

**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to increase knowledge, understanding of potential, competitive advantage and capacity of the tourism sector in the Mekong Region, so that tourism income can be maximized while possible negative impacts can be mitigated; to create a forum for discussion, exchange of information and experience; to enhance the research capacity of researchers from national tourism organizations, from the academia and from the private sectors in the sub region, and to create useful information which could support tourism policy-making. The Mekong Region is defined to include Lao PDR., Cambodia and Thailand.

An introduction to the Project begins the report followed by a background paper concerning relations among the three countries under study, which clearly itemizes the degree by which the three countries have cooperated, and plan to continue to cooperate, to enhance movement across their borders, and to encourage tourism in many aspects in all three countries.

A report on tourism forecasts for the next five years for Lao PDR, Cambodia and Thailand are next. These interesting forecasts are followed by an analysis of the comparative advantages in tourism of the three countries.

Tourism in Thailand suffered a set back in 2003 due to the outbreak of SARS, and the next study examines how the impact affected the market, in order that lessons could be learned to lessen the impact in Thailand, as well as neighboring countries, if another crisis of this kind happens in the future.

Following are studies on community-based tourism in the three countries. Researchers in Lao PDR looked at three areas where community-based tourism is practiced and identified strengths and weaknesses of the practice. In Cambodia, researchers endeavored to identify best practices for community-based tourism development of three selected case studies. In Thailand, the researchers looked at seven areas indicating good practice in tourism management. Following are studies on income distribution in community-based tourism from Thailand. The results of the studies showed that tourism had contributed to a more unequal distribution of income.