



Organizational Options for a Regional Tourism Office

Central Asia Regional Economic
Cooperation (CAREC) Program

June 2024

Photo @ Visit Kyrgyz

Agenda



01

Understanding Regional
Tourism Offices

02

Case Study: Greater Mekong
Subregion & the Mekong
Tourism Coordinating Office
(MTCO)

03

Key Considerations &
Lessons Learned



01. Understanding Regional Tourism Offices



Photo @ Kazakhstan Travel





What is a Regional Tourism Coordinating Office?



A regional tourism office is an organization or entity established to coordinate and promote tourism activities within a specific geographical region.

Regional tourism offices serve as catalysts for collaboration, promotion, and sustainable development within their respective regions, driving economic growth, cultural exchange, investment, and environmental stewardship in the global tourism landscape.

Regional Tourism Office: Benefits and Challenges

BENEFITS

Coordination

Streamlining and maximizing tourism development initiatives by facilitating communication and collaboration.

Promotion

Raising awareness and generating interest in the region through joint marketing campaigns, promotional activities, and destination branding.

Knowledge Sharing

Authoritative source of information and best practices for travelers, tour operators, donors, investors, and other tourism stakeholders.

Capacity Building

Empower tourism professionals, officials, and communities to develop and deliver high-quality tourism products and services.

Sustainability

Advocate for responsible tourism practices, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community engagement.

CHALLENGES

Resource Constraints

Limited funding and human resources restrict the effectiveness and scope of regional tourism office activities.

Competing Interests

Complex interest and priorities alignment of member countries and stakeholders restricts effective collaboration and decision-making.

Politics

Political dynamics and conflicts may impact the autonomy and neutrality of the regional tourism office.

Overlapping Mandates

Duplication of efforts and conflicting mandates with other tourism organizations or government agencies creates inefficiencies and diffused focus.

Photo @ Visit Kyrgyz



Regional Tourism Models: Single Organization



SINGLE OFFICE

A centralized body responsible for coordinating tourism activities across the region. This model involves one main organization that oversees and manages tourism initiatives, policies, and marketing efforts.

Advantages



Efficiency

Streamlined decision-making and implementation processes.



Consistency

Uniform standards and policies across the region.



Branding

Strong, cohesive regional branding and marketing efforts.

Disadvantages



Bureaucracy

Potential for slower response times due to centralized control.



Broad-focus

Difficult to create relevant programs for all members.

Regional Tourism Models: **Single Organization**



Entities

Associations, INGOs, Non-profits

Grouping

Geography

Activities

Research, Trade Shows, Networking, Advocacy, Capacity Development

Membership

Government (*national, state/province, municipal*)
Private Sector (*corporations to SMEs*)

Secretariat

Act as regional secretariat



Caribbean Tourism Organization



Regional Tourism Models: Clusters



CLUSTERS

Network of multiple organizations working collaboratively to achieve common tourism goals. May be organized by geographic, political, economic, or thematic reasons. This model involves several entities working together under a coordinated framework.

Advantages



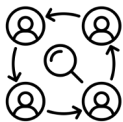
Flexibility

Ability to tailor strategies to local conditions and needs.



Innovation

Diverse perspectives and expertise can foster innovative solutions.



Resource Sharing

Pooling of resources and expertise from various organizations.

Disadvantages



Coordination

Additional fragmentation and challenges in aligning goals.



Consistency

Variability in standards and policies across different organizations.



Conflict

Risk of conflicts and competition among member organizations (*ex: trade shows, funding applications*).

Regional Tourism Models: Sub-ASEAN Clusters



Type

ASEAN Sub-regional clusters

Membership

Geography & Development needs

Funding sources

Member countries, donor support

Multi-faceted Pillars

Connectivity; Environment/Climate; Agriculture; Tourism; Environment; Digital transformation; Human Resource Development; and Socio-Cultural and Education.

