Thematic Marketing and Branding: Harnessing the Ancient Silk Road

Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program

May 2024

Photo @ Uzbekistan Travel

Trevor Weltman is Partner at Clickable Impact Consulting Group, an interdisciplinary consultancy focused on the Sustainable Development Goals.

At Clickable Impact, Trevor leads the sustainable tourism development, private sector engagement, and partnerships practice groups. Trevor is the immediate past Chief of Staff of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), where he oversaw the day-to-day operations of the association across its three offices in Bangkok, Beijing, and London. Trevor has over a decade of experience in Asia, spanning the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Trevor is currently the International Smart Tourism Ecosystem Specialist engaged under Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Southeast Asia Sustainable Tourism Facility TA-6899. Trevor leads smart tourism projects in six countries, and his recent publication for the ADB is titled _Smart Tourism Ecosystem Development Readiness in Southeast Asia_ (April 2024).

Agenda

01

Benefits & Challenges of Regional Thematic Marketing and Branding

02

Case Studies - Regional Cooperation for Destination Branding

03

Step-by-Step Strategy for Coordinated Development of Regional Thematic Circuits

01. Benefits & Challenges of Regional Thematic Marketing and Branding

Photo @ Azerbaijan Travel

Evolution of **Thematic Travel**

Heritage Tourism
Visit and observe

Outdoor
Hiking Mountaineering

1970

Cultural Tourism
Observe and experience

1980

Winter and Water Sports
4x4 Driving, Hiking and Biking

Creative Tourism
Observe Experience Participate Interact

1990

Active - mainstream
Wider choices
New activities

Genuine Travel Immersive and Authentic
Learning and Growth Life-changing
Bespoke

2000

Soft and hard
Sustainable, Nature based
Cultural, Learning

TODAY

Experiential Travel

Transformational Travel

Adventure, Ecotourism, Rural Tourism, Agritourism, Culinary Tourism, Wine Tourism, Adventure Gastronomy, Local living, Expeditions, Voluntourism, Conservation Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, Birdwatching, Arts and Music Tourism, Edutainment Tourism, Adventure Racing, Sailing, Scuba, Paragliding, Mountain Biking, Survival Training, etc.

Creating a shared regional brand: Goals

- Establish **accurate source market audience segments**, with a detailed understanding of the different kinds travelers who may be interested in experiencing thematic travel to the region.

- Drive cooperation and **strategic alignment between the national tourism strategies** for shared tourism development **and local destination marketing organisations (DMOs)** controlling key sites.

- Drive **cooperation between destinations and trade** in same and other regional countries.

- Create and launch a **centralized repository of travel products and content within the region**, to streamline marketing efforts and drive awareness of new and existing circuits.

- **Trains** relevant government and trade stakeholders in these new strategic marketing and communications approaches so they **understand how to position new thematic routes to trade and consumers**.

Regional Thematic Branding & Marketing

Benefits

Enhanced Attractiveness
Well-defined themes can make regions more appealing to tourists, investors, and residents by highlighting unique characteristics and attractions for targeted domestic and international visitors.

Cross-Sector Collaboration
Strong regional themes can foster innovation and incentivise resource sharing between public and private tourism actors.

Community Pride and Identity
Strong regional brands can foster a sense of pride among local residents and enhance community identity.

Sustainability
Focusing on unique cultural, historical, or natural resources, thematic marketing can promote sustainable tourism practices and long-term thinking.

Challenges

Market Resonance
Regional themes must differentiate from others **and** resonate well with target audiences, while not overshadowing individual brands.

Intensive Collaboration with Long-Term Commitment
May require local, regional, and international governments, businesses, and community groups to work together. Must sustain momentum through changing economic climates and leadership.

Resource Gaps
Smaller actors may struggle to meet commitments or take advantage of the initiative, while larger actors may feel disincentivized to participate.

Maintaining Authenticity
Over-commercialization of cultural elements can backfire.They can lose their authenticity and create negative visitor perceptions.

