

Study Tour to Kalaw and Inle Lake

6 - 9 July 2019

Narrative Report

Introduction

Between 6-9 July, a study tour to Kalaw and Inle was organized for a group of local community members from Mrauk U. The group comprised of members of the parliament, representatives from Mrauk U Heritage Trust, Mrauk U Youth Association, Mrauk U Guide Association, Dr. Saw Mra Aung Foundation, and local businesses. The study tour was organized by UNESCO with the support of Kalaw Tourism Organization (KTO) and Inle Heritage Trust. Over the course of four days, the group participated in various activities, site visits, and meetings with government representatives, members of parliament, owners of SMEs and relevant tourism stakeholders. The tour provided valuable insights into community-based tourism, sustainable tourism practices, which are relevant to the specific situation of Mrauk U.

I. Background information

Despite its wealth of historical, cultural and religious heritage, Mrauk U remains relatively unknown to the outside world due to its remote location, difficult transportation system and lack of awareness-raising campaigns. It is also recognized that tourism in Mrauk U is practically non-existent as a consequence of the recent security situation.

The site is home to a variety of monuments and archaeological features. The great historical, religious and cultural value is also well recognized in the final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State “Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous Future for the People of Rakhine’.

In 2017, the commission recommended the Government of Myanmar to “continue its collaboration with UNESCO and other international partners to ensure the eligibility of Mrauk U as a World Heritage Site”. The rationale being that a World Heritage designation would offer Mrauk U international recognition and visibility which in turn could potentially lead to increased tourism and economic development.

With the objective of supporting the World Heritage nomination and mitigating livelihood difficulties, UNESCO organized this four-day study tour to support planning for economic and tourism development after this serious situation is resolved. The study tour was conducted in Kalaw and Inle Lake, destinations in Myanmar that reflect ethnic and cultural diversity, sustainable tourism activities and collaborative multi-stakeholder approach in destination

management. It provided the participants with an opportunity to learn tourism related services and activities, including the role of destination management organizations and Community Based Tourism (CBT) in Kalaw. The team also visited Inle Lake to observe the management of tourism operation and discuss the environmental and heritage impacts of tourism. During the tour, participants also had a chance to discuss specific topics and issues related to the development of tourism sector in Shan State, and identify main challenges and opportunities.

II. Activities

a. Waste management and its important relevance to support tourism management in the region - Discussion with U Myat Khine Aye (Deputy Director of Kalaw Municipal Department)



(Presentation by U Myat Khine Aye – Deputy Director of Kalaw Municipal Department)

A meeting with a representative of Kalaw Municipal Department was organized in order to integrate the concept of environmental sustainability into the structure of tour activities. The presentation focused on the department's efforts to keep the town clean and ensure the well-being of local residents. The discussions aimed to share the municipal waste management mechanism for Kalaw to learn best practices that can be eventually replicated in Mrauk U. Main outcomes of the discussion were:

- The municipal department of Kalaw made strong progress in waste management during the last few years. The household covered by the waste collection increased from 11% to 89%.
- A committee was also formed in 2017 to help solve an increasing problem of waste. Local residents were able to collect funds in order to buy a garbage truck to better manage the collection. This underlined the importance of taking a community-based approach in managing waste system rather than solely relying on government bodies.
- The department has also engaged in public awareness campaigns in both Kalaw and nearby townships to improve the environmental awareness of local people. The deputy director also encouraged Mrauk U delegates to take community-based initiatives in managing waste issues. Participants were also suggested to take leading role in this issue by establishing a committee in charge of waste management in Mrauk U, similarly as in the case of Kalaw.

b. Role and benefits for the local community in the development of a sustainable tourism strategy – Discussion with representative of the local Destination Management Organization KTO (Kalaw Tourism Organization)

This discussion focused on the role of KTO, in the promotion of a sustainable and inclusive tourism sector in Kalaw. The main points being:

- KTO focused initially on awareness-raising activities. They organized over 20 events since its foundation in 2017.
- The organization has also taken an initiative role in the implementation of pilot projects for environmental conservation by planting more than 200 trees in areas surrounding Kalaw.
- Other environmental and destination management initiatives taken by KTO include garbage collection, public awareness-raising activities on waste management in schools, development of Visit Kalaw Website and publication of Kalaw Town Management Guidelines that is intended to be used as a handbook for future urban development in Kalaw.
- Moreover, the organization has also hosted Kalaw Trail Run that has benefitted the community and local businesses through significant surge of tourist arrivals.

- The organization, in collaboration with different NGOs such as GIZ and Thant Myanmar, is also planning to conduct social media marketing and environmental awareness-raising campaigns.



