

# INSIGHT MYANMAR GOES A STEP BEYOND

**The first foreign joint venture tour operator, Insight Myanmar, opened shop in Yangon February 24. Nima Chandler reports.**

INSIGHT Myanmar, the first foreign joint venture tour company in the country, aims to "go beyond the scope of the services of an ordinary tour company and provide real insight into Myanmar life and culture," said Mr Armin Schoch, co-founder and managing director of the company. "One of our goals is to promote tourism that goes beyond simple sightseeing."

Insight Myanmar is a joint venture between Mr Schoch, a former Diethelm Travel executive, who holds 40 per cent of the shares; Ms Lilli Saxer, who recently left her position as managing director of Diethelm Travel (Cambodia); and two private local partners who together hold the remaining 40 per cent of the shares.

Mr Schoch had earlier announced that he was leaving Diethelm Travel to go into the business of importing four-wheel drive vehicles. But when he went to Myanmar to check-out business opportunities, he was drawn back into travel.

"After 11 years with Diethelm Travel I was looking for a new challenge and possibly one that would make me economically independent and let me explore my entrepreneurial talents in a creative way," he said.

"In the last few years I have negotiated and established joint venture tourism companies in Laos and Cambodia and loved the experience. When I realised that Myanmar had definitely entered a new economic era

and that the moment was ideal to approach the Myanmar government with ideas of joint ventures, I decided to act.

"Initially, I was drawn to setting up a trading company in Myanmar but I changed my mind after I arrived in Yangon and realised that there was a wide gap in the tourism sector that needed filling."

While Myanmar will undoubtedly prove a challenge, both Mr Schoch and Ms Saxer have long experience in running travel operations in difficult environments.

"While in Cambodia, (Ms Saxer) gained a reputation far beyond Cambodia for successfully operating a travel company under sometimes most adverse conditions," Mr Schoch said.

While Insight Myanmar will draw on the resources of local partners, management will be the responsibility of Mr Schoch and Ms Saxer, who are both Swiss nationals.

Asked what prompted the government of Myanmar to issue a licence to a foreign tour operator, Mr Schoch said, "The government has realised that the possibilities of so many of Myanmar's licensed tour operators are limited in terms of marketing expertise, market knowledge, operational know-how and financial resources."

The government has outlined ambitious plans for Visit Myanmar Year 1996, which many travel trade observers say are unrealistic

in light of the poor infrastructure of the country.

"Even if these goals cannot be reached, the existence of Visit Myanmar Year will be very beneficial to Myanmar's industry as it will benefit from increased promotion throughout the world," Mr Schoch said.

"It is most crucial for Myanmar that its tourism industry grow in a controlled fashion and under the strictest conditions of preservation of the environment and observation of quality in services provided to foreign visitors. On a long term basis, Myanmar

will have more to gain from these aspects than from an increased number of tourist arrivals alone."

Insight Myanmar will play a role in the lead up to and during Visit Myanmar Year by promoting the destination at international tourism trade fairs and continuing in the search for and development of new destinations within Myanmar.

"Insight Myanmar will also put emphasis on promoting tourism centering specifically on ethnological aspects, wildlife, festivals, arts and crafts," Mr Schoch said.



Insight Myanmar will focus on the way of life and culture of local people.