Greater Mekong Subregion TOURISM RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

Mekong Tourism

Unlimited Experiences, Unlimited Stories



This document was prepared by the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Working Group, comprising the Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia; Ministry of Culture and Tourism, People's Republic of China; Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Lao People's Democratic Republic; Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Myanmar; Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism, Viet Nam; the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office; and other Greater Mekong Subregion tourism industry stakeholders.

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This toolkit was created as a supplement to the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Recovery Communications Plan.

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Introduction

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), comprising Cambodia, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Yunnan Province in the People's Republic of China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, has diverse natural and cultural attractions, vibrant cities, and unrivaled hospitality that each year create countless memorable experiences for visitors. But what really makes the GMS stand out as a world-class destination are the people that live here and the people that visit. The GMS is full of voices with engaging stories.

People's affinity for travel remains strong and durable despite the pandemic. According to a recent global survey, 78% of respondents planned to travel in the near future. Many will be seeking family vacations, romantic getaways, and culinary experiences. Nature–based experiences in uncrowded settings are sought by most market segments, while younger travelers are expected to lead the recovery in urban areas. There is also strong demandfor travel with purpose. Sixty–eight percent of future travelers will support brands that have sustainability policies and 72% intend to visit places where their spending benefits local economies. After more than a year of online meetings and work from home arrangements, many travelers will combine vacations with working remotely

As more people plan post-pandemictravel the GMS wants to tell the world what is being done by government and private enterprises to restart tourism safely and sustainably, and that the GMS has not lost what makesit such an attractive place to visit.

This toolkit was created to help GMS tourism stakeholders produce and communicate such messages.

Principles

Common principles to guide information dissemination by public and private tourism stakeholders are outlined below.

- Generate aligned content and messages that match GMS countries' COVID-19 recovery policies and <u>GMS Tourism Sector Strategy</u> objectives to promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient tourism. Make abundant, quality content openly accessible in suitable digital formats.
- Facilitate engaging conversations among public and private GMS tourism stakeholders and consumers using tools that foster two-way communications. Use inspiring storytelling, tone of voice, and languages best suited for intended audiences.
- Proactively connect stakeholders electronically and in-person using appropriate channels, to build trust and relationships that cost-effectively broaden information dissemination and exchange.



Recovery Phases

These principles will be applied during all recovery phases, generally defined as:

Phase 1

International borders are closed to tourists, a reopening date is uncertain, and there are some domestic travel restrictions.

Phase 2

A firm date to reopen borders to international tourists is announced, with easing domestic travel restrictions.

Phase 3

One or more international travel corridors is established and domestic travel is largely unrestricted.

Phase 4

The openness of international and domestic travel policies is similar to pre-pandemiclevels.



Messaging in Each Phase

CMS countries' public and private sectors generate engaging and inspirational content to build demand for the future. Having consistent and open collaboration between the public and private sectors builds rapport that helps boost the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of communication efforts. **Messages during this phase will focus on engaging past travelers to share their experiences while traveling in the GMS and promoting domestic tourism.** The purpose is to influence potential future international travelers to visit GMS destinations and encourage domestic travel, to diversify and help tourism enterprises survive border closures.

Messagingwill invite international travelers to visit the GMS once reopening dates are confirmed in sending markets and receiving GMS countries. Messages will feature trust-building content, including information about how countries have successfully managedCOVID-19and how they ensure tourist safety. **Domestic tourism promotion continues.**

One or more international travel corridors are operating between sending markets and GMS countries. Regardlessof whether travel is permitted only for vaccinated individuals or for everyone, targeted messagingshould be increased to steer leisure and businesstravelers toward the GMS. Once several GMS countries are open to the same source markets, messaging to promote multi-country GMS travel can resume. Domestic tourism promotion continues.

Page The timing of this phase is uncertain, however messaging should continue to be aligned and engaging.



Aligned Content

Aligned content inspires target audiences with rich stories, images, and videos that evoke memories of the GMS. Accurate information is essential to create trust and the desire to visit GMS destinations post–COVID. Content should be timely and made available through easily accessible channels like company websites, online travel agents, and sharing economy platforms that also facilitate travel planning and booking. Content should feature the unique selling points of destinations together with accurate safety and health information to enable consumers to make well–informed travel decisions.

