The Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment in Asia and the Pacific

IMPACT

Alleviating Poverty and Protecting Cultural and Natural Heritage through Community-Based Ecotourism in

Luang Namtha
Lao PDR
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Foreword

The combined effect of rapid economic development, galloping globalization and the exponential growth of tourism is putting the cultural and natural heritage of Asia and the Pacific at risk. Tangible and intangible features of this heritage are increasingly under siege as the economic and social fabric of various communities once relatively protected are being significantly transformed by stronger economic forces.

The physical heritage, cultural expressions and the natural environment of the region are attracting more and more tourists every year. This potential engine for economic and social development is often under great pressure, which may lead to the disappearance of the region’s most special places.

However, the impact of tourism in the least developed countries is not always a negative one. Apart from the much needed income generation that external visitors can bring to communities, tourism can also be beneficial, for instance, when it comes to the regeneration of fading cultural practices or the maintenance and re-use of the built heritage and it should be considered as an opportunity if managed sustainably.

Building on this assumption, UNESCO has worked closely with the Government of Lao PDR to develop a community-based ecological and natural tourism approach in the Nam Ha National Protected Area (NPA) in Luang Namtha province that has become a model for poverty alleviation and cultural and natural preservation around the Asia-Pacific region.

The Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was launched in 1999 with financial support from the Government of New Zealand by the Office of the UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific in cooperation with the Lao National Tourism Administration, the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry’s Department of Forest Resource Conservation and the Ministry of Information and Culture’s Department of Archaeology and Museums.
The project has focused on twenty-five villages located inside the NPA, mostly belonging to the Akha, Hmong, Kmhmu and Lanten ethnic groups. Community-based ecotourism has provided a means for the villagers to remain in their villages, continue to use forest products sustainably and also generate alternate forms of income to compensate for the loss of some traditional means of subsistence. The economic benefits that local communities derive from the culture and nature tours developed by the project result from their direct involvement in the planning, development and management of such programmes.

The Nam Ha Ecotourism model has met with great success and has been endorsed by the Government of Lao PDR, the private sector and the tourism industry as a whole. The project was recognized with a United Nations Development Award for Poverty Alleviation in Lao PDR in 2001, a British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award in 2002, and was a finalist for the 2006 United Nations Equator Prize. The project approach has now been adapted for implementation in other provinces in Lao PDR and in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

**IMPACT: The Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment in Asia and the Pacific: Alleviating Poverty and Protecting Cultural and Natural Heritage through Community-Based Ecotourism in Luang Namtha, Lao PDR** has been published in order to share the methodologies developed through the project and to assess the lessons learned from implementation in the field. We hope the publication will prove useful to those involved in both the private and public sectors in the fields of ecotourism, heritage conservation and socio-economic development, and will inspire future initiatives aimed at protecting heritage resources and empowering vulnerable communities in our region and beyond.

Richard A. Engelhardt  
UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific
Introduction to Luang Namtha
A Short History

Archaeological evidence including stone tools found in the Nam Jook River Valley in Vieng Phoukha and cliff paintings near Nale suggest that what is today Luang Namtha Province was inhabited as early as 6,000 years ago.¹ The first local written account of the area’s history appears in the Xieng Khaeng Chronicles that recount the founding of Xieng Khaeng on the banks of the Mekong River in the early fifteenth century by Chao Fa Dek Noi, a Tai Lue who came from the court of Chiang Rung. Xieng Khaeng began as a modest principality which later came under the influence of the Lanna Kingdom in northern Thailand in the early sixteenth century. From the mid-sixteenth to the early nineteenth century it became a Burmese vassal. Beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, Xieng Khaeng fell under Siamese domination and experienced numerous conflicts. In 1885, for strategic military reasons and a quest for more expansive agricultural land, Chao Fa Silinor, Xieng Khaeng’s ruler at the time, led more than 1,000 Tai Lue subjects to what is present day Muang Sing.²

South of Muang Sing, it appears that there were considerable population movements taking place from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century as well, in both the Nam Tha Valley and Vieng Phoukha. In 1587, a group of 17 Tai Yuan families arrived in the Nam Tha Valley from Chiang Saen, settling near present day Vieng Tai Village. By 1624, Muang Houa Tha was established under the traditional Tai muang administrative structure, ruled by four nobles of the Saenhansulin family. In 1628, Pathat Phoum Phouk and Pathat Phasat were constructed as symbols of friendship and neutrality between Muang Houa Tha and Chiang Saen. The original Pathat Phoum Phouk still exists, and is located south of Luang Namtha Township. The ruins of Pathat Phasat, on the other hand, found north of town near the source of the Nam Dee Stream, have almost completely disappeared.

Vieng Phoukha was prospering by the eighteenth century as seen by the construction of dozens of Buddhist monasteries and pagodas in the Nam Jook and Nam Fa River valleys. Evidence of what must have been a large population in Vieng Phoukha can be seen just north of the district capital, where an extensive khou vieng (earthen rampart) surrounds the ruins of sprawling Vat Mahaphot and many smaller pagodas.

Though Muang Houa Tha enjoyed peace and stability through most of the seventeenth century, beginning in 1709 a series of natural disasters weakened the muang, and it briefly came under the influence

¹ A variety of stone adzes and scraping tools are on display in the Luang Namtha Provincial Museum.
² Histories of Xieng Khaeng and Muang Sing are summarized primarily from Grabowsky (1999) Introduction to the History of Muang Sing (Lao PDR) Prior to French Rule: The Fate of a Lue Principality. Other historical accounts in this sections are drawn from the Luang Namtha Department of Information and Culture’s report Luang Namtha 30 Year Anniversary.
of the Sipsongpanna Tai Lue Kingdom centred in southern Yunnan Province, China. A population exodus to Muang Sing, Muang Nan (Thailand) and Muang Ngern (Sayabouli Province) followed that caused the Nam Tha Valley to become nearly completely abandoned for 155 years (Luang Namtha Department of Information and Culture, 2006). During the late 1700s prior to the reign of Chao Fa Silinor, one of the first main Tai Lue population movements from Xieng Khaeng to Muang Sing was underway, led by a woman named Nang Khemma. Nang Khemma was the widow of Xieng Khaeng’s ruler at the time and went on to commission the construction of Muang Sing’s That Xieng Teung stupa in 1787. Today, That Xieng Teung remains highly revered by Tai Lue Buddhists throughout the region and is believed to contain a sacred relic of the Lord Buddha.

