

# MEKONG TOURISM NEWSLETTER

Issue: May 2023



## “ Mekong Tourism Forum 2023 Recap: New Ways to Rethink Tourism

The recently-concluded Mekong Tourism Forum 2023 (MTF2023) helped hundreds of tourism stakeholders find solutions to the industry's most pressing issues.

MTF2023's theme for the year (“Rethinking for Resilience and Digitalization”) centered around reimagining the future of GMS tourism, while leveraging digitalization to ensure resilient and inclusive growth in the post COVID-19 era.

Mr. Peter Semone, Chairman of the Pacific Asia Travel Association, delivered a keynote speech about rethinking tourism in the region, especially in the following areas:

- Managing and measuring tourism as an integrated ecosystem
- Building efficiencies along the tourism value chain
- Looking after tourism workers' welfare
- Encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation
- Facilitating micro/small/medium sized enterprises
- Engaging communities in tourism
- Respond to the needs, wants and responsibilities of visitors
- Managing the intersection of tourism and technology



In the course of the MTF2023, three insightful panel discussions were conducted on challenges, opportunities, and strategic actions related to building a smart tourism ecosystem; redefining gender roles to empower women; and enhancing the quality of the tourism workforce for a resilient future. Regional tourism leaders, experts, and businesses gathered to discuss critical challenges as well as high-priority issues to chart the way forward for regional tourism.

The end of the MTF2023 this year doesn't mean we stop rethinking tourism in the Mekong – read this newsletter to do some reimagination of your own!

## Regional Spotlight: Savannakhet, Laos

From outdoor activities to cultural experiences, Savannakhet in Laos, a booming city on the banks of the Mekong River bordering Thailand, offers something for every type of adventure traveler.

Dong Natad National Protected Area is ideal for hiking, trekking, guided nature walks and bird-watching activities, where they can see the area's diverse wildlife like the rare giant ibis.

For those seeking water-based activities, the Xe Bangfai River offers kayaking and rafting opportunities. The river flows through a massive cave, which visitors can explore on guided tours, adding an element of adventure to the experience.

History and culture are a key draw for Savannakhet tourists, given the area's Buddhist temples, monasteries, and the ruins of Heuan Hin. The town offers homestay opportunities, where tourists can stay with local families and learn about their daily lives, adding an immersive and unique cultural experience.





# Sustainable Tourism News



## Vietnam tourism businesses urged to reduce plastic waste

At the Vietnam International Travel Mart (VITM-Hanoi 2023) in Hanoi, Chairman of the Vietnam Tourism Association Vu The Binh urged businesses need to seek plastic alternatives to help retain international tourists to Vietnam and protect the environment.

[Read more.](#)



## Emphasis on ecotourism when Cambodia reopens to visitors

Cambodia Sustainable Landscape and Eco-tourism Project (CSLEP), a US\$54 million World Bank initiative, is helping the country develop eco-tourism sites, improve access and train local communities to handle visitors.

[Read more.](#)



## How Thailand is managing Maya Bay's tourists and sharks

Thai authorities think they have struck the right balance between conservation and tourism after reopening Maya Bay to visitors – the serene, sheltered cove had seen a remarkable influx of blacktip reef sharks.

[Read more.](#)

# Upcoming Festivals

5 May 2023

## Yao Red Clothes Festival, China PRC.

The Yao ethnic community of Guangxi celebrate their traditional Red Clothes Festival, during which they dance, sing, and hold embroidery competitions to showcase their skills with clothes. Other festival events include a long-drum dance, village beauty pageants, and tug-of-war competitions.



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## Royal Ploughing Ceremony, Cambodia.

A symbolic ploughing procession, conducted by the King himself, that marks the beginning of the rainy season in Cambodia, and traditionally predicts a range of events depending on what the royal oxen choose from a selection of seven golden trays. [\(Tourism Cambodia\)](#)

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## Yasothon Bun Bangfai Festival, Thailand.

Held at the end of the dry season, the Bun Bangfai festival is held to bring rains down from the heavens, by firing rockets into the air. In the provincial capital of Yasothon in Northern Thailand, Bun Bangfai unfolds over several days. [\(Tourism Authority of Thailand\)](#)

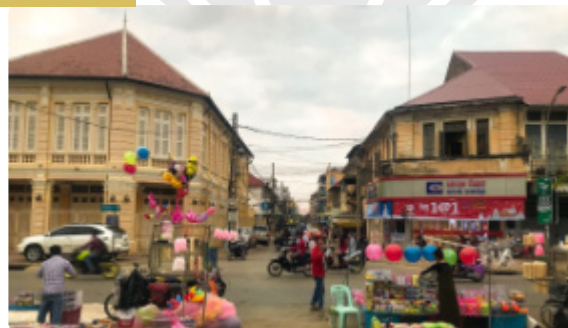




# News from the Greater Mekong Subregion

## Cambodia

- ◆ Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism to organize Cambodian-Vietnamese-Thai tourism and sports events at Techo Square in Preah Sihanouk province from May 19-23. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ For centuries, Battambang, Cambodia, was renowned for the arts; its post-war history is now informing the resilient city's creative spirit. [Read more.](#)



## China

- ◆ China-Laos Railway finally opens cross-border passenger service, cuts Kunming-Vientiane trip to 10.5 hours. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Ethnic groups in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region are ushering in a particularly lively "Sanyuesan" festival this year. [Read more.](#)

## Lao PDR

- ◆ Luang Prabang province welcomed more than 273,000 tourists in the first three months of 2023, with tourism earnings estimated at more than US\$ 157 million. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Laos and Cambodia recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on boosting tourism cooperation through privately organized package tours in Vientiane in Laos. [Read more.](#)



## Myanmar

- ◆ Myanmar resumed its floating Thingyan water festival at Inle Lake in Shan state, after a three-year pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Myanmar will restore mural paintings at the pagodas in the ancient city of Bagan in Mandalay region, a UNESCO world heritage site. [Read more.](#)



## Thailand

- ◆ Proposed tourism tax of THB 300 baht per foreign tourist postponed, may be implemented in September 2023 instead of June. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Thailand's government aims to boost sustainable tourism with a focus on wellness and medical tourism, banking on the Kingdom's competitive advantage. [Read more.](#)



## Viet Nam

- ◆ Hotels in Vietnam are gearing up for a rare five-day public holiday that combines the Hùng Kings Commemoration Day, National Reunification and May Day. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ 2023 Nha Trang-Khanh Hoa Sea Festival expected to lure 100,000 visitors from 3-6 June, with more than 60 events ready for visitors. [Read more.](#)

