Thailand 1998-1999* programme. Foreign visitors increased from some 3 million in 1986 to 7.2 million in 1997, with the average annual growth rate being 10 per cent, according to the Statistics & Research Division of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). The latest figures for arrivals in Thailand from January to October 1998 show an increase of 7.4 per cent over 1997 (Immigration Bureau, Police Department, of Thailand).

Statistics of foreign visitors to Cambodia reveal the following numbers of arrivals:

|      |         |
|------|---------|
| 1993 | 118,183 |
| 1994 | 176,617 |
| 1995 | 219,680 |
| 1996 | 260,489 |
| 1997 | 218,843 |

The apparent decline in 1977 was attributed to worries about stability and safety (Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia, May 1998). Arrivals in 1996 comprised visitors from the following regions:

|                      |         |
|----------------------|---------|
| Asia                 | 178,015 |
| Europe               | 53,761  |
| America              | 27,812  |
| Africa & Middle East | 901     |

Of these:

- 85 per cent were interested in local culture (especially Angkor Wat);
- 65 per cent in monuments and museums;
- 35 per cent in visiting coastal areas;
- 12 per cent in nature;
- 8 per cent in relaxation; and
- 14 per cent in other activities.

The major route of entry was via Bangkok to Phnom Penh (46 per cent of all visitors). In 1996, there were 137 established hotels, offering 5,087 rooms. Tourism is now regarded as providing the main opportunities for rebuilding Cambodia's economy.

Myanmar has expressed firm interest in developing the tourism industry, and 1996-1997 was declared *Visit Myanmar Year*. Mergui Archipelago was opened for tourism in 1998.

Lao PDR declared 1999-2000 as *Visit Lao Year*, and reduced the cost of visas on arrival from \$50 to \$30. In 1996 there were 403,000 tourist arrivals, and the anticipated estimate for 1999 is 780,000 visitors (Cummings, 1998).

On the global scale, ecotourism is a major component of economies in countries such as Costa Rica, Kenya, Maldives and Zimbabwe although, for reasons given above, relative estimates of importance are necessarily imprecise. However, current estimates for the role of ecotourism in the GMS countries suggest that it makes up about 10 percent of the total vacation market (WTO, 1990) and increases at a rate of about 30 per cent a year (Giongo & Bosco-Nizeye, 1994).

### 1.3 Potential for Ecotourism

#### Biological diversity and landscapes

Southeast Asia supports a diverse flora and fauna, and has been described as a zoogeographic crossroads.

The avifauna, for instance, consists of Indo-Burmese, Sino-Himalayan, Indo-Chinese and Sundaic birds, while large numbers of migrants from Palaearctic countries over-winter here. Some 300 mammals, 1,000 birds, 400 reptiles and 100 amphibians occur, and at least 25,000 higher plants. Many species are endangered and several critically endangered under IUCN's categories of threat. Some are conservation flagship species: for example, tiger and Sumatran and Javan rhinoceroses. There are high rates of endemism, especially along the border between Lao and Viet Nam. However, in spite of its biodiversity, the GMS is unlikely to offer wildlife spectacles similar to those of eastern and southern Africa. The combination of large herds and open savannah woodlands and plains in which they are easily seen do not exist in Southeast Asia.

Great variation in topography and climate has led to complex mosaics of forest types, ranging from deciduous woods to evergreen rainforests. There also are mangrove forests on saline coastal mudflats, and coniferous forests in many montane habitats. Dry dipterocarp forests are typical of large inland areas. However, the entire GMS has suffered from extensive deforestation. Originally, most was forested: today forest covers only about 38 per cent of the total land mass, least in Thailand, Viet Nam and Yunnan (about 25 per cent each), highest in Cambodia (62 per cent) although the greatest continuing rate of deforestation is probably in the latter country. This destructive activity occurred chiefly during this century, and can be attributed to increased human populations and the consequent need for more land to cultivate, uncontrolled commercial logging and war.

The range of landscapes extends from coastlines with coral reefs, mangroves and beautiful archipelagos with steep limestone rock islands (Ha Long Bay in Viet Nam, Phangnga Bay in Thailand and Mergui Archipelago in Myanmar), to the high mountains of northern Myanmar and northwest Yunnan. Snow and frost occur over extended periods during winter at these higher elevations.

## Protected Areas

There are 551 protected areas in the GMS (see Biodiversity and Protected Areas report for an overview, and individual country reports for details). The proportions of land they cover varies nationally from 18.8 percent in Cambodia to 2.1 per cent in Myanmar. Details for each country appear below under Country Surveys, and are more fully described in the separate Biodiversity and Protected Areas Country Reports.

## The Mekong River and waterways

The Mekong flows for 4,800 km through, or along the borders between, China (Tsinghai, Tibet and Yunnan provinces), Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam; from glacial alpine habitats, through subtropical and tropical climates to equatorial regions. In northwestern Yunnan three large rivers (Salween, Mekong and Yangtze) flow in parallel through two-kilometre-deep gorges.

The Mekong is navigable almost throughout Lao by boats and river ferries of between 15 and 140 tonnes, depending on season. But downstream of Savannakhet, rapids make this difficult and, at the frontier between Cambodia and Lao, the 21-metres-high Khone Falls prevent further passage downstream. With continuing road construction, water-borne traffic is declining year-by-year (Cummins 1998). The only notable ferry now is between Luang Prabang and Huay Xai, upstream on the border with Thailand.

About 1,200 species of fish have been recorded in the Mekong, nearly 500 in Cambodia alone (Rainboth 1996). Some endemic fishes measure up to three metres long and weigh 200 kg (the Mekong giant catfish *Pangasiodon gigas*). The smallest (*Rasbora urophthalma*) is less than 1.5 centimetres. In spite of the abundance of fish, there is no organised sport fishing. The Lower Mekong also has three species of dolphins, an otter (*Lutra perspicillata*) and fishing cat (*Felis viverrina*). There are broad floodplains and extensive backwater swamps, of which Tonlé Sap in Cambodia is the most famous.

There are plans for large dams on the Mekong. If they go ahead they could jeopardise the potential for river-based ecotourism, and should be subject to rigorous environmental impact assessments.

## Cultural background

The GMS was home to many great cultures such as the Thais, Mons, Khmers and Chams, who left behind many fine monuments. Several (e.g., Pagan, Angkor, Old Sukhothai and Ayutthaya) are on the World Heritage List. There are generally sufficient booklets and maps that provide information for tourists; but some extremely fine cultural sites are remote, difficult to reach and for which intending visitors need good advance information (Storey & Robinson 1995, Eliot *et al.* 1995, Eliot & Bickersteth 1997, Haywood *et al.* 1997, Cummins 1998). In general, information on cultural sites is more readily available than that about nature and wild lands.

The Mongol king Kublai Khan's rise to power in China set off dramatic migrations towards the southwest during the mid-13th century. The Thai people arrived in the Mekong area, where they encountered many Tibeto-Burmans and Mon-Khmers on the move south. The descendants of these early migrants today live chiefly in the large cities of Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City and Yangon, where several are leaders of commerce.

New mountain tribes (Meo/Hmong, Yao/Mien, Akha/Iko, Lisu, Lahu, Lolo, etc.) have also moved into the subregion over the past centuries in response to population pressures.