In 1890, the Tai Yuan returned to the Nam Tha Valley under the aegis of Chao Luangsitthisan to re-establish Muang Houa Tha. Vat Luang Korn, one of Luang Namtha’s largest Buddhist monasteries, was constructed shortly thereafter in 1892. However, the newly resettled Muang Houa Tha enjoyed its independence for only two years. In 1894, following a meeting between the French, British and Siamese colonial powers, it was agreed that Muang Houa Tha would be administered by the French, and that the Mekong from the northern reaches of Muang Sing to Chiang Saen would serve as the border between French Indochina and British-ruled Burma. Not long after this divide took place, the first group of Tai Dam arrived from Sip Song Chu Tai in northwestern Viet Nam, and established Tong Jai Village on the east bank of the Nam Tha River. At about the same time the Tai Dam arrived, migrations of Tai Neua, Tai Khao, Akha, Lanten, Yao and Lahu, originating in Sipsongpanna, Burma and northwest Viet Nam, began to migrate to the area’s fertile valleys and the forested mountains surrounding them.

By the late 1950s, following France’s withdrawal from Indochina after her defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Muang Houa Tha again found itself embroiled in conflict, this time between the US-backed Royal Lao Army and the resistance government’s Communist-inspired Pathet Lao forces. On 6 May 1962, Muang Houa Tha came under the control of the Pathet Lao and was renamed Luang Namtha Province. The area between Houei Xay and Vieng Phoukha was called Houa Khong Province and was nominally controlled by the Royalists until the establishment of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in 1975. Between 1975 and 1983, Houa Khong and Luang Namtha were administered as a single province, after which it was partitioned into what is present-day Luang Namtha and Bokeo.

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3 This is present-day Xishuangbanna Tai Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern Yunnan Province that shares a border with Luang Namtha Province.

4 The return of the Tai Yuan to Muang Houa Tha and the migrations of other ethnic groups into the area are documented in the Luang Namtha Department of Information and Culture report Luang Namtha 30 Year Anniversary.
IMPACT: Luang Namtha, Lao PDR

Luang Namtha Today: An Overview

Tucked in the northwestern corner of Lao PDR, Luang Namtha covers an area of 9,325 square kilometres with more than 85 percent of its terrain comprised of low calciferous mountains that rise to between 800–2,000 metres above sea level (masl). The highest point (2,094 masl) is found in Vieng Phoukha District, and several peaks that approach 2,000 metres can be found among the province's central mountains that separate Namtha District and Muang Sing. Like the rest of the country, Luang Namtha's weather pattern is characterized by a rainy season that lasts from May to October followed by a cool dry period from November to February. March and April are the hottest months. On average, the daily temperature is a pleasant 25°C, but during the cool season it can dip to zero on the coldest nights.

To the north, Luang Namtha shares a 140-kilometre land border with the People's Republic of China, and its northwest frontier with Myanmar follows a 130-kilometre stretch of the Mekong River. Administratively, Luang Namtha Province is divided into five districts including Namtha, Nale, Vieng Phoukha, Long and Sing (Muang Sing). These are further divided into 380 village units. The provincial capital, which is also called Luang Namtha, is in Namtha District and is the most heavily populated town with nearly 45,000 inhabitants. The total population in 2005 was 145,310 with 78 percent classified as rural and 40 percent less than 14 years old (National Statistics Centre, 2005).

Luang Namtha's main industries are agriculture, wood processing, lignite and copper mining, handicraft production, transportation and tourism. In 2005, per capita GDP stood at US$280 and was growing at an annual rate of 7.7 percent (Luang Namtha Department of Information and Culture, 2006). In terms of employment, most people are engaged in agriculture, planting rice, corn, vegetables, cassava and peanuts. Other important agricultural products are buffaloes, cattle, fish, chickens, rubber, teakwood, watermelons, sugarcane and peppers. Forest products such as bamboo shoots, mushrooms, rattan, cardamom and ginger are also key sources of income for the rural population.
Once criss-crossed by a network of caravan trails where Chinese porcelain and silk were traded for forest products and ivory, today Luang Namtha finds that its strategic position presents a range of new opportunities and challenges. Because of its abundant natural resources, river transportation and the newly completed North-South economic corridor that links China and the Greater Mekong Sub-region, both foreign and domestic investment is booming, especially in labour- and land-intensive industries such as agriculture. This scenario is fuelling broad economic development that is raising the standard of living of many families in Luang Namtha, especially those residing in towns that are participating in commercial activities related to tourism, light manufacturing and the trade in agricultural products. Less well-off, but still reaping the economic benefits of the market economy are farmers with secure land tenure who now have new markets for a range of agricultural products. It remains to be seen to what extent communities living in remote areas will benefit from the current investment boom and how the province will address the environmental and social issues that are arising from rapid deforestation, rural-to-urban migration and a large influx of immigrants that have quickly dominated many local businesses.
Part I

Cultural and Natural Heritage in Luang Namtha

Section A documents Luang Namtha’s most significant cultural and natural heritage assets. In Section B, the main issues related to heritage conservation and protection are discussed and a summary of current heritage-related legal instruments is presented. An overview of community participation in local conservation efforts is highlighted in Section B.
A. Understanding the Heritage of Luang Namtha

Ethnic Diversity in Luang Namtha: The Foundation of its Living Heritage

Luang Namtha Province is home to more than 20 different ethnic groups, making it a remarkable repository of ethnic diversity and indigenous knowledge. The traditional clothing, handicrafts, livelihood systems and rituals of these ethnic groups are a valuable part of the province’s cultural heritage. Use of the term “ethnic minority” is somewhat of a misnomer in Luang Namtha, as ethnic minorities by far outnumber the ethnic Lao who make up only about 3 percent of the provincial population. According to the 2005 census, there are more Akha in Luang Namtha than any other single ethnic group, numbering 36,531, or 25.1 percent of the provincial population. The Akha primarily inhabit upland areas in Muang Sing and Long District, with some villages found in Namtha. The next largest ethnic group is the Kmhmu, who make up 24.5 percent of the population, followed by the Tai Lue who account for 12.2 percent. Some of the province’s oldest continuously inhabited settlements are the ancient Tai Lue villages found in the northern reaches of Muang Sing. Other Tai groups, including the Tai Dam, Tai Khao and Tai Daeng, account for 10.1 percent of the population and live mostly in the Namtha Valley.

Table 1. Main Ethnic Groups (by population) in Luang Namtha, 2005

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<th>Ethnic Group</th>
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<td>Akha</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kmhmu</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Lue</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Dam, Daeng, Khao</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lahu</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai Yuan</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao (Iu-Mien), Lanten</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamet</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Luang Namtha Population and Housing Census, 2005
Luang Namtha is characterized by a lack of inter-ethnic conflict and low population density (currently less than 19 persons per square kilometre) with enough land and natural resources traditionally available to comfortably support a subsistence lifestyle. This tradition of self-sufficiency has helped, until very recently, to insulate Luang Namtha’s ethnic groups from outside pressure to change their production systems and cultural practices. Today, the introduction of sedentary commercial agriculture together with exposure to the mass media, which portrays a better “modern” lifestyle based on materialism and an unrestrained market economy, is exerting a strong influence on the younger generation and is leading many to abandon the cultural practices and beliefs followed by their ancestors.