Connectivity and Visa Harmonization
Poor road and air connectivity coupled with conflicting visa requirements disincentivize businesses from creating and visitors from taking cross-border journeys.

E-Visa Facilitation Checklist

Website Visibility

Does your official e-visa site show up as the top result for basic Google searches? Does it state it is the official website? Does the URL include [e-visa], [government domain], and [country domain]?

Website Navigation

Does it clearly present menus and instructions? Is it mobile friendly? Is the application available in other languages beside English and Chinese?

Clear Information

Is there a country selection/visa type drop down menu? Are the visa prices, payment options, permitted length of stay, processing times, required documents, and ports of entry communicated before beginning the application? Does the applicant receive an email confirming submission and expected processing date immediately after applying?

02. **Case Studies**

Photo @ Go Tajikistan

Case Study I: East African Community (EAC)

- Founded in **1999**
- **8** member countries
- Tourism Arrivals (millions):

Year	Arrivals (millions)
2022	5.8
2024 (projected)	7
2025 (projected)	14
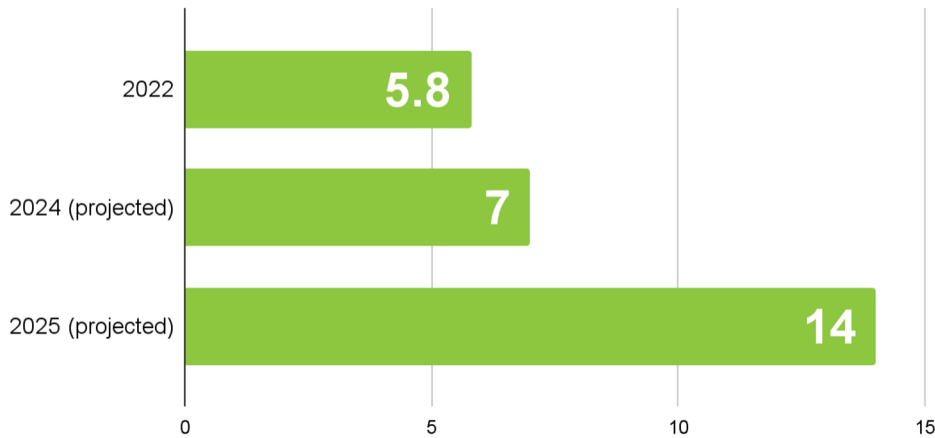
- Tourism Impacts

7% total export earnings

10% GDP

7% of jobs

Numerous Global Attractions

Lake Victoria

Serengeti National Park

Volcanoes National Park

Maasai Mara National Reserve

Mt. Kilimanjaro

Photo @ Wikipedia

Case Study I: EAC "Feel the Vibe" Campaign

Concept:
Position EAC as a single destination and investment hub

Solution:
A unified brand:
"Visit East Africa – Feel the Vibe"

Process
- Develop multi-destination thematic tourism packages that encourage visiting more than one EAC Partner State in a single trip
- Increase connectivity and visa harmonization**

VISIT EAST AFRICA FEEL THE VIBE

Photo @ East African Community

ADB CAREC

Case Study I: East African Single Tourist Visa (STV)

Concept:

Allow visitors to visit EAC member countries without needing to acquire separate Visas

Solution:

$100 single e-visa

How it works:

- Currently adopted by Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda
- Visitors apply on the e-visa page of their arrival country and receive confirmation over email
- Valid for 90 days

Photo @ Gorilla Tours to Rwanda, Uganda & Congo

Photo @ All Uganda Safaris

Case Study I: East African Single Tourist Visa (STV)