India was the original home of the majority religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) in southern parts of the GMS. The early Khmer kings were Hindus, but King Rajendravarman (944-968 AD) allowed the establishment of several Mahayana Buddhist temples at Angkor. From that time Buddhism became, and remains, the predominant religion in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

Thailand and Yunnan (China) are the only GMS countries not have been colonies of European states. Burma (now Myanmar) was part of the British colonial empire, while Cambodia, Lao and Viet Nam made up French Indochina. Burma became independent in 1948, while French rule in Indochina survived to 1954, after which Viet Nam split into two. Following the subsequent war between North and South Viet Nam, which resulted in massive amount of ordnance being dropped by the US Air Force in Viet Nam and Lao, the country was formally reunited in 1976.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge tyranny began in April 1975, and persisted to January 1979 when Viet Nam invaded. More than a million Cambodians died during this 44-month reign of terror. After the Vietnamese invasion, Khmer Rouge guerrillas fled to forested land in mountainous terrain on the frontier with Thailand. Even today, Khmer Rouge are reported near the Thai border, and the small town of Pailin was still a guerrilla base, according to international press reports, in January 1999. Following this conflict, four to eight million land mines are estimated to remain and seriously jeopardise rural development and expansion of tourism.

## Human diversity

There is enormous human diversity in the GMS. In Lao there are officially 68 ethnic groups (Cummings, 1998); in Viet Nam, 54 (Eliot *et al.* 1995); in Myanmar, 135 (Eliot & Bickersteth 1997). In Cambodia there are more than 10 minorities, and in Thailand more than 20. Yunnan Province recognises 26 nationalities.

There is a multiplicity of languages or dialects of each language. Some languages spoken today by relatively small numbers of people may die out during the next 20 to 30 years (Anhava, 1998).

## 1.4 Constraints to Tourism

All countries face inherent constraints that must be overcome or minimised in developing their tourism industries. The GMS is no exception. Some of the more significant constraints have been identified and briefly described below. In general, there has been an easing of bureaucratic constraints in recent years—a trend that seems set to remain. Some serious security constraints linger in certain areas, which need resolution if tourism is to be developed in those areas.

## Language

Immigration Bureau of Thailand statistics identify 44 nationalities visiting the country. The most numerous during January-October 1998 were Japanese (819,756), then Malaysians (750,927) and people from Hong Kong (453,872). Top of the list of Europeans were British in overall eighth position (296,713), followed by Germans (292,072). US citizens amounted to 283,443.

A majority of visitors to protected areas are likely to be nationals (at least in Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and Yunnan), so that few linguistic problem arise in the production of printed informative materials or provision of guides. But international visitors are another matter and, if they are to be encouraged, a multilingual information programme will be helpful. It is clearly beyond the resources of each country to provide a programme that encompasses more than a few languages, so that decisions must be made as to which are chosen. This report recommends the use of three foreign languages in addition to local languages, in the following order of priority.

- English. The most widely understood language in western countries and elsewhere.

- Japanese. Very few Japanese peoples speak a foreign language yet they feature high in the numbers of visitors to GMS countries.
- French. Still spoken by older educated people in the old French Indochina countries although less so by younger generations.

## **Crossing frontiers**

In some cases foreigners are not permitted to pass through land border points between GMS countries, or special permission has to be sought (sometimes from both countries, and in advance of the anticipated date of crossing), which can be a time-consuming process. This constraint is on the decrease. Land travel for foreigners is now possible between (at least) Yunnan and Viet Nam (road or rail); Lao and Viet Nam; Lao and Thailand; Cambodia and Thailand; Cambodia and Viet Nam.

The most effective way to travel between GMS countries is by air. Daily connections are available between all the capital cities.

## **Travel within GMS countries**

Internal travel within countries may be complicated by requirements for permit systems for visits to up-country areas and provincial checkpoints, which charge transit fees. Flying within countries is generally less effective than between countries, particularly when interconnection reservation systems do not exist so that seats must be reserved and purchased in each departure point.

Security issues may deny access by foreigners into parts of GMS countries, so that tourists are rarely brought face-to-face with personal threats. The more common security issues include the following.

### *Unexploded ordnance (UXO)*

UXO consists of dangerous war materials such as land mines, cluster bombs, white phosphorus canisters, mortar shells and other munitions. Several extensive areas of the GMS contain UXO. Local government officials such as police, military and forest or protected area staff are aware of their locations and prevent entry by foreigners.

## **The commercial drug trade**

The Golden Triangle, centred on the mountainous region where Lao, Myanmar and Thailand meet, is one of the world's three major raw opium producers, from which morphine is manufactured. (The others are in Afghanistan and Colombia.) Opium is also produced in Viet Nam. China is no longer a major producer, the government having won its battle against poppy cultivators, while Thailand's Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son Provinces produce little raw opium nowadays. Within the GMS, Myanmar is by far the biggest producer. The trade is dominated by the so-called 'drug lords', whose activities make certain localities no-go areas for tourists.

International tourism provides routes for minor drug trafficking. Many young, naïve foreigners, travelling on tight budgets, have been induced to carry drugs back to their countries with disastrous consequences. Airlines and customs officials in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia are particularly vigilant for drug smugglers, and draconian penalties may be awarded by the courts of those countries.

## **Banditry**

Some banditry is reported from mountainous border areas. Cambodia appears to be the most affected (Colet & Eliot, 1997), where it is sometimes encountered in the capital Phnom Penh.

## **Visa and other charges**

The information that follows was up-to-date as of May 1999.

### **Visas**

Visas are not in themselves obstacles to tourism but the way in which they are administered may hinder

development. Of the GMS countries, Thailand is the most relaxed. Nationals of a few specified countries need no visa for stays of up to 30 days, while the nationals of most others buy a visa on arrival for Baht 300. Cambodia and Lao issue tourist visas on arrival for \$20 (plus passport photograph) and \$30 respectively. The other GMS countries require that visas be obtained in advance, a process that takes at least a few days. Costs vary according to place of issue and applicants' nationalities. Viet Nam is reported to be seeking ways of relaxing its visa requirements: at present a visa costs \$50. Myanmar charges \$18. China (embassy in Vientiane) charges rates that range from \$18 (for Laotians) to \$40 (for UK citizens). All charges are subject to change.

Confusion sometimes occurs. For example, during October 1998 Thai International Airways was instructed to ensure that passengers to Cambodia were in possession of advance visas although visas on arrival were still being issued at Phnom Penh airport.

### **Foreign currency exchange**

Currency exchange is easily handled at exchange bureaux, banks and/or hotels in all GMS countries. Some illegal black market dealings may be on offer. Myanmar requires arriving foreigners immediately to change \$300 into foreign exchange certificate (FECs), a form of currency that cannot be converted back into dollars on departure, which must be a deterrent to short stays. Anecdotal reports suggest that it may be negotiable.

### **Airport departure charges**

For the most part, GMS airport charges are relatively modest: Cambodia, \$20, is the highest. The others are Lao, \$5 (payable in dollars or local currency); Myanmar, \$10; Thailand, Baht500; Viet Nam, \$10 (payable in dollars or local currency); and China (Yunnan), Yuan90.

### **Health problems**

Tropical countries have greater ranges of parasites, bacteria and viruses than do cooler countries. This applies over most of the GMS, so that intending foreign tourists should seek professional advice before departure, and take appropriate steps which may include taking medication, avoiding certain foods, drinking bottled water and staying out of rivers and lakes. The same applies to nationals and foreign residents of the GMS if they travel beyond their home bases.

Malaria is widespread, especially in rural areas, and forms resistant to the commonly used prophylactics have developed. Among other serious diseases are tuberculosis and the tick-borne Lyme disease, reported from Laos (Cummings, 1998). In all GMS countries there is the risk of contracting hepatitis A-E, cholera, typhoid, polio, rabies, giardiasis, dengue fever, trachoma, Japanese encephalitis, bilharzia (schistosomiasis), etc. There also are many kind of helminth parasites (round worms, thread worms and hookworm). The rainy season is the most risky period for all kind of diseases and parasites (including leeches) and mycosis. For health reasons, the wet seasons (roughly April to September, but December to September in northern Viet Nam) carry greater risks for foreign tourists. The period October to March, which is also a cooler season, is the preferred tourism season, especially for ecotourism, which involves travel in remoter areas.