Key messages, such as the examples below, underscore GMS countries' shared focus on a safe and sustainable tourism recovery. They build trust, are welcoming and inspiring, and remind travelers that there are genuine efforts underway to manage tourism sustainably.

- ► SAFE. We are managing COVID-19, care for our visitors, and have put appropriate health and safety measures in place.
- ▶ **SOON.** We are opening for business and welcome domestic and international tourists.
- ► **SUSTAINABLE.** We are managing tourism more sustainably for people and the planet.
- STORIES. We offer diverse and authentic experiences, including family beach holidays, pristine nature, city trips with friends, couples' retreats, and gourmet cuisine. Remember your last visit – relaxing, food, discovery, friends – and tell us what you would like to do now.

Such messages should be conveyed using human stories that capture the values and experiences that make the GMS a desirable place to visit. Content must be conveyed in a positive tone of voice that is friendly, casual, and inspiring, in languages appropriate for the target audience.



Content is Fundamental

When content marketing is successful, audiences will not feel like they are being sold something. Instead, they engage with material that does not explicitly promote a brand but stimulates interest in its products by **educating**, **entertaining**, or **inspiring**the audience. Good content marketing promotes a product or service using engaging information.

In the context of tourism marketing, effort must be made to develop material that is relevant to a tourism audience but also engages, inspires, and influences their travel plans. The challenge for marketers is to ensure that the value of the content exceeds the sales pitch it disguises. Think about what topics and types of material are appropriate for each channel.



Is your content relevant?



8 Key Travel Themes

What to write about and for whom?

Messaging and content should be timed properly and reflect the types of experiences sought by different demographic categories. Depending on the tourist type and market, it can be useful to organize your content according to travel themes shown here.



Families and groups of friends are ready for relaxing and fun beach holidays.

Youngertravelers seekcity stays with shopping, dining, and other urban experiences.





All ages appreciate the range of nature–based experiences the GMS offers in safe, uncrowded settings.

People miss their friends and family and want to reconnect.





Adults are tired of online meetings, wanting to reconnect in-personwith clients and colleagues.

We all enjoy meeting hospitable GMS people and experiencing their rich cultural heritage.





Cautious adults and families, and those seeking specialized experiences, can easily book organized tours.

Adults yearn for wellness activities to relieve stress caused by the prolonged pandemic and working from home.





O Visual Imagery & Iconography

Images tend to be more attention grabbing than words, so make sure pictures are designed for that purpose. When it comes to social media, most mobile-driven behavior takes the form of passive feed scrolling. Photos or a well-designed headline stand out most.



Image & Video Tools



Canva is a free visual design tool for digital and promotional materials. Graphic design experience is not required when using the program's simple and intuitive interface.



Freepik is an online image bank that promotes the sharing of fully editable vector images, stock photography, and illustrations by the platform's creators or uploaded by contributors.



Filmora is a paid video editing program that can be used within a browser or on a mobile device that enables users to create and edit high-quality videos swiftly and easily.

How to use images and icons:

CURATED STATISTIC: a well-placed number that begins an interest-grabbing headline. Add simple easy-to-recognize icons for sub-stats (e.g. Tourists in Bangkok increase by 30% - half are under 30).



QUOTE: a few words from a happy tourist sharing pleasant memories about their trip with multiple user-generated pictures for authenticity (e.g. "It's time I went back to Luang Prabang...for the 4th time. There'sway too much to see.").



COLLAGE: a collection of photos (between 10–25) that show the large variety of activities or attributes of a given destination or culture. Include a number prominently in the title (e.g. Top 10must–visitarchitectural beauties of Kunming).



COMPETITION: a simple question and answer game whereby audiences are asked to identify the location or name of the object in the picture is a surefire way to engage people while promoting a destination or food. You may offer prizes to people that answer correctly. (e.g. Where was this picture taken?)

