

SUMMARY REPORT OF IMT-GT TOURISM AND TRANSPORT DIALOGUE

**“ENHANCING SUBREGIONAL TRANSPORT AND TOURISM
CONNECTIVITY”**

**13 AUGUST 2024
SAMOSIR ISLAND, NORTH SUMATRA, INDONESIA**

CENTRE FOR IMT-GT SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION

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INTRODUCTION

The IMT-GT Tourism and Transport Dialogue is a subregional initiative to support the Visit IMT-GT Year 2023-2025 and serve as a crucial steppingstone to the successful implementation of the Implementation Blueprint 2022-2026, especially strategies under the Working Group on Tourism and the Working Group on Transport Connectivity.

The dialogue brought together key stakeholders from both the government and private sectors involved in tourism and transport within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) to discuss strategies and opportunities in enhancing subregional connectivity and sustainable tourism practices. The dialogue focused on improving transport networks and fostering collaboration between the three countries to boost tourism in the subregion. Participants explored opportunities to integrate transport and tourism services, address infrastructure challenges, and promote environmentally responsible tourism to support economic growth and cultural exchange within the subregion.

The event was held on 13 August 2024 in Samosir Island, North Sumatra, Indonesia, on the sidelines of the 17th IMT-GT Working Group on Tourism Meeting. Full video of the event can be accessed through the link:

<https://youtu.be/Mg0sTzOj3AY>



OPENING SESSION

WELCOMING REMARKS

MR. AMRI BUKHAIRI BAKHTIAR
DIRECTOR OF CIMT



Mr Amri Bukhairi Bakhtiar, Director of the Centre for IMT-GT Subregional Cooperation, welcomed delegates and participants to the IMT-GT Tourism and Transport Dialogue on Samosir Island, North Sumatra. He expressed gratitude to Indonesia for co-hosting the event and emphasised its significance in fostering collaboration between tourism and transport sectors. The dialogue aimed to support the Visit IMT-GT Year 2023-2025 campaign, promote cross-sectoral discussions to enhance subregional connectivity, and position the IMT-GT subregion as a single tourism destination through the development of integrated tourism routes.

He underscored the crucial role of transport connectivity in attracting tourists and revitalising the subregional tourism industry. As an example, he highlighted the new toll road in North Sumatra that significantly reduced travel time and improved accessibility to key destinations like Lake Toba and Samosir Island. He also stressed the importance of ensuring environmental sustainability in tourism and transport projects to preserve the subregion's natural beauty for future generations, noting the minimal environmental impact on Samosir Island compared to other global destinations.

Mr. Bakhtiar concluded by calling for actionable and coordinated initiatives between the IMT-GT Working Groups on Tourism and Transport Connectivity to ensure integrated development. He expressed hope for fruitful discussions, innovative ideas, and concrete outcomes from the dialogue.



OPENING REMARKS

MRS. YULIA
CHAIR OF IMT-GT WORKING GROUP ON TOURISM

Mrs. Yulia, Director of Inter-Institutions Relations at the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Republic of Indonesia, and Chair of the IMT-GT Working Group on Tourism, opened her remarks by highlighting the importance of regional connectivity within ASEAN, noting the significant role of cooperation frameworks such as the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP EAGA). IMT-GT, she noted, serves as a vital cooperation mechanism among its three member states and contributes to ASEAN's regional integration.

On tourism, Mrs. Yulia emphasised IMT-GT's position as a key ASEAN destination and stressed the importance of sustaining tourism routes. She called for active involvement from industry stakeholders such as travel agents, transport operators, and port authorities, to promote subregional destinations. These efforts, she noted, should not only boost GDP and industry profits but also bring benefit to local communities. She concluded with the hope that the dialogue would generate actionable outcomes and thanked the participants for their engagement.



OPENING REMARKS

MR. PRAPATPAOW AWAKUL
CHAIR OF IMT-GT WORKING GROUP ON TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY

Mr. Prapatpaow Awakul, Director of International Affairs Division, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Transport, Kingdom of Thailand, and Chair of the IMT-GT Working Group on Transport Connectivity (WGTC), highlighted the recent discussions during the Working Group's meeting in Bangkok, focusing on supporting the Visit IMT-GT Year 2023-2025 campaign. He underscored the Working Group's achievements, including the establishment of IMT-GT lanes at airports and promotion efforts at key entry points and via public transport systems.