Visitors should be aware that AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases pose a risk. Cambodia and Thailand record the highest rates. Viet Nam also has a serious AIDS-problem (Storey & Robinson 1995).

## **1.5 Revenues from Ecotourism**

A principle feature of ecotourism is that local peoples should derive financial benefits from it. There are several opportunities that can be derived from any form of tourism to protected areas.

### **Local craftsmanship**

Much local craft work is sought by tourists. This is to be encouraged but, if local craftsmen and women are to derive maximum benefit, they should be allowed to sell their products directly without intermediary, and by sole right. It may be necessary to prohibit the sale of competitive products from outside areas, as is the case in parts of China.

Some of the notable traditional craftwork available in the remote areas of the GMS include the silver chains of Lahu, Akha, Lisu and Mien; Karen necklaces; Hmong silvery lock-shaped pendants; Sgaw shirts; Pwo blankets and singing shawls; Hmong richly embroidered jackets, batiks, skirts and bags; Mien women's pants, heavy

silver bracelets and paintings; and Akha woman's headress. Many tribes have fine musical gourd pipes, baskets, boxes and carvings that demonstrate great professional skill (Lewis & Lewis, 1984). Tourists pay good prices for such crafts.

In order to facilitate the greatest benefits to the craftsmen, it may be necessary to obtain marketing support from organisations like the Hill Tribe Products Foundation in Chiang Mai, Thailand or the Craft Link in Viet Nam. Such kinds of co-operative organisations ought to be established in each country (MacKinnon & Bhruksasri, 1983).

### **Guide services**

Villagers can serve as guides and porters for tourists on hiking expeditions such as those in Khao Yai National Park in Thailand (Praween *et al.*, 1988; Brockelman & Dearden, 1990). These hiking programmes alone did not provide sufficient economic benefits so that an indigenous, community-based NGO was established—the Environmental Protection Society (EPS). The major goal of EPS is to act as a catalyst for income-generating projects, mainly agricultural, by serving as a credit co-operative (Praween *et al.*, 1988). Training is an integral part of all project activities, so that villagers become increasingly independent. EPS members also help the park staff to reforest park lands previously cultivated illegally, and has virtually halted encroachment on park lands. There are now eight additional villages along the Khao Yai boundaries.

### **Other services**

Local villagers can provide transportation by elephants or horses and (outside protected areas) by motor vehicles. They also can house visitors in long-houses or traditional guest houses (Boo, 1993; King & Stewart 1996). They can demonstrate local craftsmanship, traditional methods of agriculture and recreational activities

### **Revenue sharing**

Opportunities for sharing revenue with local communities is worth investigating. (See also Biodiversity and Protected Areas report: Strategic Recommendations.) In this context, it is a fairly common practice in Asia (including the GMS: e.g., Cambodia and Viet Nam) and Africa for differential pricing of entry fees to protected areas. One option is a two-tier system in which nationals pay one fee (or, in some cases, none at all) and foreigners pay a higher (usually much higher) fee. Another option is the three-tier system that distinguishes national, expatriate resident and foreigner.

### **In general**

Means of deriving benefits for local people should be specified in protected area management plans, and their success should be monitored. Local villagers must, therefore, be brought into the management planning process. If local people do not receive tangible benefits from tourism, conflict with local park officials is more likely. A consequence of conflict may be the attrition of protected area integrity, with accompanying losses of tourism and potential benefits for local people and for national interests. See Biodiversity and Protected Areas report: Strategic Recommendations.

## **2. COUNTRY SURVEYS**

The following six sections review ecotourism in each GMS country. At the end of each section are proposals for 'ecotourism triangles' (ETTs). These aim to cater for ecotourism interests, cultural and nature-related. Foreign and domestic tourists who travel for more than simple relaxation want to see and experience as much as possible during relatively short time scales. They may be interested in cultural or natural features or both. Peoples in the older age brackets tend to express above average interests in ecotourism (Eagles, 1995), and they tend to have more money. On the other hand, wilderness users and adventure tourists tend to be younger. A love of nature is also found most strongly among northern Europeans, north Americans, Japanese and Australasians (Eagles, 1995).

The structure of an ETT is such that the first of its three corners (the base corner) will be a capital or other large city, served by a major airport, and which has features that are of general interest for tourists of all sort: in other words, have something to interest everyone. The second and third corners are located in regions strong either in cultural interests or nature-related interests or both. The layout of the ETTs are summarised in Table 1 and illustrated in the accompanying map.

If the ETT concept proves useful, it can be amended, adapted or extended to suit different circumstances.

**TABLE 1. Recommended ecotourism triangles (ETTs)  
for the countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion. Refer also to the accompanying map.**

| Country  | ETT number | Base corner (location) | Second corner (features) | Third corner (features) |
|----------|------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Cambodia | ETT 1      | Phnom Penh             | Cultural                 | Nature                  |
| Lao      | ETT 1      | Vientiane              | Cultural                 | Nature                  |
|          | ETT 2      | Pakse                  | Nature                   | Nature                  |
| Myanmar  | ETT 1      | Yangon                 | Nature                   | Nature                  |
|          | ETT 2      | Mandalay               | Cultural                 | Nature                  |
| Thailand | ETT 1      | Chiang Mai             | Cultural/Nature          | Cultural/Nature         |
|          | ETT 2      | Bangkok                | Nature                   | Nature                  |
|          | ETT 3      | Bangkok                | Nature                   | Nature                  |
|          | ETT 4      | Phuket                 | Nature                   | Nature                  |
| Viet Nam | ETT 1      | Ho Chi Minh City       | Nature                   | Nature                  |
|          | ETT 2      | Hanoi                  | Nature                   | Nature                  |
| Yunnan   | ETT 1      | Kunming                | Nature                   | Culture/Nature          |

## 2.1 Cambodia

### General

Cambodia is renowned for the magnificent architecture developed by the Khmer Kingdom during the 9th-14th centuries. Angkor Wat is the most famous of Khmer temples. The country has a short coastline of about 435 km, and the highest proportion of forested land (62 per cent) in the GMS. Extensive areas are seasonally flooded, including Tonlé Sap which expands from 2,520 km<sup>2</sup> in the dry season to 15,780 km<sup>2</sup> at maximum inundation (Rainboth, 1996). However, uncontrolled commercial logging is severely depleting biodiversity.

Cambodia underwent a brutal 44-month reign of terror in 1975-79. During the Khmer Rouge era, an estimated one million Cambodians died. Tourism, which flourished before this era, came to an abrupt end. But in recent years it has revived, and the numbers of foreigners entering the country during the late 1990s have exceeded those of the 1960s.

### Travel operators

The official tourism authority is the Ministry of Tourism. Companies such as Angkor Tourism, Cambodia Tourism and Phnom Penh Tourism operate under the Prime Minister's Office. They organise tours around Phnom Penh, and arrange transport to Angkor and back.

### Internal transportation

Surface travel within Cambodia is somewhat difficult. Many NGOs ban their staff from travelling by any form of public surface transport (including ferries) due to security risks.

The only safe public transport is by air. Royal Air Cambodge and President Airlines between them fly to six domestic destinations from Phnom Penh, including Siem Reap, which serves Angkor.

### Sources of information

There are good English-language travel guides that give information useful for intending visitors to Cambodia.

Within the country, NGOs (more than 200 international ones) are a major source for information on internal travel. There are also three local English-language newspapers: *The Phnom Penh Post* (fortnightly), *The Cambodian Daily* (five days a week) and *The Cambodian Times* (weekly).

