

MEKONG TOURISM NEWSLETTER

Issue: February 2024



“ 2024: A Year for Sustainable Mekong-Wide Travel

The year is shaping up to meet GMS’s stakeholders’ high expectations. As 2024 will be the first full year for regional travel since 2019, we at the MTCO are working to make sure that today’s positive signals bear fruit in the months to come.

On 28 January, we signed off on a new strategic partnership between Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), Green Destinations (GD), and the Trade Association of Asian Ecotourism Network (AEN).

This partnership will promote sustainable tourism practices in Thailand, particularly in destination management and certification. “We aim to develop tourism destinations that are not only economically viable but also environmentally and culturally sustainable,” explains Ms. Suvimol Thanasarakij, Executive Director of MTCO.

From 23-26 January, we attended the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, focusing on sustainable tourism. As part of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), which includes five ASEAN Member States, the MTCO Executive Director highlighted MTCO’s achievements and proposed collaboration areas between GMS and ASEAN at the ASEAN National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) Meeting. The ATF also featured discussions among ASEAN Tourism Ministers on advancing tourism and promoting ASEAN Tourism Standards to boost regional competitiveness.

Events like these signals widespread optimism surrounding the recovery of tourism in the post-pandemic era: we’re hoping these signs indicate a long-term, sustainable revival of regional travel that benefits everyone!

Regional Spotlight: Nguyen Hue Street, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

The southern Viet Nam metropolis of Ho Chi Minh City is great to visit all year round – but parts of the city burst into full color during the Lunar New Year Tet holiday.

From 7-14 February, take a stroll down Nguyen Hue street to admire the street’s annual Flower Festival. This pedestrian boulevard will be transformed with elaborate flower displays, artwork, and LED lights. Themed installations will be set up along the 720-metre stretch, and visitors are welcome to take photos with the flower arrangements – a favourite part of the city’s Tet festivities. ([Viet Nam News](#), [Vietnam Travel](#))



Sustainable Tourism News



Photo by Tourism Malaysia Corporate

ASEAN ministers vow sustainable, inclusive and competitive tourism in Vientiane

Tourism ministers from the 10 ASEAN Member States have vowed to push for sustainable, inclusive and competitive tourism in the region, which continues to promote a single tourism destination.

[Read more.](#)



DASTA, MTCO, Green Destinations, and AEN establish partnership on sustainable tourism

A new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) marks a significant step towards promoting sustainable tourism certification for destinations in Asia with a focus on the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

[Read more.](#)



Photo by TanHoaVillage.com

UNWTO Launches 'TourismConnectsRural' for Global Rural Tourism Enhancement

UNWTO has unveiled the largest digital platform globally, 'TourismConnectsRural', aimed at enhancing rural tourism communities. This initiative will facilitate cooperation among the top tourism villages in the UNWTO Network, linking approximately 200 rural locations across various global regions.

[Read more.](#)

Upcoming Festivals

8-14 February 2024

Tet (Lunar New Year) in Viet Nam and Chinese New Year.

This period marks significant celebrations in both Vietnam and China, as families come together to honour ancestors and pray for luck, prosperity, and health in the new year. In Vietnam, the Lunar New Year (Tết Nguyên Đán) is celebrated with special foods like candied fruit, braised pork with eggs, and sticky rice cakes (bánh chưng). Simultaneously, Chinese New Year festivities are characterized by their own unique traditions and culinary delights, symbolizing renewal and reunion.

[\(Vietnam Tourism Ministry\)](#)



22-24 February 2024

Vat Phou Festival, Lao PDR. Held on the grounds of the pre-Angkorian ruin of Vat Phou in Champasack, Vat Phou celebrates the Buddhist festival of Makhaboucha from the full moon of the third lunar month. An early-morning parade of monks receives alms, and in the evening, some 4,000 lamps are lit around the temple, imparting an ethereal charm to the ruins. [\(Tourism Laos\)](#)



24 February 2024

Lantern Festival. The Lantern Festival in China celebrates the end of Chinese New Year with lantern displays, parades, and the eating of tangyuan (glutinous rice balls). Highlighting the event are lantern riddles, offering a blend of light, joy, and cultural tradition in a festive atmosphere. Lantern Festival. The Lantern Festival in China celebrates the end of Chinese New Year with lantern displays, parades, and the eating of tangyuan (glutinous rice balls). Highlighting the event are lantern riddles, offering a blend of light, joy, and cultural tradition in a festive atmosphere.



News from the Greater Mekong Subregion

Cambodia

- ◆ Vietnam emerges as second largest tourists' source for Cambodia, with influx of 1.01 million Vietnamese tourists. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Battambang plans development of five tourist sites, with aim to increase both national and international tourism in the area. [Read more.](#)



China

- ◆ Coffee-themed tours brewing interest in Pu'er, Yunnan, a tea producing area now making a name for itself as China's coffee capital. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Yunnan takes position as "high-altitude training ground" for global sports tourism. [Read more.](#)

Lao PDR

- ◆ ASEAN Tourism Forum 2024 kicks off in Lao PDR on January 24, aiming to strengthen region-wide collaboration on tourism. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ The Laos-China Railway boosts daily trips to 12, supporting the anticipated tourism surge for Visit Laos 2024. [Read more.](#)



Myanmar

- ◆ Myanmar Airways International aims to enhance connectivity to existing markets, braces for the Chinese market recovery. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Tourists invited to Kengtung Cherry Blossom Festival and Ethnic Food Exhibition hosted in Shan State's Kengtung province. [Read more.](#)

Thailand

- ◆ China and Thailand permanently waive visa requirements from March 2024, boosting tourism and economic ties between the two countries. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Thai government launches visa allowing Muay Thai training for tourists for up to 90 days. [Read more.](#)



Viet Nam

- ◆ 2024 sees significant increase in entrance fees for Hanoi attractions, including the Temple of Literature, Hoa Lo Prison, and Huong Pagoda. [Read more.](#)
- ◆ Hanoi targets a five-fold increase in per capita green space to 8-10 m² by 2025, planning to plant up to 250,000 trees in 2024. [Read more.](#)