Mr. Awakul identified three key contributions of WGTC to the campaign. First, enhancing aviation infrastructure by increasing flight capacity and frequency and fostering collaboration between government, tourism, and transport industries to stimulate travel demand. Second, leveraging public transport marketing platforms, websites, and social media for campaign promotion, including engaging video content and promotional activities to boost visibility and economic benefits within the IMT-GT Economic Corridors. Third, advancing infrastructure projects such as the upgrading of Kota Bharu Airport and the expansion of Surat Thani International Airport Terminal to build trust and reliability in tourism destinations.

He urged local governments to improve public transport accessibility and convenience, emphasising that cross-sectoral coordination between transport and tourism is vital for promoting sustainable regional transport and driving travel growth beyond the campaign's conclusion in 2025. Concluding, he expressed optimism for productive discussions and his intention to meet the participants in person in the near future.

SESSION 1

ENHANCING TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY FOR SUBREGIONAL TOURISM GROWTH

This session delved into the various government initiatives aimed at promoting subregional tourism integration and embracing sustainable practices within both the tourism and transport sectors. The session also discussed regional perspectives on tourism integration and sustainability, shedding light on the collaborative efforts aimed at fostering a sustainable tourism ecosystem whilst optimising transport networks for mutual benefit.

Speakers



**Mr. Raden Wisnu
Sindhutrisno**

Director, Tourism Marketing
for Asia Pacific,
Ministry of Tourism and
Creative Economy,
Republic of Indonesia



Mr. Boonserm Khunkaew

Deputy Director-General,
Department of Tourism,
Ministry of Tourism and
Sports,
Kingdom of Thailand



**Mr. Khairul Nizam bin
Hashim**

Principal Assistant
Secretary (ASEAN),
Ministry of Transport,
Malaysia

Moderated by

Ms. Shanina Samsuri

Senior Assistant Director,
Tourism Malaysia



Mr. Raden Wisnu Sindhutrisno

Mr. Sindhutrisno highlighted key initiatives and strategies for sustainable tourism in Indonesia within the IMT-GT framework. His presentation outlined three main focuses: promoting sustainable, inclusive, and competitive tourism initiatives; fostering regional collaboration; and addressing potential challenges.

He shared that international tourism in Asia-Pacific is recovering strongly, with Indonesia leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digitisation to enhance its tourism industry which contributed significantly to the improvement of Indonesia's ranking on the Travel and Tourism Development Index. Moreover, he highlighted Indonesia's sustainable tourism initiatives that include ministerial decrees on plastic waste and sustainable destination management, a tourism village programme, carbon footprint calculators, and mangrove planting schemes. Furthermore, he underscored that super priority destinations such as Lake Toba, Mandalika, and Labuan Bajo are implementing various sustainable practices, including lake restoration, marine conservation, and community participation.

Mr. Sindhutrisno emphasised collaboration within ASEAN to position the subregion as a sustainable tourism hub. Indonesia's framework for post-pandemic recovery focuses on adaptation, innovation, and collaboration. The ministry's strategy, underpinned by quick action (*gercep*), collective movement (*geber*), and job creation (*gaspol*), aims to elevate Indonesia's and ASEAN's global standing in tourism.

He addressed challenges like global inflation, infrastructure gaps, and environmental impact by highlighting opportunities in niche markets, digitisation, and smart tourism technologies. Key challenges remain in enhancing connectivity with Malaysia and Thailand and restoring pre-pandemic levels of air and sea routes. Proposals include "twin destinations" between the three countries and establishing ASEAN as a single tourism destination, with specific plans for new flight routes and festivals to strengthen inter-regional ties.

Mr. Sindhutrisno concluded with optimism and determination, calling for enhanced collaboration within IMT-GT and ASEAN to ensure sustainable tourism growth. He expressed a vision for brighter, more connected futures in regional tourism, underpinned by mutual learning and cooperation.

Mr. Boonserm Khunkaew

Mr. Khunkaew delivered a presentation outlining Thailand's initiatives for tourism and transport connectivity within the IMT-GT subregion. He began by introducing Thailand's tourism policy, which aims to transform the country into a regional hub for various sectors, including tourism. The key goals include increasing tourist spending, extending stays, promoting secondary cities, waving visa fees, and boosting tourism infrastructure such as airports and flight routes. Thailand is targeting 36.7 million international arrivals in 2024, with a revenue goal of 3.5 trillion baht.

