

# MEKONG TOURISM NEWSLETTER

Issue: April 2023



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Protecting wildlife  
habitats to  
encourage  
sustainable tourism

Preserving the Mekong Sub-Region’s wildlife has become critical to retaining a base for sustainable tourism in the region. Consider the trans-national efforts to preserve the Irrawaddy dolphin, a native of the Mekong River whose survival mirrors that of the larger ecosystem as a whole.

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), “river dolphins act as indicators of river health in the basins where they live.... if that population is on the decline, then it’s considered a red flag for the ecosystem as a whole.”

Recently, Thai officials consulted with worldwide experts and representatives from Irrawaddy dolphin-populated waterways: their agenda covered protections for Songkhla Lake’s remaining dolphins. The new plan will conserve the 14-20 dolphins through a variety of methods, including boat-based surveys, genetic diversity efforts, and water quality testing.

This coincides with the government of Cambodia designating Mekong River Dolphin Management Areas in Stung Treng and Kratie provinces, putting teeth in law enforcement to help increase Irrawaddy dolphin numbers in the face of an alarming number of recent dolphin deaths.

These developments build on longstanding efforts to protect wildlife habitats in the region – from conservation programs like Lao PDR’s Gibbon Experience, to creating protected areas like Viet Nam’s Cuc Phuong National Park and Cat Ba National Park – all demonstrating the region’s total commitment to protecting endangered animal habitats and preserving its rich biodiversity.

Read this newsletter to learn about sustainable travel news in the region, and other developments!

## Regional Spotlight: Sihanoukville, Cambodia

Sihanoukville’s rapid evolution from sleepy fishing village to glitzy tourist hotspot has not been all smooth, to be sure. But “Snookyville’s” unique character remains under all the newness.

The beautiful Ochheuteal, Otres & Independence Beaches are still there, where you can knock back a cold beer with friends; the white-sand beaches of Koh Rong Samloem and Koh Rong Island are still easily accessible, a short boat’s ride away; and Wat Leu Pagoda still watches over the city, a calm spiritual oasis on a hill.

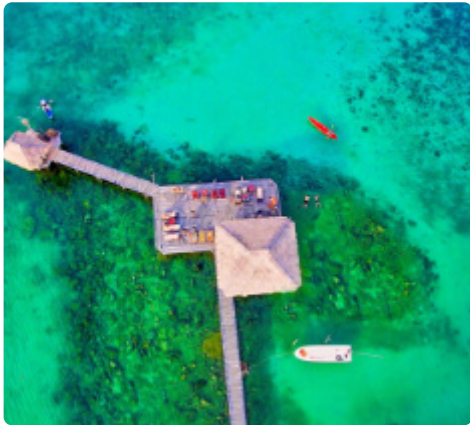
As an International Offshore Financial Centre, Sihanoukville has become a nexus for trade and investment in the Kingdom of Cambodia. A new expressway now links Phnom Penh with Sihanoukville, strengthening business links between both economic powerhouses.

This promising regional economic hub will host the 2023 Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF), which will be held on 25 – 27 April 2023. Amid Sihanoukville’s beaches, wide avenues, shopping malls and gleaming casinos, MTF guests will see how development has transformed, and see how this destination applies the sustainable tourism practice.





# Sustainable Tourism News



## Thailand's Huay Pu Keng and Ko Mak win Green Destinations Story Awards

This year, the Green Destinations Story Awards at ITB Berlin 2023 recognized Huay Pu Keng's community-based tourism practice and Ko Mak's low-carbon destination effort. [Read more.](#)



## Viet Nam scaling up sustainable and green coffee production

To maintain its position as a coffee powerhouse, Vietnam is focused on growing high-quality and environment-friendly coffee, building sustainable coffee supply chains, and investing in modern coffee processing and better farmer livelihoods. [Read more.](#)



## EV charging stations inaugurated in Yangon Region

EV charging stations of Chindwin Shan Construction Co Ltd and Earth Renewable Energy Co Ltd were inaugurated at the Thakin Mya park in Ahlon Township and at Mile-Post 1 on the Yangon-Mandalay Expressway in Hlegu Township this March. [Read more.](#)

## Upcoming Festivals

### 13 April 2023

**Boun Pimai, Lao PDR.** The three-day Lao New Year is a purification festival, during which the Buddhist images in the household and the temples are ritually cleaned with sacred water. Luang Prabang puts on Laos' biggest and most scenic Pimai Lao parade. ([Tourism Laos](#))



**Songkran Water Festival, Thailand.** The Thai New Year finds the whole country subsumed in water showers and celebrations. Don't get mad: getting wet is a portent of good luck! The most scenic celebrations take place in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket. ([Tourism Authority of Thailand](#))

**Khmer New Year Day (Choul Chhnam Khmer), Cambodia.** The three-day Khmer New Year has a solemn first day, a generous second, and a festive third. Locals celebrate the last day with traditional games like hand-scarf-throwing and tug of war, and splashing water on each other with abandon. ([Tourism Cambodia](#))



**Thingyan Burmese Water Festival, Myanmar.** During Thingyan, locals douse each other with water to ward off evil and wash away the previous year's bad luck. This is also the time to enjoy foods like mont lone yay paw (a sticky rice dumpling with a palm sugar center) and the Yane dance held at custom-built pavilions. ([Myanmar Tourism Ministry](#))





# News from the Greater Mekong Subregion

## Cambodia

- ◆ Cambodia celebrates return of stolen artifacts, including important Hindu and Buddhist statues, as well as ancient Angkor-era jewelry. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Siem Reap is preparing for the biggest Khmer New Year celebration in the history of the province, with two events hoping to break Guinness World Records. [Read more.](#)



Credit: Kok Ky/Cambodia's Government Cabinet via AP



## China

- ◆ Foreigners with valid visas to be allowed to enter China; visa-free policies to be resumed for Hainan and cruise tour groups at Shanghai ports. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Inns help village in Southwest China's Yunnan province find a way out of hardship: "Our villagers have escaped poverty through their tourism businesses." [Read more.](#)

## Lao PDR

- ◆ New UXO clearance project, funded by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, was officially launched in Khammouane province. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Laos New Year festival program for Luang Prabang announced, featuring a variety of activities from 11 to 20 April. [Read more.](#)



## Myanmar

- ◆ Myanmar Airways will operate direct flights between Yangon and Chennai, starting 5 May 2023. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ International tourist arrivals to Myanmar increased by 214 per cent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. [Read more.](#)

## Thailand

- ◆ Thai officials reviewing strategies to attract Muslim-friendly tourism in the Kingdom, revealed a focus group discussion in Phuket province. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Koh Samui and Surat Thani to be featured in upcoming edition of the MICHELIN Guide Thailand 2024. [Read more.](#)



Ba Tam Temple in Gia Lam District. Photo: Hong Hanh

## Viet Nam

- ◆ Hai Ba Trung walking street in Vinh Ninh ward, Hue city formally launched, to operate from 6pm-12 midnight every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Hanoi to launch tour to introduce ancient architecture of Ly Dynasty, centered on ancient temple and pagoda in Gia Lam District. [Read more.](#)