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## ASEAN Tourism Forum Efforts to Increase Tourist Visits in Southeast Asia

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### Abstract

This research carries the title "ASEAN Tourism Forum's Efforts to Increase Tourist Visits in Southeast Asia" under the guidance of Mr. Andi Purnawarman S. Sos., M. Si International Relations Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Mulawarman University, 2023. This research aims to determine and describe the ASEAN Tourism Forum's efforts to increase tourist visits in Southeast Asia using the concept of tourism effort and competitiveness. The type of data used secondary data with data collection techniques through literature study. This research uses qualitative data analysis techniques. Based on research conducted by the author, the research results found that the ASEAN Tourism Forum's has attempted to increase tourist visits in Southeast Asia by improve tourism services and conduciveness in Southeast Asia, improve international standard tourism services, improve tourism marketing and promotion, create sustainable tourism regulation, develop tourism infrastructure and connectivity and encourage the utilization of the potential nature and cultural resources for tourism.

### Keywords

Tourism Strategic, ASEAN Tourism, Tourism Forum, Southeast Asia.

### 1. Introduction

Tourism is a sector that plays an important role in the economic development of many countries. Related to the opinion of tourism experts who view tourism as a system of various elements arranged like a spider’s web—“like a spider’s web—touch one part of it and reverberation will be felt throughout the area” (Moenir et al., 2021). It can be interpreted that the tourism sector has a double impact, not only economic but also social and cultural. Many countries rely on the tourism sector as an important source of national income and a part of local community life, including the Southeast Asian region (Lim & Ser, 2020). Southeast Asia itself consists of two sub-regional areas with similar geographical characteristics. The first is Mainland Southeast Asia, which includes the countries of Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The second is Island or Maritime Southeast Asia, which includes the countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore. ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a regional organization where these ten countries are members (Andrias, 2022; Fadli et al., 2022).

The ASEAN region, in terms of tourism sector development, continues to show contributions. Tourism can bring significant social, cultural, and economic benefits to a country. The impact of tourism success can be seen from government revenue through the tourism sector, which drives the development of other sectors. The most easily observed success is the increase in the number of visitors or tourists each year.

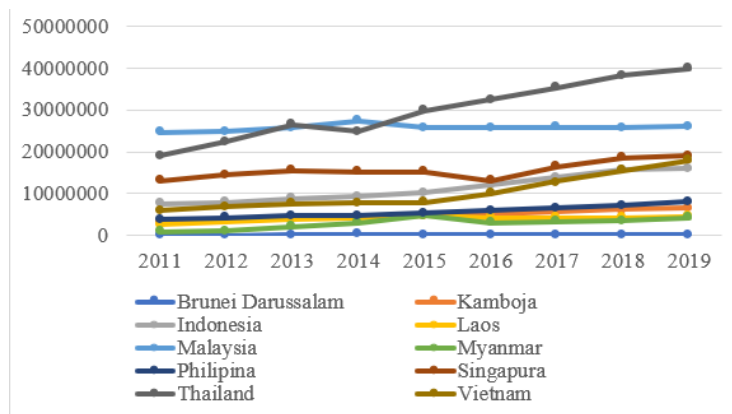


Figure 1. ASEAN Tourist Visits 2011-2019

The number of tourist visits to each country continues to increase every year, as shown by the data in the graph above, where Thailand has the highest number of tourist visits. This increase in tourism is not independent of the cooperation of the ASEAN Tourism Forum, which discusses tourism developments through conferences held in one of the ASEAN countries each year. The first meeting was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 2011, with the strategic output of the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan – ATSP I (2011-2015) (Amalia, 2016; Tung, 2020).

The increasing number of visits indicates that the ATSP I (2011-2015) program was successful in its efforts to increase tourism visits in Southeast Asia. However, because tourism circumstances and conditions continue to change over time, the tourism market segment is deemed necessary to be developed globally. Thus, in 2015, when the ATSP I evaluation or ASEAN Tourism Forum II was held in Myanmar, it was decided that ASEAN would focus on two strategies for ASEAN tourism: ensuring that ASEAN tourism is sustainable and inclusive and enhancing its competitiveness as a major tourist destination (ASEAN Secretary, 2015). ASEAN

tourism then faced challenges from the global Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted the level of tourist visits in Southeast Asia since 2019. The impact of the pandemic not only affected the level of tourist visits but also reduced the economic income of ASEAN countries.

