MEKONG RIVER RACE & CANOE TRAIL - DEVELOP COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM & ASSIST IN CONSERVATION OF THE ICONIC MEKONG RIVER DOLPHIN

ICCDT & 6th ASEAN TOURISM INVESTMENT FORUM (ATIF) Sofitel Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Sept 16/17 2014

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ICCDT & 6th ATIF - MEKONG RIVER RACE & CANOE TRAIL – Dr Gayle Mayes

Contents of the presentation

1. WHO? Introduction and background - Dr Gayle Mayes
   .... Relationship with Cambodian Ministry of Tourism

2. WHAT? WHERE? Recommendations and the way forward

3. WHY? Aims and objectives of the event

4. HOW? Seeking partnership and plan to run the pilot for race & event

MEKONG RIVER RACE & EXTENDED CANOE TRAIL = COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM

» ... CANOE FOR CONSERVATION
» ... PADDLE FOR PRESERVATION
1. WHO? Introduction – Professional/Academic Background

- Masters in Outdoor Education
- PhD in Sustainable Wild Dolphin Tourism Interaction & Practices
- National Award - Teaching Excellence
- 25 years lecturing in universities
  - Outdoor/adventure & environmental education/recreation/conservation
  - Sport and event marketing
  - Tourism, SPORT, leisure, events
  - International internships and student-based projects and expeditions
  - Tourism Policy and Planning

- Expertise in international projects
  - Asia/Pacific: Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia
  - Sustainable wildlife tourism
  - Sustainable coastal and marine tourism development/management
1. WHO? International Business & Sporting Background

- Small business owner – tourism - 6 years
- International health consultant – 6 years
- Elite athlete – 6 years
- World class athlete – 15 years
- World champion: ultra marathon paddle events

- **Olympics 1992 Barcelona**
  - Represented Australia Women’s Kayak Team

- **12 times World Champion (1988 - 2014)**
  - Kayaking, outrigger canoeing, dragon boats
  - Current world champion and coach 2014

- 25 years coaching, managing and competing at international, national, state, regional local level
  - National Coach for Outrigger Canoeing
  - National Coach & Coordinator for Adaptive Paddling
  - International Committee for Adaptive Paddling

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1. WHO? USC relationship with Cambodian MoT

Relationship – Cambodian Ministry of Tourism

- Working with MoT since 2010 = 6 years
- Long-term strong relationship with MoT
- Collaborative ecotourism & CBT conference papers
- International professional development programs
- Three Cambodian AusAID training programs in Australia
- Staff & student research projects each year
- Development of Tourism Policy & Planning
- Student-based research & education expeditions
January 2013 – 6 USC students & 4 USC staff – generous support and sponsored by CMoT

WHO? Mekong River expedition – feasibility study, report and recommendations on developing an annual ultra marathon canoe/kayak race and extended canoe trail for the full length of the Cambodian Mekong River from Laos to Vietnam borders...Mekong River Dolphin
Mekong Discovery Canoe/Bike Trail

Congratulations – A Wonderful Tourism Initiative – let’s build on this

One of the world’s greatest rivers with extraordinary natural, historical, cultural tourism assets, attractions and biodiversity
One of only four species of fresh water dolphins left on the planet
Opportunity to develop unique tourism experiences and adventures
Opportunity to develop and need to conserve assets through CBT
WHAT? 1. Mekong River Ultra Marathon Canoe Race
(For competitive paddlers/sports tourists)

Canoe for conservation
Paddle for preservation
Mekong River Dolphin
WHAT? 2. Extended Mekong Canoe Trail
for recreational (non competitive) paddlers/tourists

Canoe for conservation
Paddle for preservation
Mekong River Dolphin
WHAT? 3. Extended Mekong Bike Trail
for recreational (non competitive) cyclists tourists

Cycle for conservation
Peddle for preservation
Mekong River Dolphin
Cambodia Mekong has 1 of only 4 Freshwater Dolphins Species in the WORLD

Baiji: Chinese (Yangtze) River Dolphin declared **extinct** in 2002 (Turvey et al... 2007) .. “a national tragedy and an International disgrace”

1. **EXTINCT IN 2002**

Ganges & Indus River Dolphin: “*missing from most early habitat areas – declared close to extinction in 2012*” WWF

2. **CLOSE TO EXTINCTION**
Cambodia Mekong has 1 of only 4 Freshwater Dolphins Species in the WORLD

