

# **Fostering ASEAN Tourism through Regional Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities**

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The travel and tourism industry has become an important driver of economic growth and socio-cultural exchange in the Asia Pacific. More specifically among ten countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)<sup>1</sup>, the role of tourism has grown steadily over the past decade. The number of international tourist arrivals grew from 36 million in 2000 to 77 million in 2010; at the same time, the share of ASEAN in total global arrivals increased from 5.4 percent in 2000 to 7.9 percent in 2010. Intra-ASEAN travel, another indicator for vibrant people-to-people contacts within the region, comprises around 43 percent of all arrivals in ASEAN. All in all, the GDP contribution of tourism to ASEAN amounts to nearly 10.9 percent.<sup>2</sup>

While long-term trends of ASEAN tourism seem evidently positive, there remains a wide array of obstacles in maintaining this momentum, including inadequate infrastructure, economic and development disparities among member governments. The absence of ASEAN single visa for non-ASEAN nationals as well as the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate changes also remain critical tasks to improve in the near future.

Against this backdrop, the paper aims to identify key internal and external challenges for ASEAN tourism. The paper also reviews the current tourism trends and further prospects of its growth. Despite existing challenges, the paper argues that ASEAN's tourism stands at a crossroad between opportunities and new directions, due to its geographic proximity to fast-growing markets such as China and India. Ultimately, continuing closer cooperation with non-ASEAN countries, e.g. Republic of Korea, Japan and Australia, remains a key factor in fostering tourism in ASEAN.

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<sup>1</sup> The Member States of ASEAN are Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, 2013. The ASEAN Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2012: Fostering Prosperity and Regional Integration through Travel and Tourism.