

**Between Two Seas:
Travels From the Gulf of Thailand
to the Andaman Coast**



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Supang Chantavanich
Editor



Between Two Seas: Travels From the Gulf of Thailand to the Andaman Coast/
Supang Chantavanich, Project head and editor

1. Tourism -- Social aspects. 2. Tourism -- Social aspects -- Myeik.
3. Tourism -- Social aspects -- Prachuap Khiri Khan.

338.47910959

ISBN 978-616-586-246-2

Q10/05/2564



สรรคุณคำวิชาการ สู้สังคม
Knowledge to All
www.cupress.chula.ac.th

The academic quality of this book has been approved by experts of Chulalongkorn University Press

First Print 2021 200 Copies

Published by Asian Research Center for Migration - Center of Excellence
Institute of Asian Studies
Faculty of Political Science
Chulalongkorn University

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Coordinator : Wasana Sumsen

Proof reader : Penrung Noiream

Artwork and Cover : Chulalongkorn University Press

Printed by : Chulalongkorn University [CUP6407-089]

Phayathai Road. Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

Tel. 0-2218-3562-3 Fax. 0-2218-3547

www.cupress.chula.ac.th



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“Between Two Seas: Travels From the Gulf of Thailand to the Andaman Coast” is an edited volume which originates from a research study conducted by Chulalongkorn University during 2018 - 2020 in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province in Thailand and Myeik and Tanaosri Towns in Myanmar. The study sought to explore the possibility of connecting the southern parts of both countries through the promotion of tourism, and to advance cross-border people mobility via the Indo-Pacific linkage at its narrowest geographical spot. The attempts were successful in the sense that all stakeholders on both sides were enthusiastic to cooperate under this common vision. The provincial/regional tourism authorities, the tourist associations in Prachuap and Myeik, the Chambers of Commerce as well as the academics played vital roles in tourism connectivity promotion. Workshops and consultative meetings were organized during 2018-2019. At the termination of the project, a pilot tour package to validate the findings of the study and to present attractive tourist spots in Prachuap and Myeik to relevant stakeholders was conducted bilaterally. Consequently, in 2019, the number of Thai and Myanmar tourists who crossed the Singkhorn Pass on Thai side and the Maw Daung Pass on Myanmar

side to visit the Prachuap-Myeik Corridor tripled over the previous years. The study proved that this corridor offers a unique travel experience at a moderate cost for land travelers.

Then the Covid-19 epidemic erupted in Thailand in early 2020, and later spread in Myanmar, making Corridor tourism impossible because of border closures. However, the researchers continued to prepare and revise their chapters which appear in this volume. More data validation and networking with counterparts in Myanmar were conducted to ensure that the book will be one of the best academic and most informative documents for anyone who wants to travel to this region as indicated in the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC 2025) under people-to-people connectivity through tourism. *“Is it fascinating to learn from the regional history that once a Burmese king who led his troop in the Nine-Army War along this route in 1786 got malaria and died on his way back to Burma (Sir Arthur Purves Phayre, History of Burma, 1883); then, in 1868, a Thai king took this route to observe the solar eclipse that he could identify based on his own astronomic calculation and also got malaria and finally died in Bangkok upon his return (N. Arunothai, this volume)?”* This is just one of the many intriguing episodes that happened on this route. The corridor contains many pages of history dating back to before the 17th century. That is why it is also called “The Route of the Past”.

The collaborative activities of this research project and this book in your hand are the real evidence of the *Indo-Pacific People-to-People Connectivity*.

Once tourism and travel on the route resume their active life, the book can definitely serve all the intended purposes.