In February 1998, the Cambodian Statistics and Information Office (Planning Department, Ministry of Tourism) put information about tourism in Cambodia 1993-97 on the internet. This was up-dated on 24 November 1998). Look in <Cambodia+tourism>

## Protected areas

There are seven national parks, 10 wildlife sanctuaries, three protected landscapes and three multiple use areas. Their total area is 34,023 km<sup>2</sup> or 18.8 per cent of the country.

This relatively large protected area system (largest in the GMS by proportion of country covered) is virtually without management. Only four areas have any personnel, and those inadequate to the demands of management. Nor are any areas demarcated on the ground, and the legal provisions for protected areas, in general, are suspect. Uncontrolled logging is taking place in every protected area, much of it by the Cambodian Army.

## Ecotourism trends

There are still some fine areas with ecotourism potential, especially Verachay National Park and Tonlé Sap Multiple Use Area—the later in conjunction with culturally based tourism to Angkor Wat.

An unfortunate perception of protected areas and tourism was reported to one of the consultants during the current study. It appears that during the 1960-70 period, one national park was developed as a playground for the wealthy, with golf course and casino. This gave decision-makers a distorted impression of the purposes of protected areas that has persisted to the present-day.

The future for nature-related ecotourism is gloomy. Forests and biodiversity are being plundered, protected areas are protected in name only and there is no sign of serious official concern. Security remains a threat in many remote areas.

## Ecotourism Triangles (ETTs): Recommendations

Only one ETT is identified, based on the capital Phnom Penh.

### Ecotourism Triangle 1

The base corner (ETT 1/I) is Phnom Penh (estimated population 0.9 million), which has the country's only international Airport (Pochentong). The city exudes a provincial charm but has some fine architectural (and some grim historical) features that are exploited by the general tourist industry.

The second corner (ETT 1/II) is largely a cultural corner: Angkor Wat and its surroundings, which include Tonlé Sap Multiple Use Area and lake of the same name. There is a ferry connection between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, and a shorter run (five hours) by fast boats. Royal Air Cambodge and President Airlines also serve Angkor via Siem Reap (at least two flights a day and up to five on Sundays). Angkor is a vast temple area (160 km<sup>2</sup>) north of the town and its airfield. Angkor Thom (the capital), Angkor Wat (the greatest temple), the Bayon (temple-mountain), Baphuon, Phimeanakas, Avenue of Victory, etc. were built by the kings of Angkor during 800-1300 AD. To the north is a sandstone plateau with Phnom Kulen, the holy River of Thousand Lingas, Banteay Chmar and Beng Mealea. All temples are guarded but land mines have been laid along some outlying paths although the guides know how to avoid them. Ecotourists can also enjoy the surrounding woodlands, and it is recommended that nature trails be developed here

The third corner is a nature corner (ETT 1/III), on the Cambodian coast, centred on the town of Sihanoukville. The town has 34 hotels (781 rooms), 11 guesthouses (69), 34 restaurants and a good beach. There are some private mountain hotels: Kirirom Hill Station and Bokor Hill Station (managed by the Bokor Mountain Club in Phnom Penh). Four national parks lie nearby: Ream, Bokor, Kep and Botum Sakor. There are many offshore islands, and the Cardamom Mountains lie inland with evergreen rainforest on the southwest slopes. Annual

rainfall is high: 3,000-4,000 mm. Oddly, there is scarcely any published information about nature and wildlife in these mountain areas. Although biodiversity is high, little has been done to exploit the potential for ecotourism.

## 2.2 Lao PDR

### General

After nearly 20 years of isolation, Lao PDR opened its doors to tourists in 1994. The declaration of *Visit Lao Year 1999-2000* followed. Being landlocked, Lao cannot offer beach tourism, and ecotourism (cultural and nature-related) offer the best potential.

Lao's chief tourism assets are its cultural heritage and gentle people. Foreigners can walk day or night, alone or in groups, in Vientiane or in other towns and experience no harassment whatsoever. It also has a rich natural heritage although this has yet to be exploited.

### Travel operators

Travel operators are a relative recent phenomenon. The country's official, government-sponsored tour operator is the National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR (NTAL). Some old traditional western operators have operating licences in Laos and new offices are springing up.

### Internal transportation

Bus, truck and pick-up services operate throughout the country but much of the road system in mountainous terrain (70 per cent of the country) is tortuous and poorly surfaced. Only the roads from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and Savannaket have tarmac surfaces, and some other roads in the north and south are surfaced. Cars with drivers are available for hire.

The Mekong River is navigable almost throughout Lao: only near the border with Cambodia do rapids prevent river transport. Some slow passenger services exist although this traditional waterway is mainly used for shifting freight—increasingly so as the roads improve. Boat tours (including speed boats) and passenger services are available up-stream from Luang Prabang.

Lao Aviation is the only domestic airline. It serves 11 domestic destinations including Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannaket and Pakxe.

There is no railroad although the Thai rail system reaches the Friendship Bridge a few kilometres downstream of Vientiane.

### Sources of information

English-language travel guides are available that give information useful for intending visitors.

### Protected areas

Lao has 20 national biodiversity conservation areas (NBCAs). In total they measure 29,030 km<sup>2</sup> or 12.3 per cent of the country. A further 11 areas have been proposed for NBCA status. None yet has facilities for tourism although two or three are paid day visits by people living within motorable distance.

### Ecotourism trends

Lao has considerable potential for cultural and nature-related tourism, the former being pursued already. Development of ecotourism into and around the NBCAs may bring peoples of the hill tribes into regular contact with foreigners, which could have both favourable and unfavourable impacts. Lao is in a position to plan carefully in advance so as to optimise these impacts.

Wildlands and wildlife have suffered less from human impacts than elsewhere in the GMS. Lao's human

population density of 23/km<sup>2</sup> is the least of all six countries. The opportunity exists to plan for ecotourism in protected areas beginning with a clean sheet.

The potential for recreational sport fishing in the Mekong River is high.

## Ecotourism Triangles (ETTs): Recommendations

Two ETTs are proposed, based on Vientiane and Pakse.

### Ecotourism Triangle 1

Vientiane is the base corner (ETT 1/I). Almost all tourists enter via Vientiane, either by air or across the Friendship Bridge. Vientiane is itself a location of interest to tourists. The small city (population about 500,000) has a rustic charm; a delightful riverfront with simple bars and cafes; a few up-market restaurants; inexpensive massage parlours; and numerous Buddhist temples and impressive monuments. There is a cheerful nightlife.

North of Vientiane the old capital Luang Prabang, is the second corner (ETT 1/II), which is a cultural corner. The road journey from Vientiane (about 400 km) takes a day, but there are up to three flights a day that take about an hour. It also is possible to go by riverboat upstream or downstream along the Mekong. In the course of a journey between Vientiane and Luang Prabang, the vessel passes the Vang Vieng Caves. The town of Luang Prabang is very picturesque. There are numerous temples and monuments, and the Royal Palace Museum is well worth a visit. River trips are easily organised.

The third corner (ETT 1/III) is a nature corner that lies about 80 km to the northeast of Vientiane. This is Phou Khao Khouay National Biodiversity Conservation Area. There is mountainous terrain up to 2,000 metres elevation, in which may be found tiger, Asiatic black bear and other large fauna. With difficulty it may be possible to travel further afield to the east-southeast to Nakai Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area on the border with Viet Nam—an area of high biodiversity, endemism and spectacular scenery. The area is famous for the recent discovery (to science) of three large mammals—the saola, small dark muntjac and giant muntjak

### Ecotourism Triangle 2

The base corner (ETT 2/I) is Pakse, provincial capital of Champassak Province. Pakse (population 64,000) is a relatively new town at the confluence of the Mekong and Se Don Rivers. It can be reached from Vientiane by road (750 km) or by daily flights (1 hour and 25 minutes). A local tourist office can arrange vehicles for private transport within the vicinity. There are 20 temples of which Wat Luang is the most famous.

