

# MEKONG TOURISM FORUM 2024 POST-EVENT REPORT

## “Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel”

23-25 April 2023  
Lijiang, China



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## About Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF)

The Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF) is an annual event dedicated to the tourism industry in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. The event provides a cooperative platform for stakeholders in the tourism industry to discuss the development, marketing, and promotion of travel to, from and within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). It presents an inclusive, interactive, and results-oriented opportunity to encourage public and private sector participation in representing the GMS as a single destination.

### The Mekong Tourism Forum 2024

Amidst the dynamic shifts in the global travel sector, as it navigates new challenges and pursues new possibilities, the annual Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF) returns this year to Lijiang, China, from April 23-25, 2024, providing an interactive platform that encourages a visionary approach. The focus is on redefining travel experiences to promote sustainability and enhance the benefit of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

Hosted by the Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, the Yunnan Provincial Culture and Tourism Department, the People's Government of Lijiang, and the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), MTF2024 brings together regional tourism stakeholders and industry experts for collaborative dialogues on critical issues and emerging trends. The forum offers an opportunity to envision the future of GMS tourism, share insights and experiences, and foster face-to-face connections.

MTF2024 in the enchanting city of Lijiang features the forward-looking theme 'Visionary Journeys: Redefining Tomorrow's Travel.' Engage in constructive dialogues, uncovers opportunities, and contributes to shaping the GMS's future, pioneering sustainable, culturally rich, and technologically advanced travel experiences.





## Host Destination

Returning this year to navigate the vibrant tourism landscape in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), the Mekong Tourism Forum 2024 (MTF2024) sets the stage against the breathtaking backdrop of Lijiang, China. Taking place from April 23-26, 2024, this year's forum embraces the forward-looking theme, *'Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel.'*

### About Lijiang

Lijiang is a city located in the northwest of Yunnan Province in China. Known for its rich cultural heritage and stunning natural landscapes, Lijiang is a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists.

### Key Attractions and Features:

1. **Old Town of Lijiang:** A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lijiang Old Town is famous for its well-preserved ancient architecture, cobblestone streets, and intricate waterways. It reflects a harmonious blend of different cultural influences and is a prime example of ancient Chinese urban planning.
2. **Jade Dragon Snow Mountain:** This mountain range is a scenic spot offering stunning views, skiing, and hiking opportunities. It is also a significant cultural site for the local Naxi people.
3. **Black Dragon Pool:** Located in Jade Spring Park, this serene pool offers beautiful reflections of the surrounding mountains and traditional architecture, making it a favorite spot for photography.
4. **Tiger Leaping Gorge:** One of the deepest gorges in the world, it provides adventurous trekking routes and breathtaking views of the Yangtze River rushing through the narrow valley.
5. **Naxi Culture:** The Naxi ethnic group, indigenous to the region, adds a unique cultural dimension to Lijiang. Visitors can experience traditional Naxi music, dance, and Dongba pictographic script.



### Lijiang as a Tourism Destination

Lijiang's appeal as a tourism destination lies in its combination of historical significance, cultural richness, and natural beauty. It offers a variety of experiences, from exploring ancient towns and learning about ethnic cultures to outdoor adventures in picturesque landscapes.

- **Cultural Heritage:** The city's ancient town and traditional practices provide a deep dive into China's historical and cultural past.
- **Scenic Beauty:** The surrounding mountains, rivers, and gorges offer numerous opportunities for nature lovers and adventure enthusiasts.
- **Modern Amenities:** Despite its ancient charm, Lijiang is equipped with modern amenities, including luxury hotels, restaurants, and transportation, making it convenient for tourists.

### Lijiang as the Host Destination for MTF 2024

The Mekong Tourism Forum (MTF) 2024 was hosted in Lijiang, highlighting its capability as a premier destination for international events.

#### Why Lijiang?

1. **Accessibility:** Lijiang is accessible via Lijiang Sanyi International Airport, which connects to major cities in China and some international destinations.
2. **Event Facilities:** The city boasts modern conference facilities and hotels capable of hosting large-scale events and international delegates.
3. **Cultural Appeal:** Hosting MTF 2024 in Lijiang provides attendees with the opportunity to experience the unique cultural heritage and scenic beauty of the region, enhancing the overall appeal of the event.
4. **Sustainable Tourism:** Lijiang is committed to sustainable tourism practices, aligning with the themes often discussed at the Mekong Tourism Forum. This commitment includes preserving its cultural heritage and natural environment while promoting responsible tourism.

Lijiang's blend of historical charm, cultural richness, and modern conveniences make it an ideal destination for both tourists and international events like the MTF 2024. Its ability to offer unique experiences, from exploring ancient towns to trekking through stunning gorges, ensures that it stands out as a must-visit location in China.