**Table 1.** Economic Growth Rate in ASEAN 2015-2020 (in percent)

No	Negara	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	Brunei D	-0,4	-2,5	1,3	0,1	3,9	1,1
2	Cambodia	9,0	5,0	7,0	7,5	7,1	-3,1
3	Indonesia	4,9	5,0	5,1	5,2	5,0	-2,1
4	Laos	7,3	7,0	6,9	6,3	5,5	3,3
5	Malaysia	5,0	4,4	5,8	4,8	4,4	-5,6
6	Myanmar	7,0	5,9	61,8	6,8	6,2	3,2
7	Philippines	6,3	7,1	6,9	6,3	6,1	-9,6
8	Singapura	2,2	3,6	4,7	3,7	1,1	-4,1
9	Thailand	3,1	3,4	4,2	4,2	2,2	-6,2
10	Vietnam	6,7	6,2	6,8	7,1	7,0	2,9
	<b>ASEAN</b>	<b>4,9</b>	<b>5,0</b>	<b>5,4</b>	<b>5,3</b>	<b>4,7</b>	<b>-3,2</b>

The data revealed by ASEAN on the economic income of its member countries shows a decline as a result of Covid-19. With the highest total income in 2017 after the implementation of ATSP II, which was 5.4%, it decreased to -3.2% in 2020. The condition of ASEAN tourism, as presented by the author, becomes interesting to further research regarding the efforts made by the ASEAN Tourism Forum in increasing tourist visits to Southeast Asia post-Covid-19 pandemic.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Effort Concept

Poerwadarminta (2006) describes efforts as attempts to convey intentions, thoughts, and initiatives. Efforts are also attempts to make something more useful and successful according to its purpose, objectives, functions, and benefits. The use of facilities and infrastructure to support efforts is also very important and interconnected. Efforts must be made with methods and other tools to ensure their success (Trupp et al., 2020). Similarly, Surayin opines those efforts are endeavors, thoughts, and initiatives (to achieve a goal). Every effort is made with a purpose, either to avoid unnecessary things or to find a way out of problems. Efforts can be categorized according to type:

- a. Preventive Efforts  
Preventive efforts refer to attempts to prevent a problem or an issue. The issue in question can contain dangers or negative impacts, both for personal and global scopes.
- b. Preservative Efforts  
Preservative efforts are attempts to maintain or preserve conditions that are already conducive or good, ensuring they do not become unfavorable.
- c. Curative Efforts  
Curative efforts are attempts to guide someone back to their original path, from initially being problematic to becoming someone who can solve problems and be free from them. This effort also aims to build a person's self-confidence so they can socialize with others or their environment.
- d. Adaptive Efforts  
Adaptive efforts are attempts to help create adjustments between a person and their environment, resulting in a harmony between themselves and their surroundings.

In this context, the form of efforts by the ASEAN Tourism Forum is Adaptive Efforts through the transition from the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan I to II, aimed at increasing tourist visits to Southeast Asia and achieving the goal of making ASEAN a single tourism destination (Bhati et al., 2021).

## ***2.2. Tourism Competitiveness***

According to Michael Porter, tourism competitiveness is the result of a country's ability to achieve its goals and gain advantages over other countries in various sectors and industries (Kemenkeu, 2014). In this study, the variable of tourism competitiveness is used to increase the number of visitors coming to Southeast Asian countries. To measure this, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has issued several indicators in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), which consists of:

- a. A conducive environment to support tourism activities. Several factors form this indicator, such as information and communication technology readiness, human resources, security and safety, health, and hygiene.
- b. Tourism regulations explain how the government supports tourism activities and the conditions that support these activities in environmental sustainability.
- c. Infrastructure describes the quality of a country's infrastructure in supporting tourism activities. This indicator includes several factors, such as air, land, and port transportation infrastructure and tourist services. According to many observers, this point is the most important pillar of all effective international anti-terrorism policies, etc.
- d. Natural and cultural resources indicators explain a country's potential to support tourism.