3. DECLARED VULNERABLE

Amazon River Dolphin (Boto) – South America
Declared “Vulnerable” (WWF)

Mekong or Irrawaddy River Dolphin Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam

4. CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (100?)

The goals of the river race, extended canoe & bike trails:

1. Develop/contribute to community-based tourism and help alleviate poverty in the Mekong River communities

2. Provide alternative income sources to communities through tourism experiences, services, products, associated activities

3. Raise awareness of the beauty and biodiversity of the Mekong River and environment to international sport/adventure tourists

4. Raise awareness of the status of the critically endangered MRD at all levels and convey the need to protect and conserve the iconic species ... and all Mekong River flora and fauna

5. Raise funds for research, conservation and protection of the critically endangered Mekong River Dolphins – brink of extinction?

6. Develop an iconic annual international down-river race on an iconic and extraordinary river... and extended canoe and bike trail

8. Develop a sister-river relationship between the Murray and Mekong Rivers in Australia and long-term collaborative project between Cambodian and Australian YMCA organisations
The Mighty Murray River Race

- Iconic Australian Event
- Five days & 404 kilometres
- Five stages each day
- 700 – 1000 paddlers
- > 2000 supporters
- > 300 volunteers
- Longest ultra marathon race in the southern hemisphere
- Charity event – fundraiser
- $300,000 in funds to projects
- $1.5 mill to regional economy
International Agreement between YMCA Victoria and CMoT

- YMCA Victoria event staff met with HE Dr Thong Khon CMoT and Thok Sokhom in 2014
- YMCA Vic will fully train and support 12 Cambodian Mekong River race volunteers in AUS
- YMCA Vic will partner with CMoT & collaboratively run the event in Cambodia annually
- YMCA Vic will market and cross-promote the Mekong Ultra Marathon Race in AUS
- YMCA international long-term collaborative relationship between YMCA Victoria and CMoT
  - YMCA Victoria run international community projects in Cambodia
  - Significant number of Cambodian youth in Victoria looking for a “country connection”
  - Ideal opportunity to train Cambodian youth for international sport/event project
- Need funding to run the first pilot race and begin training Cambodian event organisers
The proposed distance: 410 kilometers - 5 days

**Part A:** Laos/Cambodian Border to Phnom Penh: 310 k, 4 days of paddling

**Part B:** Phnom Penh to Cambodian/Vietnam Border: 100 k, 1 day of paddling

Equals the Murray River Ultra Marathon Race distance in Approximately 404 kilometers in total
Proposed 12 day Mekong River race program

Day 0: Race registration and briefing

**Race on Day 1:** Laos Boarder to Stung Treng
**Day 2 off** for activities, sight seeing, dolphin watching

**Race on Day 3:** Stung Treng to Kratie
**Day 4 off**

**Race on Day 5:** Kratie to Kampong Cham
**Day 6 off**

**Race on Day 7:** Kampong Cham to Phnom Penh
**Day 8 off** in Phnom Penh River - festival and sight seeing

**Race on Day 9:** Phnom Penh to Vietnam Border, return to Phnom Penh
**Day 10** final day of the water and Moon Festival

**Medal presentations for competitive paddlers**

**Day 11:** Tour of Phnom Penh
**Day 12:** pack and depart for other tours in Cambodia

*An extraordinary adventure – totally unique*
Extend tourists and competitors’ length of stay by offering packages to Angkor Wat and Tonle Sap Lake, etc etc etc
5-Day Challenge - individually or in teams of 8 to 10 people
Full or Half day – 50 or 100k per day

4-Day Challenge
Full or Half day

3-Day Challenge
Full or Half day

2-Day Challenge
Full or Half day

1- Last day challenge
Full or Half day

ADD Adventure race components – mountain bikes, runs, hill climbs
Traditional Cambodian Canoe Race using traditional canoe craft
Dragon Boat Race in Phnom Penh – 60 to 80 people craft