MTF2024 in Lijiang provides insightful discussions, innovative strategies, and inspiring collaborative sessions. Be part of this visionary journey and contribute to shaping the future of collaboration in the GMS.



## Program / Agenda

| Date   Time           | Program  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>April 23, 2024</b> | <b>The 53<sup>rd</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting,<br/>The 53<sup>rd</sup> MTCO Board Meeting<br/>@ Hillton, Lijiang</b>        |
| 08:00-08:30           | Registration of GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting  |
| 08:30-10:30           | The 53 <sup>rd</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting   |
| 10:45-11:00           | Coffee Break   |
| 11:00-12:00           | The 53 <sup>rd</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting   |
| 12:00-13:00           | Lunch Break  |
| 13:00-14:30           | The 53 <sup>rd</sup> GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting (closed session)<br>(Closed Session)  |
| 14:30-14:50           | Coffee Break   |
| 14:50-17:00           | The MTCO Board Meeting (closed session)  |
| 19:00-21:00           | Welcome Dinner with folk songs and dancing performance<br>Speech by Ms. Pu Hong, Party Secretary of CPC Lijiang Municipal<br>Committee |
| <b>April 24, 2024</b> | <b>Mekong Tourism Forum 2014 @ Hillton, Lijiang<br/>and Field Study @ Lijiang Old Town</b>   |
| 08:00 - 08:30         | Registration   |
| 08:30 - 08:35         | <b>Welcome and Introduction</b><br><i>The Master of Ceremonies</i>   |
| 08:35 - 08:45         | <b>Opening Remarks</b><br><i>By the Leader from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism</i>  |
| 08:45 - 08:55         | <b>MTCO's Welcome Remarks</b><br><i>Ms. Suvimol Thanasarakij, Executive Director, Mekong Tourism<br/>Coordinating Office</i>           |
| 08:55 - 09:01         | <b>Yunnan Province's Opening Remarks</b><br><i>By the Leader from Yunnan Province</i>  |
| 09:01 - 09:07         | <b>Lijiang's Welcome Speech</b><br><i>By Secretary of Lijiang Municipal Party Committee</i>  |
| 09:07 - 09:15         | <b>Lijiang's Cultural, Tourism and Investment Promotion</b><br><i>By Lijiang Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism</i>               |
| 09:15 - 09:20         | <b>Opening Ceremony</b>  |
| 09:20 - 09:30         | <b>Group Photo</b>   |
| 09:30 - 10:00         | <b>Keynote Speech - "Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's<br/>Travel"</b>  |

*Embark on a transformative journey through the evolving landscape of the travel industry, spotlighting the shift towards sustainable and conscious tourism. Discover how the industry is adapting to the new normal post-pandemic, and the evolving preferences of the conscious traveler. Uncover the latest market shifts and learn innovative strategies to thrive in this new era. This session is a roadmap to the future of travel, blending inspiration with practical insights for a world on the move. Prepare to be enlightened, engaged, and excited about what lies ahead in the world of travel, particularly in the context of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).*

10:00 - 10:15

**Refreshment Break and Networking**

10:15 - 11:15

**Concurrent Panel Discussions:**

**Panel Discussion 1: "Crossing Bridges, Building Connections for Cultural Integration and Prosperity"**

*Delve into the transformative power of tourism in bridging diverse cultures along the GMS corridor. This session will discuss the complex aspects of cultural integration and demonstrate how it supports strong, inclusive, and sustainable tourism, especially after the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Explore cutting-edge digital tools, policy innovations, and the untapped potential of secondary destinations, all while highlighting the pivotal role of community engagement in empowering local cultures, women, and minorities. The discussion will offer fresh insights into how tourism can be a conduit for deeper cross-cultural understanding and economic prosperity in one of the most culturally rich regions of the world.*

**Panel Discussion 2: "Unleashing Potential: Enhancing International Cooperation to Propel Tourism Growth"**

*Join our panel to explore enhancing international cooperation and sustainable tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The session will discuss the benefits and challenges of regional collaboration, focusing on economic growth, environmental sustainability, equitable distribution, and travel facilitation. Experts will address strategies for strengthening cooperation, such as policy harmonization and sustainable practices, aiming to foster a unified, prosperous, and responsible future for GMS tourism.*

11:15 - 11:20

**Wrap – up Session**

*By Ms. Suvimol Thanasarakij, Executive Director, Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office*

11:20 - 11:25

**Closing Remarks**

*By the leader of the People's Government of Lijiang*

11:25 - 11:30

**MTF Handover Ceremony**

11:30 - 11:40

**Speech by the next MTF Host**

*By Mr Khom Douangchantha, Director General of the Tourism Marketing Department, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Lao PDR*