Mr. Khunkaew then discussed the importance of Southern Thailand, which contributes over a third of the nation's tourism revenue. The government's development plan for the southern provinces focuses on establishing the region as a Muslim-friendly tourism hub, as well as promoting trade and investment. Transportation and connectivity projects in the area, such as the Rantau Panjang-Sungai Golok Bridge and various railway and air infrastructure upgrades, are designed to enhance regional connectivity. These efforts aim to support both local tourism and broader economic growth within the IMT-GT framework.

He concluded by addressing challenges faced by the IMT-GT subregion, such as budget constraints and legal barriers to cross-border development projects. Mr. Khunkaew suggested that member countries

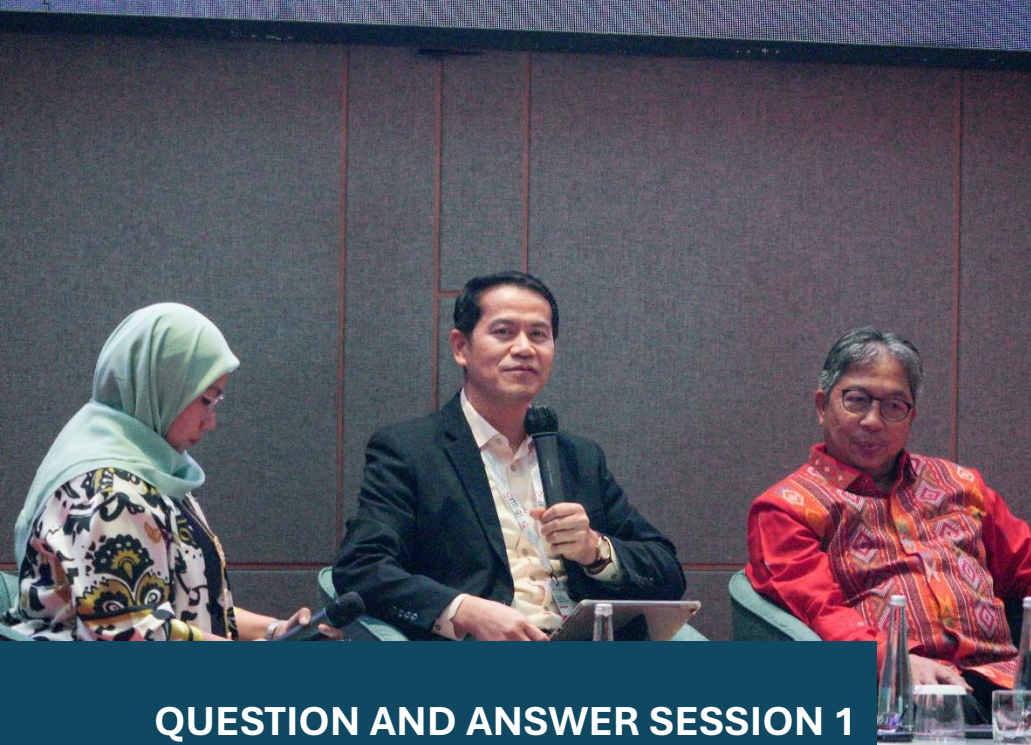
must prioritise the completion of planned projects, even if delayed, and called for securing external funding to bridge these gaps. He highlighted the need for seamless cooperation between countries in terms of immigration procedures and infrastructure development to achieve a fully integrated tourism network across the region.

Mr. Khairul Nizam bin Hashim

Mr. Hashim's presentation outlined Malaysia's transport connectivity initiatives supporting the IMT-GT subregion's economic development. He began by emphasising Malaysia's strategic position in the centre of the IMT-GT subregion, facilitating crucial transport links between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. He highlighted six priority projects currently underway in Malaysia, including the second Rantau Panjang-Sungai Golok bridge link, a new road alignment connecting Bukit Kayu Hitam in Malaysia with Sadao in Thailand, the East Coast Rail Link, the upgrade of Kota Bharu Airport, and the Melaka-Dumai ferry service. These projects aim to enhance cross-border connectivity, ease congestion, and support tourism, trade, and logistics in the subregion.