Tour

Uganda Tour, Rwanda & Kenya

ADVENTURESABROAD since 1987

- 3 countries
- $13,990+, 21 Days, 10 major attractions

Tour

Kenya & Uganda Gorilla Overland: Forests & Wildlife Spotting

Hoi An Express
Expressions Of Indochina

- 2 countries
- $4,037,064, 15 days, 8 major attractions

Case Study II: The Greater Mekong Subregion

- **6** Countries sharing a major natural asset
- The Mekong River is 4,900km and plays a significant role in the region's history, economy, and culture.
- **52 million** visitor arrivals in 2023
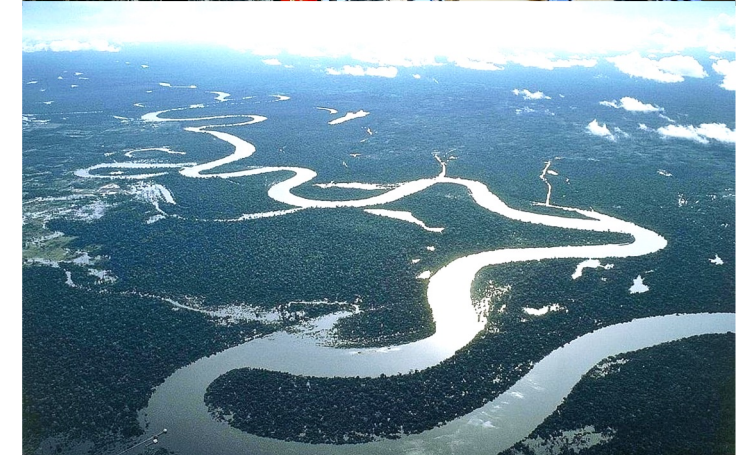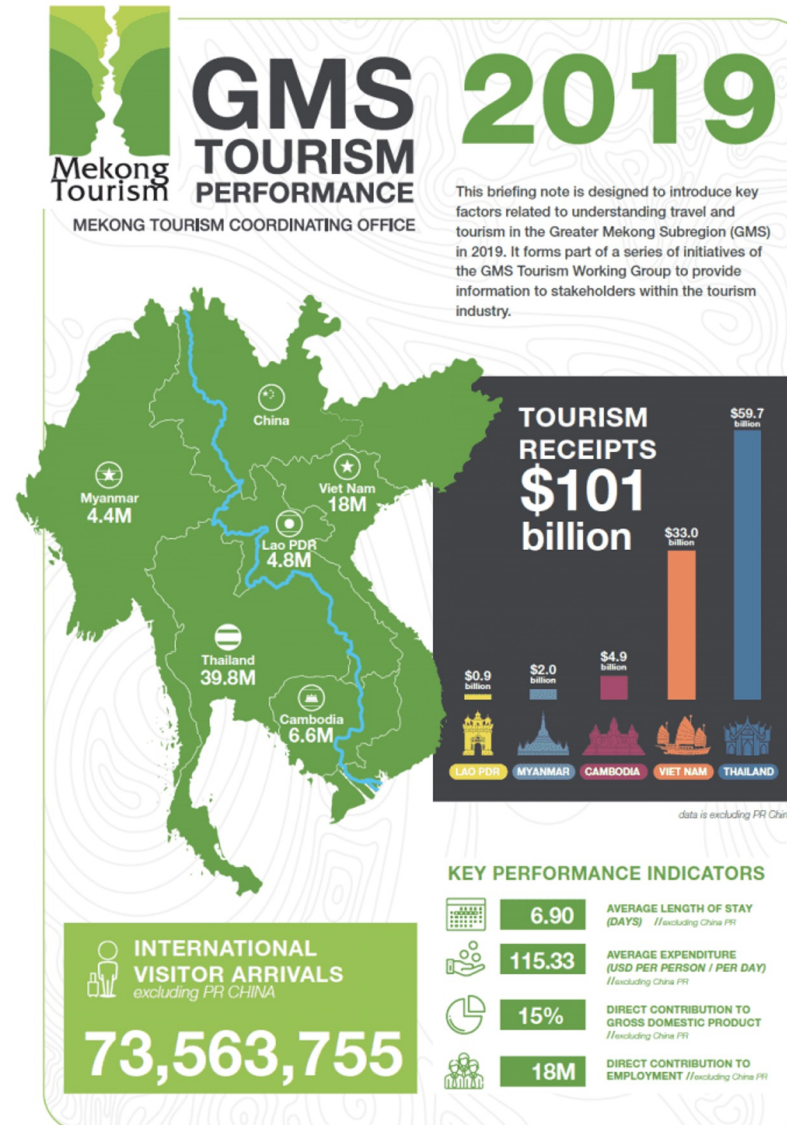