12:00 - 14:00

**Networking Lunch**

**Field Study: Lijiang Immersive Experience**

14:00 - 18:00

*An on-site exploration at Lijiang's Old Town, highlighting smart management practices, followed by an exclusive exhibition at the museum showcasing Lijiang's rich cultural and tourism industry integration.*

19:00-21:00

**Dinner**

**April 25, 2024**

**Mekong Tourism Forum 2014: Technical Tour**

All day

**Technical Tour**

- Visit Jade **Dragon Snow Mountain Glacier Park**, a natural spectacle offering stunning views.
- Explore the serene **Blue Moon Valley Scenic Area**, known for its crystal-clear waters.
- Enjoy a relaxing lunch at a local restaurant
- Watch the “**Impression of Lijiang**” show, a vibrant outdoor showcase of Yunnan’s ethnic cultures and natural beauty.
- Visit the **Baisha Jinxu Art Institute** to witness the area’s rich artistic heritage.
- Explore the ancient **Baisha Murals**, reflecting the diverse cultural influences of the region.

19:00-21:00

**Dinner**

**April 26, 2024**

**Departure**



# Mekong Tourism Forum 2024 Snapshot

MTF 2024 Snapshot offers a quick overview of this year's Mekong Tourism Forum, set in Lijiang, China. This event served as a dynamic platform for tourism leaders and stakeholders in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) to showcase and discuss sustainable and culturally enriched travel within the region. Through engaging keynotes, expert panels, and interactive exhibits, the forum emphasizes innovative strategies for navigating the evolving travel landscape, fostering international cooperation, and promoting cultural integration."



1. **Keynote:** The keynote speech focused on "Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel," discussing the transition towards sustainable and conscious tourism in the post-pandemic era. This session aimed to offer insights and strategies for navigating the new normal in the travel industry, emphasizing the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).
2. **Expert Panels:**
  - **Panel 1: "Crossing Bridges, Building Connections for Cultural Integration and Prosperity"** explored the role of tourism in fostering cultural integration and economic prosperity within the GMS, highlighting digital tools and community engagement.
  - **Panel 2: "Unleashing Potential: Enhancing International Cooperation to Propel Tourism Growth"** discussed the benefits and challenges of regional collaboration, focusing on sustainable practices and policy harmonization.



3. **GMS Tourism Cooperation Exhibition:** This exhibition showcased tourism cooperation efforts, initiatives, activities, and achievements among the GMS countries, emphasizing sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism development in the region.
4. **Field Research at Lijiang Old Town:** MTF delegates participated in cultural immersion activities at Lijiang's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to understand smart management practices and the integration of culture and tourism.



5. **Technical Visit:** This part of the forum included a full-day of explorative activities around Lijiang, enriching participants' understanding of the area's cultural and natural heritage:
  - **Morning:** The day began with a visit to the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Glacier Park, where attendees can experience breathtaking views of the natural landscape.
  - **Afternoon:** The cultural journey continued with the "Impression of Lijiang" show, an outdoor performance highlighting Yunnan's ethnic cultures and natural scenery. Afterwards, participants visited the Baisha Jinxiu Art Institute to delve into the region's artistic traditions and explore the ancient Baisha Murals, which reflect diverse cultural influences.
6. **Networking:** Opportunities for networking were integrated throughout the forum, with specific sessions dedicated to fostering connections among delegates, including various networking functions and informal gatherings.





# China PR's Welcome Address

by Vice Minister Zhang Zheng, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, China



# Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office's Welcome Remarks

by Ms. Suvimol Thanasarakij, Executive Director, Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO)



Good morning, Excellencies, Distinguish guests, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Dee, the Executive Director of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (or "MTCO"). It's so nice to be here in the beautiful city of Lijiang, one of my favorite destinations. My first trip to Lijiang was in September 2017. I came here by myself as a tourist, having really wonderful time. Lijiang is one of the most unique and memorable cities in the world. I am grateful for the opportunity to organize the Mekong Tourism Forum here in Lijiang.

On behalf of MTCO, I would like to thank the host country, China, including the Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, the Yunnan Provincial Culture

and Tourism Department, and the People's Government of Lijiang City, for hosting this important event, the signature-event of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) tourism cooperation. It's my honour to work with you, China team.

For this year, 2024, our MTF theme is "VISIONARY JOURNEYS REDEFINING TOMORROW'S TRAVEL". The reason is because this is a very significant year. UN Tourism and many tourism experts estimated that international tourism will reach the pre-pandemic level by the end of this year. This is the year the tourism industry globally has been waiting for.

But what's next? What to do and what to prepare for this new journey? What are there from this point onwards? We will hear the insights from our keynote speaker from one of China's biggest travel firms, Trip.com Group.