Video Storyboarding

A storyboard is a visual planning document. It is created to help illustrate a story or show the changes in a scene. Usually, this will be based on a montage of video shots or a timeline with a narrative story. A storyboard can help transfer your ideas to the screen in just a few steps:



IDENTIFY KEY MESSAGE. What messagedo you want to convey? (e.g. invite travelers to visit)



CHOOSE AUDIENCE MARKET. Which type of traveler do we want to market to? (e.g. middle-class travelers interested in nature and culture from asian markets)



SELECT TRAVEL THEMES. What travel themes do you want to portray that would appeal to that traveler market? (e.g. culture, nature)



VISUALIZE THE THEMES. Insert pictures of the main shots that will visually help tell the story or guide the montage.

ADD CAPTIONS. Add inspiring phrases about the shots that inspire people to visit the destination.

Laos Simply Beautiful Video Storyboard

PAGE ____ / _2___

Message:Phase2-InspireTravelers Audience:CuriousExplorers Themes:CultureandNature Style: Montage Duration:1minute







Text:wherediverselandscape VFX:Textexpandsslightly

VFX:Textexpandsslightly





VFX:Textexpandsslightly

There are many free templates available online to help create storyboards. Consider trying StudioBinder (studiobinder.com) and Milanote (milanote.com) to plan your film.

Click here to download sample

Social Media

Choose the right social media channels.

It is no surprise that the pandemic has placed an even greater reliance on technology, with social media channels as primary distributors of information. People seek information about the things they care about, as well as sharing social content that they find on platforms they use. While there are hundreds of social media channels to choose from, it's best to limit your presence to the most popular, established international channels and maximize exposure for your content.







As the world's most popular social networking site, Facebook is a force to contend with as it draws people and content creators of all kinds. As the variation of digital audiences on the site is so high, it is important to select a broad mix of multimedia posts: rich stories with multiple photographs, long and short videos, sweepstakes and giveaways, public announcement updates, and professional web article/blog links. This is to increase the probability of engaging as many of the right audiences with the right content as possible.



Crowdsource feedback with questions that evoke good memories.



Be social and make sure to respond to everyone.



Vertically-oriented videos tend to perform better because over 98% of users browse Facebook on mobile.



Facebook facilitates a wide range of formats including posts, stories, and videos.





Twitter is an online a forum that delivers updates from media channels and businesses, friends, or celebrities. The channel promotes short, sharp messages called Tweets. Deploy Tweets that mimic news articles with attention grabbing headlines announcing the latest country-specific developments, trends, and attractions with accompanying photograph(s).



Keep an eye on trending conversations and social trends.



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Replies and retweets provide best engagement, hashtags fuel reach (limit to 1–2 hashtagsper tweet).



#

Converse with people who @Mention you.



Tourism brands have an advantage when tweeting beautiful imagery.



YouTubeis currently the industry leader for video and distinguishes itself from other social channels in its design to be searchable. Many tourists are looking to YouTubefor emotional inspiration, more detailed planning, and confirmation of their trips. Provide a good overview of your destination's attractions in varied-length video form taking into account the different travel stages.





Take advantage of video already on hand to showcase relevant tourism content.

Experiment with both longer videos and short clips to take advantage of people who need more details or inspiration.

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Engage with your YouTubeaudience and channel community through comments and replies.



Easily share YouTubevideos to other channels and platforms.



The word "Instagrammable" is an adjective inspired by this channel to describe something worth photographing and sharing online. Choose an Instagramworthy photograph(s) and an inspirational caption that complements it. The picture should already be worth a thousand words so keep the caption short and smart. For a more unpolished tone, publish vertically-oriented videos in Stories mode – where the videos disappearafter a certain period of time. This is to take advantage of audiences that are attracted to the unfiltered fleetingness of the content while also allowing for numerous or richer photos/videos that won't affect audiences overall NewsFeed–experience.





Share an authentic behind-the-scenesor neverbefore-seen sneak preview of the opening of a destination on Stories mode.



Geo-tag feature allows users to search locations and view recent posts.



Instant book buttons allow users to book trips directly from the platform.



Instagram celebrities command some of the highest influence in the brand marketing industry. Engage them for help in getting the word out for your destination.



