

MEKONG TOURISM NEWSLETTER

Issue: February 2023



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Why sustainable travel is an all-hands effort in the Mekong Region

There's a growing appetite for sustainable travel among global travelers, with the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) set to be one of the first beneficiaries of this trend.

A [new report](#) released by World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), Trip.com Group, and Deloitte found 69% of respondents were actively seeking sustainable travel options for the year ahead. Nearly 60%, too, have chosen more sustainable travel options in the last few years. Finally, over three quarters of high-end travellers are willing to pay extra to make their trips more sustainable.

This growing awareness dovetails with regional efforts to lower the tourism industry's carbon footprint and improve its sustainability in the long run. Team-ups with global organisations have resulted in projects like the Lao PDR's [Sustour Laos](#) and Cambodia's [#ONESTEPNOPLASTIC](#).

Thailand has elevated sustainability into an all-hands effort through its [Bio-Circular-Green Economy \(BCG\) model](#), introduced to “create sustainability and inclusiveness to Thailand's economy, society and the environment” across a broad range of sectors, tourism included.

With tourists, providers and governments all working towards sustainability, we predict the GMS will make serious progress in turning the tourism industry “green, and set an example for the rest of the world. Read this newsletter to learn about sustainable travel news in the region, and other developments!

Regional Spotlight: Xayaboury, Lao PDR

This February, Xayaboury Province will see the Lao Elephant Festival [make a comeback](#) after a three-year break. For generations, the giant mammals have been employed in Xayaboury to carry heavy loads. The province still has the largest number of elephants in Laos, some of which you can visit at the Lao Elephant Conservation Center.

Far off the beaten track, the mountainous Nam Phui National Protected Area shelters hundreds of wild elephants and many other large animals, including gibbons, tigers, silvered langurs, and Asiatic black bears.

Of course, Xayaboury has more in store than just elephants. On the banks of the Mekong you'll find Paklay, a small riverside town with French colonial buildings and traditional Lao-style wooden houses. Tai Lue villages can be found throughout the province; visitors can watch locals weave colorful traditional textiles, and buy them to take home. Finally, visit Sayabouly town to see centuries-old temples like Wat Sibounheuang, diamond-shaped Wat Siphandon, and Wat Sisavangvong. ([Tourism Sayabouly](#))



Sustainable Tourism News



Viet Nam's Ba Ria-Vung Tau promoting green tourism

The southern region's sea tourism capital hopes to use sustainability to accelerate tourism in the area. Their plans include developing new coastal routes and surrounding areas to encourage high-end marine tourism such as scuba diving, fishing, and coral viewing. [Read more.](#)



More global travelers looking for sustainable tourism options

A new report by World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), Trip.com Group, and Deloitte reveals a heightened appetite for sustainable tourism amongst consumers, with 69% of travellers actively seeking sustainable travel options. [Read More.](#)



Can Cambodia become Southeast Asia's sustainable travel capital?

Cambodia announced a string of sustainability initiatives that included a Sustainable Landscape and Ecotourism Project, an anti-poaching initiative in Monduliri Province, and a plan to introduce Indian tigers into the forests of the Cardamom mountains. [Read more.](#)

Upcoming Festivals

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Maha Muni Pagoda Festival, Myanmar. Mandalay's majestic Mahan Muni Buddha image is a highly cherished local religious landmark. On the full moon day of Thabodwe, devotees cook glutinous rice over bonfires that are offered to the monks at that area. [Read more.](#)



Image by Ministry of Hotels & Tourism Myanmar



18-20 February 2023

Boun Xang (The Elephant Festival), Lao PDR. Kicked off in 2006, the Elephant Festival was organised to celebrate the Lao people's cultural ties with the elephant. The Festival will be held again in 2023 after a three-year hiatus, marking the return of elephant parades, dance performances, and night markets. [Read more.](#)

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Sword & Pole Festival, China. Known as "a-tang-de" in the Lisu language, meaning "a festival of climbing knife-ladders", the festival's namesake ritual shows men climbing 20-meter-high ladders with rungs made from 72 sharp knives. [Read more.](#)



Image by Inkunming on Website

News from the Greater Mekong Subregion

Cambodia

- ◆ Cambodia revival depends on Chinese tourists, who represent the highest spending segment of all international visitors. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Return of cruise ships to Sihanoukville mark a positive sign for Cambodia's tourism sector recovery. [Read more.](#)



China

- ◆ With over 45 million trips made to Yunnan during the Spring Festival, rebound in tourism volume and revenue is higher than 2019. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Starting 6 February, China's travel agencies will resume outbound group tours to 20 countries, including Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR. [Read more.](#)

Lao PDR

- ◆ The Fifth Thai-Lao bridge opens next year, linking Thailand's Bueng Kan province and Lao PDR's Bolikhamxai province. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Lao PDR, China reopens Boten-Bohan border gate connecting Luang Namtha (Lao PDR) and Yunnan province. [Read more.](#)



Myanmar

- ◆ Myanmar hosts its own travel mart in Feb 2023. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Myanmar Airways flies travel agents to Myanmar. [Read more.](#)

Thailand

- ◆ Thailand maintains "fully-reopen" entry rules: health insurance required only from tourists arriving from or going to countries requiring a RT-PCR test. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ MuvMi and other tuk-tuk apps in Thailand spare tourists the hassle of haggling, making rides more accessible to foreigners. [Read more.](#)



Viet Nam

- ◆ Viet Nam Poetry Day to take place on February 5 at Thang Long Citadel, Ha Noi. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ By 2024, Viet Nam's tourism revenues will reach US\$11 billion, surpassing pre-pandemic figure of US \$10.8 billion in 2019. [Read More.](#)