The short descriptions that follow are intended to provide a brief introduction to Luang Namtha’s main ethnic groups and highlight some aspects of their material and traditional culture.

**Akha**

The Akha are a Tibeto-Burman-speaking ethnic group that first appeared in the country around the mid-nineteenth century. Akha life is characterized by a ritual and ethical code which provides them with strict guidelines on how to live their lives; the Akha call this the “Akha Way” (Akha zang). The “Akha Way” not only includes all Akha traditions, ceremonies and customary law, but also determines how they cultivate their fields, hunt animals, view and treat sickness and relate to one another and to outsiders.

The Akha practice swidden agriculture in upland fields. They cultivate rice that is inter-mixed with other food crops, for example, maize, millet and corn. The Akha, like many other ethnic groups living in Luang Namtha, also utilize the forest to supplement their diet and consequently have an extensive knowledge of the plants and animals living there.

The Akha traditionally lived in the mountains at altitudes around 1,000–1,200 metres above sea level but today many have moved down to lower altitudes. Akha settlements are marked by their towering swings and gates both at the front and back of the village. These gates mark the boundary between the human world and the outside, natural world. The gates are usually flanked by a pair of male and female wooden figures and woven bamboo symbols. Visitors to the village can pass through the village gates, but should not touch the gates, the wooden figures or anything else associated with these gates.

Akha women are easily recognizable by their distinctive garments which consist of black cotton mini-skirts and black, tight-fitting bodices covered by jackets decorated with embroidery and appliqué designs, topped by tall, elaborate head-dress decorated with beads, silver, seeds, and in the past, monkey fur.
Kmhmu

The Kmhmu, or their ancestors, probably settled the area of present-day Lao PDR several thousand years ago and are today one of the country’s most populous ethnic groups. Part of the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family, the Kmhmu are divided into many sub-groups including the Kmhmu Lue, Kwaen, Rok and Ou, with the majority of Kmhmu in Luang Namtha being Kwaen or Rok. Like many of the ethnic groups in northern Lao PDR, the Kmhmu are not Buddhist, but practice their own form of animism. Because they are among the earliest settlers, many Lao believe that the Kmhmu have power over the spirits of the land.

The Kmhmu traditionally lived on the mountainsides, however, in recent times, many Kmhmu have moved down to lower altitudes and live close to the roads. The Kmhmu in Luang Namtha generally practice mixed economies, growing upland swidden rice, hunting, fishing and gathering forest products. They are known in Luang Namtha for producing a rice alcohol called *lao hai* that is drunk communally through bamboo straws inserted into a large ceramic urn.

Because the Kmhmu are highly knowledgeable about medicinal plants and are highly-skilled producers of woven rattan and bamboo basketry, many Kmhmu villages are regularly visited by tourists who purchase handicrafts and hire local guides to lead them on forest treks. Tourism has become a new and important source of income for a number of Kmhmu villages in Namtha and Vieng Phoukha District, especially in the villages located on the Ban Nalan Trekking Trail.

Tai Lue

The Tai Lue are part of the larger Tai-Kadai linguistic family. All Tai languages are linguistically very alike. Consequently the Tai Lue language is similar, but not identical to, the Tai spoken by lowland Lao and other Tai-Lao speakers. Some of Luang Namtha’s most populous Tai-Lao speakers are the Tai Dam, Tai Khao and Tai Yuan. The Tai Lue began settling present day Muang Sing (Xieng Kaeng) in the fifteenth century, moving into valleys and establishing settlements near rivers or streams to make it easier to grow their main crop, glutinous rice in irrigated paddies. The industrious Tai Lue also cultivate small kitchen gardens and fruit trees and raise a variety of domesticated animals.

Like many Tai-Lao groups, the Tai Lue practice Theravada Buddhism and every village will typically have a Buddhist temple and monks. Most Tai Lue males are ordained for at least a short time during some point in their lives. Their Buddhism is mixed with...
The Hmong language belongs to the Hmong-Mien family (also referred to as Miao-Yao). The Hmong, like the Akha (and other Tibeto-Burman speaking groups) are not native to northern Lao PDR. They migrated there from southern China sometime during the nineteenth century, typically locating their villages along the ridges near the tops of mountains. Today, however, most Hmong communities have been resettled to lower altitudes. Unlike most of the other ethnic groups living in Luang Namtha, the Hmong build their houses on the ground, rather than raised up on stilts.

The Hmong, like other upland groups, traditionally practiced swidden agriculture and supplemented their diet with forest products. Like both Akha and the Kmhmu, Hmong people are known for their knowledge of the forest, proficiency as hunters and ability to prepare herbal medicines. They are also recognized for their expertise in raising animals, particularly horses.

Hmong religious practice reflects their long history of contact with the Chinese in south China. Although they are not Buddhist, elements of their religious practice derive from Chinese popular Buddhism mixed with Taoism. They believe in a complex pantheon of powerful spirits who need constant attention and propitiation. The latter is carried out by shamans. The Hmong are organized into clans and lineages, and their religious practices incorporate elements of ancestor worship as well.

Hmong traditional dress is adorned with intricate embroidery and heavy silver jewellery. Some villages still know how to produce batik on hemp or cotton textiles using beeswax and indigo dyes. During Hmong New Year, which falls sometime during December/January, numerous festivities take place including top-spinning competitions, trade fairs, singing and tossing the mak kone (a small ball made of fabric). This game is part of the courting ritual during Hmong New Year (Photo: Kees Sprengers)
ritual between young men and women. Known as industrious and shrewd merchants, the Hmong trade a variety of forest products and agricultural goods. In fact, the first village to experiment with commercial rubber production, which has become prevalent in the province today, was Had Yao Village, a Hmong community located just north of Luang Namtha Town.

Tai Dam

The Tai Dam language, as has been noted, belongs to the Tai-Kadai linguistic family, and is closely related to the other Tai languages spoken in the area. The Tai-Dam in Luang Namtha are believed to have come into Lao PDR from northwestern Viet Nam. They began to migrate to the Nam Tha Valley in the late nineteenth century. Today there are 13 Tai Dam villages in Luang Namtha, and they constitute one of the Nam Tha Valley’s main ethnic groups. The Tai Dam differ from many other Tai groups in that they are not Theravada Buddhists. Instead, they practice a form of spirit worship which traditionally functioned on multiple levels: (1) the traditional Tai state (i.e. the *muang*), (2) the village and (3) individual households. This spirit worship is deeply embedded in all Tai groups and is still found even among Buddhist Tai. These practices pre-date the arrival of Buddhism and can be considered the earliest form of religion for all Tai groups.

The Tai Dam traditionally settled in upland valleys, growing both paddy and upland swidden rice. Individual families also cultivate small vegetable gardens and supplement their diet through hunting and fishing. Other livelihood activities include the production of fine quality silk and cotton textiles. In the late 1990s many of Luang Namtha’s local Tai Dam women began exporting directly to markets in Japan and the USA.