Douyin (TikTokin international app stores) is one of the fastest growing mobile-driven applications in the world, known for its engaging and comical content. The channel'sattraction lies in its ability to draw out the most creatively raw, largely unscripted, and authentic visual talents. It puts authentic firstperson narrative experiences with upbeat music at the center of short videos, highlighting one particular tourism-related aspect – food, daring activity, cultural experience, public announcement, etc. Since the channel is so new, experiment as much as possible with content format to see which works. Having a video go viral on this platform can have a huge impact.



23

Short videos should be funny, witty, and inspiring.

Good content attracts more views than followers on Douyin.

Move fast with real-time marketing and get in early on trends.



Platform is still new with huge opportunity for viral success if the right content can be produced.

	SOCIAL TIME	CONTENT	CATEGORY	САРТІОН	HULLINK.	STATUS	NOTES
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Choose social media managerswisely.

While the core messaging should come from the destination marketers, the social media manager must be someone that is intimately familiar with the target market. Whether it be the length and tone of the copy, the angle of the photographs, the audience strategy, or the color of the designs, the goal is to figure out how to get the target audience to choose to leave their homes, overlook other countries, and choose the destination that is being promoted.



Public Relations

One of the most efficient methods to build on marketing strategies and establish a strong online reputation is through public relations.



Don't promote yourself, have someone else do it for you.

Maintaining good public relations is a must for tourism destination marketers. Earned media – when news writers publish positive content free of charge – is one of the best public relations ve– hicles. Due to its perceived authenticity as "news," content that is published by a third–party outlet is highly credible. The article or news piece benefits from a halo effect and is more positively received by the audience who follows that particular media.



Think like a publisher.

Identify the media outlets (digital, print, broadcast) that your potential markets follow and start to (or hire someone to) think like them. Pitch stories that the media outlet would be likely to want to publish. Do research on past articles and entice journalists and editors with material and headlines that they could use to capture the attention of or grow their audiences. The more research that goes into your story, the better. Adding accurate data makes your story more credible.

Possible Media
 Travel Magazines In-flight Magazines
Newspapers
News WebsitesTravel Websites
 Travel Trade News Podcasts
Foucasis

Measuring Impact

Measuring the results of a social media and public relations campaign should be one of the priorities of any marketing effort. A comprehensive post-campaignassessment of your activities will provide the necessary justification for the current and any future budgets allocated to tourism marketing.

Marketing evaluations should include both quantitative (reach, engagement, views, etc.) and qualitative (focus group discussions, interviews, and surveys) components since it is most useful to collect and review numerical and emotional feedback. Ideally, the objective should supplement broad-scale trends and patterns (which are captured by statistics) with actual human opinions over a certain period of time.



Data Analytics & Measurement Tools



Key quantitative and qualitative indicators

The Mekong TourismCoordinating Office will monitor GMS tourism recovery communications and prepare periodic progress reports. Key quantitative and qualitative indicators to be tracked are shown on the right. These indicators will be reviewed quarterly and updated when needed.

© Objective Widely disseminate accurate and engaging information that supports a safe and sustainable GMS tourism recovery.









 \odot Number of positive-sentiment media mentions (print, broadcast, online, and social media) about the GMS tourism recovery

 \odot Number of visual content pieces shared with GMS tourism campaign hashtags

✓ Mekongtourism.org website traffic (e.g., users, visits, page-views, time-on-site, downloads) and website traffic of GMS National TourismOrganization websites, GMS tourism recovery campaign, Destination Mekong, and select destination management organizations

✓ Number of likes and shares generated by social media accounts:
 Mekong TourismCoordinating Office, GMS National TourismOrganizations,
 GMS tourism recovery campaign, Destination Mekong, and select destination management organizations

 \odot Number of businesses and consumers engaging Experience Mekong Collection

✓ Number of participants in the Mekong TourismForum, Destination Mekong Summit, and select major GMS tourism trade events

✓ Number of participants in Mekong TourismCoordinating Office affiliated webinars and events that support GMS tourism recovery

✓ Number of websites and social media accounts linked to GMS National Tourism Organization, Mekong TourismCoordinating Office, GMS tourism recovery campaign, Destination Mekong, and select destination management organization websites

Digging Deeper Into the Data

Data is extremely valuable as it allows insight into user behavior at both a micro and societal level. Since social media sites constantly tweak their algorithms to enhance the time people spend on their channels, analyzing data should be a regular activity used to guide content development.