The second corner (ETT 2/II) is both a cultural and nature corner. It is centred on the Bolaven Highlands to the east of Pakse. These highlands are home to several Mon-Khmer ethnic groups: Alak, Katu, Ta-oy, Suay and Laven. Vietnamese people (the frontier is near) call them *Montagnards*. Villagers grow coffee (originally started by French planters in the 1950s), both *arabica* and *robusta*, which fetches among the highest prices in the world (Cummings 1998). Lao's largest NBCA complex is located here (Xe Pian, Dong Ampham and Dong Hua Sao plus three proposed areas). There are extensive tracts of forest and beautiful montane scenery. Elephant rides are available over terrain that could be covered on foot only with great difficulty through thickets of high, sharp grasses and bamboo.

The third corner (ETT 2/III) is a nature corner. It lies on the border with Cambodia, where the Mekong River leaves Lao in the region of Four Thousand Islands. During the dry season, the water level drops and exposes hundreds of islands and islets. At the frontier, the river flows by way of many cascades through a fall of 21 metres—the spectacular Khone Falls. The Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) occurs, being found only here and in the Padma River of Bangladesh and the Irrawaddy of Myanmar. It is believed that only 20-50 individuals may remain near the falls, out of a world population of 100-300. They are threatened by fishermen's explosives and nylon nets although no one hunts them deliberately for they are traditionally considered by Laos and Khmers to be reincarnated humans.

## 2.3 Myanmar

### General

Myanmar has recently placed emphasis on developing tourism. The government largely controls the industry through state companies although liberalisation in recent years has led to more private involvement. Some frontier crossing points on the border with Thailand now issue one-day visas: they are Kawthoung near Ranong, Thailand; Payathonzu near Three Pagodas Pass; and Tachilek near Mae Sai, Thailand).

Most tourists arrive in Myanmar at the new Mingaladon aerodrome, 19 km northwest of the capital, Yangon, which is a green and leafy metropolis with an estimated population of 3.9 million.

The most used internal tourist route is the Mandalay-Bagan-Lake Inle triangle in the centre of the country. Mandalay has a airport, railway stations and is also a river port. The botanical garden of 140 ha is situated near the town of Pyin U Lwin, where a golf course has been carved out of the jungle (Eliot & Bickersteth, 1997).

## **Travel operators**

Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT) is the official tourist office of the country.

In the summer of 1998, the first scuba diver operators arrived in Mergui Archipelago from Phuket, Thailand (Internet, December 1998). By the end of 1998 there were 36 private tourism offices and operators in Yangon.

## **Internal transportation**

It is possible to travel between Yangon and Mandalay by train on the Mandalay Express, a journey of 616 km that takes 12-18 hours

It is also possible to travel by riverboat operated by the state-owned Water Transport Company. The most common route is from Mandalay downstream on the Irrawaddy to Bagan (12-15 hrs, cost \$38). Another state-owned concern, Myanmar Five Star Line (MFSL), plies coastal routes. While coastal roads and buses are closed to foreigners the coastal vessels offer alternative means of travel, especially to the south (Eliot & Bickersteth, 1997).

Myanmar Airways and Air Mandalay fly to several domestic destinations. Tickets can be purchased in Bangkok but reservations can be made only in Myanmar.

## **Sources of information**

English-language travel guides are available that give information useful for intending visitors.

The government has financed co-operative home pages on the internet, and has adopted an aggressive advertising programme, second only to Thailand in the GMS.

Yangon-based tour operators have internet home pages that give marketing information about trips and travels, prices, timetables, locations, sights to see and bookings. Some are able to offer personally tailored tours in authentic ecotourism. Unless a tourist uses one of these operators, he or she may experience difficulty in obtaining travel permits to the various states and divisions.

## **Protected areas**

There are two national parks; one marine national park; 19 wildlife sanctuaries; five bird sanctuaries; one wildlife park; one mountain park; and one elephant range. The total size of the protected area system is 14,160 km<sup>2</sup> or 2.1 per cent of the country.

Scott (1989) identified 26 wetlands but only one, Lake Inle, seems to have ecotourism potential.

## **Ecotourism trends**

Myanmar has some fine beaches along the coast, and there are many impressive granitic islands offshore, capped with lush tropical woods and coral formations, and with shorelines that support mangroves. Inland along the Taninthayi coast are tropical monsoon forest, dune woods, hundreds of bird species, Asiatic black bear and Malayan sun bear, leopard, tiger, several primates, etc. But none is developed for tourism, nor can any travel operator book clients to go there. These vast areas contain great potential for nature conservation

and ecotourism. During the hot season, which begins in March, and in spite of the beaches across the border in Thailand being crowded, there is no sort of beach tourism along the beaches and islands of Myanmar.

Inle lake and its surroundings to the southeast from Mandalay, offer some minor nature tourism activities such as canoeing, boating and trekking. There are many canals and large mangrove thickets in western parts of the Irrawaddy Delta near Yangon but none is used for nature excursions.

Recent news reports by Reuters (January, 1999) tell of military attacks on three secessionist groups in the eastern states. This development seems likely to ensure that these areas will stay closed to tourism for the foreseeable future.

## Ecotourism Triangles (ETTs): Recommendations

Two ETTs are described and recommended, based on Yangon and Mandalay.

### Ecotourism Triangle 1

The usual point of arrival and departure for foreign tourists in Myanmar is Mingaladon airport, Yangon. Yangon also is the centre for national travel operators, and is itself a tourism centre with considerable architectural and cultural sites and lively nightlife. All travel permits, etc are issued here. The old capital Bago lies, and Hlawga Wildlife Park lies on the city boundary. Yangon is therefore the base corner (ETT 1/I).

The second corner (ETT 1/II) is a nature corner, set in the western parts of the Irrawaddy Delta, which offer the closest ecotourism areas to Yangon. Hundreds of kilometres of channels with narrow mangrove canals and tunnels occur. At the seaward end of the main river channel of Patheingyi is Thamein Wildlife Sanctuary (1 sq km). This island is an important nesting site for the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). The delta supports an important population of the endangered estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*). The dugong (*Dugong dugon*) also occurs but is very rare.

The third corner (ETT 1/III) is a cultural corner that lies to the southeast. It comprises the Mergui Archipelago and coastal forests. It can be reached by air (*Myanmar Airways*) or sea (*MFSL*). Road conditions are poor and foreigners are not permitted to travel by surface. The archipelago was opened to tourism in Summer 1998, first for Thai diving operators from Phuket. Myeik Town is the capital of Taninthayi Division. Tavoyi to the north has a nearby beach resort called Maungmagan, and just offshore are the Moscos Islands, where there are coral reefs. Mergui Archipelago consist of over 800 pristine islands. Some of are granitic; some have karstic limestone with large caves. Nearby Lampi Marine National Park has crystal clear waters, coral formations and beaches. Further along the coast is Pakchan Reserved Forest (a proposed nature reserve) with mangrove swamps and forested hills rising steeply to the east. The forests are undisturbed climax low tropical evergreen forests with lianas and orchids. There is a rich avifauna. There are elephant, tiger, loris, leopard and others. Average annual rainfall is about 4,000 mm, with the wettest period being May to September.

### Ecotourism triangle 2

Ecotourism triangle 2 lies on the central northern plateaux of Myanmar with its base corner (ETT 2/I) at Mandalay, where there is an airport. The Mandalay Express runs between Yangon and Mandalay. The Inland Water Transport Company carries passengers by river to and from Bagan—a 12-15 hours' journey. Private boats can be hired for short trips, and rowing boats can be used for local sightseeing. The Botanical Garden is to the east of Mandalay at Pyin U Lwin.

