# ASEAN and China Underline Strategic Tourism Partnership

As the inaugural ASEAN-China Tourism Cooperation Year comes to a close, tourism leaders hail closer institutional ties and look forward to continued strong two-way growth

New levels of ASEAN-China tourism cooperation were lauded as a success and an indication of more to come, at the closing ceremony of the ASEAN-China Tourism Cooperation Year 2017, which took place in Kunming, China on 17 November.

Since the official launch of the ASEAN-China Tourism Cooperation Year in Manila in March, the two tourism blocs have grown closer together on tourism matters.

As a result of the cooperation year, Mr Pongpanu Svetarundra, Thailand's Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, said that ASEAN and China had established high level cooperation on tourism matters, shared data and tourism statistics at multiple levels, promoted quality tourism through the enhancement of standards, encouraged participation at travel trade shows and tourism festivals through the ASEAN-China Centre, boosted links between tourism education institutions, facilitated greater liberalised air connectivity, and created a framework for better cruise and yacht tourism cooperation.

Speaking at the closing ceremony in Kunming on 17 November, Mr Pongpanu said, "The inaugural ASEAN-CHINA Tourism Cooperation Year has successfully laid the foundations for enhanced two-way tourism cooperation between ASEAN and China. Many mutual tourism benefits have been achieved. ASEAN and China can now look forward to further deepening and broadening their tourism cooperation."

China is the biggest source of foreign tourists for ASEAN. Tourism growth between the two blocs is already huge.

In 2016 the number of tourist arrivals from China to ASEAN was 19.8 million, an increase of 6.4% over 2015. While the number of ASEAN tourists to China recorded 10.34 million, an increase of 57.8 %.

The ASEAN-China Tourism Cooperation Year was launched in March in the Philippines. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte fully endorsed the initiative.

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ASEAN Tourism Competitiveness Committee:
contact: atmcwg@gmail.com

ASEAN Secretariat:
contact: eddy@asean.org