Photo @ Destination Mekong

Case Study II: Cross-Border Product Examples

Cruise

Magnificent Mekong
VIKING

- Vietnam and Cambodia
- $7,499, 15 Days, 16 Guided Tours

Cruise

Fascinating Vietnam, Cambodia & The Mekong River
AVALON WATERWAYS

- Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand
- $5,064, 13 Days, 7 cities

Case Study II: Cross-Border Product Examples

Tour

Thailand, Laos & Vietnam

INDOCHINA ODYSSEY TOURS
Sub-Brand of Odynovo

- 3 countries
- $6,000+, 20 Days, 12 major attractions

Tour

21 days Thailand, Laos, Vietnam & Cambodia

Hoi An Express
Expressions Of Indochina

- 4 countries
- $5,064, 13 Days, 7 cities

ADB   CAREC

Mekong Region Brand Challenges

Visa harmonization for non-ASEAN visitors

No shared language

Diverse local cultures and identities

Diverse products and experiences

Photo @ Unsplash

ADB CAREC

Case Study: #MekongMoments

Organization:
Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office

Concept:
Use technology to capture diversity of experiences under one unified campaign: #MekongMoments

Solution:
Aggregate user generated content (UGC) to drive traffic to local experiences

How it works:
- Businesses encourage guests, staff, and stakeholders to share their experiences via their own social media accounts by tagging #MekongMoments and the respective hashtag of the experience
- The user-generated content is aggregated to MekongMoments.com and directs traffic to the respective websites of the experiences and businesses.
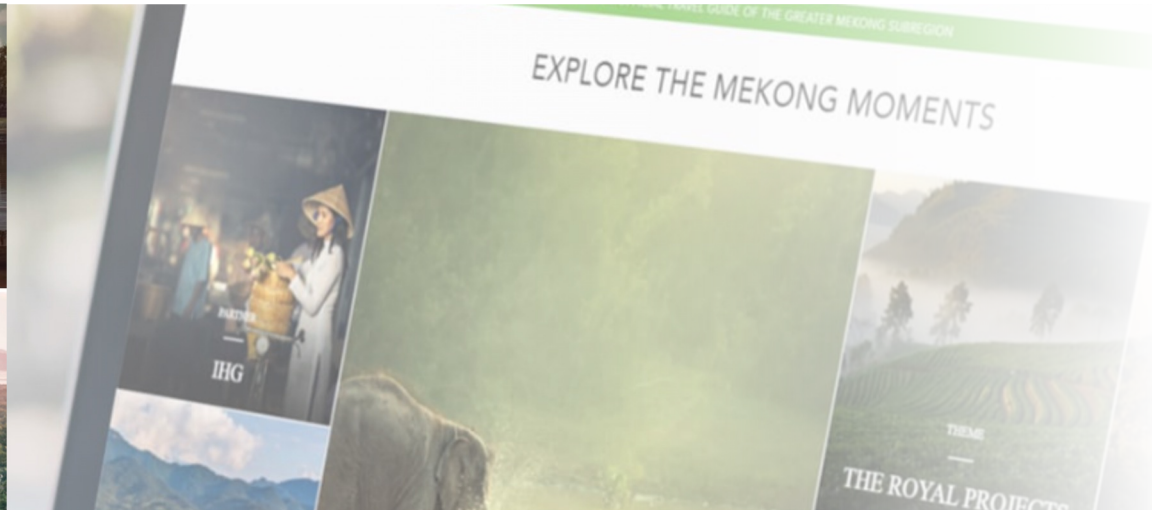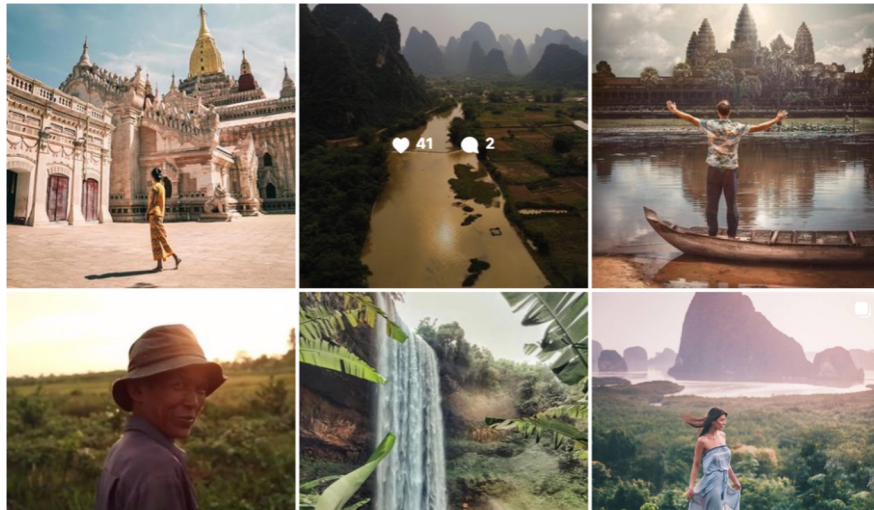
ONE
FLAMING-HOT
#MEKONG
MOMENT