As we proceed with the Forum, we will have 2 panel discussions running concurrently. Panel 1 will discuss the power of cultural integration, and how it supports strong, inclusive, and sustainable tourism. And panel 2 will discuss the importance and impact of international cooperation within the GMS and beyond. What partnership action plans are carried out to ensure the continued growth and sustainability of our tourism industry?

I am so proud to have tourism gurus from every GMS country on the panels, showcasing the depth of expertise and strong collaborative spirit across our region. They are ready to share their best practices, lessons, challenges and the way forward.

This afternoon, our field research session in Lijiang's Old Town will provide firsthand insights and perspective on how smart tourism management is implemented on the ground, with the harmony of culture, heritage and technology.

Well, I cannot wait for the forum to start. Thanks all the delegates for being here. I look forward to the fruitful discussions today. Thank you.



## Yunnan Province's Opening Remarks

by H.E. Wang Hao, Vice Governor of the People's Government of Yunnan Province



## Lijiang City's Opening Remarks

by Dr. Pu Hong, the Party Secretary of the Communist Party Committee of Lijiang Municipal Committee



# Lijiang's Cultural, Tourism and Investment Promotion Presentation

by Mr. Li Gang, Deputy Secretary of CPC Lijiang Municipal Committee, Mayor of the People's Government of Lijiang City





# Speakers

## Keynote: Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel



**Kimi Xiaozhou LIU**  
CEO TripAdvisor China, VP Trip.com Group

Since 2019, Kimi has served as the CEO of Tripadvisor China, where he oversees the overall strategy and daily operations in the region. Before joining Tripadvisor, he played a significant role at Ctrip Group, leading various business units and departments. His achievements there include creating the Ctrip Gourmet List, building the content ecosystem, and managing the overseas homestay department. Kimi holds an MBA from the University of Southern California and a Master's degree in Computer Science from New York University.

## Panel 1: Crossing Bridges, Building Connections for Cultural Integration and Prosperity

Moderator



**Hsiao Chink (Benzhe) TANG**  
Senior Economist, East Asia Department  
East Asia Department, Asian Development Bank

Benzhe has over 25 years of professional experience in policy, research, training, and project and knowledge management in a central bank, academe, and multilateral institution, as well as diverse humanitarian and social service voluntary experiences from disability/aged carer to dental assistant to disaster relief personnel.

He was recently transferred back to ADB Headquarters as Senior Economist. Prior to that he was Head of ADB Beijing's Regional Knowledge Sharing Initiative ([RKS](#)), a south-south development knowledge sharing platform. RKS focuses primarily on the sharing of lessons and experiences of the People's Republic of China's remarkable economic transformations in the last four decades with other developing countries.

Benzhe has a strong academic background in management, finance, and economics. He obtained his Bachelor of Business in business administration and Bachelor of Business (First Class Honors) in finance, from the University of Technology, Sydney; MPhil. in finance from University of Cambridge; and PhD in economics from the Australian National University.

Panelist



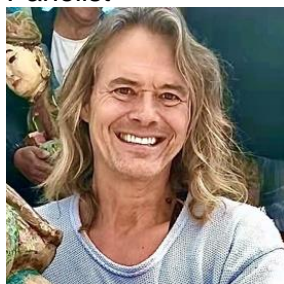
**Aditta KITTIKHOUN**

Senior Partner  
RDK Group

Aditta is a key figure in Laos' digital media and marketing landscapes, notably co-founding the RDK Group, which plays a pivotal role in the country's tourism sector through major campaigns like Lao Thiao Lao (domestic tourism) and various international tourism initiatives like the Sabai Sabai series. These efforts have significantly boosted Laos' profile as a tourism destination. Educated at Oxford University, Aditta has also explored the impact of Facebook on Laos' digital media scene, highlighting the platform's influence on content consumption and information access.

RDK Group, under Aditta's guidance, boasts a diverse array of media products that span online platforms and offline publications, including in-flight magazines and online news platforms that showcase Lao culture to travelers. The company also provides PR services for a wide variety of clients in Laos, demonstrating its versatility and comprehensive approach to media and marketing. This blend of innovation and insight positions RDK Group as a central player in advancing Laos' media and tourism landscapes.

Panelist



**Brian LINDEN**

Founder  
The Linden Centre

Born and raised in Chicago, Brian began working in Beijing in 1984, playing the leading role in the first movie since 1949 to have a foreign leading actor. He spent the next two years with CBS News in Beijing, interviewing Chinese leaders. He traveled to every Chinese province, spending nearly 200 nights on trains in the mid-1980s, and was arrested 18 times. Brian learned Mandarin during these journeys. He has completed graduate degrees at the University of Illinois, Hopkins Nanjing Center, and Stanford.

Brian's career started in international education development and investment. He worked in over 100 countries before returning to China in 2004 with his family to repurpose a Chinese nationally protected structure, The Linden Centre. This venture has been unprecedented in China. The Centre is Brian's attempt to create a sustainable tourism development and heritage preservation model in China.