## ***2.3. The Role of the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Increasing Tourism***

The ASEAN Tourism Forum is a regional ASEAN economic cooperation initiative established to promote the socio-economic development of ASEAN countries with potential in the development of natural and artificial resources. This forum was formed to facilitate the exchange of information and promote tourism in each ASEAN country, realizing ASEAN tourism as a single tourism destination. The results of this research show that the ASEAN Tourism Forum, through its ATMS (ASEAN Tourism Marketing Strategic) program, has played its role in increasing tourist visits through Travel Exchange activities. These activities aim to enhance the quality of tourism and marketing strategies through branding slogans and taglines like "Wonderful Indonesia," then introducing a website (e-marketing strategy) through [www.aseantourism.travel](http://www.aseantourism.travel), and subsequently creating creative regional packages along with investment strategies realized in multi-country tourism packages. Additionally, it aims to enhance external relations policies and ASEAN tourism procedures realized through the establishment of the ASEAN Center (Aini, 2024).

In the research by F. Deni and P. Sopian titled "The Role of the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Enhancing Indonesian Tourism for the Period 2011-2015," the realization of the ASEAN Tourism Forum's role as a communication platform for ASEAN countries is detailed. It explains how the forum performs its role in discussing tourism issues that contribute to the economies of developed and developing countries, including Indonesia as an ASEAN member country, which lags significantly in terms of facilities and infrastructure compared to Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. How this effort can address the role of the ASEAN Tourism Forum illustrates the importance of this forum in realizing ASEAN's vision as a single tourism destination. Furthermore, the author can outline strategies to enhance Indonesian tourism, from improving its quality to promoting its tourism.

Additionally, the Framework for International Cooperation and the Concept of Regionalism help the author explain the role of the ASEAN Tourism Forum in boosting Indonesian tourism, especially from 2011 to 2015, through innovations carried out by ASEAN through ATF, where member countries can meet to discuss programs to enhance Indonesian tourism. However, this research does not explain the impact of the ASEAN Tourism Forum's role as an ASEAN tourism forum on tourism in ASEAN itself. Although the author uses the concepts of international cooperation, regionalism, and tourism, there is still no explanation discussing the realization of the ASEAN Tourism Forum's role in its implementation in several countries as a basis for comparison.

After reviewing the research written by Deni & Sopian (2017), the similarities between these two studies lie in the shared focus of both researchers on explaining how cooperation is established or the realization of cooperation through the ASEAN Tourism Forum. However, the major difference arises in the work programs and the scope of the regions involved by several ASEAN countries. Deni & Sopian (2017) focuses on the role of ATF in enhancing Indonesian tourism from 2011 to 2015, while the author focuses on the efforts of the ASEAN Tourism Forum to increase tourist visits in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, from 2019 to 2023, the previous researchers used three other concepts: international cooperation, regionalism, and tourism, whereas the author uses two other concepts: Efforts and Tourism Competitiveness, to address the research questions.

### **3. Method**

This type of research utilizes qualitative descriptive research. According to Sugiyono (2018), descriptive research is conducted to determine the value of one or more independent variables without comparing or relating them to other variables. The reason the author employs qualitative research methods is to describe how the ASEAN Tourism Forum's efforts have contributed to increasing tourist visits in Southeast Asia. The research will focus on the efforts made by the ASEAN Tourism Forum through ATSP II from 2019 to 2023 to enhance tourist visits in Southeast Asia over a span of 5 years, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. The types and sources of data used in this study consist of secondary data derived from books, journals, theses, the internet, and other relevant sources. The data collection technique involves library research or literature review, which means studying research or information from sources such as journals, books, websites, documents, and other relevant sources related to the research topic.

### **4. Result**

After evaluating ATSP I, the ATF formulated policies to further develop the tourism sector. These policies were incorporated into the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan II for the period 2016–2025, leveraging the tourism competitiveness variable. According to Michael Porter, tourism competitiveness is the result of a country's ability to generate profits across various fields compared to other countries. According to the WEF in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, several indicators are used to assess this output, including conducive environment, tourism regulations, infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources.