An earlier draft of the book *“Between Two Seas: Travels From the Gulf of Thailand to the Andaman Coast”* was presented at a conference in Prachuap Province in 2019, and the authors received many constructive comments from academics, the private sector involved in tourism and trade along the corridor, and local authorities from both ‘sister cities.’ The authors revised the manuscript according to suggestions and comments. We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation for the overwhelming support from the following institutions and persons. On Thailand side, we thank Privy Council Air Chief Marshal Chalit Pukbhasuk and the Air Force Wing 5 at Ao Manao, the Abbot of Koh Lak Monastery, Prachuap Provincial Governor and his office, King Mongkut Memorial Park of Science and Technology and Waghor Aquarium, Prachuap Tourism Office, Prachuap Immigration Office, Prachuap Chamber of Commerce, Prachuap Tourism Association, Mr. Warut Thongsan from Prachuap Tourism Business Association and Huay Yang Artisanal Fisheries and Community Tourism Enterprise.

In Myanmar, we are thankful to the President, Vice President and scholars from Myeik University, the Abbot of Taw Kaung Forest Temple, Mr. U La Tan and Myeik Chamber of Commerce, Myeik Tourism Office, Myeik Tourism Association, and Mr. Aung Kyi Myint from AKM Tour Company in Myeik.

We deeply appreciate the ASEAN Studies Center and the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University for their

continued support to the project. We sincerely hope that this book will be a concrete flagship of ASEAN people-to-people connectivity.

Supang Chantavanich
Project Head and Editor
May 2021



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CHAPTER 1

Tourism Connectivity and ASEAN

Supang Chantavanich
Sukanda Luang-On Lewis

What is Tourism Connectivity?

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) under the UN described connectivity as the *movement of people, mail, and cargo involving the minimum transit points which makes the trip as short as possible with optimal user satisfaction at the minimum price* (ICAO, 2016). In order to optimize connectivity, a strong supporting framework is needed. This includes market access (e.g., liberalization), optimal use of air navigation services, aircraft, airport systems, facilitation, security, intermodality, and airline activities. ICAO stated that connectivity can be improved in various areas, e.g., market access, consumer protection and fostering various initiatives including the facilitation of international agreements to liberalize the current restrictions through policy and guidance material.

On tourism, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) describes *tourism as the movement of people for a number*

of purposes, either pleasure, business, or economic (UNWTO, 2008). *It includes sightseeing in tourist spots, transportation connections and travel facilities.* From the description, it is obvious that tourism connectivity is people-to-people links, combining two key terms from two sectors. ICAO Indicates that aviation is the backbone of tourism, which is partly true, because aviation with no passengers cannot be the backbone. Thus, it is the people that matters. ASEAN has reached full ratification of ‘open skies’ arrangements through the ASEAN Single Aviation Market (ASAM). Its purpose is to provide Southeast Asia’s airlines with access to new markets and flight routes (Tan Sri, 2016).

ASEAN Economic Corridor and Tourism Connectivity

Since 1998, the ADB has promoted the notion of East-West Economic Corridors as a flagship initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The GMS strategy and action plan were revised in 2001 and 2009 to create a better implementation modality, and expanded from transport to include trade, investment and tourism (ADB, 2010). The upper areas of the GMS have already been developed as the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) in the 2000s. As for the southern areas of the GMS, a felt need to develop the Southern East-West Economic Corridor (SEWEC) is well-recognized. Such connectivity will link both the land and the sea parts of the south of the GMS or mainland Southeast Asia. The Corridor will connect Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam (ADB, 2010).

In 2011, the ADB supported the studies on Strategy and Road

Map for Improving Tourism Connectivity and Destination Management of Cultural and Natural Resources in the South Asia Subregion 2011 – 2015 (ADB, 2011). Tourism connectivity for ASEAN was shaped up in the 2010s under its master plan on connectivity.

Within ASEAN, some countries (e.g., Singapore and Malaysia) showed the political will to push the implementation of connectivity. They started to liberalize air traffic on a bilateral level. Indonesia, however, seems to be reluctant to support the effort due to fears of highly competitive regional airlines, inadequate and underdeveloped infrastructure and, particularly, national security concerns.