Mr. Hashim also provided updates on the progress of specific projects, such as the second bridge link, which will feature dual-lane carriageways to reduce border congestion, with construction set to begin in April 2025. He further elaborated on the East Coast Rail Link, a 655-kilometre rail network that will connect the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia with the Klang Valley, aiming to reduce travel time significantly. The Kota Bharu Airport upgrade, including a runway extension, will elevate the airport to international status, enhancing connectivity with the IMT-GT subregion. Additionally, Malaysia is working on the Melaka-Dumai ferry service and has made significant strides in establishing cruise tourism with fully operational terminals in Langkawi, Penang, and Port Klang.

In support of subregional tourism and connectivity, Mr. Hashim discussed Malaysia's efforts to amend laws facilitating cross-border vehicle movement, which will ease the transportation of passengers and goods between Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. He concluded by outlining Malaysia's readiness to ratify the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport of Passengers (CBTP) by early 2025, which would streamline tourism travel within the region.



Question and Answer

During the Q&A session, the speaker emphasised the effective collaboration between the Tourism and Transport Working Groups, which have made significant progress in transportation linkages. The speaker acknowledged the hard work of the involved communities and affirmed that both Working Groups would ensure that proposed projects are progressing as planned.

Mr. Sindhutrisno highlighted Indonesia's sustainability initiatives in tourism and transport, especially concerning tourism's carbon footprint. He explained that Indonesia is aiming for a zero-carbon footprint in tourism, starting with the five super-priority destinations initiative. For example, Lombok's Gili Islands are car- and motorcycle-free, offering eco-friendly experiences like cycling, walking, and horse travel. Additionally, the focus is on regenerative tourism, where visitors contribute to local conservation efforts such as tree planting and waste management. This approach aligns with post-COVID trends, where consumers prioritise sustainability.

Mrs. Tetti Naibaho, Head of Culture and Tourism of Samosir, raised two points: the need for a direct flight from Europe to Kuala Namu (North Sumatra) to boost tourism and a shorter flight from Kuala Lumpur to Samosir using smaller aircraft. She also asked about sustainable initiatives at Lake Toba, including its restoration, agroecology, and renewable energy use. **Mr. Sindhutrisno** responded by noting that air travel recovery is a priority, with 80% recovery post-pandemic. He also confirmed that sustainable tourism projects at Lake Toba include lake restoration, agroecology, and renewable energy initiatives like installation of solar panels and hydropower.

The session concluded with a discussion on funding challenges within the IMT-GT framework. Panelists discussed the potential for third-party funding, including ASEAN-China and ASEAN-Korea collaborations, citing past examples of funding for projects in the Mekong subregion. **Mr. Hashim** from Malaysia shared that while Malaysia no longer receives grants due to its development status, it relies on federal and state funds, as well as private sector funding through bonds.



SESSION 2

UNLOCKING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND TOURISM INTEGRATION IN THE SUBREGION

The session delved into the collaborative efforts needed from the private sector to promote seamless integration of tourism and transport within the subregion. The session explored the challenges faced by the private sector in promoting sustainable tourism and transport connectivity, such as balancing profitability with the environmental stewardship and discuss strategies required to address these challenges.

Speakers



Mr. Ricky Setiawanto

Director,
Panorama Destination



Ms. Aida Oujeh

President,
Association of Tourism
Trade Halal Thai-Asian



**Mr. Mohammad
Sallauddin Mohamed
Shah**

Vice Chairman,
Pacific Asia Travel
Association (PATA)
Malaysia Chapter



**Mr. Watcharakrit
Yaem-Ot**

Chief of International
Cooperation Section,
Tourism Authority of
Thailand

Moderated by

Ms. Shanina Samsuri

Senior Assistant Director,
Tourism Malaysia



Mr. Ricky Setiawanto

Mr. Setiawanto delivered a presentation emphasising the potential of ASEAN as a unified tourist destination, particularly integrating Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. He introduced *Panorama Destination*, established in 1972, as a leading inbound tour operator with offices in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. The company, with its tagline “Bringing Smiles Across Asia,” has been committed to promoting regional tourism through tailored travel packages and extensive transport services. Since becoming a public-listed company in 2006, *Panorama Destination* has expanded its operations to sell ASEAN as a multi-destination travel experience.