These efforts are carried out through the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) program. The program focusing on services is spearheaded by the ATPMC (ASEAN Tourism Professional Monitoring Committee), which aids in human resource development through planning, capacity building, and programs. The ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP) was first signed by ASEAN tourism ministers in November 2012 with the aim of facilitating professional mobility in tourism and exchanging information on

educational practices and competency training. The ultimate goal is to make ASEAN a quality tourism destination (Untung, 2019). MRA encourages good practices and knowledge sharing among partners and ensures commitments and agreements in international trade. This can enhance competitiveness, increase market access, and reduce costs. Additionally, the benefits of MRA-TP include mobility of tourism workforce based on tourism qualifications or competency certificates; improvement in alignment of competency-based training and education on professional tourism skills; enhancement of tourism human resource quality (graduates ready for employment in the industry); and improvement in service quality (Aini, 2024).

To achieve high tourism standards, the Southeast Asian region implements a certification system that gives travellers confidence when choosing tourist destinations. According to a survey by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), 57% of travellers feel better if their accommodations have sustainable certification. According to Sofyan (2023), this tourism trend significantly influences traveller awareness and encourages their desire to visit sustainably. One such initiative is the Green Hotel Standard (GHS), an ASEAN initiative aimed at promoting sustainable tourism practices across ASEAN. The core of GHS involves minimum requirements that hotels must meet to protect and preserve ASEAN's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism harnesses its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation. ASEAN certification ensures that goods, services, or labor produced by member countries meet ASEAN standards for quality, safety, and security.

In efforts to promote and market tourism in Southeast Asia, ASEAN provides user-friendly access for tourists to explore the region's tourist destinations through the branded website [www.aseantourism.travel](http://www.aseantourism.travel). Promotion steps also include using the slogan "Southeast Asia Feel the Warmth," which emphasizes the harmony, unity, and solidarity among the member countries. This slogan campaigns for each country to develop tourism products and attractions with a focus on hospitality that leverages the unique local wisdom of Southeast Asian communities (Pssat, 2016; Rahman & Baddam, 2021).

The 50th ASEAN NTOs meeting took place at Borei Angkor Resort & Spa, Siem Reap, Cambodia, from July 8-12, 2019. This meeting was part of efforts to promote Southeast Asia as a single tourism destination. The outcomes of the meeting included several points. Firstly, implementing an integrated marketing campaign using partners and influencers in online and social media with the hashtag #WheninSEAsia. Secondly, revamping the website to a new online media named SEAsia.travel or visitSEAsia.travel. Thirdly, establishing the ASEAN Tourism Digital Platform. Fourthly, initiating the ATMS Project in 2019, where four ASEAN countries—Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand—each hosted tourism events. Fifthly, starting joint promotion cooperation between ASEAN and Russia through social media in 2020, seeking support for Russia's promotion on social media. This proposal was to be presented to the Russian delegation at the ATF forum in Brunei Darussalam in 2020 (Untung, 2019; Amin, 2021).

In a meeting of the Asia Development Bank attended by Moderator panel David Ingles from Bloomberg Television and Radio, Indonesian Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno, CEO of the Asia Pacific Travel Association Liz Ortiguera, one of the founders and CEO of YouTrip Caecilia Chu, and Deputy Director-General of the Southeast Asia Department at ADB Winfried Wicklein, the discussion yielded several outcomes. Southeast Asian countries were advised to develop sustainable tourism projects in various ways. This includes the use of digital platforms and digital payment methods to reduce transaction costs and time, expanding bankable facilities as green financial facilities prepared by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and providing more facilities that can encourage tourists to stay longer in the country.

Furthermore, increasing bankable facilities as green financial facilities prepared by ADB. The ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance (ACGF) is an initiative of the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund (AIF) launched in April 2019 to accelerate investment in environmentally friendly infrastructure in Southeast Asia. Governments of ASEAN member countries receive technical assistance and loans exceeding \$1 billion from ACGF from joint financing partners. ACGF focuses on projects supporting renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste management, sustainable water supply and sanitation, and climate-resilient agriculture. Additionally, it builds institutional capacity of ASEAN governments to enhance environmental infrastructure investment and provides knowledge services and training programs to strengthen environmental regulations. ACGF does not stand alone but partners with ADB, Agence Française de Développement, AIF, European Investment Bank, European Union, KfW, and the Republic of Korea (ADB, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023).