His talk will focus on how his sites incorporate and train local villagers, leverage existing structures to revitalize communities, develop education bases, and use government funds to grow his company to 15 sites.

The Linden Centre has been praised by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the US Secretary of State, and media. Brian's latest book, "Redefining Diplomacy: One Village at a Time," was published by CITIC Press. He will discuss its English version released in the States.



Panelist



**Su Myat Sandi Oo**

Founder & CEO

Mira Travels and Myanmar Educational Expeditions (MEX)

Dr. Su Myat Sandi Oo (Sandi) is a Myanmar woman tourism entrepreneur. She is an executive director of Mira Travels and a co-founder of award-winning Accessible Myanmar and Myanmar Educational Expeditions. She is also an executive director of Myanmar Tourism Development Institute. Sandi is an ASEAN national tourism trainer, a board member of Tourism Professional Certification Board of Myanmar and an executive member and secretary at International Relations and Investment Committee of Myanmar Tourism Federation.

A medical doctor by education, Sandi has moved into tourism industry due to her passion of traveling, starting with medical tourism in 2011. Before joining tourism industry, she has worked extensively in media industry in Myanmar and Singapore. Despite no prior knowledge, experience or support network in the tourism sector, she successfully threaded her way in tourism by her creativity, hard work, dedication and continuous professional development.

Sandi's special interests are sustainable models in tourism and international education to help next generations of Myanmar youths. She enjoys mentoring the youths and volunteering at various business associations.

Sandi graduated from University of Medicine (1), Yangon and completed her MBA from University of Bradford. With her three sons, she is currently residing in Yangon and Bangkok.

Panelist



**Wan TING**

Deputy Director-General

Network of International Culturalink Entities (NICE), Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China

Mr. WAN Ting, Deputy Director-General of the Network of International Culturalink Entities (NICE), Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, Representative of the Secretariat of the International Tourism Alliance of Silk Road Cities (ITASRC). He graduated from Beijing Foreign Studies University with a major in Arabic literature. He has worked in Chinese Embassies in Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and other countries, and has served as Cultural Counselor in Israel, Director of the Chinese Cultural Center in Tel Aviv, Israel, and Director of the Asia-Africa Department of the International Exchange and Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Since 2021, he has served as Deputy Director-General of NICE, mainly responsible for international cultural exchange events for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China.

## Panel 2: Unleashing Potential: Enhancing International Cooperation to Propel Tourism Growth

Moderator



### **Wouter SCHALKEN**

Senior Sustainable Tourism Development Specialist  
Asian Development Bank

Wouter Schalken is a Senior Tourism Development Specialist. Wouter has around 28 years of experience in diverse and multi-faceted interventions in tourism market development and operations. Before joining ADB, Wouter worked for a wide variety of multi- and bilateral development agencies across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. He has designed and managed tourism support interventions across Asia, Africa, and the Middle-east that improve competitiveness by enhancing industry standards and targeting investments with linkages and synergy between public domain facilities and private enterprises as well as strengthening the enabling environment through policy and strategy formulation. Wouter is widely recognized for his demonstrated expertise in private sector tourism development in fragile and infant tourism markets and for supporting tourism planning and management system at national and local levels. His technical expertise covers facilitating private sector investments, investment in public domain tourism infrastructure, concessions, joint venture creation, promotion, and human resource development in tourism. His skills-set is completed by extensive experience in disseminating tourism insights through training, presentations, and publications.

Panelist



### **Yaying LI**

Deputy Director of the Education, Culture and Tourism Section  
ASEAN - China Centre

Mrs. Li Yaying, born in 1964 in China, is the Deputy Director of the Education, Culture and Tourism Division of the ASEAN-China Centre. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Tourism Foreign Language at Nankai University, Tianjin, China. Mrs. Li Yaying served as Director of the China's National Tourism Office in Los Angeles, Director of China's National Tourism Office in Frankfurt, Director-General of the Department of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Tourism Affairs of the National Tourism Administration of China, and Deputy Director-General of the International Exchanges and Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, contributing significantly to the exchanges and cooperation in the field of tourism.

Panelist



**Mia SIGNS**

Outreach and Advocacy Manager, Illegal Wildlife Trade  
WWF Greater Mekong

Mia Signs is the Regional Outreach and Advocacy Manager for the WWF-Greater Mekong Illegal Wildlife Trade program. Working with the WWF offices in the five countries of continental Southeast Asia - Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam - and in collaboration with public and private sector partners, Mia works with key stakeholders to identify intervention points to reduce demand and availability of illegal wildlife products. Her work targets the drivers of the trade and key influential actors in order to decrease the poaching pressures on wildlife in the wild. Illegal wildlife trade is a transnational crime which requires transnational interventions to effectively address, and in recent years, Mia has been working with colleagues in China, Thailand, Viet Nam and Cambodia to reduce the trade in elephant ivory and other illegal wildlife products facilitated by tourism.