A Tai Dam women’s clothing is characterized by a colourful headscarf, long tubular skirt and tight-fitting shirt adorned with silver buttons. Male clothing consists of indigo-dyed cotton trousers and a simple cotton shirt.

Lanten

The term Lanten, according to ethnographers, is derived from Chinese and it has become the more commonly used ethnonym for this group. The Lanten actually belong to the Mun sub-group of the wider Yao (Iu-Mien) ethnic group. They originally came from China and are still found in today’s Guangxi Province, Yunnan Province and on Hainan Island. They speak a Yao language that is part of the larger Hmong-Mien linguistic family (also called Miao-Yao). However, unlike other Yao groups, the Lanten do not build their villages high in the mountains, but settle further down on the slopes. In Luang Namtha they are usually found near streams. For
this reason, the Lanten are sometimes referred to as *Lao Houay*, or “stream Lao.” According to their oral histories, the Lanten recount that they probably moved into Lao PDR during the nineteenth century.

The Lanten typically practice swidden agriculture for their rice and vegetable production and raise some small domestic animals. They supplement their diet and income by hunting and gathering forest products.

Like the Miao, the Yao and Lanten subgroups are strongly influenced by their long contact with the Chinese. The Lanten have patrilineal clans and lineages and practice a mixture of ancestor worship and Taoism. They have a well developed writing system based on Chinese characters and this is mostly used to write religious texts and local histories. Men are the ritual specialists and guardians of the written traditions. Books and manuscripts are written on a durable bamboo paper made by the women.

Lanten women wear distinctive black indigo-dyed cotton tunics with pink trim, heavy silver jewellery and white leggings. The Lanten produce thick, high-quality cotton cloth, wooden ceremonial masks and there are a few remaining silversmiths and blacksmiths.

One place that Lanten ceremonial masks are still being made is in Nam Lue Village. Lao Lee, a Lanten ritual specialist who lives in Nam Lue village, reports that the production of these masks almost completely stopped during the mid-1970s. Production was revived in the late 1990s due to a combination of support from the government to strengthen cultural industries and tourists’ interest in purchasing them.

**Lahu**

The Lahu speak a Tibeto-Burman language that exhibits some similarities with the Akha language. The Lahu moved into Lao PDR during the past 100 years from southern China along the Yunnan-Burma frontier. They are now found in Myanmar, Thailand as well as northern Lao PDR. Lahu can be broadly divided into black (Lahu Na), red (Lahu Nyi) and yellow (Lahu Shi). Most Lahu villages in Lao PDR are located in Bokeo Province and Luang Namtha’s Vieng Phoukha and Long Districts. Lahu prefer to live in villages located above 1,200 metres and like the other Tibet-Burman groups, practice swidden agriculture. However, they also rely on the forest to supplement their diet. The men hunt and the women gather a variety of edible plants.

The Lahu form patrilineal clans and, like the Akha, practice their own distinct form of spirit worship, with good and bad spirits as-
Understanding the Heritage of Luang Namtha

associated with natural phenomena, houses, livestock and the forest. Many Lahu inside Myanmar and Thailand have converted to Christianity as a result of contact with missionaries but this has not occurred in Luang Namtha. Rituals and celebrations associated with the agricultural cycle, marriage and house-building take place throughout the year. The most colourful is the New Year festival that usually takes place during January/February each year.

Festivals and Daily Life

The routine of daily rituals and annual festivals in Luang Namtha revolves around the agricultural cycle, lunar calendar and religious beliefs specific to each individual ethnic group. For example, in Buddhist communities, one can observe monks on their morning alms round, giving lay people the opportunity to gain merit by making offerings as part of a daily ritual called *binthabhat*. Other Buddhist rituals such as offering candles and incense to Buddha images and the ordination of young men follow a pattern similar to that seen in other parts of the country.

Local festivals that attract the largest number of people are the annual boat races on the Nam Tha each October, Muang Sing’s That Xieng Teung Festival in November, Hmong and Kmhmu New Year’s celebrations in December/January, the That Phoum Pouk Festival in February, the Rocket Festival in April (Namtha District) and May (Muang Sing) and Lao New Year in April. There is also a large public gathering on 2 December which is National Day in Lao PDR.

In general, all of Luang Namtha’s ethnic groups hold special rituals and festivals associated with the planting and harvest season, with the latter from November–January being the time when food is plentiful and farmers have a chance to rest briefly before making preparations for the upcoming year’s planting. Following the harvest, the Kmhmu hold the “spirit of the new rice” festival in December/January. New Year celebrations held by the Lanten, Yao, Tai Dam, Hmong and Seda that mark the end of their agricultural cycles also take place in December/January.

One special festival only held in Luang Namtha is the huge *Boun Tai Dam* that is held every three years in one of the province’s 13 Tai Dam villages. This three-day festival brings together people of all ages in a show of solidarity among the Tai Dam, and includes traditional performances, music, sports competition and plenty of food and the potent local rice alcohol called *lao lao*. A particularly large *Boun Tai Dam* was held in Nam Ngaen Village during February 2008.
Major Buddhist Festivals in Luang Namtha

**February**

*Boun Maka Bousa* – This festival is held on the full moon to commemorate the speech given by the Lord Buddha to 1,250 enlightened monks who gathered without prior notice. In the evening, the faithful visit local temples and circumambulate three times with candles in a ceremony known as *vien tian.*

*Boun Khao Chi* – A special offering of sticky rice is coated with eggs then roasted and offered to monks. This ceremony is associated with *Maka Bousa.*

**May**

*Boun Visakha Bousa* – This festival celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Lord Buddha. It is held on the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month. Beautiful candlelit processions take place in the evening.

**July**

*Boun Khao Pansa* – This full moon festival marks the beginning of Buddhist lent, a three-month period when monks are required to stay within their *vat* to meditate and focus on *dhamma* studies. Lao men are traditionally ordained as monks during this time.

**August**

*Boun Khao Padap Din* – Special offerings are made to spirits of the deceased on the new moon of the ninth lunar month.

**September**

*Boun Khao Salak* – Offerings including daily necessities such as books, pens, sugar and coffee are made to specific monks based on a lottery system. Laypeople also present beautiful wax-flower candles to the monks to gain merit.

**October**

*Boun Ork Pansa* – Held on the full moon in October near the end of the rainy season, monks who were ordained for the three month lent period leave the *vat* and rejoin their families. During the evening of *Van Ork Pansa,* small banana-leaf boats called *heua fai* are launched on rivers with offerings of incense, candles and small amounts of money in a ceremony meant to bring luck and prosperity.