Tourism Mechanism

Cluster on Joint Tourism Development (JTD); **Working Group on Tourism (WGT)**

Funded secretariat

BIMP-EAGA Facilitation Center (FC); Center for IMT-GT Sub Regional Cooperation (CIMT)

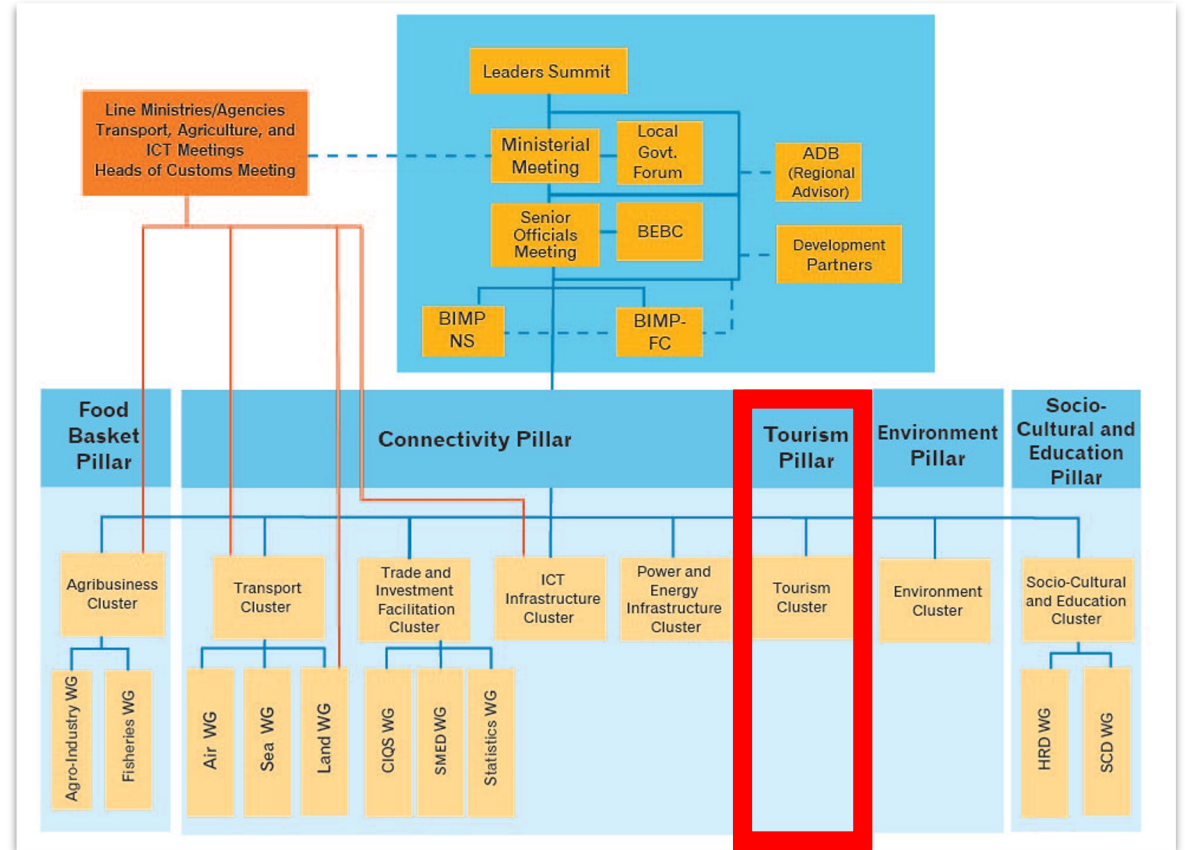
Activities

Dialogues, priority project coordination, and preparation.