Panelist



**Dr. Chuwit MITRCHOB**

Deputy Director-General  
Designed Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA)

Dr. Chuwit holds a Doctoral Degree of Business Administration (DBA) in Human Resource Development from Southern Cross University, New South Wales, Australia as a Royal Thai Government Scholarship student. He was posted as Counselor (Agriculture) in the diplomatic corp of the Mission of Thailand to the European Union, Royal Thai Embassy, Brussels, Belgium.

He then moved to work at the Office of National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) serving in various roles of secretariat of a number of high-ranking national committees chaired by the Prime Minister. He was appointed by the NESDB as the head of working group on drafting Thailand Strategies towards ASEAN Community and as the National Secretariat team of Thailand on such sub-regional cooperation frameworks as Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), and Mekong-Japan Economic Cooperation.

In the area of tourism, he was a member of National Tourism Policy Committee. He is now Deputy Director-General of the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) under Ministry of Tourism and Sports. He has initiated windows of cooperation between DASTA and international tourism bodies. He was a pioneer who brought the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) into the circle of sustainable tourism development in Thailand.

## Panelist



### **Veth YOUVANNEATH**

Deputy Director General of Tourism Development and International Cooperation,  
Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia

Mr. Veth Youvanneath, born in 1981 in Cambodia, is the esteemed Deputy Director General of Tourism Development and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia. With an illustrious educational background, he holds two Master's degrees, one in Accounting from Central Queensland University and another in Marketing from Victoria University, both located in Melbourne, Australia. Since 2017, Mr. Youvanneath has been serving diligently as a government official, contributing significantly to the development and international cooperation in tourism within Cambodia. He is proficient in Khmer, his native language, and English, enabling him to foster international relations and promote Cambodia's rich cultural heritage on the global stage.



## Keynote Session

Keynote Speech: "***Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel***"

by Mr. Kimi Liu XiaoZhou, CEO TripAdvisor China and Vice President of Trip.com Group



Mr. Kimi Liu XiaoZhou, VP of Trip.com and CEO of TripAdvisor China, delivered an enlightening keynote address on the transformative trends shaping the future of the travel industry. His presentation, titled "Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel," offered a deep dive into the evolving landscape of tourism, focusing on sustainability and the conscious traveler.

### **Key Highlights:**

1. **Shift Towards Sustainable and Conscious Tourism:** Mr. Liu highlighted the increasing shift towards sustainable tourism practices within the industry, emphasizing the integration of environmental consciousness into travel planning and operations. He pointed out that a significant portion of travelers are now choosing destinations and services based on their sustainability credentials.
2. **Adapting to the New Normal Post-Pandemic:** Reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Liu discussed how it has reshaped traveler priorities, with health, safety, and sustainability coming to the forefront. He showcased how Trip.com has adapted by implementing robust health protocols and enhancing digital interfaces to ensure safety and convenience for travelers.
3. **Innovative Strategies for Growth:** Exploring the strategies to thrive in this new era, Mr. Liu shared insights into Trip.com's innovative approaches, such as the development of low-carbon travel products and eco-friendly accommodations. He stressed the importance of technology in crafting personalized and environmentally responsible travel experiences.
4. **Market Shifts and Consumer Behavior:** Mr. Liu provided data on the recovery of global tourism, with particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region. He noted that while international

tourism revenues have bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, the industry must now cater to a more discerning traveler who values sustainable and culturally enriching experiences.

5. **Empowering Local Communities:** The keynote also covered Trip.com's initiatives to empower local communities through tourism. Mr. Liu discussed the company's efforts in promoting rural tourism and revitalizing local economies by integrating cultural heritage and natural conservation into travel offerings.
6. **Future Outlook:** Concluding his speech, Mr. Liu presented a visionary outlook for the travel industry, emphasizing the role of collaboration among stakeholders to foster sustainable growth. He called for continued innovation and commitment to responsible tourism practices, ensuring that the travel industry contributes positively to global and local sustainability goals.

Mr. Liu's keynote was both inspiring and instructive, providing attendees with a clear roadmap for navigating the future of travel in the Greater Mekong Subregion and beyond. His insights highlighted the importance of sustainability and adaptation in redefining travel for a post-pandemic world, making a compelling case for a more thoughtful and responsible approach to global tourism.



## Panel Session 1



### Panel Discussion 1: "Crossing Bridges, Building Connections for Cultural Integration and Prosperity"

The first panel of the Mekong Tourism Forum explored the transformative power of tourism in bridging diverse cultures across the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The session highlighted the complex aspects of cultural integration and its role in fostering strong, inclusive, and sustainable tourism, especially in the post-COVID recovery phase.