**November**

*Boun That Xieng Teung* – Muang Sing’s most famous festival attracts large crowds of people from around the province as well as Tai Lue Buddhists from as far away as Myanmar, China and Thailand. This festival is held during the same period as the famous That Luang Festival in Vientiane.
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Unfortunately, because of poverty and lack of awareness, many antique textiles, Buddha images, bronze drums, ceremonial masks, ritual clothing and ancient manuscripts once produced in Luang Namtha have been sold by the families that originally owned them and are now in private collections in Vientiane, Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Some pieces have even travelled as far as the USA and Europe, thus making it very difficult to see authentic antiques in the province. Just about the only place to find them on display publicly in Luang Namtha is at the Luang Namtha Museum located in the provincial capital or at the Muang Sing Exhibition Centre housed in the recently restored residence of Phaya Sekong, an aristocrat who lived in Muang Sing during the early twentieth century. The Namtha Museum has a very good collection of bronze drums, ethnic clothing, stone tools and basketry, while the Muang Sing Exhibition Centre mainly displays rare old photographs, palm leaf manuscripts, farm tools and a variety of common household items.

Despite the lack of antiques, there are still many skilful handicraft producers in the province who make clothing, textiles, basketry, paper and agricultural tools for both personal use and for sale. Most producers have modified production methods and discontinued using natural materials to make their traditional clothing in order to save time and labour. But it is still possible to find authentic ethnic garments and hand-made textiles in some villages and handicraft galleries in town. Most of what is seen for sale is based on traditional Tai, Akha, Lanten and Hmong designs, which may vary considerably depending on the creativity and skill of the producer. Some of the most popular crafts are described below.

**Tai Dam Silk**

Mulberry orchards lining the banks of the Nam Tha River have been planted for generations to feed the voracious appetite of silkworms. Tai Dam women patiently unwind each cocoon and through an intricate process of spinning, dyeing and weaving the fine silk thread, create intricate *sins* (traditional skirts), scarves and wall hangings in a variety of patterns, shapes and sizes. These products can be found for sale in town, but a visit to a working loom in a village is the best way to learn about the entire process. Tong Jai Tai, Nam Mye and Nam Ngaen Villages have many skilled weavers who use both natural and chemical dyes. In the past, Tai Dam produced beautiful and functional silk and cotton mosquito nets with intricately woven trim. These nets are rarely made today because of the wide availability of cheaper, factory-made versions fashioned from nylon mesh and plastic.
Cotton Textiles

Both the Lanten and Akha produce heavy, indigo-dyed bolts of organically grown cotton that is used to make clothing and shoulder bags. Bolts of cloth to make bags and clothing can be purchased directly from the producers in villages around the Namtha Valley. Because of an influx of cheap, factory-made cotton thread from China and Thailand, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find locally spun yarns. Natural indigo dyeing is still common, but there is concern that chemical dyes will replace the more environmentally-friendly indigo, and further contribute to the loss of authenticity of this traditional handicraft. The Tai Lue and Tai Yuan were once well-known producers of colourful, naturally-dyed cotton sin, but today, as with the Akha and Lanten, much of the cotton that is used in Tai weaving is imported and natural dyes are seldom used. Though it is unfortunate that most producers have moved away from traditional production methods, the increasing demand that international tourists and discerning domestic customers show for authentic cotton textiles is helping to ensure that they do not altogether disappear from Luang Namtha.

Basketry

Baskets are made by nearly every village for everything from storing textiles to carrying products to market, steaming food, catching fish and sheathing knives. The most skillful bamboo and rattan weavers are the Kmhmu, who produce pieces of artistic quality for home use, sale and ritual purposes. Most of the cylindrical baskets that one sees for sale in town were probably produced by a male Kmhmu basket weaver.

An interesting piece of basketry sometimes seen hanging from the foundation of a building under construction is a long tubular bamboo and rattan sai, which is a fish trap. Many people will tie the sai to a foundation pillar as part of a ceremony intended to bring luck and prosperity to a new building and its inhabitants. This piece of basketry is used because the Lao word sai sounds like the same word for “luck”. Other items tied to the pillar might be sugarcane and a banana tree to induce fertility, an effigy of a turtle so the house will be cool and pleasant and some banknotes to further ensure prosperity.
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The Lanten and Yao make a durable paper out of bamboo that was traditionally used to record ancient religious texts and legends. This rough brown parchment is made from finely pounded bamboo pulp that is spread thinly across a large sheet of cotton and then dried in the sun. The paper is still used for its traditional purposes, and is also now made into photo albums, journals and lamp shades, some accented with the Lanten or Yao script. Upon entering a Lanten or Yao home, one will notice a small spirit altar on the wall near the middle of the house that may have bits of bamboo or mulberry bark paper hanging from it. This paper, like other ritual items, should not be disturbed by anyone expect the owners of the house or a ritual specialist who is invited to perform certain ceremonies associated with it. Two of the best places to see bamboo paper making are Ban Sop Dtut and Ban Nam Dee during the months of January–March.

Bamboo and Mulberry Bark Paper

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Embroidery

Many of Luang Namtha’s ethnic groups embroider patterns based on the natural or mystical world into their traditional clothing using cotton or silk thread. The fine needlework seen on an authentic Yao woman’s colourful trousers, tunic and turban may take her up to one year to complete. Equally colourful and difficult to make is the traditional Hmong clothing that can be seen during the Hmong New Year festival in December/January each year. The Lanten embroider bags, shirts and children’s hats with colourful cotton patterns. Almost as intricate as a Yao woman’s costume are a Lanten and Yao shaman’s robes. These robes have dragon and celestial motifs that are very labour-intensive to produce.
Silversmiths and Blacksmiths

Lanten, Hmong and Akha artisans are known for their detailed silverwork, though, unfortunately, many have died without passing on their knowledge of the craft. The high cost of silver also threatens the survival of this skill. It is possible to see intricate silver ornaments on traditional clothing and jewellery worn by these ethnic groups, but is becoming increasingly rare except during New Year festivals and weddings.

Blacksmiths are kept busy fashioning knives and farm implements from high-grade carbon steel recovered from the leaf springs of old cars and trucks. Hand-powered bellows and anvils commonly made from decommissioned artillery shells are used to shape these sturdy tools that typically last many years. Pieng Ngam Village has several groups of skilled blacksmiths, as does Chalensouk, Sop Sim and Nam Lue. Each village has subtle variations in knife and tool design based on the creativity of the producer and the demands of the user.

Bronze Casting

Evidence of bronze casting and sites where bronze drums, called kong bang were possibly produced can be found in Vieng Phoukha District. Bronze Buddha images in the provincial museum that were taken from Muang Sing also suggest that bronze items were once cast in the province. Today the craft has totally disappeared.