Regional Tourism Models: Clusters

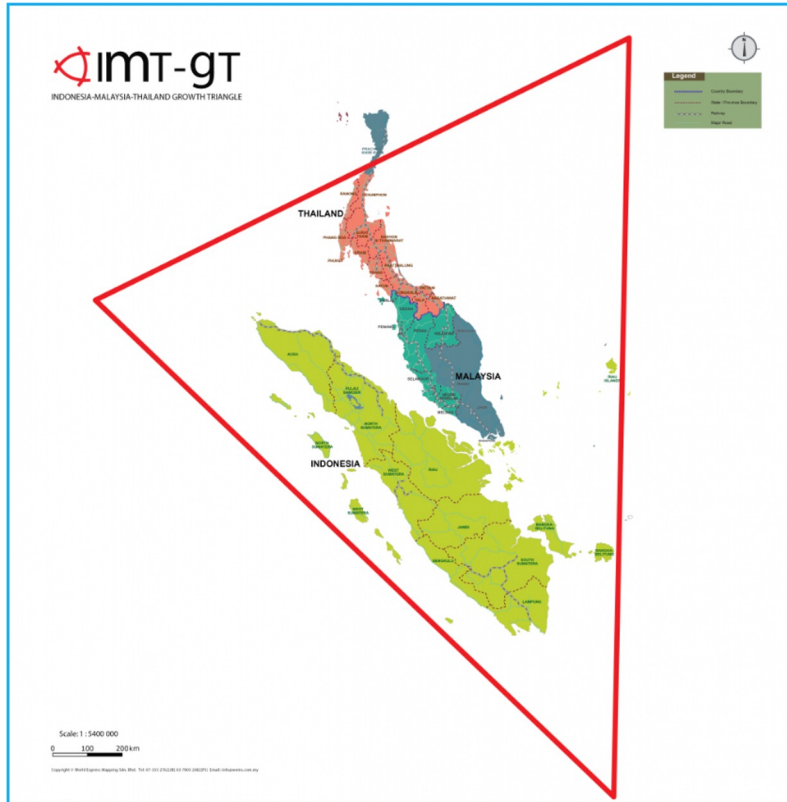


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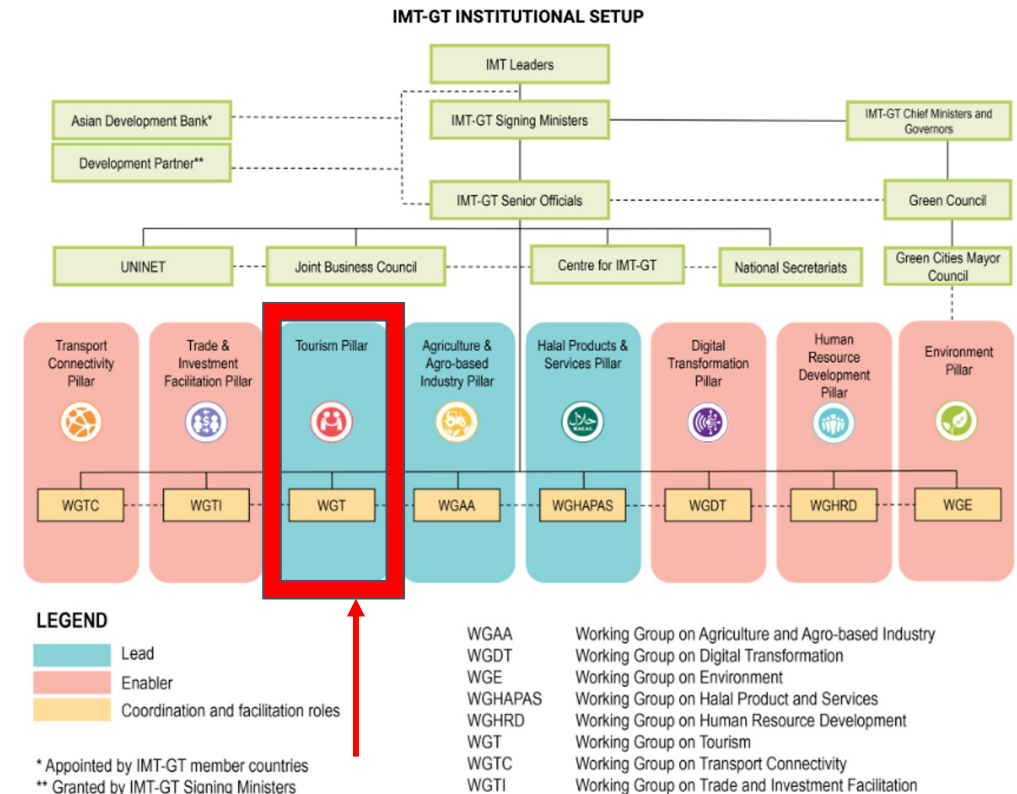