The WATER FESTIVAL grand finale and entry to Phnom Penh

Incorporate “service” at pagodas to assist monks in cleaning & renovations
Before you hit the water, it’s worth spending a night or two in one for Cambodia’s larger cities. Kratie is heavily influenced by the French and is enriched with history and numerous tourist attractions. Kratie offers various kinds of accommodation which includes hotels, guesthouses and home stays which cater to any travellers’ budget. If you wish to spoil yourself, check out Le Bungalow, a sheik guesthouse facing the Mekong River. For $70 a night this includes stylish bathrooms, wifi, air conditioning, superb bedding and your choice of western and traditional Cambodian cuisines. Balcony Guesthouse and Restaurant offers six rooms, both ensuite and single with hot water and wifi. Prices range from $6- $8 a night. This guesthouse is also facing the Mekong River. Kratie has many restaurants and bars, however it is strongly recommended to try the Khmer beef dish ‘Lac Loc’, sticky rice (Krolan). These are just a few local delicacies and are a real treat! Kratie attractions include West Bank - here you can see locals producing tobacco, noodles, palm sugar and rice wine…If you take a short trip north by taxi or bike to a place called ‘Kampi’, jump on a Mekong River dolphin watching boat for $7 and see these wild and critically endangered species up close. Buy some carvings and donate to a good cause - help save this unique dolphin from extinction!
5 Days off between 5 race days – use Amazon River tourism model

- Expeditions on water to natural/cultural attractions with fast or slow boats
- Visit neighbouring natural areas and attractions on foot, by bike, vehicle
- Visit villages, towns, communities, local inhabitants, dolphin watching
- Explore markets, weaving, pottery, shop, memorabilia, photography etc
- Learn Cambodian language, cooking, dancing, music, culture, etc
- Visit pagodas and spiritual places, volunteer labour to renovate pagodas
- Watch wildlife, volunteer to monitor, manage, feed Cambodian wildlife
- Eat, relax, enjoy, recover, sports massage, springs, swim, spa, mend gear
NEXT STAGES – CAPACITY BUILDING, TRAINING, PILOT/TRIAL the RACE

12 Cambodian volunteers to Australia - event management

12 Australians trial the Mekong race stages and distances

Gear and equipment for all water and land event aspects

Risk management of all participants and safety on land and water

Communications and logistics, accommodation, transport, food

Community awareness and education program - how to leverage off event and develop a range of event services and alternative tourism experiences for the days off – between race days

Manage minimal impact on dolphins, environment, people and culture, training in natural & cultural guiding and interpretation

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Mekong Discovery Canoe/Bike Trail
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Cycle for conservation
Peddle for preservation
Mekong River Dolphin
Mekong Discovery Trail
Kratie to Kampong Cham Recommendations

- 6 to 7 days in length
- All ages and levels of ability
- Safe, challenging, self-paced
- Fully guided by experienced & trained expedition leaders
- Kayaks and all gear provided +
- Accommodation of their choice, home stays, community houses, camping areas
- Food & water included in price pppd
- Attractions visited daily on tours
- Different - Stung Treng to Kratie
Thank you for your efforts and assistance and generous support of our USC projects

H.E. Dr Thong Kohn – Cambodian Minister for Tourism, Chair of Cambodian Olympic Committee

Mr Thok Sokhom - Director, Department of International Cooperation and ASEAN, Ministry of Tourism

Mr Porsoeun Orn – National Project Liaison and Logistics Consultant, Mekong Discovery Trail Project

H.E. Touch Seang Tana - Chairman of Commission for Conservation and Development of Mekong River Dolphin Eco-Tourism Zone

Mr Phay Somany – WWF

Mr Bunthok Deth – YMCA National General Secretary

YMCA Victoria CEO, Land & Water Risk Management, Mapping, International Projects,
References


- Black robin, Department of Conservation, viewed 3 February http://www.doc.govt.nz/conservation/native-animals/birds/land-birds/black-robin


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Canoe for conservation, paddle for preservation

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End of presentation
Additional slides
Mekong Discovery Trail
# 2 Kratie to Kampong Cham
Ecotourism Recommendations

- Develop/extend existing canoe trail section to include Kratie to Phnom Penh to develop CBT and alleviate poverty and increase awareness of the MRD and biodiversity of the Mekong River.

- Consider inviting the Buddhist monks to be the interpretive guides as their English is very good and they are on site, can offer and provide tours services, food and accommodation.

- Present trails #1 and #2 in e-format on internet with GPS points, informative, interactive, and similar in existing design and format.

- Use both trails to convey the information about the biodiversity of the region, the attractions, the status of the MRD and the strong message about the need for conservation measures through signage, interpretation, banners to abide by ecotourism practices.