Performing Arts

Music and dance are the two most prevalent forms of performing arts in Luang Namtha. In Ban Vieng Tai, the Provincial Tourism Department and the Department of Information and Culture are working with village elders from this Tai Yuan community to train youth to play the instruments that make up a traditional orchestra. These include the lanat (xylophone), stringed saw ou, cymbals and long drum. A dance troupe has been formed and both the orchestra and dance group regularly perform for tourists at the Ban Vieng Cultural Centre, a replica of a traditional Tai Yuan house. During Lao New Year and other festivals, Luang Namtha’s ethnic groups will stage traditional performances as well, with the Kmhmu noted for gong performances accompanied by dancing and copious amounts of lao hai. The Hmong play a version of the kaen or mouth organ that is slightly larger than the Lao version of the instrument. Hmong musicians, rather than remaining stationary during a song, will perform an impressive series of somersaults while holding the kaen. To support and popularize traditional music and dance, the Provincial Tourism Department and the Department of Information...
Understanding the Heritage of Luang Namtha

While Luang Namtha is not well known for its cuisine, there is great culinary variety in the province. This is because of the province’s ethnic diversity and the availability of fresh ingredients from the forests, fields and rivers. For an excellent account of a foreign woman’s adventures in eating her way through Luang Namtha and the rest of Lao PDR, see Ant Egg Soup – Adventures of a Food Tourist in Laos by Natacha Du Pont De Bie.

Besides kaeng kai mot daeng, a pungent, sour tasting soup made with red ant eggs, herbs and fish, Luang Namtha is famous for soups made from bitter bamboo and rattan shoots. There is a wide variety of dipping sauces collectively referred to as jaeow for the ubiquitous sticky rice, including jaeow ong, made by the Tai Yuan from a mix of fermented soybeans, tomato and a range of savoury spices. The Tai Dam prepare a special dish called sin mat, consisting of thinly-sliced grilled beef marinated in a mixture of fish sauce, salt and mak kaen, a forest herb that tastes somewhat like a cross between pepper and cloves. Also produced in Luang Namtha is a variation of flash-fried kai paen, or dried river moss, to which the locals add a small amount of ginger essence, making it arguably more delicious than the famed Luang Prabang version.

Rice is the core component of every meal, and a hand-milled serving of one of the hundreds of indigenous varieties is a culinary experience in itself. Glutinous sticky rice and non-sticky rice are grown in both irrigated paddies and on the mountainsides, with each variety adapted to its micro-environment influenced by temperature, altitude, soil quality and rainfall. Most farmers produce sticky rice, but Lanten, Hmong, Lahu and Akha prefer varieties with a lower gluten content. Rice is pounded into flour that becomes the basic ingredient for bread and the popular flat noodles called kao soi. The light, crispy baguettes (a type of French bread) one finds in Luang Namtha are produced from rice (not wheat) flour, are baked in wood-fired ovens, and go very well with a cup of Lao Arabica coffee that may have been grown in Muang Sing.

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In general, the food in Luang Namtha is not as spicy as that found in Vientiane and further south. There is much less use of the fermented fish paste \textit{pa dek} as a flavouring, and more emphasis on the use of plain salt, lard and forest herbs. Unfortunately, wildlife destined for the dinner table, including many endangered species, is commonly seen for sale in provincial markets and at roadside stopovers near villages.

When a Lao or foreign guest is invited to a local person’s home for a meal or is invited to an official function in Luang Namtha, the host will almost certainly offer a glass of potent \textit{lao lao} alcohol that is made by fermenting and distilling sticky rice. Sharing a glass of \textit{lao lao} is an important social practice in Luang Namtha and it is considered rude to refuse if offered. If indeed one chooses not to drink, a simple gesture of raising the glass to the lips will suffice. In Kmhmu and some Tai villages a popular local drink, known as \textit{lao hai} may be offered. \textit{Lao hai} is made by fermenting rice, yeast, spices and rice husks in a large earthen jar. These jars of sweet and surprisingly strong alcohol are an important part of any Kmhmu ceremony or celebration, from weddings and religious rituals to a simple gathering of a few friends who want to relax and socialize. Traditionally, one must drink a volume of liquid that can fill two small buffalo horns (about a half-litre) through a long curved bamboo straw, before passing the straw on to the next person.

\section*{Built Heritage}

Visible remnants of religious, secular and colonial-period buildings are scattered throughout Luang Namtha, but because of a lack of written records and inconsistent oral histories, very few reliable sources of information about these structures exist. Clearly, more research is needed, especially in remote areas of Muang Sing, Vieng Phoukha, Nale and Long Districts.

An interesting observation in the provincial capital of Luang Namtha is that there is only one Buddhist temple, Vat That Luang, that was completed in 2007. This is because the town is mainly populated by a mix of non-Buddhist ethnic groups that have only recently migrated to this new town. Luang Namtha was carved out of the forest in the early 1980s and its neat layout follows a purposeful grid pattern with wide avenues running north to south, transected by smaller cross streets. Consequently, nearly all the buildings in Luang Namtha town are less than 30 years old, comprised of a mix of uninspiring, multi-storey utilitarian cement structures and small wood and cement residences. Very few buildings in the main town retain traditional architectural lines or design features.

The highest concentration of religious buildings is found in Muang Sing’s district centre. Here, Buddhist \textit{vats} are constructed mainly
in the Tai Lue style, characterized by low sloping roofs supported by large wood posts and thick cement or whitewashed plaster walls. In the past, these structures were covered with locally-produced terracotta roof tiles. The most important is Vat Luang, located just off the main road through town and behind the Muang Sing Exhibition Centre. Most of the temples in Muang Sing have today been renovated using non-traditional materials such as corrugated iron roofing and cement and latex paints that have severely diminished the heritage value of these buildings. Important religious monuments in Muang Sing include the Tai Lue-influenced That Xieng Teung, That Jorm Sing and That Xieng Khaeng. Located upstream of That Xieng Khaeng on a small Mekong peninsula that becomes an island in the rainy season is That Hin Fou, a Shan-style pagoda originally constructed in 1783. That Hin Fou and That Xieng Khaeng receive very few visitors because of their remote location on the northern reaches of the Mekong. Also receiving few visitors is Muang Long’s That Jorm Jeuang which was constructed in 1799 and somewhat resembles That Xieng Khaeng.

In Namtha District, the Tai Yuan villages Ban Vieng and Ban Kone have vibrant vats with resident monks. The largest and oldest is Vat Luang Khone built in 1892. Vat Luang Khone serves as the province’s official school for dhamma studies and is the focal point for religious activities of the Tai Yuan community. Further south in Vieng Phoukha, remnants of what are believed to be seventeenth to eighteenth century Buddhist monasteries and pagodas can be found, though most are little more than indiscriminate mounds of earth, broken roof tiles and large clay bricks that characterize temple construction of that period. The most intact and accessible is Vat Mahaphot, set in the centre of an extensive, spiral-shaped earthen rampart just north of the main town.

Built religious heritage in Luang Namtha Province is mainly comprised of structures related to Buddhism. However, one exception is a forested area containing roughly two dozen stone stele up to 50 centimetres in height that are inscribed with images of buffaloes, coins and celestial motifs. The site is located in Nale District near a Lamet community called Ban Dornthip. The Lamet are a non-Buddhist Mon-Khmer speaking ethnic group that bury their dead, therefore it is hypothesized that this area is a cemetery. Also in Nale near a community called Ban Koop is an unusual cliff painting of what appears to be a human figure grasping a chicken. This painting has not been dated, nor has any research been published about the site.

