



# Foreword

The tourism sector is a major contributor to the socioeconomic development of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). For this reason, the GMS Ministers include tourism as one of the flagship programs of the ten-year GMS strategic framework. The framework envisions a future where the vast potential of the subregion is fulfilled, people are freed from poverty, and sustainable development provides opportunities for all.

If managed strategically, tourism has the potential to generate jobs and economic benefits for people across the subregion. Managing strategically means ensuring that the benefits of tourism are more equitably distributed among countries and, especially, to the poor. It also means minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on the subregion's cultural and natural heritage, on the environment, and on society as a whole. If these challenges are met, the tourism sector will increasingly contribute to the GMS vision, and help GMS countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

It is within this context that the GMS countries requested the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in preparing a strategy to address key challenges in the tourism sector. This strategy is the result of the work of the six GMS countries, the private sector, nongovernment organizations, and development partners. ADB is pleased to have supported development of the strategy and looks forward to working with all partners to implement it.

The strategy envisions the GMS as a single destination, with a strong focus on culture, nature, and adventure. It is hoped that the strategy will inspire not only governments of the subregion, but all stakeholders, particularly in the tourism industry, to develop a truly unique Mekong brand of tourism – a brand that will showcase the subregion's incomparable beauty, diversity, and spirit, and bring its people a better quality of life.



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