The limited infrastructure for air, sea, and land transportation, as well as the lack of regional communication-based connectivity such as visitor information centers, are barriers to Southeast Asia's tourism growth. ASEAN's efforts to promote infrastructure development include opening up investment. One type of investment that has significantly contributed to the prosperity of recipient countries is foreign direct investment (FDI). This is due to the benefits provided by innovation, technology, management methods, skills enhancement, capital increase, job creation, and industrial sector development. Since the 1997-1998 economic crisis, FDI into Southeast Asia has nearly quadrupled, making the region an attractive investment destination (Erni, 2020). From 2016 to 2021, Southeast Asia's market investment has grown rapidly due to several factors, such as:

1. Increase in Foreign Investment

Many foreign investors are attracted to invest in the tourism sector of Southeast Asia due to its large market potential and stable economic growth in several countries in the region. Countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines offer attractive incentives to foreign investors investing in their tourism sectors. The tourism sector in Southeast Asia will continue to grow with more investments. The value of foreign direct investment into ASEAN countries in 2021 is as follows:

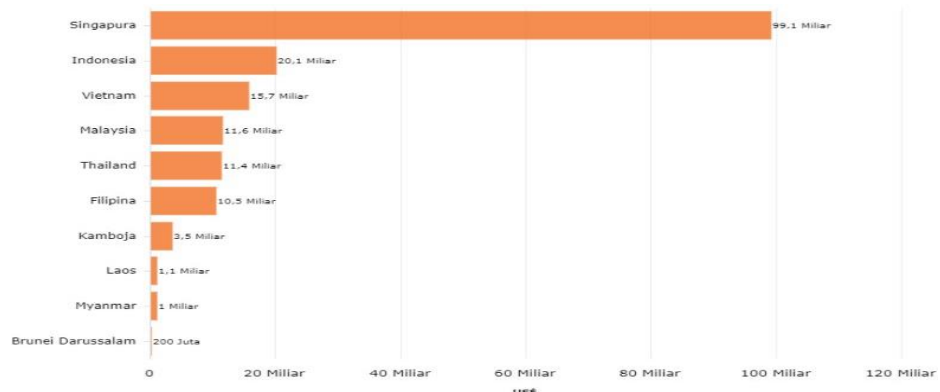


Figure 2. Value of Direct Investment to ASEAN Countries 2021

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in ASEAN reached US\$137.1 billion in 2016 and increased to US\$154 billion in 2019. However, due to COVID-19, FDI decreased to US\$107.6 billion in 2020 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). Nevertheless, some countries in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia continue to successfully attract foreign investment into the tourism industry, especially for infrastructure development such as airports, hotels, and other tourist attractions.

## 2. Improvement of Tourism Infrastructure

From 2016 to 2022, many countries in Southeast Asia have enhanced their tourism infrastructure, including road construction, airports, hotels, and other vital tourism facilities. Good infrastructure can increase tourist numbers and revenue, making investment in the tourism sector more attractive. Examples of infrastructure in Southeast Asia include the development of new airports like Kertajati International Airport in Indonesia and Cam Ranh International Airport in Vietnam. Additionally, high-speed rail lines have been built, such as the Indonesia-China and Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high-speed railways.