Source: [BIMP-EAGA](#)

Regional Tourism Models: Clusters



Source: [IMT-GT](#)



Source: [IMT-GT Institutional Set Up](#)

Regional Tourism Models: Clusters



Tourism Working Groups

Group members from each country

Chair / co-chair structure

Role & Responsibilities

- Policy Development
- Marketing and Promotion
- Capacity Building
- Sustainability



Key Activities

- Annual Meetings
- Joint Campaigns
- Infrastructure Investment Coordination

Self-funded

- Event hosting
- Travel

Donor support upon request



02. Case Study: Greater Mekong Subregion & the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO)



Photo @ Azerbaijan Travel



Case Study II: The Greater Mekong Subregion

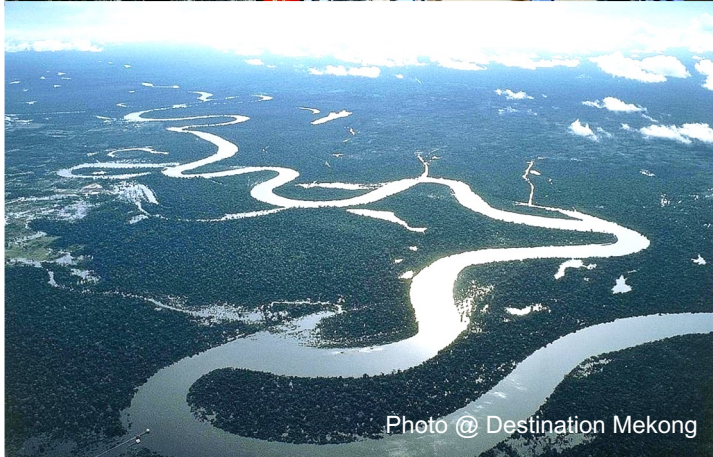


Photo @ Destination Mekong

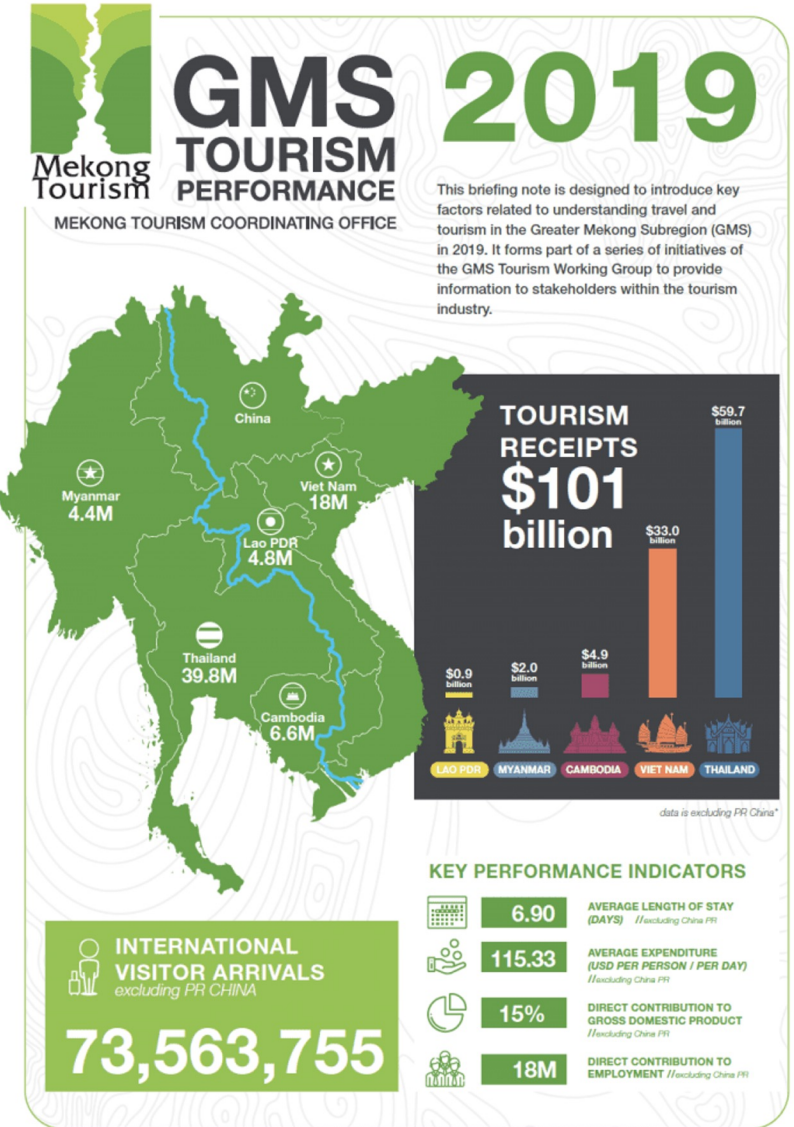
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Countries sharing a major natural asset