firejuggler

Case Study: #MekongMoments

Photo @ Unsplash

Principles:

- Experience driven and supported by digital platforms
- Complementary or "light-weight" branding - enhances existing initiatives, not overpower them
- Limited stakeholder input with strong stakeholder impact

Results:

7,800
Experiences

30,000
Moments posted

30 million
Reach

The Golden City Gate - Tourism Multimedia Award (ITB Berlin)

Step-by-Step Strategy for Coordinated Development of Regional Thematic Circuits

Photo @ Welcome to Mongolia

Process Outcomes

01

A fully mapped and defined series of tourism circuits with supportive path-to-purchase (P2P) models defining products, channels and markets.

02

From this, a plan to 'communitize' the region by creating shared cooperative resources, events and training to support the marketing and enablement of regional travel.*

Creating a thematic regional circuit: Step-by-Step

Step 6: Familiarization Trip to the Region

Step 5: Development of central Online Hub

Step 4: Training towards Cooperative Communitization

Step 3: Develop Strategic Communications Plan

Step 2: Content Audit, Content Aggregation and Content Management Plan
- Content Audit for the Circuit with Gap Analysis
- List of Prioritized B2B Partners from across the region
- List of Prioritized Content requirements

Step 1: Market, Product, and Channel Audit
- **Market Research using sourced International Data and Trends**
- Product Audit
- Complete Circuit Map
- Prioritized List of Partners/Trade on the circuit
- Channel Audit for Travel to the circuit
- Create detailed Path to Purchase (P2P)
- **From all inputs refine theme/brand concept**

Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program

ADB   CAREC

INTERNAL. This information is accessible to ADB Management and staff. It may be shared outside ADB with appropriate permission.

Summary

Key Points

01

Cultural and heritage themes need to be grounded in experiential and transformation products to meet the demands and expectations of modern consumers.

02

Connectivity and visa facilitation considerations form the foundation of regional cross-border thematic and branding development.

03

Map tourism circuits with supportive path-to-purchase (P2P) models that define product, channels and markets to drive cross-border thematic collaboration.

Thank You.

Trevor Weltman
Partner, Clickable Impact

✉ trevor.weltman@clickableasia.com

🌐 www.clickableasia.com

Photo @ Georgia Travel