The pandemic posed significant challenges to the travel industry, which *Panorama Destination* addressed by restructuring and adopting “Safe Travel” initiatives. The company ensured readiness by collaborating with partners to guarantee safety in transport, accommodation, and tours. Committed to sustainability, *Panorama Destination* has participated in the *Travelife* programme since 2018 and launched a “Green Initiative” in 2023. This initiative includes using a carbon calculator to assess and reduce the environmental impact of its programmes across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Mr. Setiawanto highlighted the company’s efforts to promote destinations beyond Bali, such as Lake Toba, Borobudur, and Flores, showcasing unique cultural and natural attractions. Although tourist numbers have steadily recovered post-pandemic, challenges remain, particularly in improving connectivity between ASEAN destinations. For example, direct flights between key locations like Medan and Langkawi are lacking, hindering seamless multi-destination travel. To address this, the company

is collaborating with airlines and governments to improve connectivity, including plans for a direct Bangkok-Yogyakarta route via Jakarta.

In closing, Mr. Setiawanto reiterated *Panorama Destination's* commitment to promoting ASEAN as a multi-destination travel hub. He stressed the importance of regional collaboration among governments, airlines, and operators to overcome logistical challenges and create more affordable travel options. With its focus on sustainability and interconnectivity, *Panorama Destination* is optimistic about ASEAN's potential to attract global tourists and boost regional tourism.

Ms. Aida Oujeh

Ms. Oujeh highlighted that tourism in Thailand was not widely accessible to Muslim travellers, with many visitors from Indonesia and Malaysia coming for non-halal purposes. However, she explained that there is a significant Muslim population in southern Thailand, with around 50% of the population in the southern border provinces, as well as in cities like Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai, practicing Islam.

The focus of her efforts has been the promotion of halal tourism, particularly through private initiatives, though the Thai government is now starting to support this initiative. Ms. Oujeh noted that in the past, it was difficult to attract Muslim tourists due to the lack of halal options and the perception that Thailand was not a suitable destination for Muslim travellers. Through dedicated efforts, she has developed and popularised the Muslim Friendly Route in Thailand, successfully attracting Muslim tourists, especially from Indonesia and Malaysia.

She also presented data comparing the number of visitors to Thailand from Indonesia and Malaysia, showing a marked difference in the figures. For example, in June, Thailand only saw 762,118 visitors from Indonesia, while Malaysia saw over 3 million Indonesian visitors. The majority of Muslim tourists coming to Thailand are from Malaysia, with 70% of visitors to southern border provinces like Songkhla. Ms. Oujeh emphasised the economic benefits of halal tourism, particularly in cities like Hat Yai, which sees significant influxes of visitors from Malaysia and Indonesia. The city offers affordable hotels, local food, and easy transport links, including a convenient train service from Kuala Lumpur.

In addition to land transport, Ms. Oujeh discussed the importance of maritime connections, such as ferry services from Langkawi to Thailand, and the potential to expand these routes. She proposed further collaboration between Thailand and Indonesia to improve connectivity, particularly with the opening of a ferry route between Medan and Satun, which would make travel more efficient. She also advocated for improved infrastructure, particularly wider roads, to support the growing number of Thai visitors to Indonesia, particularly to regions like Medan and Lake Toba.

Finally, Ms. Oujeh highlighted the importance of continued cooperation between Thailand and Indonesia to foster tourism. She expressed the need for government support to facilitate easier travel, specifically by reopening flight routes between Medan and Hat Yai, and between Jakarta and Chiang Mai, which would allow for smoother exchanges of tourists. Her aim is to increase the flow of tourists both ways, benefitting both countries economically and culturally.

Mr. Mohammad Sallauddin Mohamed Shah

Mr. Shah emphasised the importance of enhancing air connectivity within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle. Acknowledging the robust regulatory framework enabling liberal skies across ASEAN, he stressed the need for practical collaboration among governments, airlines, and tourism stakeholders to unlock the full potential of this subregion.

Mr. Shah highlighted the significant disparity in air connectivity, with limited domestic routes in IMT-GT cities and sparse international links, exemplified by the few existing flights like Penang to Phuket or Medan. He noted that the current "white canvas" of air connectivity presents an opportunity to shape a more integrated network but requires commitment and strategic planning from all stakeholders.