#### Key Discussion Points:

##### 1. Digital Innovation and Media Fragmentation:

- The panel discussed the impact of digital tools on tourism marketing and the phenomenon of media fragmentation. The explosion of digital platforms has diversified the ways in which destinations and experiences can be marketed to potential tourists. However, this has also led to challenges such as context collapse, where nuanced cultural messages can get lost in broad communications aimed at a global audience.

##### 2. Policy Innovations and Cultural Exchange:

- Speakers underscored the importance of policy innovations that facilitate cultural exchange and integration. These policies are pivotal in supporting sustainable tourism practices that respect local cultures and environments while promoting economic growth.

##### 3. Promoting Secondary Destinations:

- The discussion also touched on the untapped potential of secondary destinations within the GMS. Focusing on these less-traveled destinations not only helps in



distributing tourism benefits more evenly but also aids in preserving and promoting local cultures and traditions which are often overshadowed by mainstream tourist spots.

#### 4. Community Engagement and Empowerment:

- A significant part of the conversation revolved around community engagement. Panelists shared insights on how tourism can empower local communities, women, and minorities by involving them directly in tourism development projects. This approach helps ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are equitably shared.

#### 5. Ethnographic Research and Authentic Experiences:

- The importance of ethnographic research was highlighted, emphasizing deep, immersive experiences that allow tourists and locals alike to truly understand and appreciate each other's cultural nuances. Such research is crucial in designing tourism experiences that are genuinely respectful and inclusive of local cultures.

#### 6. Challenges of Integration and the Role of Technology:

- While discussing the role of technology in tourism, panelists debated the challenges of integrating digital tools in a way that enhances rather than dilutes cultural experiences. They stressed the need for technology to complement, not replace, the human elements of cultural exchange.

The panel provided fresh insights into the role of tourism as a conduit for deeper cross-cultural understanding and economic prosperity in the GMS. It emphasized that while technology and policies are crucial, the true essence of cultural integration lies in authentic human connections and respectful engagement with local traditions and communities.



## Panel Session 2



### **Panel Discussion 2 Summary: "Unleashing Potential: Enhancing International Cooperation to Propel Tourism Growth"**

This panel delved into the pivotal role of international cooperation in propelling sustainable tourism growth across the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The session underscored the essential benefits and notable challenges of regional collaboration, focusing on driving economic growth, promoting environmental sustainability, ensuring equitable distribution of tourism benefits, and facilitating seamless travel across the region.

#### **Key Points from the Discussion:**

##### **1. Economic and Political Stability through Cooperation:**

- Speakers highlighted the necessity of international cooperation for achieving economic stability and political harmony within the GMS, which in turn, enhances tourist attraction. The discussion included how initiatives like "six countries, one destination" could foster regional integration and economic benefits for all involved nations.

##### **2. Role of Development Partners and Institutional Support:**

- Development agencies, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian China Center (ACC), were recognized for their crucial contributions in supporting sustainable tourism infrastructure and capacity building. Their efforts help facilitate larger regional projects and policy harmonization, vital for the GMS's unified tourism approach.

##### **3. Sustainable Tourism Initiatives and Environmental Preservation:**

- The panel also explored sustainable tourism practices, emphasizing the importance of conserving natural and cultural resources. Organizations like the WWF shared insights on their regional campaigns, such as the Travel Ivory Free



Campaign, aimed at reducing the wildlife trade and promoting ecotourism, which are essential for maintaining biodiversity and enhancing local community livelihoods.

#### 4. Challenges and Strategic Directions for Sustainable Growth:

- The discussion acknowledged the challenges in integrating sustainability into the tourism sector, including the need for continuous collaboration and learning. Experts shared strategies for strengthening cooperation through policy harmonization and sustainable practices, aiming to ensure a prosperous and responsible future for GMS tourism.

#### 5. Future Outlook on Regional Tourism Cooperation:

- The panel was optimistic about the future of tourism in the GMS, emphasizing ongoing efforts to enhance connectivity and cooperation. The focus was on creating an integrated tourism market that not only attracts international tourists but also benefits local economies and promotes inclusive growth.

This session provided a comprehensive overview of how enhancing international cooperation can significantly propel tourism growth in the GMS, focusing on economic benefits, sustainability, and equitable development.



# Wrap-Up

By Ms Suvimol Thanasarakij, Executive Director of MTCO



Good morning again. As we conclude our sessions, I am pleased to reflect on the rich and intensive discussions we've had. Both panels have provided us with deep insights, underscoring the importance of sustainable and culturally integrated tourism.

From our discussions, it's clear that sustainable tourism is not just a preference but a necessity. Businesses are recognizing this shift; companies like Trip.com are witnessing a rise in customers who prefer services aligned with sustainability. Responding to this demand, Trip.com has introduced several initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable practices, including carbon-neutral travel programs and training for stakeholders to enhance their sustainability performance.

