



UNWTO/Chimelong Sub-regional Capacity Building Workshop on Sustainable Tourism & Biodiversity Conservation for the Mekong Sub-region Member States

Pakse, Lao PDR
19-21 February 2019

Concept Note

BACKGROUND

The Mekong River is a trans-boundary river in Southeast Asia that runs through six countries. Measuring 4,350 km in length, it is the world's 12th longest river and the 7th longest in Asia. River- and eco-based tourism along the Mekong is an emerging activity with significant potential for growth and impact on people's livelihoods. Tourists are attracted to major cultural attractions located on or near the river, and in particular to the river's natural assets including freshwater dolphins, wetlands, and birds.

The sustainable development of tourism along the Mekong will depend, on the one hand, on the success to market river- and eco-based attractions among regional and international tourists, and, on the other hand, on the capacity to maintain and improve the quality of the tourism products and enhance client satisfaction. An essential aspect to develop quality tourism products is to pay high attention to the sensitive ecosystem, biodiversity conservation and environmental protection along the Mekong River.

Tourism can significantly contribute to environmental protection, conservation and restoration of biological diversity and sustainable use of natural resources. Because of their attractiveness, pristine sites and natural areas are identified as valuable and the need to keep the attraction alive can lead to creation of wildlife reserves and national parks.

The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) is comprised of Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Guangxi), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. In recognition of the substantial contribution that tourism can make to poverty reduction, sustainable development, and inclusive economic growth, sub-regional tourism cooperation has been included as a flagship component in the GMS Economic Cooperation Programme since its inception in 1992.

OBJECTIVES

Within the above context, the aim of the Workshop is to raise awareness among local tourism stakeholders and the communities of the importance of biodiversity conservation along the Mekong and how to address environmental issues while undertaking tourism activities.

The Workshop will motivate local tourism employees and communities to act as champions of biodiversity conservation and environmental protection along the Mekong, which will help ensure sustained income generation for the local people as a result of tourism activities.

The key objectives of the Workshop are:

- To analyse in a participatory manner the main threats to biodiversity and the environment along the Mekong, in particular those threats caused by activities of local people or enterprises.
- To provide guidance to local people that are (self-) employed in the tourism sector on how to act as champions for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection in their communities.
- To provide guidance to tourism employees on how to contribute to environmental management (making optimal use of scarce natural resources) and waste management in their enterprises.

METHODOLOGY

The Workshop will build on successful seminars on tourism and biodiversity that UNWTO delivered in Gambia, Ghana and Tanzania in 2013 and 2014, as well as more recently in West and Central Africa in 2017. It will address the biodiversity conservation and environmental protection as an integral part of sustainable tourism development, taking into account the importance of this topic to safeguard future opportunities for local people to generate income from sustainable tourism development. For the delivery of the Workshop, UNWTO in consultation with LNTA, will first identify international expert/s and a national trainer with experience on tourism and biodiversity conservation, and subsequently deliver the Workshop to officials of local tourism administrations and local tourism employees in order to motivate them to act as champions for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection in their enterprise and community.

The Workshop will be delivered in an interactive manner, with field exercises in the destination to identify environmental issues to be addressed and a final assignment for the participants to prepare action plans with initiatives they can take in their destination to help protect the environment and conserve biodiversity.

Based on the deliberations at the Workshop and the action plans prepared, recommendations will be provided to monitor the outcome and impact of the training, in particular to monitor how the training has motivated local employees to act as champions for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection, and how this has led to reduced pressure on the natural environment in the destination.

PARTICIPANTS

The Workshop will be attended by tourism officials at the local and provincial level, and selected local people who are (self-)employed in the tourism sector. Representatives from the national tourism administrations of the GMS Countries will be invited to the Workshop, especially to share experiences on this new training initiative and explore opportunities to replicate the Workshop in their countries.