The essence of successful air routes, he explained, lies in the interplay of economics: passenger mix, consistent volume, and balanced traffic flow between destinations. He urged stakeholders to build sustainable routes through coordinated efforts in promotion, marketing, and route diversification, citing examples like the Melaka-Pekanbaru route, which has struggled due to a narrow focus on medical tourism. He advised that

airlines need tailored incentives and collaborative partnerships with airports and tourism entities to ensure route profitability.

While promoting IMT-GT as a single destination sounds compelling, he advocated for a realistic approach, suggesting a phased development of individual city-to-city routes. Addressing underserved or thin routes with shuttle services before scaling up to regular flights was proposed as a practical solution to foster long-term growth. Ultimately, he called for innovation and shared responsibility to strengthen air connectivity, transforming IMT-GT into a cohesive and thriving aviation network.

Mr. Watcharakrit Yaem-Ot

Mr. Yaem-Ot addressed the challenges and opportunities in fostering tourism collaboration within the IMT-GT subregion. His presentation focused on strategies to enhance connectivity, promote IMT-GT as a single tourism destination, and strengthen branding and cooperation among member countries—Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. He emphasised that achieving seamless collaboration is complex yet vital for making the IMT-GT a globally desirable destination.

The presentation was structured around five key topics. First, he highlighted "connecting the dots" through improved transportation accessibility. He noted existing air, land, and marine travel connections, such as cross-border tourism via land and direct train links between Malaysia and Thailand, while stressing gaps, including the lack of direct flights from southern Thailand to Sumatra and the need for improved cruise terminals and ports. Marine and yacht tourism were identified as emerging areas of potential collaboration, along with seaplane tourism, which could provide better access to the region's many islands, including Lake Toba in Indonesia.

Second, Mr. Yaem-Ot questioned whether "IMT-GT" is a marketable term or merely a phrase used internally within meetings, suggesting a rebranding effort might be necessary to increase global recognition. He compared the potential of the IMT-GT to established tourist regions like the Riviera or the Caribbean, emphasising the need for cohesive branding to showcase the region's unique offerings, such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, and culinary experiences.

Finally, he underscored the importance of coordinated efforts to "strengthen the knot" between tourism agencies. He called for intensified collaboration through initiatives such as joint marketing campaigns, familiarisation trips, business exchanges, and incentive programmes to attract and retain tourists. Concluding his presentation, he encouraged dialogue on developing innovative transportation modes, enhancing branding strategies, and promoting the IMT-GT as a unified and diverse destination.

Mr. Yaem-Ot's address reflected a forward-looking vision of the IMT-GT region as a well-connected, marketable, and globally competitive tourism destination, urging stakeholders to embrace innovation, collaboration, and strategic branding to achieve shared goals.



QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION 2



Question and Answer

The session explored the feasibility and profitability of promoting multi-destination tourism packages combining destinations across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Discussions highlighted both challenges and opportunities for travel agencies, particularly in integrating destinations such as Sumatra, Langkawi, and Koh Lipe. While these combinations were successful before the pandemic, limited direct connectivity and reliance on time-consuming transits through major hubs remain significant obstacles. The need for improved direct air routes was emphasised to enhance efficiency and the overall tourist experience. For sustainability, airlines must ensure balanced inbound and outbound demand on these routes to maintain profitability.

The discussion also stressed the importance of collaboration between government agencies, tourism boards, and airlines to develop underutilised routes, with proposals to initiate charter flights in secondary cities as a testbed for future scheduled services. The session examined the balance between infrastructure and product development, noting the need for improved road and air connectivity in certain regions to ensure a more seamless tourist experience. Specific initiatives such as exploring seaplane services for Lake Toba and establishing direct routes to enhance accessibility were discussed as vital steps to unlock the full potential of multi-destination tourism in the IMT-GT subregion.

CLOSING REMARKS

MRS. YULIA
CHAIR OF IMT-GT WORKING GROUP ON TOURISM

In her closing remarks, Mrs. Yulia expressed her gratitude to the speakers, moderator, and participants for fostering discussions on enhancing regional connectivity. She emphasised the importance of integration and mutual support between governments and industry players to promote tourism packages, improve accessibility, develop supporting infrastructure, and expand connectivity. She extended her thanks to the Director of CIMT for facilitating collaboration between the Tourism and Transport Working Groups and underscored the value of such dialogues for fostering regional integration.

