

**OPENING SPEECH OF THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EMERGING  
TOURISM DESTINATIONS.**

**MINISTER OF STATE IN THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND  
ACTING MINISTER OF TOURISM, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY  
AGIO PEREIRA**



**“Tourism for Peace, Harmony and Fraternity: Development of Religious Tourism and  
Pilgrimage”**

**May 17, 2019**

Your Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear Participants,

First of all, and on behalf of His Excellency the Prime Minister, I would like to thank you for your invitation to attend this conference. The Prime Minister, being unable to attend, asked me to represent him, expressing the votes of success for this Second International Conference on Emerging Tourist Destinations.

As Minister of Tourism, Trade and Industry, I am grateful to the Dili Institute of Technology and USAID for organizing this important event that will enable us to share experiences and gain insights into the direction of tourism in Timor-Leste, and more specifically religious tourism, and its relationship and potential contribution to the development and socio-economic growth of our country.

Timor-Leste, despite being a small country, prides itself on its cultural diversity resulting from countless influences over time. Our various ethnic groups imprint a unique diversity, represented by language, dance, music, architecture, crafts and even our beliefs. We are a People with ancestral traditions and animist beliefs that are an important part of Timorese culture, and which were later associated with the Portuguese colonial legacy, leaving the Catholic faith and the Portuguese language, and, even more recently, our history of resistance and struggle for national liberation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Because of all of this, we are a half-island with a unique history and culture.

I cannot speak of the development of national tourism, without mentioning the support infrastructures and the importance of improving basic services to international standards, of investing seriously in education for the provision of services in this area, not only in higher education but, above all, at the level of technical vocational education.

It is therefore imperative to invest in our young people, ensuring technical training that is oriented to the various tourist activities, as is the case of religious tourism.

We have few restrictions on the entry of tourists, except for obtaining a visa, we have one of the lowest crime rates in the region and we have a natural and cultural environment recognized internationally as having added value in our tourism offer.

However, there is much to do in terms of accessibility, both in terms of air transport and land access routes to tourist points, especially in rural areas. Accessibility to information technologies, the internet and mobile networks has been improving, but

there remain many challenges to tour operators and services in general. The Eight Government will continue to work hard to improve accessibility and invest in the continuous improvement of these sectors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Religious tourism has its genesis in spiritual satisfaction, in pilgrimage, but it can also be motivated by cultural or anthropological reasons. Over time, it has come to stand out as a segment of tourism that somehow coincides with cultural tourism, including visits to artistic, historical and cultural heritage. However, it is distinguished by the visit to spaces of worship or even by the participation in religious events. As an example, I mention the religious pilgrimages to the Shrine of the Virgin Mary in Ramelau. Apart from the Catholic community, Timor-Leste has the privilege of having other religious communities, such as Protestant, Muslim, Christian, Hindu and other religious denominations that will very actively contribute to the development and promotion of sacred places and worship, buildings and their collections.

Most tourists who visit religious spaces do so within cultural programs, so it is important to work in interpretive programs of the religious space both for faith-based tourists as in the perspective of the tourist pilgrim or the common tourist. Programs that allow the visitor to understand the place, the meaning of religious expressions.

Another purpose of this type of tourism is to promote dialogue between people and cultures and should be based on solidarity tourism in support of the sustainable development of local communities. It is, therefore, a tool that allows dialogue between cultures and between religions, through the knowledge of practices, beliefs and rituals, promoting tolerance and fraternity among peoples.

It is imperative, therefore, to establish complementary initiatives, strategies and equipment that contextualize architecture and art in all its components: functional, liturgical and symbolic.

Your Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Government has demonstrated its strong commitment to this emerging global tourism area by establishing in the Strategic Development Plan for the period 2011-2030 that religious tourism is one of the priority objectives of the National Tourism Policy.

The First International Conference on Emerging Tourism Destinations, under the theme "Challenges and Opportunities", in 2016, was decisive for the implementation of the National Tourism Policy, later approved in March 2017, with the purpose of "increasing tourism by 2030: strengthening national identity".

As such, I am pleased to have the presence of such distinguished national and international speakers at this Second Conference on "Tourism for Peace, Harmony and

Fraternity: Development of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage" and, especially of those who came from afar. On behalf of the Government of Timor-Leste, I thank you for your presence and willingness to continue to join us in making Timor-Leste an excellent tourist destination.

I think it is consensual to say that Timor-Leste continues to create many opportunities and, of course, challenges. Opportunities to capitalize on the experience and capital of the region, as we are geographically inserted in Southeast Asia. And challenges, as we must invest seriously in our human resources and in the development of infrastructures so that we can compete with the neighbors of the region, creating market segments that can capture investment and business, essential to our economic diversification.

On behalf of the Government, I leave you with our wishes of great success for this conference.

Thank you very much.