52 million

Visitor arrivals in 2023

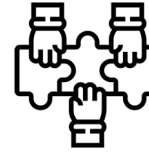
Mekong River is 4,900km. It plays a significant role in the region's history, economy, and culture.



Greater Mekong Subregion: Collaboration



FOUNDED
1992



PILLARS
“3 C’s” of Cooperation

- Connectivity
- Competitiveness
- Community



Greater
Mekong
Subregion

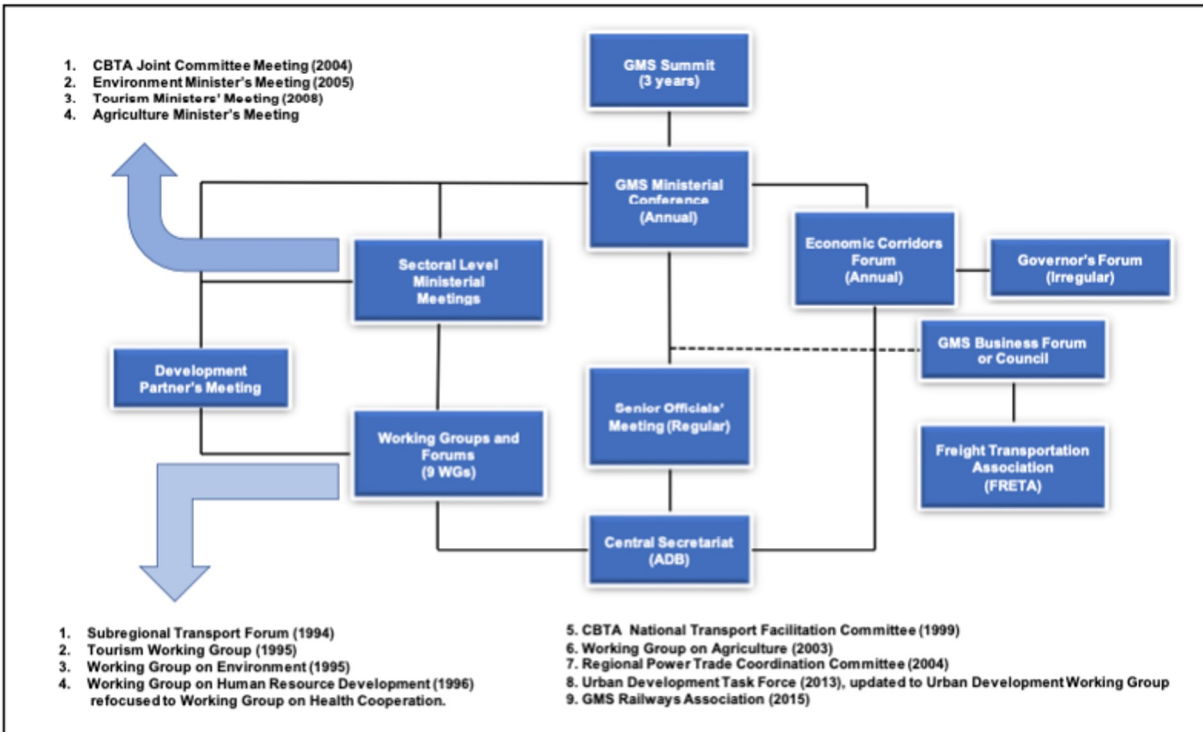


FUNDING SOURCES
Member countries
Asian Development Bank
Donors



TOURISM MECHANISM
Tourism Working Group (TWG)
Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office

