I do not have to tell this meeting about the importance of tourism to a country’s or a region’s economy at this time of economic recovery or at any other time. Tourism is labor-intensive, creating many jobs, cuts across many sectors of the economy and of society, benefits many regions and many communities around the country, and earns foreign exchange very quickly. This is precisely the kind of activity that all of ASEAN’s economies need. It should be at the top of our countries’ and our region’s agenda, but often it is not.

To me, the promotion of tourism in ASEAN has three parts investment in tourism facilities, the removal of barriers to tourism, and the competitive marketing of ASEAN tourism.

Investment in Tourism
The need for tourism infrastructure, physical or human or institutional, and for investment in it is obvious. On orders issued by ASEAN’s leaders at their summit in Manila last November, ASEAN is undertaking joint investment missions to Japan next month and to Europe and the United States somewhat later. I am confident that our tourism organizations are ensuring that the missions will be carrying with them proposals for specific, concrete investment projects in tourism.

In this regard, the ASEAN Tourism Investment Guide, launched at last year’s ASEAN Tourism Forum, is most helpful. I trust that the Guide will be used well and reach as many potential investors as possible. In this light, I hope that it can be translated into Japanese and into other languages useful for the purpose.

Obstacles to Tourism
Another part of promoting tourism is removing obstacles to it. One obstacle is policies and attitudes that belong to the past. These include those that pertain to regulations on the entry of visitors. In some countries, such policies and attitudes need to be re-examined and updated. Tourism ministries and national tourism organizations ought to be at the forefront of this effort.

Another obstacle is the restrictions imposed by most countries on civil aviation. Clearly, most tourists will not go to a country if they find it too difficult, too expensive, too long or too tedious to get there. Ideally, tourism industries and national airlines should be working together to promote tourism; but, if one had to make a
choice, I would favor the tourism industry, which benefits so many more people, over the airline, which should, in any case, compete with others in the business.

Yet another obstacle is placed in the way of the free movement of human resources in the tourism industry. Tourism is basically a service industry, and the best people, of whatever nationality, or particularly of ASEAN nationality, should be allowed more freedom to work in a country’s tourism facilities and render the best service to visitors. Employing the best people in such facilities would be crucial in bringing in tourists and other visitors, as well as in developing the country’s human resources for tourism through the transfer of skills. This would, in turn, generate jobs in many other sectors of the economy. We ought to point this out to our employment and immigration authorities.

ASEAN’s leaders have issued instructions to step up negotiations to liberalize trade in services in ASEAN. Tourism is the one sector in which all ASEAN countries have indicated commitments for liberalization. Recently, the ASEAN Economic Ministers decided that the sectoral committees are primarily to carry out the negotiations in their respective sectors. In the case of tourism, this task falls on the national tourism organizations. Tourism is a particularly complex area for such negotiations, as it involves more than one sector and more than one “mode of supply.” The sooner and the faster we make progress in the negotiations the sooner and the faster will we remove barriers to tourism.

In terms of barriers to travel, I wish to point out that freedom to travel works both ways. If we are to promote intra-ASEAN travel, the outflow, as well as the inflow, of people within ASEAN should be made easier. Some countries may now find that restrictions on outbound travel could stand some relaxation. I know that the issue of the exit tax has been raised many times in the past and that a couple of ASEAN countries have problems with its removal. But, in the spirit of intra-ASEAN tourism and people-to-people contact, I think it now deserves another look.

Marketing Tourism
Finally, marketing. In the economic and other sectors, ASEAN has found that, in this globalized and competitive environment, individual ASEAN countries cannot afford to go it alone. Increasingly, they must work together and move together. In this light, marketing ASEAN as a single destination is the way to go. It is good not only for the cause of ASEAN cooperation but also for the tourism industries of ASEAN members.

This is why Visit ASEAN Millennium Year 2002, as the centerpiece of ASEAN tourism promotion for the coming three years, has the full support of the Secretariat. I trust that the campaign will avoid the shortcomings of Visit ASEAN Year 1992. The decision to hire a world-class advertising firm and a top-notch public relations agency is essential for the campaign’s prospects of success. I know that the utmost care will be taken to see that we engage the best outfits - or a combined one.
Specifically, there is great potential for ASEAN-Japan cooperation in promoting tourism into ASEAN. I am glad that the NTOs are working on this. Here, I should like to state our appreciation for the support of the ASEAN Promotion Centre in Tokyo, particularly in the tourism sector. In turn, I urge our tourism authorities to encourage their governments to support the APC. Contributions to the Centre come back to ASEAN in the form of promotion activities on ASEAN’s behalf.

Plans are well advanced for the workshop for ASEAN and Korean travel agents in Seoul later this year. I hope that many in the travel trade of both sides will participate in it. I also hope that, in addition to marketing their respective countries, ASEAN participants will keep in mind ASEAN as a single destination in this, as well as in other, promotional activities.

We in the Secretariat have finished the ASEAN Map, and its distribution has begun. I know that the NTOs are as intent as we are in seeing that the map reaches a large number of potential travelers and those who help them make their travel decisions. We would like to see the map translated into languages critical to our work. This should help not only in the promotion of tourism but also in the enhancement of ASEAN’s international image.

The television spot for international broadcast could be even more helpful in this regard. We are fortunate to have the UNDP’s substantial support for this endeavor. It is now for us to raise the resources still needed to make this important project a reality. I hope that, in determining the placement of the spot, we will not lose sight of the considerable importance of the United States not only as a rich source of tourism but also in terms of its influence on world public opinion. I also hope that, in each case, the spot uses the language most effective for the target audience.

Under the direction and guidance of the NTOs and their task forces, the Secretariat has developed the concept of a tourism web site and database. With the support of all, we aim to create a good web site and database and find creative ways to hyperlink them to sites where they will do the most good in terms of promoting tourism, including the travel web sites of the major international media.

Cruise tourism is an activity still undeveloped in ASEAN. With the mandate of ASEAN’s leaders, the NTOs and the senior transport officials are jointly working on a proposal for a study of cruise tourism for the region. I trust that the results of the study and subsequent action on it will take into account the potential benefits for all ASEAN members and will encourage the participation of as many world-class cruise companies as possible.

Finally, in the three years to the end of VAMY 2002, two major sporting events will be taking place in our part of the world - the Summer Olympics in Sydney this year and the World Cup in Japan and Korea in 2002. ASEAN would do well to tap into the
flow of massive numbers of people from all over the world for these events.

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