- Consider 10% of income goes back into research effort on the MRD to abide by ecotourism guidelines.
Threats to the survival of freshwater dolphins

Unsustainable human-wildlife conflicts & dams

Constantly growing human population – high human population densities

Thousands of years of environmental exploitation, deforestation, decrease in food sources

Toxicity of river water from industry, waste, pollution, mercury from gold mining

Intensive farming and agriculture plus runoff in the water from fertilizer and chemicals

Transformation/degradation of ecosystems and habitats, competition with humans for food

Fishing, gill netting, used for food or bait, boat and/or propellor strikes, mainstream dams
Current plans

Education and awareness plans

- Ensuring all stakeholders are aware of regulations relating to dolphin conservation and key messages
- Producing educational signboards and materials for tourists and the Cambodian public with key messages
- Educational village workshops and school visits for communities adjacent to core dolphin habitats
- Integrating monks into MRD & environmental education
Mekong River Dolphin Research Projects

Research – the race can assist with funding

- Dolphin mortality, especially high calf mortality rate
- Dolphin population and distribution surveys
- Impacts of dolphin watching tourism on dolphins
- Genetic research to assess population viability
- Monitoring all threats to dolphins
- Education and awareness campaign effectiveness
- Conservation behaviour of communities to dolphins
- Motivation, value and need to conserve
Support Recommendations

- Continue research effort on exact causes of death
- Examine tissue for contamination/disease
- Sustainable solution to gill net practices...focus on deep pool habitats commonly frequented by dolphins during dry season
- Survey every year on population from now – photo identification
- Assess impacts of tourism on dolphins – engine/social/feeding
- Dam construction on tributaries of Mekong River only
- Further investigation into intensive breeding program in an aquarium environment with London Zoo or Singapore Aquarium
- Investigate possibilities and feasibility relocation to alternative semi-natural sites - Jeff Archer (WCS) although warned against by authors (Beasley, Marsh, Arnold & Jefferson)
Additional Recommendations

USC expedition participants - ecotourism

1. Clean up the Mekong River and river banks as a matter of urgency of contaminants & pollution

2. Remove/stop plastic and rubbish from accumulating and washing into the river at all towns on the river, especially Kampi Pools where rubbish & human waste wash down the river and into dolphin pools

3. Develop strategy for increasing visitation to and train staff/community at the less visited pools/sites

4. Renew/repair and enhance/increase interpretation and education signage at all dolphin watching sites, tourist information centres in towns/villages
5. Train all river guides at the Mekong River Dolphin watching pools in English and wildlife interpretation.

6. Have information about the dolphins and conservation strategies available including on the hulls of boats.


8. Educate locals and visitors more about conserving the dolphins and their habitat – direct them to government organisations and NGOs such as WWF and encourage donating to conservation of the dolphins.

9. Showcase the dolphin skeleton in the case, rebuild the shelter/building and make a major feature of it.

10. Have education speakers and film nights for tourists at the main Mekong River Dolphin watching centres.
PR/PROMOTION CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES TO HELP SAVE THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED MEKONG RIVER DOLPHIN
International Promotion/PR campaign

1. Little knowledge of the MRD locally, nationally, internationally so need to go international – have a PR company develop strategy with key messages, logo & slogan

2. Have a site on the Cambodian webpage dedicated to MRD conservation

3. Students have developed and monitor a Mekong River Dolphin face book page

4. Use social media to convey/communicate

5. Increase signage about the MRD at entry points to Cambodia and all popular tourism destinations and main tourism towns

6. Choose a celebrity and/or top sports person (a Cambodian champion/hero) to be a face to the campaign and endorse the campaign
International Promotion/PR campaign

7. Develop a strategic approach to applying and gaining grants/funding/research organisations

8. Angkor Wat as a main site for PR and provide %age of income to fund research and the PR promotion campaign

9. Partner with/invite support from a global and international conservation/activist organisation such as Sea Shepherd and have a strategic plan for an international media/PR launch

10. Increase appropriate merchandising and conservation-based memorabilia at all sites

11. Display conservation posters prominently at all sites – have trained interpretive staff available for education/information/questions
Canoe for conservation
Paddle for Preservation

‘Do not wait until you have all the facts before you act – you will never have all you would like.

Action is what brings change, and saves endangered animals, not words’ Don Merton, Chatham Island black robin recovery program (Turvey 2008)