

New E-Guide Makes Responsible Travel in Mekong Region Easy



A new online guide shows you how to have a great holiday using boutique hotels, guest houses, restaurants, shops and tour operators that all build positive change throughout Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and the Guangxi and Yunnan provinces of China.

A new online e-guide, describes over 185 responsible holiday activities in the Mekong river region of Southeast Asia.

Only responsible tourism operators and suppliers have been included in the website

The aim of the guide is to boost demand for the many responsible businesses in the Mekong region that now cater to all budgets and types of holidaymakers. The second objective is to foster more responsible tourism practices among travellers and the travel industry.

The guide complements other guides, but offers a different angle. Each country profile focuses on cultural and natural heritage sites. The site also includes sections on what to do, where to stay, where to shop, and where to eat.

Visitors to the site will find many cultural and environmental tips that are unique to the people and cultures of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and the Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of southwest China.

Google Maps allow tourists to browse a town or province for responsible activities so they know where to go. The map icons show exact locations for active tours, homestays, nature discoveries, art and culture venues, body and mind healing services, as well as places to stay, eat and shop.

"This is an outstanding guide to a fascinating region," says Professor Geoffrey Lipman, Director, greenearth.travel. "It's an easy read, full of valuable insights and guidance. Readers will find this site an invaluable resource on what to do, as well as how to do it in a way that lets visitors and hosts reap the benefits in a mutually enjoyable way."

The e-guide helps both tourists and Mekong region suppliers foster more responsible tourism practices, with many cultural and environmental tips that are unique to the people and cultures of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and the Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of southern China.

Profiles of 20 responsible tour operators are included. "We are confident the e-guide will provide travellers with information to help them make informed decisions on how they can contribute towards poverty alleviation, the cultural revival of skills and traditions, the protection of unique ecosystems, and the conservation of cultural heritage," says Louise Nathan, a senior manager at Exotissimo Travel in Bangkok. "It's a fantastic tool for the overall promotion of the Mekong region," she says.

The selection process for inclusion is described on the site. An internal scoring system rated how

each applicant complied with social, cultural and environmental sustainability. The business's efforts to increase guests' awareness of how they could best contribute to local communities and minimise any negative impacts were part of the rating process.

Each activity has been screened so that it is consistent with the 2002 Cape Town Declaration on responsible tourism.

While activities cannot be booked on mekongresponsibletourism.org, the site does list full contact information for each activity. Each entry has a comment zone where tourists can share their opinions and questions before, during or after the experience.

PDF icons make it easy to print out specific activities and sections. A downloadable PDF version is currently being developed. Booklets for each country will also be designed in PDF that can be printed out as a book. There are also plans to create a version of the website for mobile devices and also a French language version.

"The e-guide profiles a wide range of operators and suppliers who are committed to making the Mekong region a better place for inhabitants to live in and for tourists to visit," says Christine Jacquemin, Project Coordinator for the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office, which produced the guide with French government support.

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