Cultural integration was another key theme, highlighted through powerful stories like that of Brian Linden, who uses historical properties to foster community and cultural development at the Linden Center. This approach not only preserves heritage but also empowers local communities by making them proud of their culture, encouraging them

to share their unique stories.

We also heard from a speaker from Myanmar who discussed creating meaningful experiences for youth travelers that promote deep cultural engagement. Additionally, the Network of International Cultural Link Entities (NICE) in China has been instrumental in fostering cultural integration and communication through a robust platform that supports cultural exchange.

Digital marketing's role in promoting cultural tourism was another significant point of discussion, emphasizing the need for using digital tools to effectively engage target audiences and promote cultural heritage.

In terms of international cooperation, we discussed how it enhances connectivity and inclusivity, with projects like the train from China to Laos serving as prime examples of how cross-border collaboration can lead to increased tourism and economic prosperity. Furthermore, standards set by regional cooperation, like those established by the Designated Areas of Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) of Thailand together with GMS countries, are facilitating uniformity and recognition across borders, thereby boosting regional tourism.

I hope today's insights inspire you to implement changes in your respective fields to advance sustainable and culturally rich tourism. Thank you for your engagement and thoughtful contributions.

## Closing Remarks

by Ms. Wei Niya, Vice Mayor of the People's Government of Lijiang City





# Mekong Tourism Forum Handover Ceremony

Speech by Mr. Khom Duangchantha, Head of Delegations, Director General of Tourism Marketing Department, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism of Lao PDR at the MTF Flag Handover Ceremony



His Excellency.

Distinguished Guest, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism of the Lao PDR, I am delighted and proud to lead the Lao tourism delegation to attend this Mekong Tourism Forum 2024 under the theme "Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel" the wonder of cultural heritage, well-known and outstanding tourism city Lijiang, China.

On this occasion, I would like to express our sincere thanks to the the The People's republic of China, particularly the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Yunnan Provincial Culture and Tourism Department and the People's Government of Lijiang City the committee for hosting this important event in Lijiang and the warm welcome accorded our delegation and wholeheartedly congratulate to the great success of the MTF 2024 It's a great honor of the Lao PDR to receive the MTF Flag after China in order to continue to do our best to be the host of MEKONG TOURISM FORUM 2025, which will be held from 6th to 8th May 2025, Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR. Under the theme " United Journey - Stronger Together" reflects our ambition to strengthen public-private collaboration to build prosperous, resilient, and sustainable tourism destinations. This is very meaningful and important for Lao Tourism sector. The Lao PDR will continue to work closely with GMS Member Countries, Development Partners, MTCO, International Organizations and other relevant sectors, to further enhancing tourism and strengthening efforts in the sustainable tourism development.

In conclusion, May I wish excellences, delegates, guests, ladies and gentlemen good health, prosperity and great success. Taking this opportunity, I would like to cordially invite you to visit Laos and attend Mekong Tourism Forum 2025 in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR.

Thank you.



# Field Study

On April 24, 2024, delegates of the Mekong Tourism Forum participated in an enriching half-day field study at Lijiang's Old Town. This on-site exploration provided a comprehensive look into the historical and cultural significance of the area, with a special emphasis on the innovative smart management practices that have been implemented to preserve and enhance the heritage site. Following this insightful tour, the delegates attended an exclusive exhibition at the Lijiang Municipal Museum. The exhibition showcased the seamless integration of Lijiang's cultural heritage with its burgeoning tourism industry, highlighting unique artifacts, multimedia displays, and interactive exhibits that narrated the rich history and contemporary advancements of the region. This immersive experience not only offered valuable insights into Lijiang's successful tourism strategies but also fostered a deeper appreciation of its cultural legacy.





# GMS Tourism Cooperation Photo Exhibition







## Technical Tour

On April 25, 2024, the Mekong Tourism Forum delegates enjoyed the full-day technical tour showcasing some of Lijiang's most spectacular attractions. The tour began with a visit to **Jade Dragon Snow Mountain Glacier Park**, where participants marveled at the stunning natural views. This was followed by a relaxing lunch at a local restaurant, allowing attendees to savor the local cuisine. The tour continued with the **"Impression of Lijiang" show**, an outdoor performance that vividly showcased Yunnan's ethnic cultures and natural beauty. Participants then visited the **Baisha Jinxiu Art Institute** to experience the area's rich artistic heritage. The day concluded with an exploration of the ancient **Baisha Murals**, which reflect the diverse cultural influences that have shaped the region.



# Organizers, Supporting Partners and Media Partners

- **Organizers**



- **Supporting Partners**



- **Media Partners**



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