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By

Renton de Alwis
Good Morning Ladies & Gentlemen

I am Renton de Alwis, Director of Member Services of PATA Asia Division, based here in Singapore.

Let me on behalf of PATA extend a very warm welcome to you to this first ever PATA/AMIC Asian Tourism Communicators Workshop.

I am today, also representing Mr. Lakshman Ratnapala, PATA Vice President for Asia & the Executive Vice President designate of PATA, who is unable to be with us. Lakshman sends his very best wishes to us, for a very successful workshop.

There is another gentleman from PATA, who very much longed to be with us today but could not. And that is Mr. Graham Hornel, PATA's Director of Communications. Both Laskhsman and Graham are at a PATA management meeting in Hawaii. Graham had sent me a message for you, in which he wants me to tell you how sorry he is, he cannot be with us. He goes on to say, I quote "The staging of this innovative PATA/AMIC programme in Singapore is, I believe very appropriate. It was in Singapore in 1982, that I had the privilege to deliver similar opening remarks at the first PATA Communicators Conference, the inaugural event in a decade long series of PATA sponsored training and education programmes in the Asia-Pacific region. I wish you all a most enjoyable and productive two days" - unquote.

Let me also take this opportunity to recognize two organizations without whose assistance, support and encouragement this workshop would not have taken shape. First our partner the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, whose Secretary General Mr. Vijay Menon will speak to you in a little while. The other is the PATA Foundation. The PATA Foundation assisted us by funding the Communicators Training Manual, which in my opinion will provide the essential follow up element to this workshop. You will learn more about the manual later on at the workshop, so I need not elaborate now.

The idea of holding an Asian Tourism Communicators Workshop was mooted about one and half years ago. The idea stems from the fact that travel & tourism in Asia has been and is growing at a very rapid pace. During the past decade we have seen average growth rates per annum of 15 - 20 per cent. The structure of the market has also changed to take a completely new shape. Asia is no longer a destination area for visitors as it used to be ten years ago. It is now a vibrant outbound visitor generating market as well. Last year Japan had 10.6 million outbound visitors, Taiwan 3.3 million, Hong Kong over 2 million, Korea 1.8 million and Singapore 1.6 million. With Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan all generating substantial outbound visits, the total Asian Outbound visitor generation is estimated to be over 25 million. And over 70 % of these visitors travel within Asia.
Asia is today, a strong market for both inbound and outbound travel with new market niches emerging.

It was just yesterday that the financial columnist Leon Richardson of the Asia Magazine said this. "Make no mistake, Asia, which a few decades ago was considered a backwoods and a primitive economic area will soon become the tail that wags the economic dog."

He refers to the rapid economic growth rates in the NIE's... Taiwan in the first quarter of this year had 11% growth and now has the world's second largest financial reserves... explains how we have one third of our participants here from the ROC. Almost all the economies of South Asia that were closed for over a half century are now opening up. All this leads to more growth in disposable income, higher living standards and more leisure time and with that, the ability to travel to other places.

This new scenario demands new products, new services, and most of all new thinking.... and travel and tourism communicators have a major role to play. Not only does Asia need more communicators .... We need communicators with modified tools... Communicators who can cope with rapid change while maintaining the high standards demanded of them. Then there is the new technology which make communication easier, but more challenging. These are some of the reasons why PATA ventured out to organize this series of workshops at this time.

Depending on the success of this workshop....and there is no doubt about its success judging from the array of stars we have as facilitators, speakers, resource persons and participants.... PATA and AMIC will work together to ensure that more and more similar opportunities will be made available for travel and tourism communicators to talk to each other and learn from each other.

Let me now recognize what we at PATA call the PATA spirit of volunteerism... The speakers, resource persons and panelists whom you will interact with today and tomorrow are all volunteers, who at our invitation, have devoted their time and energy for a cause we all believe in together... the continuance and the upliftment of the standards of travel and tourism communication in the Asia-Pacific area. Our salutation to all of you.

And last... but not least all of you good communicators who are participants at the workshop, thank you for being with us here, for what we believe will be a most productive two days of learning and sharing.

Thank you