The second corner (ETT 2/II) is a cultural corner (ETT 2/II) at Bagan. Bagan is of special interest for cultural tourists. It was the capital for 230 years in the 11th and 13th centuries. There are 2,217 pagodas and 2,000 ruined temples dating from the country's architectural Golden Age.

The third corner (ETT 2/III) is a nature corner set at Lake Inle and its surroundings—642 km<sup>2</sup> of which are Inle Wetland Bird Sanctuary. This 5 km by 40 km natural lake lies in a broad valley of the eastern mountain. Water hyacinth strips with floating gardens, floating markets and leg-rowing fishermen are among Inle's noteworthy sights. From January to April the lakeside blooms with lilac-coloured jacaranda, scarlet flame of the forest (*Butea frondosa*), bougainvilleas, white bohemia (Hong Kong orchid) and cherry-trees. Travelling by boat through the network of canals and open lake is a must for every tourist.

## 2.4 Thailand

### General

Over 6 million foreign tourists visit Thailand each year but the domestic market is much greater. Thailand's capital Bangkok (population 8.9 million) is itself a major tourist centre. The largest airport in Southeast Asia is located here. Most arrivals from outside the country enter and depart at Don Muang airport. Bangkok is also an important centre for charter flights. Don Muang offers connections to all other capitals of the GMS.

The country's system of protected areas is the largest in Southeast Asia. It receives over 19 million visitors a year—mostly nationals. Thailand has traditional nature tourism centres in Chiang Mai Province and other northern provinces. The mountainous north is inhabited by several tribal peoples including the Karens, Hmongs, Miens, Lahus, Akhas and Lisus.

Thailand has many famous resorts for beach tourism. Pattaya is the oldest but Phuket is the most popular and best known. The most recently developed is the island of Ko Pha Ngan. The eastern seaboard of the Gulf of Thailand, from Bangkok to the Cambodian border, is remarkably picturesque. Unspoilt islands lie within sight of the coast, and not far inland are some little-visited national parks. The islands of Ko Samet and Ko Chang are both included in national marine parks.

Northeastern Thailand, the wide and relatively barren scrubland of the Khorat Plateau, has a rich history. Many Khmer temples are found here. Although the Khorat Plateau is well served by air-conditioned coaches, there are less foreign tourists here than in other parts of Thailand.

### Travel operators

The government tourist agency is the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). There are innumerable private travel companies that operate virtually throughout Thailand. Tourist are well provided with hotels and restaurants ranging from five-star to more modest establishments although the majority cater for mass tourism.

Many tour operators can and will organise tours for ecotourists. Hundreds of operators offer trekking in Chiang Mai. Competition is fierce and most operators provide roughly the same assortment of treks, ranging from a single night to over a week. Few, however, advertise ecotourism specifically. Motorcycle trekking is becoming popular although it is environmentally destructive, bringing noise to otherwise quiet areas and leading to soil erosion. Many trekking guides can speak the hill tribe languages.

Many of the larger travel agents in Bangkok and Chiang Mai will also arrange visas and tours to Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam.

### Internal transportation

Transportation systems are good. It is easy to fly by Thai International Airways to several domestic destinations, including at least 10 flights daily between Bangkok and Phuket. Other smaller airlines fly additional domestic routes. There is also an extensive rail network, and coaches operate throughout the country.

### Sources of information

Many good English-language travel guides are available that give information useful for intending visitors to Thailand.

In Chiang Mai, the Tribal Research Institute provides information on the various hill tribes and provides maps of trekking areas. No firm recommendations can be made regarding specific travel operators because circumstances are very fluid and standards alter frequently.

TAT distributes lists of recommended trekking operators and a leaflet on what to look out for when choosing a trip.

Tourist Police are based in the main tourist areas. Their function is to police problems relating to tourism. Guides must hold a Professional Guide License, and treks must be registered with the Tourist Police. In compliance with local rules, guides are obliged to supply the Tourist Police with photocopies of the ID pages of

each tourist's passport and dates of entry stamps. It is, therefore, possible to check on a tour operator's reputation by contacting the local police department.

Most Thai travel companies do not have web sites but many operators in Phuket have home pages for taking reservations.

A selection of tourism-related and general topographic maps are widely available in Thailand as well as in Europe and North America.

## Protected areas

Thailand has a system of protected areas that covers 77,922 km<sup>2</sup>, or 15.2 per cent of the country. It comprises 64 national parks, 18 national marine parks, 42 wildlife sanctuaries, 66 forest parks and 49 non-hunting areas. The first was Khao Yai National Park, declared in 1962. Development has been rapid in recent years, and it is likely that by the time this report is produced Thailand's protected area system will have grown further. There are at least 42 wetlands (Scott 1989).

However, many of these areas lack tourism facilities, and the function of wildlife sanctuaries is largely nature conservation.

## Ecotourism trends

There are plentiful opportunities for developing ecotourism in Thailand. However, it is clear that Thai travel operators are also interested in expanding into neighbouring countries such as Lao, Cambodia and Myanmar, and perhaps into Viet Nam. A current example is the move by some Thai operators into the Mergui Archipelago, Myanmar. Some tourism revenues may therefore 'leak' from the country. A recent estimate (Lindberg *et al.*, 1998) is a 60 per cent 'leakage'.

Thailand's forests may continue to decline, in spite of the 1989 ban on logging. Continuation of terrestrial ecotourism will depend almost entirely upon the existence of protected areas coupled with management that succeeds in maintaining the integrity of natural environments and their flora and fauna. This will be a major challenge in the face of continued, or even increasing, heavy visitor use. The RFD already acknowledges that visitor control is a major management problem.

## Ecotourism Triangles (ETTs): Recommendations

Four Ecotourism Triangles are described and recommended, based on Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket. Bangkok is the most frequently used point of entry to Thailand although not the only one. The city (population 8.9 million) is itself a tourist attraction, cultural and hedonistic, and is the Base Corner for two ETTs.

### Ecotourism Triangle 1

Chiang Mai is the base corner (ETT 1/I). It is a large modern, city with shopping centres and a lively life style. Treks can be booked here. Beside the town is Doi Suthep-Pui National Park, and to the west is Thailand's highest mountain Doi Inthanon, within its own national park.

The second corner (ETT 1/II) is both a nature and cultural corner. It is set in the northern mountain that are home to several hill tribes, the six main groups being Hmong, Mien, Lahu, Lisu, Karen and Akha. Many tourists visit this area, including ecotourists and hikers. This is the best area in Southeast Asia in which to see hill tribe villages and their cultures *in situ*.

Similar circumstances occur to the north in the third corner (ETT1/III). It is possible to pass from here via a narrow bridge into the Golden Triangle areas of Myanmar with a one-day visa. This area, which is the drug lords' heartland, is closed to foreigners from all other directions outside of Thailand.

### Ecotourism Triangle 2

Bangkok is the Base Corner of Ecotourism Triangle 2 (ETT 2/I).

The second corner (ETT 2/II) is a nature corner. To the northwest of Bangkok is an exceptional area of natural interest. Beyond the town of Kanchanaburi on the border with Myanmar is Southeast Asia's largest nature

protection complex, the Western Forest Complex (WFC), which comprises several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (for details see Biodiversity and Protected Areas Country Report for Thailand). The WFC harbours wild buffalo, gaur, tiger, Asian elephants, Malayan sun bear, clouded leopard and gibbons. The three-centimetre-long Kitties hog-nosed bat—the worlds smallest mammal—has been recorded here. The famous and spectacular River Kwai runs through this area..

