

Tourism power of one in Asean

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Under the theme “Asean – The Power of One” the 38th edition of the Asean Tourism Forum (ATF) was successfully held at Ha Long City, Vietnam, from January 14 to 18. Some 1,500 delegates, including 145 international and local media, convened at the Quang Ninh Exhibition of Planning and Expo Center (QNEPEC) for TRAVEX, while the Asean Tourism Conference, ATF 2019 opening ceremony, Tourism ministers’ press conference and ATF 2019 closing ceremony were organised at the FLC Ha Long Bay Resort.

On January 15, there was a complimentary pre-show half day cruise at the scenic Ha Long Bay and also a complementary pre-show half day tour to Yen Tu Mountain for all delegates. I opted for the cruise with Paradise Cruises from Tuan Chau International Marina to visit the Hang Dau Go Cave.

One of the highlights in the limestone cave is seeing the stalactites and stalagmites of highest aesthetic and geological values. Ha Long Bay itself covers an area with 1,969 islands and it was declared as a Natural World Heritage by Unesco in 1994. We also passed a myriad of islands in varied sizes emerging from the seawater, shaped and sculptured by wind and water over millions of years such as the Incense Burner Islet and Fighting Cock Islet.

In the evening, a brilliant Saigon Night was offered for international media on the Princess Cruise Ship anchored at Bai Chay Ward to showcase “Vibrant Ho Chi Minh City” with its culinary delights, music and arts performances. With compliments from the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism, international media was invited to the largest and most established International Travel Expo (ITE) in Vietnam and the Mekong Sub-region to be held on September 5-7 at the Saigon Exhibition & Convention Center in Ho Chi Minh City. Almost dazzling and very entertaining was a special “Ao Dai Show”.

The Asean Tourism Conference on “Connecting heritages for Asean tourism development in the digital age” had presentations by Peter DeBrine on sustainable tourism, Seul Ki Lee on digital technology and connectivity as well as Con Apostolopoulos from NatGeo, on smart technologies and creative tourism.

Representatives from Vietnam, Myanmar and Lao PDR gave their experiences in heritage tourism developments. The wrap up was done by Dr Ha Van Sieu, Vice Chairman of Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), while at the end of the conference Jens Thraenhart, Director of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office shared the highlights of First Annual Mekong Mini Movie Festival and called for more public participation in this year’s second one to promote the six countries of the Greater Mekong-Sub-region, namely Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Guangxi), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

There was also 11 media briefings and the first media briefing was given by Vietnam. There was a total of 15.5 million tourist arrivals to the country in 2018 coming by air, road and sea, mostly from Asia, Europe and Americas – an increase of 20 percent compared with 2017. The biggest markets are China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and US, followed by Russia and Malaysia.

For 2019 Vietnam will expect 18 million tourists to its increasing popular destinations such as Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and Ha Noi with city breaks. As marketing plan for 2019, VNTA keeps its logo “Vietnam Timeless Charm” and intends to promote Vietnam’s boundless mountainous and coastal assets such as Sapa, Ha Long Bay, Ninh Binh, Hoi An, Nha Trang, Da Lat and Phu Quoc Island among others.

The other media briefings were from Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Brunei, the Philippines, Singapore, and Asean.

Cambodia’s media briefing was given by Prak Vuthy from the Ministry of Tourism, which is headed by the popular tourism minister Dr Thong Khon. Under the logo “Kingdom of Wonder feel the warmth” Cambodia attracted some 4.8 million tourists as at October 2018 and reached 6.2 million tourist arrivals in 2018.

The five big markets are China, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Thailand and South Korea. Digital marketing is the key for a bright future and there will be upcoming festivals such as the Kampong Chhnang River Festival, International Yoga Day, and the next Sea Festival at Kampot.

Highly promoted is the Cambodia Travel Mart, which will be held from October 10 to 13 2019 in Phnom Penh. Besides, ATF 2021 will be in Phnom Penh too. Connectivity is good with six border checkpoints with Thailand, one with Lao PDR and nine with Vietnam.

The Asean Media Briefing was given by representative of the Office in Jakarta and by Chattan Kunjara Na Ayutthaya, TAT Deputy Governor for International Marketing Asia & Pacific, from Thailand – as Thailand holds the chair of the 10 member countries in 2019.

Mentioned were the Asean Tourism Strategy Plan 2016-2025 and the Asean Tourism Marketing Strategy 2017-2020. While each member state will continue to promote their own country, the 10 member states will also work together to promote Southeast Asia as a single destination. Targeted geographic segments next to Asean countries are China, Japan, Korea, India, Europe, US, Australia, and the Middle East, while important themes are culinary, wellness, culture and heritage, and nature and adventure. Marketing activities of 2018 were given as well as the plan for 2019 to raise awareness of the diversity of the Asean region through digital channels and partnerships.

At the well-prepared ATF closing ceremony there was a gala party celebrating the success of ATF 2019 and Visit Vietnam Year 2018 Ha Long-Quang Ninh. Also, the National Tourism Flag for Khanh Hoa Province was awarded at the closing ceremony. All delegates could feel the warmth of Asean unity and all in all, ATF 2019 was more than a success.

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