Greater Mekong Subregion: Operational Structure



- **Three layers of decision making:**
 - The GMS Summit of national leaders of the six member countries;
 - The GMS Ministerial Conference that supports the GMS Summit guiding strategic matters of the GMS Program; and
 - Senior Official Meetings.
- Sector level ministerial meetings and councils, including forums and working groups.
- ADB performs the function of the GMS Central Secretariat and serves as a financier, honest broker, and technical advisor.

ADB = Asian Development Bank, CBTA = Cross Border Transport Agreement, GMS = greater Mekong subregion.

Source: Independent Evaluation Department evaluation team construction based on information provided by the GMS Secretariat.



Source: ADB: Evaluation of ADB Support for the Greater Mekong Subregion Program, 2012–2020

Greater Mekong Subregion: **Tourism Working Group**

Members

Senior officials from each GMS national tourism organization.

Meets minimum 2X annually to

- Set GMS Tourism Working Group and Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office implementation priorities;
- Endorse annual work plan and budget;
- Coordinate with other subregional working groups and multilateral cooperation mechanisms;
- Maintain relations with development partners;
- Monitor strategic program and project results; and
- Prepare progress reports to the GMS tourism ministers and GMS national secretariats.

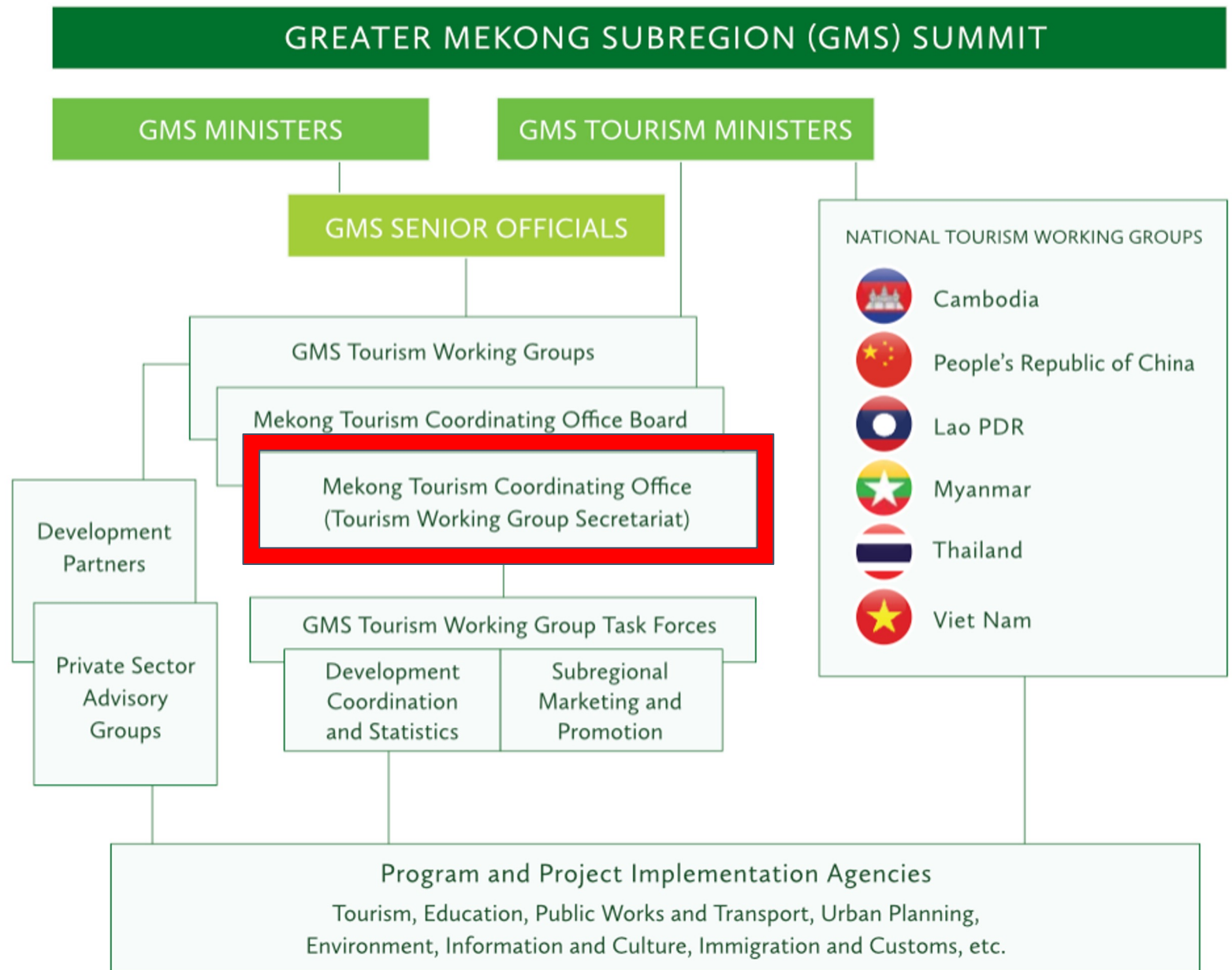
Self-funded since 2006

- Hosted on rotating basis (alphabetical)
- Host pays for the event, countries pay own expenses
- Development partners participate
- Sideline meetings are about projects and priorities



Photo @ Flickr

GMS Tourism Cooperation Organizational Framework



Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO)



- 2006 - 16th meeting of the **GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG)**
- Last meeting funded by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and ADB
