



H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN
Pre-Recorded Opening Remarks at the
Inaugural ASEAN-India Tourism Professionals Exchange

13 December 2025, Guwahati, India

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning and Namaste. I'm delighted to address the Inaugural ASEAN–India Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme. While I cannot be with you physically, I welcome this opportunity to speak on behalf of ASEAN as we launch a significant new chapter in tourism cooperation, professional development, and regional connection.

My sincere thanks to the Government of India, the Ministry of External Affairs, and the Assam Tourism Development Corporation for hosting this programme in Guwahati, Kaziranga, and New Delhi. Assam's stunning landscapes, vibrant cultural traditions, and dedication to sustainable tourism provide the perfect backdrop for this initiative.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN and India are strengthening our economic partnership through the ongoing review of the ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement. This creates tangible opportunities to expand connectivity, enhance services, and deepen investment—opening new pathways for cross-border travel and tourism collaboration. These roads are already well-travelled. In 2024, ASEAN received 5.9 million visitors from India—evidence of India's expanding engagement with Southeast Asia's diverse cultures, landscapes, and experiences.

Similarly, ASEAN travellers increasingly discover India's historic cities, spiritual centres, wellness traditions, and remarkable natural wonders. These flows reveal the vast untapped potential in our shared tourism future. The economic impact is substantial. Tourism generates 9.7 percent of ASEAN's GDP and sustains 42.5 million livelihoods. It lifts rural economies, creates opportunities for women and youth, and fuels countless micro, small, and medium enterprises. India recognises tourism as equally vital for growth, employment, and regional prosperity. Our regions stand to gain tremendously from intensified cooperation in this sector.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism does something remarkable: it turns strangers into storytellers, differences into discoveries. It challenges us to see beyond our borders and recognize ourselves in others. Mahatma Gandhi observed that we find ourselves through serving others. Tourism embodies this spirit—an industry built on genuine hospitality, human connection, and the simple act of welcoming someone into your world. This is why the ASEAN–India Year of Tourism 2025 represents more than a calendar milestone. It reflects the growing momentum in our partnership and the deepening ties between our peoples.

This spirit of connection manifests in concrete ways across both regions. India's globally acclaimed conservation work at Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, shows how tourism can simultaneously protect biodiversity and benefit local communities. Its digital payment infrastructure, smart tourism platforms, and wellness tourism sector illustrate how traditional values can merge with cutting-edge technology to elevate visitor experiences.

Across ASEAN, we see Cambodia's magnificent Angkor heritage sites, Lao PDR's authentic community-based tourism, Singapore's green-tourism initiatives, and the creative innovations from Thailand and Viet Nam—alongside Indonesia and Malaysia's cultural village experiences. These examples demonstrate tourism's transformative capacity when anchored in sustainability, inclusion, and community ownership.

This exchange programme arrives at exactly the right moment to deepen this learning. It brings together emerging leaders, practitioners, policymakers, and specialists from both regions to share knowledge, build networks, and develop practical expertise. It also highlights India's Northeast Region—a natural bridge between ASEAN and India, rich with cultural diversity, ecological treasures, and longstanding ties to Southeast Asia.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your work during this programme aligns with our broader regional direction, articulated in the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which our Leaders adopted earlier this year. This vision calls for a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN that prioritises sustainability, accelerates digital transformation, and strengthens social-cultural bonds. Tourism sits at the heart of this agenda—not merely as an economic engine, but as a cultural bridge, an environmental steward, and a force for social cohesion. This programme translates that vision into action, building the skills, networks, and partnerships that will shape our collective future.

More specifically, as ASEAN prepares to implement the Tourism Sectoral Plan 2026–2030, we're emphasising sustainability, digital innovation, quality standards, and workforce excellence. These objectives align closely with India's own aspirations and create opportunities for greater collaboration in cruise tourism, heritage and nature tourism, human capital development, digital innovation, and sustainable destination management.

At the centre of all these plans are people. Tourism succeeds because of people—the passion, creativity, and expertise of millions who craft meaningful experiences for travellers every day. Through sustained investment in training, exchanges, and collaborative learning like this programme, we are strengthening the human foundation of ASEAN–India tourism cooperation for decades ahead.

Let's seize this opportunity to advance a tourism partnership that is ambitious, inclusive, and forward-looking—one that supports communities, safeguards our cultural and natural heritage, and strengthens the friendship between ASEAN and India.

On behalf of ASEAN, I wish all participants an enriching experience. May this inaugural programme generate fresh ideas, lasting relationships, and productive collaborations that advance our vision of a more connected, resilient, and people-centred ASEAN–India community.

Thank you.