(Mrak U Delegates Participating in a Game Organized by KTO)

c. Responsible and Community-Based Tourism (CBT) – Visit the Kalaw Hill Lodge

On the second day of the tour, participants joined the site visit at the Hotel – Kalaw Hill Lodge. The hotel is the winner of Asia Green Hotel Award 2018-2020 for its sustainable waste management system and environmental conservation initiatives. This site visit was particularly organized to reflect participants' desire to learn the development of sustainable Community-Based Tourism (CBT) that is also socially and environmentally conscious. A representative from hotel briefed an explanation on Community-Based Tourism (CBT), the critical importance of hygiene and sanitation practice in service industry and the preparation of value-added regional cuisines.

In particular, the discussion focused on the following points:

- 80% of the people employed are local, and tour packages are designed to directly channel the profits into the hands of the local community. Community Trail Package,

which is the most popular among visitors for its authentic local experience was developed by the hotel to support local community.

- Public consultations were conducted prior to the construction of the hotel to avoid any potential conflicts. Fundamentally, the concept of building a relationship with the local community was extensively discussed and shared with participants.
- Participants were then brought to the organic farm in the hotel compound to grasp the concept of increasing demand for quality food and service in the tourism industry. It was also informed that, in nearby Sin Taung village, the hotel has been providing food and beverage (F&B) and hygiene training for local youths to strengthen their capacity and employability.
- In addition, it was shared that the hotel also conducts cleaning and plastic-free campaigns in the village on a regular basis as well as community consultations.



(Participants during Food Safety and Hygiene Orientation)

d. Visit local organic farms and hotels



(Visit Certified Organic Farm in Yay Yarr Village)

The group also visited an organic farm located just outside of Kalaw in Yay Yarr village. The main purposes of the visit were:

- to improve the knowledge of organic farming and the growing demand for its products in tourism industry.
- to understand the challenges faced in running a certified organic farm, including the composition of natural fertilizers, direct marketing for farm products, systematic farming practices and their impacts on yield, quality, profitability, soil, water, and natural environment.

The tour then proceeded to Hillock Villa and Morning Glory Inn in Kalaw to observe the operation of medium-sized hotel and B&B. This covered the topics of front desk management, online booking process, employee management, F&B preparation, and room service.

e. Discussion with Daw Pyone Kathy Naing – Member of Parliament Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw)

An informal meeting was arranged with the Member of Parliament (MP) Daw Pyone Kathy Naing. During the meeting, the MP has highlighted the importance of the political will of government authorities and politicians for the development of a region. The MP shared legal challenges faced in Kalaw during an initial stage of tourism planning. Topics discussed included

- Lack of coordination among government bodies in the tourism sector and the inability to take responsibility.
- Analysis of tourism legal framework, tourism laws and potential development of a master plan for Mrauk U.
- Current security issues in Rakhine state and its drastic impact on local livelihoods and tourism sector were also discussed.
- Quality control, hygiene practices and infrastructure in the hospitality industry.



(Informal Meeting with local MP Daw Pyone Kathy Naing at Kalaw Heritage Hotel)

f. Heritage walk in Kalaw and site visit to Inle Heritage Foundation

On the third day of the tour, participants took part in Kalaw Heritage Walk organized by KTO. The programs covered visits to the colonial train station, Kayin Baptist Church, old colonial buildings within the town and family-owned restaurant that serve regional cuisines (Innhar and Danu ethnic food). The group then traveled to Inle Lake to continue the study tour at Inle Heritage Foundation (HF) where the founder, Daw Yin Myo Su, gave a welcome speech and shared her experiences of operating Mrauk U Princess Resort, Inle Princess Resort, and Inle Heritage Foundation. The discussion also highlighted the importance of bringing local people together, growing together and working towards shared goal while being both environmentally and socially responsible. Following the discussion, IHF team members organized an orientation tour on cooking class, F&B management, room service training, preservation of extinct Burmese cats, organic vegetable farms, as well as waste and water management system practiced at Inle Heritage Hotel.



(Organic Farm at Inle Heritage Foundation)



(Site Visit to Inle Heritage Foundation)



(Meeting with Daw Yin Myo Su, Founder of Inle Heritage Foundation)

III. Conclusion

Throughout the activity, the group from Mrauk U has shown great interest. They were particularly impressed by the level of services and sanitation practices employed both in Kalaw and Inle Lake region.

Young participants, in particular, have shown strong commitment to learn and improve their knowledge, with specific reference to sustainable practices in tourism, environmental awareness and the overall role of the community in destination management.