- Countries had to decide how to carry forward tourism cooperation
- Currently ratifying “**Agreement on the Establishment of the MTCO**” as an international organization
- Known as the **Siem Reap Declaration on Mekong Tourism**
 - Members agreed to self-fund enhanced tourism implementation mechanism known as the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO)
 - Initialization budget (2 years) for office set up and marketing: \$250,000
 - Operating cost including salaries for Executive Director, Program Manager and Secretary: \$15,000 per country per year (\$90,000 total per year)
 - The **Department of Tourism under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand** agreed to host the office in Bangkok.

MTCO Roles & Responsibilities



Secretariat for the GMS Tourism Working Group, the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office board, and the Mekong Tourism Forum

Lead the development and promotion of the GMS as a **single tourism destination** in collaboration with the public and private sectors

Mobilize resources to effectively implement the **GMS Tourism Sector Strategy (TSS)** and related programs

Represent the GMS countries at travel trade events, conferences, seminars, and other tourism-related meetings;

Ownership and responsibility for the www.mekongtourism.org website.

Greater Mekong Subregion: Mekong Tourism Forum



MEKONG TOURISM FORUM 2024
"Visionary Journeys Redefining Tomorrow's Travel"

Lijiang, China 23-25 April 2024

IN PERSON EVENT

REGISTER NOW



MEKONG TOURISM FORUM 2023
Under the theme "Rethinking for Resilience and Digitalization"
24th - 28th April 2023, Preah Sihanouk Province, Cambodia

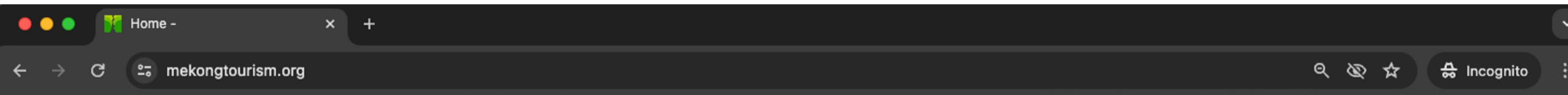


MEKONG TOURISM FORUM
Rebuild Tourism...Rebound with Resilience
12th October 2022 QUANG NAM, VIET NAM

Register Now
www.mekongtourismforum.org
info@mekongtourism-ritco.org
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GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016-2025