Mrs. Yulia suggested making this type of event a regular occurrence to discuss future strategies and ensure coordinated follow-up involving various stakeholders, including GBC, UNINET, local governments, and others. She concluded by inviting participants to the technical tour and destination visits in Samosir, thanking everyone for their contributions, and wishing them a productive afternoon.

KEY TAKEAWAYS OF THE DIALOGUE

IMT-GT Subregional Tourism and Connectivity Challenges

From the discussions, it was highlighted that IMT-GT Subregional Tourism and Connectivity faces some challenges as follows:



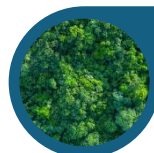
Connectivity Issues:

- Limited direct transport links (air, land, and maritime) between key IMT-GT destinations like Medan-Langkawi and Hat Yai-Medan.
- Insufficient infrastructure, particularly in secondary cities and areas like Indonesia's road networks and ferry terminals.
- Budget and legal constraints delaying cross-border infrastructure projects.



Air Route Profitability:

- Uneven demand and passenger traffic reduce the economic viability of certain routes.
- Lack of collaborative marketing and promotion for underutilised routes.



Environmental and Sustainability:

- Balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation.
- Limited adoption of sustainable tourism practices and eco-friendly transport systems.



Halal Tourism Development:

- Insufficient halal-friendly services in Thailand despite high demand from neighboring Muslim-majority countries



Regional Branding and Marketability:

- Low global recognition of "IMT-GT" as a unified tourism destination.
- Weak branding to showcase cultural and natural offerings effectively.



Tourism Recovery Post-Pandemic:

- Lingering effects on travel demand and uneven recovery across the subregion.
- Adjusting to consumer shifts toward eco-tourism and niche travel segments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion highlighted several recommendations as a way forward to be considered by IMT-GT stakeholders as follows:

Enhancing Connectivity:

- Develop direct flight routes (e.g., Medan-Langkawi, Hat Yai-Jakarta) and test market demand with charter flights.
- Expand ferry services (e.g., Langkawi-Satun) and introduce innovative modes like seaplanes for last-mile connectivity.
- Streamline cross-border vehicle movement by ratifying agreements such as the ASEAN CBTP.



Promoting Sustainable Tourism:

- Adopt regenerative tourism practices, such as eco-tourism and conservation-based activities.
- Use carbon calculators and eco-friendly infrastructure in tourist destinations.
- Invest in renewable energy solutions and sustainable transport options.



Strengthening Collaboration and Regional Branding:

- Partner with governments, airlines, and tourism boards to promote multi-destination packages.
- Rebrand IMT-GT with a marketable identity to position it as a globally competitive tourism destination.
- Conduct joint marketing campaigns and familiarisation trips for global travel agents.



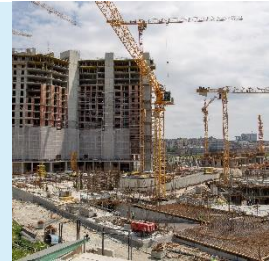
Supporting Muslim-Friendly/Halal Tourism:

- Build more Muslim-friendly infrastructure like prayer facilities and certified restaurants.
- Expand initiatives like the Muslim-Friendly Route in Thailand to cater to Muslim travellers.



Accelerating Infrastructure Development:

- Prioritise upgrades for airports, ports, and roads in underdeveloped regions.
- Balance infrastructure investment with product development for a seamless tourist experience.



Boosting Tourism Recovery:

- Implement policies like visa waivers and promote niche travel segments such as eco-tourism and halal tourism.
- Tailor promotional campaigns to key markets and develop secondary destinations.



Leveraging Funding Mechanisms:

- Secure external funding through ASEAN development partnerships such as with China and Korea.
- Encourage private sector involvement via public-private partnerships.



Fostering Dialogue and Monitoring Progress:

- Foster regular multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral dialogue such as the IMT-GT Tourism and Transport Dialogue.
- Establish a follow-up framework to monitor progress on connectivity and tourism integration initiatives.