VIDEOS. Don't obsessover view counts. Dig deeper and analyze other metrics in each platform. Most importantly, the video retention rate shows what percentage of viewers are retained on the video at any given point. This is a better measure for content guality and viewer receptivity than engagement.

REACH.High reach isimportant because it increases the possibility of your content influencing the people who are more interested in your content. Take a look at engagements (reactions, comments, shares, clicks). Anything over 10% is good.

REACTIONS. Posts with the most likes are not necessarily the best. Likes are easily given, while it takes more effort for a user to choose different types of reactions, such as a heart or a wow. These reactions mean that the post is eliciting a higher quality response from the user. It could even be argued that such content is more memorable.

COMMENTS. Takeinto considerationpeople'sthoughts in the comments section. When possible, reply to them (as a Page admin) in the thread to see what and how they think. If appropriate, chat to them privately. Deeper conversations ead to a better understanding farget markets.

SHARES.A share is most of the time insignificant (when the share now button was simply clicked on without accompanying text). Click on the sharestab and see if people are writing about what they are sharing (a significant share - that has accompanying text).



Marketing managers cannot assume that the audience is like them. They are way more complex than we think. Engage in deep market research using unstructured interviews and/or short ethnographies on source markets. Figure out what really makes them tick to arrive at a more nuanced and ultimately better campaign that really appeals to people on both a practical and emotional level.



Resourcing



Get target source experts to coordinate.

It is highly advisable to employ a dedicated team equipped with the right digital marketing and communications skills. Moreover, the team must engage the services of experts familiar with marketing to and within key source markets. For example, when attempting to market to a broad source market such as India, People's Republic of China, the US, or Australia, it is best to consult professional country–specific marketing agencies. These agencies should be able to perform the requisite market research and promotional material loca– lization (dubbing, subtitling, translation, etc.) to ensure that the right message accurately reaches the right audience. While the communications program can be handled domestically, experience suggests that no one knows the tar– get market better than the people within that market.



Public-private sector coordination is important.

The private sector is the backbone of the tourism industry and will be able to provide valuable insight into their own preparedness for recovery and reopening. A national marketing plan should take into account the readiness of tourism businesses they will be the primary drivers of the opening strategy.

Press Release

A press release is an official announcement issued by an organization to news media and journalists in the hope of being published and reaching a wider audien– ce. A good press release is a cost–effective marketing tool that will help to announce and promote a new product or newsworthy event. When a news agency publishes information about your brand or organization, it provides a recommendation or endorsement by a third–party, which is perceived by audiences as more credible than plain self–promotion.

Typically, press releases follow a standard format that is succinct, informative, and includes a call to action. They may be written to promote a product launch, an opening, event, rebranding, or new partnership, and are submitted to major news media outlets.



Official Launch of [PLACE] Sandbox Program Underway

[City], [DD-MONTH], [YEAR] – The [TOURISM BOARD] of [COUNTRY] has announced that the long-awaited reopening of [PLACE] to tourism has begun, with the official launch of the [PLACE] Sandbox program.

The programallows fully vaccinated international visitors arriving on major airlines to enter [PLA– CE] without quarantine and enjoy the full range of hospitality [PLACE] is famous for, while under the protection of comprehensive health and safety measures.

Some [NUMBER] of fully vaccinated international visitors are expected to arrive in [PLACE] over the next few weeks, with businesstravelers and grouptours anticipated to make up the bulk of arrivals. Strict safety measures in place will ensure the well-being of every visitor, with the [COUN-TRY] government recommending travelers use [CERTIFICATION PROGRAM] certified businesses and services for added safety.