Examples of buildings constructed during the colonial period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are found in Muang Sing. Here, the old French army garrison is still standing, though in an advanced stage of decay and today used by the Lao Army. The original Muang Sing Market, once a centre of trade in opium and forest products, has had its original clay roof tiles replaced with
corrugated iron and is now used as a handicrafts market. Most commercial activity today takes place in the new market on the edge of town, revolving around the sale of everyday produce and imported goods manufactured in China and Thailand. In Namtha District, the only visible remnants of a colonial structure are the stone foundation and steps that were once part of a French administrator’s residence. This site is now a private home, located directly in front of Khone Village’s secondary school.

Two heritage buildings that have been restored recently in Muang Sing are the home of an early twentieth-century merchant that is now the Muang Sing Tourist Information Centre and the Muang Sing Exhibition Centre. These structures were refurbished between 2004 and 2007 with assistance from GTZ under the framework of Lao-German Cooperation. Although the buildings are now aesthetically pleasing, serving as functional structures with refinished facades and roofing materials, the authenticity of the buildings has been compromised by the use of modern construction materials. For example, the original thick mud and rice-straw adobe walls of the Tourist Information Centre have been replaced with brick and mortar and the clay roofing tiles that covered the residence of Phaya Sekong before it was converted to the Muang Sing Exhibition Centre is now a mix of corrugated iron and asbestos tiles painted red.

The best place to see homes constructed from authentic materials such as wood, bamboo and thatch is in rural communities. Here, families still rely heavily on the forest to obtain construction materials and generally follow traditional beliefs and practices regarding how and when to construct a house. Historically, each ethnic group had a particular architectural style. Today, however, with increasing affluence and a desire for more durable construction materials, the use of cement, bricks and steel to create plain, homogenous one- and two-story villas is becoming ubiquitous.

**Natural Heritage**

Luang Namtha’s natural heritage forms the foundation of the provincial tourism industry and is the basis of economic activities for more than 85 percent of the population. The province’s mountains, broad valleys, forests, caves and rivers also play an important role in the cultural beliefs and practices of the multi-ethnic population.

The dominant vegetation cover is evergreen, mixed evergreen and deciduous forests that harbour diverse wildlife and plant species. Historically, much of the land that now falls within Luang Namtha’s borders would have been covered by dense, triple-canopy subtropical monsoon forests. However, after generations of swidden cultivation and human alteration, today much of the forest is fragmented, with 30 percent native and undisturbed
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Land and 60 percent classified as re-growth or woody shrub land. About 10 percent has been converted to agricultural land (Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Programme, 2003).

Most undisturbed forest is located in remote and inaccessible areas but a few Tai Dam villages have preserved a series of ancient forest patches because they are believed to be sacred sites and are used as cemeteries. These green patches hold some of the Namtha Valley’s largest trees and are highly venerated. As one wanders through the soaring trees, older Tai Dam graves appear as large piles of soil while newer graves are marked by colourful flags, ritual items and the taleo woven from bamboo. Common household items, or more often effigies of the latter, are placed next to the graves for use by the departed spirit in the after-world. The concept of the “sacred forest” is widespread among Luang Namtha’s ethnic groups, and near many villages, large stands of primary forest can be found. These sacred forests may be cemeteries, while some derive their spiritual significance from the occurrence of natural landmarks or historic events.

Nam Ha National Protected Area:
an ASEAN Natural Heritage Site

Because of its regional significance in terms of habitat and diversity of species, the Nam Ha National Protected Area (NPA) was designated as an ASEAN Heritage Site in 2003. Located entirely within Luang Namtha’s borders, the 222,400 square-hectare Nam Ha NPA covers 24 percent of the province and extends into all five of the province’s administrative districts. It is the fourth largest NPA in Lao PDR and also the fourth largest protected area in the Northern Indochina subtropical forest zone. This zone has the highest species diversity for birds among all eco-regions in the Indo-Pacific Realm. The Nam Ha NPA is contiguous with the 77,500 hectare Nam Kan Provincial Protected Area in Bokeo and the 44,000 hectare Shiang Yong Protected Area in Yunnan, China. There is at least one group of elephants that regularly cross between the Nam Ha NPA’s upper Nam Kong watershed and Shiang Yong. The Nam Ha NPA is reported to harbour at least 38 species of large mammals and 22 endangered species have been observed in the area including the globally threatened cloulded leopard and tiger (Tizard et al., 1997). There are small populations of gaur, Asian elephant and possibly a unique muntjac species living in and around the NPA. A survey in 2003 confirmed that the black-cheeked crested gibbon, one of the rarest and most endangered gibbon species, can be found in low numbers in at least three remote forest locations in Nale, Vieng Phoukha and Long districts (Johnson et al., 2004). Tizard reports the bird fauna is diverse with over 288 species found within the boundaries of the protected area (ibid). Key species include the
byth's kingfisher, grey-headed lapwing, pied falconet, green cochoa, yellow-vented warbler, rufous-throated fulvetta and short-tailed parrotbill. The area contains nationally important populations of silver pheasant and has recorded the first recent sightings of the crimson-breasted woodpecker in Lao PDR.

The majority of the NPA lies at around 1,000-1,500 masl with an elevation range of 540-2,094 metres. The province's largest mountain and one of the highest peaks in northern Lao PDR is within the western core zone of the NPA in Vieng Phoukha District. The climate here is moist to dry sub-tropical and the area receives about 1,500-2,000 millimetres of rainfall per annum. It is estimated that about 32 percent of the NPA is undisturbed or primary forest (Hedemark, 2003). Both the Nam Tha and Nam Kong Rivers rise in the northern Nam Kong core zone, part of an important catchment that provides water for Luang Namtha Town and the villagers living downstream. Lowland wet-rice cultivation is promoted by the government as the preferred method of rice production, but evidence of swidden fields can be found among nearly all NPA land located within 5 kilometres of human settlement. Despite official efforts to reduce swidden cultivation and some success in doing so, this method of agriculture was still commonly practiced in 2007.