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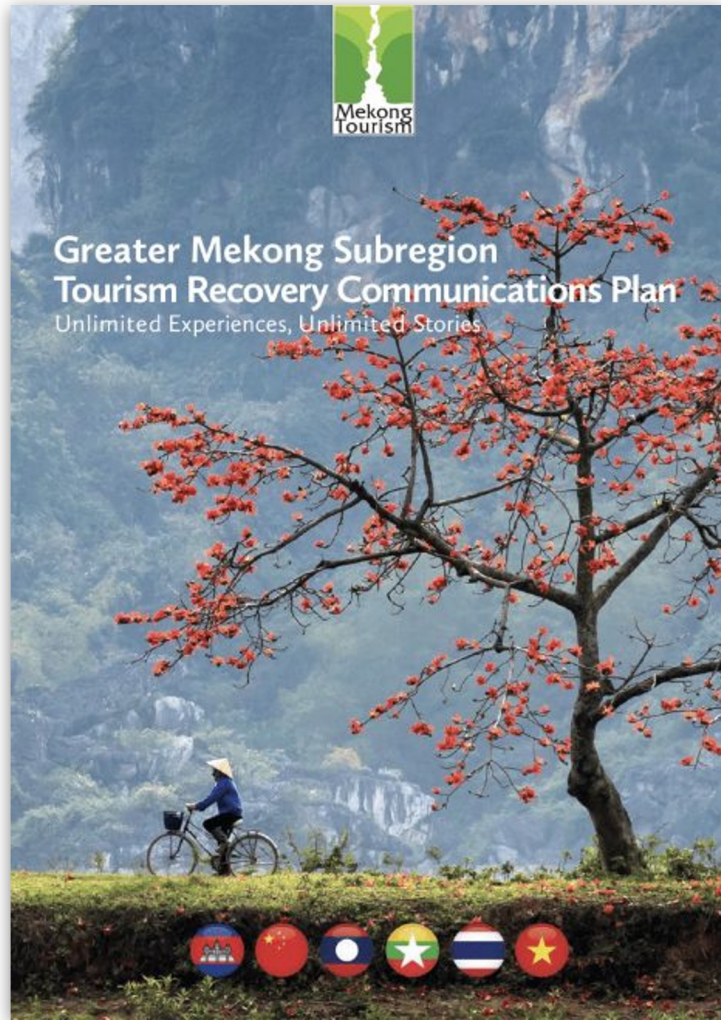
Welcome to the Official Website of Mekong Tourism

Managed by the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) encompasses Cambodia, Guangxi and Yunnan Provinces in China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Notable for their hospitable people, flavorful cuisine, and colorful diversity, these six nations serve up a wealth of encounters for travelers, covering culture, landscape, people, flora and fauna, food, handicrafts, entertainment, shopping, recreation and excitement.

Even as each country in the GMS offers its own unique experience, the region is collectively a single world-class destination, with multi-country travel adventures which you will cherish for the rest of your life.

MTCO Publications & Toolkits



MTCO Successful Programs



- 2017 - 2021, implemented by MTCO
- Promote **Sustainable Tourism**
- Foster Innovation
- Enhance Investment
- Private Sector Engagement
- Rated “**Highly Successful**” by program evaluators as it involved “**significant private sector participation.**”



BambooLao Wins 2018 Mekong Travel Startup Challenge

A reusable bamboo straw producer from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) beat 111 entrants from across Southeast Asia to take the top prize in the 2018 Mekong Innovative Startups in Tourism (MIST) challenge.

GMS Tourism Results



10% of ADB GMS investment made into tourism



TA projects in tourism assessed **SUCCESSFUL**



Cross-border infrastructure investments



03.

Key Considerations & Lessons Learned



Photo @ Pakistan Tourism



Considerations



Regional tourism reached a **critical mass** necessitating cross-border cooperation.

Secretariat **Executive Director** continuity

Ministry staff continuity is important

Use **secondary destinations for summits** to drive destination investment

Development partner continuity is important

Always provide space for and facilitate side meetings

Key Lessons



01

Coordinated regional tourism cooperation yields significant economic and infrastructure returns.

02

Cooperation can start small with minimum inputs per country and scale over time.

03

Cooperation can be led by a Tourism Working Group. Countries may establish secretariat hosted by a member country.

Thank You.

Trevor Weltman

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 www.clickableasia.com