To the south is another nature corner (ETT2/III) that can be reached by air, train, coach or boat from Bangkok. This is an area of beach resorts that includes the island of Ko Samui near Surat Thani and Mu Ko Ang Thong National Park, which is an archipelago. The endemic orchid *Paphiopedilum* occurs on the islands.

### Ecotourism Triangle 3

ETT 3 lies on the eastern seaboard of the Gulf of Thailand. Bangkok is the base corner (ETT 3/I).

The second corner 2 (ETT 3/II) is a nature corner that includes Thailand's first national park, KhaoYai. Some 300 birds, including Thailand's national bird, the Siamese Fireback Pheasant's (*Lophura diardi*), occur in the forests. There are several mountains of around 1,000 metre elevation. Tigers, Asian elephant, gibbons, leopard, sambar deer and bears also occur. This park is very popular among residents of Bangkok. Local villagers serve as guides and manage some accommodation facilities by the park boundary.

The third corner (ETT 3/III) is also a nature corner: a coastal area where Mu Ko Samet and Mu Ko Chang National Marine Parks are located. There are 52 islands and coral reefs. Annual rainfall exceeds 3,000 mm. Monitor lizards, pythons, king cobras and the endemic Ko Chang frog occur in Mu Ko Chang. The island is famous for its large waterfalls..

### Ecotourism Triangle 4

The base corner (ETT 4/I) is at the island of Phuket, which is served by many internal scheduled flights and by charter flights from Europe. This is Thailand's largest island measuring 48 by 550 km. There are beautiful beaches with palms and high mountainous limestone stacks in the interior. Behind the town is the Butterfly Garden and Aquarium. A little further away is the Gibbon Rehabilitation Centre beside Khao Phra Taew Forest Park. There are also a pearl farm, Marine Research Centre (with well-designed aquarium), Orchid Garden (40,000 specimens) in Thai Village, beaches along the west coast, waterfalls and rubber plantations.

The second corner (ETT 4/II) is a nature corner: Khao Sok National Park to the north along the Ranong road from Phuket. The park contains dramatic southern rainforest set between karst limestone mountains. The worlds largest flower, the giant *Rafflesia kerri* (diameter 80 cm) grows here. The park has many marked trails. The big argus pheasant (*Argusianus argus*) occurs, plus hornbills (*Buceros* spp.), tiger, Asian elephant, bears, wild boar, barking deer and monkeys.

The third corner (ETT 4/III) is a nature corner consisting of Phangnga Bay with the chasms, tunnels and lagoons of its islands. The coasts are thickly grown with mangroves (*Sonneratia*, *Avicennia*, *Rhizophora*, *Bruguiera* and *Nipa* spp). Behind them are sheer, precipitous mountains with peaks clothed in lush tropical vegetation. There is a hot spring along the Tung Tiew forest trail near Khlong Thom town on the east coast. There are many striking protected areas in the Phangnga Bay region: Khao Phanombenja National Park; and Had Wopparat Thara-Mu Ko Phi Phi, Hat Chao Mai and Tarutao National Marine Parks.

## 2.5 Viet Nam

### General

Viet Nam has been involved in wars on-and-off for much of the century: World War I (1914-18); World War II (1939-45); the Franco-Viet Minh War (1946-54); the Viet Nam War (1964-75); war with China (1979); and against the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (1978-89). Only after the last-named conflict did a general liberalisation begin, and the doors open to foreign tourists. But the recent wars destroyed wide forested areas and there are still thousands of pieces of UXO in rural areas. Nature-related ecotourism has developed more slowly than cultural tourism.

Existing tourist foci in Viet Nam include the capital Hanoi, the former capital Hue and the southern (and largest) conurbation, Ho Chi Minh City.

## Travel operators

The official government travel operator is the National Administration of Tourism (NAT). There also are government travel agencies such as Saigon Tourist and Viet Nam Tourism, and numerous private travel operators. The first foreign travel operator will soon begin operating on a joint venture basis.

## Internal transportation

Viet Nam has two major navigable river systems: the deltas of the Red River in the north and the Mekong in the south. Both are criss-crossed with navigable canals. Many sorts of vessels can be hired in most riverine and seaside towns.

Air-conditioned coaches are available for tourists, and a minibus service connects Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and other major tourist routes.

A rail service (the Reunification Express) runs between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The 1,726-km trip takes over 24 hours. There is also a service between Hanoi and the port of Hai Phong. Trains also connect Hanoi with Kunming (Yunnan Province of China) via Lao Cai, and via a northern route to Beijing.

*Viet Nam Airlines* flies to several domestic destinations.

## Sources of information

There are several up-to-date English-language travel books on Viet Nam.

## Protected areas

Viet Nam has 10 national parks, 52 nature reserves, 18 species/habitat reserves and 22 protected landscapes. In total they amount to 22,690 km<sup>2</sup> or 6.8 per cent of the country. The national parks are managed for tourism while nature reserves and species/habitat reserves are conservation areas. There are 25 wetlands in Viet Nam, the Mekong Delta being the largest (Scott, 1989).

Protected areas are under considerable threat by encroachment and illegal harvesting of non-timber forest products. Viet Nam has the highest human population density of all the GMS countries (240/km<sup>2</sup>) so that the pressures here are especially great.

## Ecotourism trends

Protected areas are the last repositories for Viet Nam's wildlife. Elsewhere forests have virtually disappeared, and some 40 per cent of the country is classified as 'barren lands'. Ecotourism will be highly dependent upon the integrity of protected areas being maintained.

## Ecotourism Triangles (ETT): Recommendations

Two ETTs are identified: one in the north and one in the south.

### Ecotourism Triangle 1

The Base Corner 1 (ETT 1/I) is Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), population officially 4.0 million but possibly larger. There is an international airport (Tan Son Nhat), and daily coach services to Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh. Ho Chi Minh is in itself a tourist location. It is a bustling city with street markets, sidewalk cafes and tourist bars.

The second corner (ETT 1/II) is a feature of potential interest to ecotourists lying 70-80 km southeast of Ho Chi Minh City. This is the Binh Chau-Phuoc Buu Nature Reserve, and the nearby Binh Chau hot springs. Unfortunately there are no tourist facilities, nor is there public transport to the site. The reserve is in two parts: a coastal forest to the west, and forest on low hills and wetlands on the east. Between them is narrow neck. In the wetlands, some hundred migratory bird over-winter here, and the 36 recorded mammals include two lorises, several macaques, Malayan sun bear, leopard, wildcat (*Felis chaus*), mouse deer and Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*). There are 33 reptiles, 217 trees and 14 orchids. All occur in the last remnants of semi-evergreen and

mixed deciduous forest along this coastal stretch. The area is tranquil. Roads end here, and there is no connection from this part of Vung Tau Province to National Highway 1. Apart from local residents, Vietnamese people seem to know little about this reserve in spite of there being a large conurbation to the northwest.

The third corner (ETT 1/III) is also a nature corner: Con Dao National Park, a cluster of islands some 85 km offshore from the Mekong Delta. It consists of one large island (Con Dao) and 15 smaller ones, totalling 720 km<sup>2</sup>. They are mountainous with elevations up to 577 metres. There are coastal mangroves, while *Melaleuca* and *Dipterocarpus* forests cover 88 per cent of the whole land area. In the marine habitats are corals, porpoises, dolphins, turtles and shore- and sea-birds. There is a limited amount of beach tourism.

## Ecotourism triangle 2

The base corner (ETT 2/I) is the capital Hanoi (population 2.2 million). Hanoi is a city of lakes, shaded boulevards, large parks and pleasing architecture. The city is served by an international airport (Noi Bai) about 30 km to the north.