To promote tourism connectivity, the importance of border security protection against non-traditional threats (e.g., people smuggling and human trafficking, money laundering, drug smuggling, terrorism, spread of communicable diseases) must be observed (Tan Sri, 2016). Given these heightened security concerns, a country should strike a balance between promoting tourism, i.e., visa relaxation, and border security.

Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC 2025) on Tourism

In 2016, ASEAN developed its master plan entitled “*Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC 2025)*”. The MPAC contains a significant part on connectivity. It considers connectivity as an important element of ASEAN cooperation and integration. In the Master Plan, connectivity in ASEAN encompasses three aspects: the physical, institutional and people-to-people linkages which include education,

culture, and tourism as a means to achieving the economic, political security, and socio-cultural pillars of an integrated ASEAN Community (ASEAN, 2016).

Since the adoption of the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity 2025, progress has been made on *people-to-people connectivity*. A new strategy to guide future progress on ASEAN connectivity is people mobility and tourism connectivity. The MPAC 2025 on people connectivity aims to overcome restrictions on travel for ASEAN nationals within the region, as indicated by ICAO, and to improve mobility by facilitating travel for tourists by addressing the lack of information on travel options and providing simpler mechanisms to apply for a visa (ASEAN, 2016).

Since the adoption of the MPAC 2025, ASEAN has reported that notable progress has been made. As of May 2016, 39 initiatives in MPAC 2025 have been completed. Among these, four are in people-to-people connectivity, i.e., the promotion of deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural understanding in schools; the ASEAN University Network (AUN) initiatives; encouragement of intra-ASEAN tourism (e.g., heritage sites, cruises, eco- tourism, medical tourism, etc.); and freer mobility of skilled labor. However, much remains to be done to realize the vision of a seamlessly-connected ASEAN (ASEAN, 2016). Here, we need to discuss further on the focus and progress of ASEAN Tourism Connectivity and the significance of the target location of Prachuap-Myeik.

A Special Focus on People -to- People Mobility and ASEAN Tourism Connectivity

The goal of MPAC 2025 is to encourage greater connectivity among and within ASEAN member states. Promoting exchange of culture, tourism, education, and know-how. A new strategy to guide future progress on ASEAN connectivity is people mobility. Restrictions on travel for ASEAN nationals within the region are largely a thing of the past. However, there are still opportunities to improve mobility in ASEAN. Opportunities include facilitating travel for tourists by addressing the lack of information on travel options and providing simpler mechanisms to apply for necessary visas.

With such a goal, restrictions, and opportunities, some core areas that past academic research has found to be critical for a more active ASEAN tourism include the following:

1) Strong focus and targets that are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic (but challenging), and Timely (SMART).

2) Clear and aligned plans. The starting point for successful implementation is to ensure that there is a vision which is both realistic and clear, with alignment and clarity at all relevant levels of government and with external stakeholders.

3) Proactive stakeholder engagement which requires the cultivation of relationships that will be critical to the success of the program, with regular communications about the delivery effort and associated priorities.

Progress of Connectivity as Related to Tourism Connectivity since 2016

Under *institutional connectivity*, most of the work on the enhancement of border management capabilities is being achieved at the sub-regional and bilateral levels. Under *People-to-People Connectivity*, there are notable developments in promoting deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural understanding. There have also been steps taken to encourage intra-ASEAN tourism through the concerted development of tourism products (for example, heritage sites, cruises, home stay, health and medical tourism, and eco-tourism); easier access to tourism areas; and affordable packages. However, tourism connectivity has not yet been developed adequately. Barriers to progress include lack of coordination (harmonization of the system) and lack of capacity (appropriate technology and skilled labor necessary for successful implementation) (ADB, 2016).

It is important to highlight attributes likely to impact ASEAN Tourism Connectivity, which include the rich cultural heritage and natural attractions in ASEAN member states which are significant strengths and hold considerable potential for tourism (ASEAN, 2016). Myanmar and Thailand are countries with rich cultural heritage and natural attractions as mentioned in ASEAN MPAC 2025.

