

Media release

Using or abusing nature? Tanintharyi Tourism is at a crossroad on the path to sustainable development

Known for its pristine beaches, dazzling seas, unique Moken sea gypsy culture and some outstanding coral reefs in the Myeik archipelago, tourism in Tanintharyi is taking off. The region has 47 existing and 39 planned hotels and resorts, many of them on remote islands, and many more investors expressing interest.

However if the local and national government does not address the environmental impacts of this growth in investment, and involve communities in planning and decision-making, this growth is likely to result in environmental damage and social conflict. These were the main messages to emerge from a two day multi-stakeholder workshop on responsible tourism co-hosted by the Tanintharyi Regional Government, Fauna & Flora International (FFI), Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), and the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environmental Conservation in Dawei on 19/20 December 2016.

In his keynote address, U Myint Maung, Minister of Natural Resources and Hotels and Tourism, which was delivered on behalf of the Chief Minister of Tanintharyi Region, Dr Lei Lei Maw said ‘*We have a lot to learn from foreign experience, including on sustainability and how to attract the international tourism market. While priority will be given to national investment, Myanmar and foreign investment should co-exist*’. She also called for end to sand-mining, mangrove destruction, dynamite fishing and trawling in nearshore waters, in order to support local fishing communities.

Frank Momberg, Director of FFI Myanmar said: ‘*Marine tourism depends on intact ecosystems and can be a driver of marine conservation. To enable this, the income from permits and licences for tourist operations should stay local and be allocated to marine conservation. We also need hotels and other tourism operations to adopt better environmental management, otherwise their operations will destroy the natural assets their profits depend on*’.

Participants were polled on what they believed to be the most serious negative environmental and social impacts which could result from the growth in tourism development. The greatest concern for the environment was failure to manage waste (41%), with unsustainable use of building materials (e.g. timber logging on islands, beach

sand mining) (13%) and destruction of coral reefs due to trampling by snorkelers and damage from boat anchors (11%).

Concerning social impacts, the top three concerns were conflict due to lack of community involvement in planning and decision-making (29%), grabbing of land and beaches for hotels and tourism infrastructure (24%), and lack of economic opportunities for local people resulting in conflict between communities and the tourism sector (20%).

Vicky Bowman, Director of MCRB said *'The strong message from the workshop is that local communities need to be involved in tourism in their areas, and they need to benefit through jobs and income opportunities. In Tanintharyi, this includes indigenous communities, such as the Moken. They should not only be a tourism asset for the region, but should participate and benefit from it. Without community involvement, there will be conflicts between tourism investment and the locals, and everyone, including the environment, will suffer'*.

Zau Lunn, the Marine Conservation Coordinator of FFI noted that this was the first multi-stakeholder workshop about responsible tourism held in Tanintharyi. *'There was huge interest, and huge appetite for concrete follow-up in the various tourism destinations. We need to engage government, businesses and local communities at local level in making responsible tourism a reality and building a market which can protect the natural and cultural heritage of Tanintharyi'*.

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Notes for Editors

1. **Fauna & Flora International (FFI)** (www.fauna-flora.org) protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.
2. FFI has spent three years undertaking marine biodiversity surveys in the archipelago and along the Tanintharyi coastline to identify key areas for conservation which need to be protected and integrated into tourism destination management plans. They also conducted a baseline assessment of sustainable tourism development in Tanintharyi in 2016 to be published in early 2017.
3. The Myanmar Forest Department (FD), ICIMOD, Oikos and FFI have also undertaken studies to develop eco-tourism strategies for protected areas in Myanmar and piloted community-based in eco-tourism in Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary (FFI) and Lampi National Park (Oikos).
4. Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) (www.mcrb.org.mm) is a Yangon-based initiative established in 2013 focussed on promoting knowledge, capacity and dialogue concerning responsible business and international standards. It conducted a sector-wide impact assessment on tourism in 2014 (published February 2015) with a focus on social and human rights impacts and have promoted multi-stakeholder dialogue on these issues at national and local level, including in Ngapali.

5. This multi-stakeholder workshop in one Myanmar's most important emerging tourist destinations is intended to facilitate local stakeholders to discuss priorities and challenges facing the development of tourism, and provide support to Tanintharyi Regional Government as it develops responsible tourism plans and policies for the region, including for to manage impacts to the outstanding natural resources of Tanintharyi's coastal area, its extensive lowland rainforests and the Myeik archipelago.
6. Government officials, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, local communities and tourism experts participated in the workshop which discussed priority issues related to responsible tourism in Tanintharyi with focus on planning and consultation with communities, land issues, community benefits, zoning, licensing for SME development and environmental and biodiversity impacts.
7. Experts from WWF Galapagos presented on lessons learned from global best practice in tourism in protected areas at the Galapagos Islands World Heritage Sites, community-based tourism initiatives in Myanmar (Kayah State, and Lampi NP) as well as lessons learned from other coastal destinations in Myanmar (Ngapali, ChaungTha, NgweSaung).
8. Presentations from the workshop are available from the MCRB www.mcrb.org.mm .

For further information (including high resolution images and maps), please contact:

Kaung Latt, FFI Media Liaison Officer
Email : kaung.latt@fauna-flora.org ; Mobile: +95 9 421015563

Frank Momberg, FFI Myanmar Program Director
Email: frank.momberg@fauna-flora.org

Thein Than Htay, MCRB

Vicky Bowman, MCRB
Email: Vicky.bowman@myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org