The second corner (ETT 2/II) is a nature corner: the well known Ha Long Bay west of Hanoi. This is a World Heritage Site consisting of 1,600 tall and precipitous islands and islets. The scenery is spectacular. This archipelago is popular with both Vietnamese and foreign tourists, and is visited by some one million each year. The western side borders Cat Ba National Park (345 km<sup>2</sup>), which comprises one main island and 366 smaller ones, offshore coral reefs, sandy beaches, mangrove forests and freshwater swamp forests. There are also 'sugar loaf' limestone karst islands with numerous waterfalls, caves and grottos. The fauna includes leaf monkey (*Presbytis francoisi*), three macaques, leopard, muntjak, otter, small cats and 200 species of fishes.

The third corner (ETT 2/III) is primarily a nature corner based on the coastal of town Vinh but includes Vu Quang Nature Reserve on the border with Lao in the Annamite Mountains. As mentioned above, nature reserves are primarily conservation rather than tourism areas. Some of the best primary mountain forest in the GMS occurs here, and the area also lies in a biodiversity hotspot. The Ca River has potential for boating, canoeing and white-water rafting. Extensive beaches occur along the coast.

There is also cultural interest here, in that the Ho Chi Minh Trail passed this way during the War.

## 2.6 Yunnan (province of China)

### General

Yunnan has a mild climate and is the most geographically diverse of China's provinces. It ranges from tropical rainforest at Xishuangbanna in the south, to icy mountains in the extreme northwest. It contains half of China's plant and animal species and a third of China's ethnic minorities. It is popular with domestic tourists, and nearly 750,000 foreign tourists visit annually.

There are many popular tourist resorts: the capital Kunming, Xishuangbanna State Nature Reserve, the old town of Lijiang, Dali City, Deqin, Ruili, Tiger Leaping Gorge, to name but a few.

Xishuangbanna is a noted area of forests and minorities, and is an ecotourist's paradise. China's tourism authorities are now placing greater emphasis on ecotourism, and Yunnan offers the best opportunities—including a longer season.

### Travel operators

The main tourism organisation of China is The China International Travel Service (CITS) but Yunnan also has its own Travel and Tourism Administration of Yunnan. Visitors to Kunming can fly direct by Thai International Airlines, Lao Aviation, Myanmar Airlines and Silk Air (from Singapore).

### Internal transportation

Yunnan Airlines based in Kunming serves many towns of the province. They include Lijiang, Baoshan, Mangshi, Jinghong, Simao and Dali, but the only crosswise direction flight is from Lijiang to Jinghong.

The best means of getting to more out of the way places around the province is by long-distance buses. Roads are rough but passable. Breakdowns are frequent and can occur anywhere, especially on winding mountain roads. Privately owned minibuses are increasingly competing with public buses on medium-length routes.

## Sources of information

Good English-language travel books provide information for intending visitors to China, and include details of Yunnan Province. *Lonely Planet* recently published a good trekking-guide to Yunnan (Mayhew & Huhti 1998).

The China National Tourist Association, however, has its own web site <[www.cnta.com](http://www.cnta.com)>.

## Protected areas

There are 111 nature reserves and 26 forest parks. The former fulfil both conservation and tourism roles, although many are too remote to attract any visitors. The latter are managed chiefly to serve domestic demands for recreation. Their total combined area is 20,004 km<sup>2</sup> or 5.0 per cent of the province.

The major problems experienced by these protected areas are inadequately defined boundaries, which lead to lack of legal protection, illegal hunting and forest felling, mining for minerals, excessive over-grazing, fire, development programmes that excise land and human population pressures. Although numbers of personnel appear adequate, there is a lack of good scientific management and poor public relations with local residents.

## Ecotourism trends

At present, tourism in Yunnan is dominated by the domestic (Chinese) market. The province's mild climate, wealth of spectacular scenery and unusual geomorphological features, tropical forests (found only in one other province) and minority peoples are of enormous interest. These features are also of interest to foreigners; and those who visit China are most likely to be interested in seeing, listening and learning—be it about local cultures and traditions or natural history. The sea-sand-and-sun type of holiday is unlikely to be developed in Yunnan, which is a landlocked province, and it is too distant from the European and American markets.

If bureaucracy can be reduced by, for example, issuing visas on arrival and waiving the need for internal travel permits, foreign tourism could boom. At present, however, the direction that ecotourism will take is uncertain.

## Ecotourism Triangles (ETT): recommendations

One ETT is recommended, based upon Kunming.

### Ecotourism triangle 1

Yunnan's capital Kunming (estimated population 4.0 million) is the base corner (ETT 1/I). The city lies beside the 300 km<sup>2</sup> Lake Dian, and is a place for tourism in its own right, with its old quarter of timber houses, the flower and bird market, botanical gardens, bookshops and department stores and cheerful nightlife. To the west is Xishan County Nature Reserve, which receives half a million visitors a year—mostly Chinese—who ride the cable cars and walk the Dragon's Gate—half precipitous footpath, half tunnel carved out of the sheer rock face. Bicycle trips can be made around the lake. Hiking is popular in the hills, and *Yunnan Exploration* travel office organises trips and other more exotic outdoor activities. Not far away is the famous Stone Forest. Between the city and the lake is the Nationalities Village—a popular theme park in which the ways of life of the 26 minorities are on live display.

The second corner (ETT 1/II) is a nature corner in the western corner of Yunnan: Gaoligongshan State Nature Reserve (1,239 km<sup>2</sup>). This reserve contains a deep canyon along the Nu Jiang River (known as Salween in Myanmar). The river runs a course similar to the Mekong and Yangtze Rivers, known as the Great Gorges. Trek and bike permits are available. Mountains averaging 3,000 metres in height border the Nu Jiang Canyon. Dense virgin forests of pine and fir cover slopes at higher elevations, and bamboo thickets predominate below. Tiger, leopard, Asiatic black bear, various deer, raptors and rare pheasants occur. There are hundreds of different orchids (main group *Cymbidium*) and azaleas. The river water is clear and potable, in contrast to the muddy waters of the Mekong. There is also one of the largest forests in China. The giant flying squirrel is the distinctive animal of the area. The area has enormous potential for ecotourism, which could be advertised for the foreign market under the name of *Tiger Tour*. Similar habitats are found across the border in Myanmar but they are closed to foreigners.

The third corner (ETT 1/III) is a nature and cultural corner, centred on Xishuangbanna State Nature Reserve (2,418 km<sup>2</sup>) in the southern corner of the province, near the town of Jinghong and close to the border with Lao. Long-distance buses travel daily to Kunming and back. Many articles and books have been published about this subtropical corner of China (Lan 1981, Anon, 1992, Albers & Grinspoon 1997 and others). It is one of China's natural 'crown jewels'. Many species of vertebrate occur, including 102 mammals and 427 birds. Asian elephant, tiger, leopard, gaur, black gibbon, Phayre's leaf monkey, slow loris and four species of macaque occur. More than 10 minority peoples live here, including Dai, Hani, Bulang, Lahu, Aini, Yao and Kuchong. There are already several features developed to encourage tourism: restaurants, canopy treehouses, cable car and elephant performances. Between 200,000 and 300,000 visitors are recorded each year.

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Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). In the Spotlight. Integrating Strategic Environmental Assessment into Power Development Planning in Viet Nam. This publication presents the integration of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in the revised Power Development Plan VII of Viet Nam. The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is a natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, covering 2.6 million square kilometers and a combined population of around 326 million. The GMS countries are Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC, specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. There are three main economic corridors in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Plans are underway to expand these corridors, and strengthen links between GMS nations' capital cities. The North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC). More than 1,200 years ago, during the Tang Dynasty, merchants in Yunnan, People's Republic of China, began forging trade routes to carry the region's aromatic tea and other goods to the far corners of Asia. One of these southern caravan trails cut through what is today Luang Namtha Province in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), and across the Mekong River into