The Southern East-West Economic Corridor: Prachuap-Myeik Corridor

Myanmar and Thailand are countries with rich cultural heritage and natural attractions as mentioned in ASEAN MPAC 2025. Such heritage and natural attractions are significant strengths and hold considerable potential for tourism, especially considering the growth of the consumer class in Asia. It is estimated that Asian tourists will make 525 million trips within the region by 2030 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2013). Of this number, 200 million trips will originate from China alone. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) forecasts that the tourism sector in Southeast Asia could grow to over \$200 billion by 2025, almost double today's level. To take advantage of this opportunity, ASEAN member states will need to invest substantially in tourism infrastructure, and encourage easier access to travel visas. The vision and strategic objectives for ASEAN Tourism Connectivity support ease of travel throughout ASEAN, visa liberalization/facilitation, and enhanced access to travel information. The main communication tool is the ASEAN tourism website as a "one-stop shop" to help travelers obtain the essential information to plan a trip to the region. The first step is to review other international, regional and national websites to identify opportunities to strengthen the existing ASEAN tourism website, with a particular focus on more interactive content. One significant improvement would be to develop potential itineraries for tourists wishing to travel among multiple countries in the region, which includes specific details on different transport options between

locations and relevant links for tourists wishing to purchase tickets.

In addition, the ASEAN tourism website could be translated into multiple languages to reflect the background of the most common foreign visitors to ASEAN. Finally, in order to drive usage of the website, there will be an outreach effort to engage tourism operators and other tourism information providers. Proactive stakeholder engagement will use the ASEAN Tourism Integration and Budget Committee to monitor and report development of a single visa initiative for ASEAN member states.

The tourism campaign for ‘50 Years of ASEAN,’ was launched in 2017. Part of that campaign includes extensive travel deals and promotions. The campaign presents a good opportunity to develop itineraries that cover untouched areas in the Southern part of the Thailand-Myanmar Economic Corridor. A project to promote those itineraries can serve as an example and pilot case study to illustrate ASEAN Tourism Connectivity by linking two touristic locations, and enhancing travel by improving access to relevant information and facilitating cross-border travel. A dedicated website will help travelers obtain all the essential information required to plan a trip in the subregion. This volume describes the case study of the potential for tourism connectivity between Myiek in Myanmar and Prachuap Khirikan in Thailand, or “Myiek-Prachuap.”

The publication of *Between Two Seas: Travels from the Gulf of Thailand to the Andaman Coast* has the following objectives: (1) To describe

the development of three potential itineraries for tourists wishing to travel along the southern Myanmar-Thailand Corridor; (2) To analyze people mobility (especially tourists flows), organizations and infrastructure related to tourism, including tour agencies, tour guides, logistics, land/sea/air transportation routes; and (3) To engage stakeholders at the local, provincial and regional levels (both private, public and people) to identify good practices and initiatives in tourism connectivity which can overcome barriers, including lack of coordination and capacity in tourism management in order to obtain ASEAN-sustainable tourism on the corridor.

Prachuap-Myeik are the two towns in the context of Tanintharyi or Tanaosri and the Indo- Pacific region. The focus on tourism connectivity between Prachuap and Myeik has increased ever since the 2015 opening of the immigration crossing which greatly facilitated transportation between the two cities. In addition to increasing people mobility along the Corridor, this new passage spurred cross-border trade and investment. After the opening of the border, the number of people from Myanmar and Thailand crossing the Singkorn-Mudong Pass increased steadily. In 2017 alone, the number crossing the border increased from 10,700 persons in January, to 17,800 persons in December, contributing to a total of 146,400 border crossings for 2017 (Prachuap Immigration Office, 2018). These migrants include laborers, traders, and tourists. Similarly, the trade volume of marine life from Myanmar (via Mudong) to Thailand (via Prachaup) reached \$5 million in 2018 (Prachuap Province Annual Report, 2019).