H.E. Mr/s. [NAME], Minister of Tourism, said "the reopeningof [PLACE] marks a significant step forward in the revival of [COUNTRY]'s tourist sector, with [PLACE] leading the way as a pilot destination. Our country is proud to welcome travelers once again, and visitors can be certain that their safety, protection and comfort are our highest priority."

Extensive planning and preparations have been made in the run–upto the [PLACE] Sandbox program'slaunch, including the [CERTIFICATION PROGRAM] that was established in [DATE]. With over [NUMBER] hotels, restaurants, and tourist sites fully certified under the hygiene and safety program, visitors can rest assured that their stay and activities will remain safe and clean.

Alongside the hygiene and safety programs in place, [PLACE] boasts a high vaccination rate among its population, with some [NUMBER] percent of the local population having been fully vaccinated against Covid–19.

The pristine beaches and beautiful natural scenery of [PLACE] are once again ready to welcome guests from all over the world, who can enjoy its famous hospitality in comfort and safety.

Press Conference Preparation Checklist

National tourism organizations can use press conferences as a public relations tool to garner media attention for important announcements and other note-worthy events. The following are some suggestions for planning and execut-ing a smooth and successful press conference.

Pre-Press Conference Planning

- Reserve a location. Hotels and conference rooms are the most common venues for hosting press conferences. Regardless of the option you choose, make sure to book your time and date at least a week in advance to avoid any contractual complications.
- Determine the layout and setup of channels, seating, and equipment. Make a list of anything the camera crew may require, such as power strips, risers set up in the back, lighting, etc.
- Be prepared for worst-case scenarios involving equipment failure. Have an audio/visual contact person available during the press conference, just in case anything goes wrong.
- Be considerate of non-local media. If gaining international coverage is the goal, consider setting up videoconferencing or live streaming for journalists who are not able to physically be there.

- Alert the media as far in advance as possible. In the media alert, emphasize that important information will be provided at the press conference that was not provided in the release. This will entice your readers to attend.
- Understand the venue's COVID requirements and be sure your invite list doesn't exceed the maximum number of guests for your space including both your team and media invitees.
- Stagger seating so that there are empty spaces between chairs. This provides a better view for participants and makes the space seem fuller without sacrificing the important six-footrule.
- Self-contained.
- It is impossible to over-prepare. Always bring hard copies of the press release, media packets, and statements. Review them with the relevant departments before release.

During The Event

- Plan to begin 10–15minuteslate to give everyone a chance to settle in and work out any technical issues.
- Treat media representatives well. Greet each reporter as they walk in. Have a sign-in sheet and a refreshment table on hand. Small gestures can make a big impact.
- Take the extra time to make sure everyone is wearing a mask and practicing appropriate physical distancing. This may seem like a given; however, photos and videos from your event will tell the true story. The safety and health of your team and guests should always be a top priority.
- Speak loudly and clearly.
- Record the event so it could be packaged and sent to media. This is a useful tactic at any time in case media aren't able to come to an event but especially relevant duringCOVID.
- \checkmark

Use social media to update your audience in real-time. Live-tweeting and adding to your Instagram and Facebook stories are great ways to make your community feel part of the event.

- If no one is asking questions during the Q&A, the speaker may propose a question.
 - Thank the media for coming and assure them they have received all the necessary information.

Post-PressConference Follow Up

- Have an exit plan ready for people who do not want to be confronted by the media.
- Follow up with each individual reporter individually, acknowledging their attendance at the conference. This is essential in building a long-lasting relationship with that particular journalist.

Adapted from "Checklist for a Successful Press Conference" by Megan Braverman, Berbay Marketing & PR



MEDIA SAMPLES

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Facebook Posts



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Phase 1



Phase 3

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Phase 3

Digital Brochure

GUIDELINES FOR FULLY VACCINATED TRAVELLERS ARRIVING IN THAILAND

THAILAND IS OPENING TO FULLY VACCINATED VISITORS FROM LOW-RISK COUNTRIES ON I NOVEMBER.

International localities may shift Thatland and mail to print who from occurring approved by the Managery of Public Health. Visit the Tourism Anthonity of Thatland website at exercisioner any.

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Advertisement – Newspaper



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Advertisement – Website



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