## 3. Enhanced Accessibility

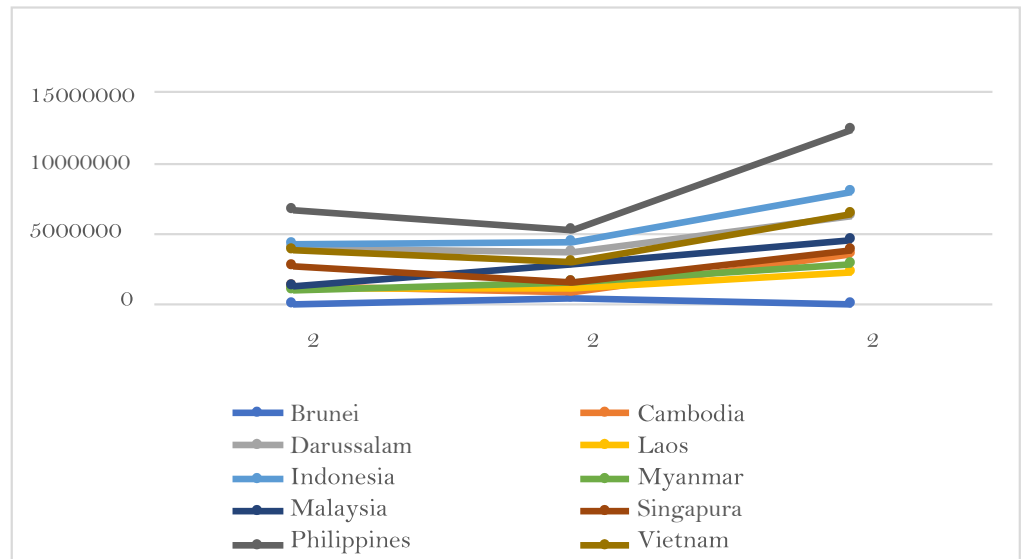
Improved accessibility to Southeast Asian countries will also boost tourism investment. Many airlines have opened new routes to these countries, increasing tourist visits and attractiveness. One example of enhanced accessibility in Southeast Asia is the advancement of information technology through tourism mobile apps and websites that facilitate travel planning for tourists. There has also been an increase in air transportation with more airlines and routes available. Furthermore, improvements in ground transportation, including toll roads, railway lines, public transportation, and the expansion of public transportation networks, have been observed. In recent years, governments across various regions have strengthened their cooperation by improving access throughout their region. Examples include the ASEAN Open Skies Agreement, cross-border transportation cooperation, and the Mekong Tourism Forum initiative.

## 4. Technological Advancements

Several technological developments supporting Southeast Asia's tourism sector include mobile apps that assist tourists in planning their trips, purchasing tickets, and obtaining information about tourist destinations. Popular mobile apps in Southeast Asia such as Traveloka, Agoda, and AirAsia serve this purpose. By utilizing smart devices like tablets and smartphones, IoT (Internet of Things) can enhance visitor experiences, such as booking hotels, transportation tickets, and purchasing food and beverages. Additionally, digital marketing and Big Data can aid governments and the tourism industry in strategic planning and promoting tourist attractions through social media and websites.

Countries in Southeast Asia are known for their diverse tourism potentials, including beaches, mountains, tropical forests, historical temples and ruins, metropolitan cities, and rich and diverse culinary offerings. With such diverse natural and cultural resources, there are abundant opportunities to develop the tourism industry in each country. Developing new tourism products, improving infrastructure, and enhancing human resources can capitalize on these opportunities. From 2016 to the present, ASEAN has been striving to develop new types of tourism such as ecotourism, halal tourism, and medical tourism, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The output of efforts undertaken by the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) can be observed from the graph of ASEAN tourist visits from 2020 to 2022:





**Figure 3.** Number of Southeast Asian Tourist Visits 2020 – 2022

From the Figure 3, conclude that after the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist visits to ASEAN have gradually increased. The sharpest decline occurred in 2020 (ASEAN Statistic, 2020). Over the past four years since the start of ATSP II, ASEAN tourism has made significant progress in developing sustainable tourism and enhancing national competitiveness, resulting in four ASEAN countries ranking in the top 50 of the Tourism and Trade Competitiveness Index. These countries are Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. According to the ATF Vision Mission, ASEAN aims to leverage this competitiveness to further develop tourism. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries experienced a decline in their rankings. Additionally, in 2020, the World Economic Forum did not release a report on ASEAN tourism rankings due to the disrupted tourism sector, and Myanmar was not included in the ranking (World Economic Forum, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

The annual ASEAN Tourism Forum is a form of regional collaboration that benefits its member countries. This forum gathers all ASEAN member states to discuss their tourism status, including growth, development, and performance evaluations. Private sector participation is encouraged for promoting tourism alongside ASEAN member countries. With the implementation of the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan II (2016-2025), Southeast Asia's tourism enhancement is evident across several countries. This progress is closely linked to ATF's efforts through the ASEAN Tourism Forum, focusing on two strategic priorities: ensuring inclusive sustainable tourism and enhancing tourism competitiveness. ASEAN aims to improve Southeast Asia's tourism by enhancing human resources and tourism promotion, improving service quality, raising international standards, boosting marketing and tourism promotion, promoting sustainable tourism, enhancing tourism infrastructure and connectivity, encouraging investment in this sector, and maximizing natural and cultural resources potential.

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