In terms of NPA management zones, the protected area has been divided into three strictly protected core zones (Nam Kong, Phou Song Phan and the Central Core Zone) and multi-use areas where some livelihood activities like agriculture, hunting and the collection of non-timber forest products are permitted. Geographically, the NPA has four distinct areas: (i) the Luang Nam Tha Plain, made up of bamboo, secondary evergreen forests and scrub, (ii) the Northern Highlands Zone, with patches of primary evergreen forest mixed with secondary forest and large patches of *imperata* grass, (iii) the Southern Highlands, including evergreen forest and scrubland and (iv) the Nam Kong area along the border with China that has mainly secondary evergreen forest and scrub. The majority of undisturbed forest falls within the three core zones that cover 30 percent of the protected area, with the largest being the Central Core Zone situated north and west of Luang Namtha town, extending into Vieng Phoukha and Sing Districts. There are 104 villages that surround the NPA, all of which are reliant on the protected area as a source of food, water, medicine, building material and sometimes agricultural land (Nam Ha NPA Management Unit, 2004).
Understanding the Heritage of Luang Namtha

Those accustomed to seeing the broad, meandering Mekong River in Lao PDR’s capital Vientiane would hardly recognize the narrow, silt-laden torrent that rushes out of southern China to form the border between Myanmar and Lao PDR. The Mekong begins its 1,860 kilometre journey through Lao PDR in the upper reaches of Muang Sing, then flows past the ancient Tai Lue settlements of Ban Xai and Xieng Kaeng before reaching Xieng Kok, a major stopover for cargo ships plying the river between China and Thailand’s northern port at Chiang Saen. Several rivers that are tributaries of the Mekong rise in Luang Namtha, including the Nam Ha, Nam Tha, Nam Fa, Nam Kha, Nam Pha, Nam Ma and Nam Kong.

Due to its remote setting, the section of the Mekong Valley that traverses Luang Namtha is sparsely populated, with only a few villages found along the 130 kilometre frontier with Myanmar. In contrast, settlements can be found at 5-10 kilometre intervals along

Box 3. Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)

The vast monsoon forests that cover Luang Namtha produce much more than just timber for the local wood-processing industry. Over 150 commercially important species of non-timber forest products are found here, many of which comprise rural people’s main source of income and food security. The definition of a non-timber forest product (NTFP) goes far beyond plants and includes terrestrial and aquatic wildlife. Some of the most common NTFP’s harvested in Luang Namtha for home use and sale in local markets are bitter bamboo shoots, rattan, mushrooms, honey, fish, small mammals, insects, birds and forest fruits. High value NTFP’s such as aromatic eagleswood resin (*aquilaria* sp.) and cardamom are much sought after by Thai, Indian and Chinese traders for export to international markets.

A visit to a rural village shows that nearly all raw materials used for household construction and everyday items such as baskets, bags and herbal remedies come from the forest. Stacks of *peuak meuak* bark that is used to make adhesives or the woody yellow vine *keua haem*, known for its medicinal properties, are commonly seen stacked under houses waiting to be sold to itinerant traders. NTFP’s like bamboo, rattan, forest vines and natural plant-based dyes are important raw materials that are used in the production of many traditional handicrafts and other household items like bamboo-based paper that are indispensable to maintaining the authenticity of religious rituals practiced by the Hmong, Yao and Lanten ethnic groups.
almost the entire length of the Nam Tha, and the 10 kilometre stretch of the Namtha Valley between Luang Namtha Town and Ban Kone is intensely cultivated and one of the province’s most densely populated areas.

Before the advent of modern roads, the 325 kilometre-long Nam Tha River was the province’s main north-south transportation artery linking Namtha to Nale District and further on to the Mekong just south of Ban Houei Xay. Even today, the narrow dirt track that runs parallel to the Namtha is impassable for most of the rainy season; and from June through October household necessities such as salt, cooking oil and detergent are loaded onto small wooden pirogues headed south. After local traders sell or barter their cargo to the Lanten, Khmu, Lamet and Lue communities living along the river, they return with boatloads of pigs, chickens and non-timber forest products to sell at the large commercial market in Luang Namtha. Although the majority of boat captains and crew are men, trading activities, like in most parts of the country, are mostly carried out by women.

Caves in Vieng Phoukha

Some of the deepest and most extensive networks of limestone caves in northwestern Lao PDR can be found in the Vieng Phoukha District. With the completion of the North-South Economic Corridor road project in 2008, linking Thailand and China, access to two of the three most prominent cave complexes, Nam Eng and Phou Phasat, was greatly improved and now both sites receive a small but steadily increasing number of visitors. In addition to the Nam Eng and Phou Phasat Caves, there is a remote and unmapped grotto called the Phoulan Cave situated in the thick jungle, about a three-hour walk from Phoulan Village. The Phoulet Cave halfway between Vieng Phoukha and Nale District is set high on a cliff and like the Phoulan Cave, Phoulet receives very few visitors because of difficult access. Both caves have very large populations of bats that inhabit these immense caverns.

The Nam Eng Cave complex is located 12 kilometre north of Vieng Phoukha Town and is comprised of two main caverns and a smaller escarpment. There is a dry fossil cave and two wet resurgence caves. The largest is the Nam Eng Resurgence Cave that extends approximately 3,400 metre into the rock face (Dreybrodt, 2005) and is the source of the Nam Jook River. Here, in the Nam Jook Valley between the cave entrance and Vieng Phoukha town, stone adzes have been found suggesting that this area and perhaps the Nam Eng Cave Complex itself were inhabited by prehistoric peoples. Cave formations in the Nam Eng resurgence cave are extraordinarily well preserved.
The Nam Eng fossil cave, known as Kao Rao by the Kmhmu living nearby in Nam Eng Village, is today the most visited cave in the province and managed under a cooperative agreement between the village, the Provincial Tourism Department and district authorities. This agreement stipulates that the village may retain 50 percent of the entrance fees that the site generates in return for ensuring that the cave formations are not damaged. A local guide will accompany all groups into the cave and the 200 metres of forest between the cave and roadside to ensure both are not degraded. Initially, with only a small number of visitors, the cave has not suffered any adverse effects but as visitor numbers grow, there is increasing risk of damage or removal of fragile cave formations if management actions in the cooperative agreement cannot be effectively enforced.
B. Heritage Preservation in Luang Namtha

Threats to the Cultural and Natural Heritage in Luang Namtha

Since the founding of the Lao PDR in 1975 until the late 1990s, Luang Namtha’s remote location and mountainous terrain served to insulate the province’s cultural and natural heritage from modernizing influences to a large extent. This was particularly true in regard to the cultural practices of its various ethnic groups. Today, as the province opens its doors to the outside world and embraces the market economy, satellite television and trade in international commodities, issues such as the over-exploitation of natural resources, rapid population expansion, consumerism and risky migration both into and out of the province have become some of the principal threats to Luang Namtha’s cultural and natural heritage. Completion of the Lao PDR section of the North-South Economic Corridor in 2008 that links China and Thailand may serve to exacerbate these problems, and may lead to an increase in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS infections\(^5\) and trafficking in women and children. It may also inadvertently facilitate smuggling of wildlife, antiquities, timber and rare plant species unless effective preventative actions are taken.

With urban expansion, especially in and around the main towns, many of Luang Namtha’s heritage buildings are at risk of being removed to make way for new development. Those left standing are being maintained using inauthentic building materials which already compromise their authenticity and heritage value. This is unfortunately the case for both religious and secular buildings. Loss of architectural heritage is particularly noticeable in Muang Sing where many of the Lue-style houses that once lined the town’s main street have been replaced by indiscriminate concrete buildings that in no way resemble the structures that preceded them. Also in Muang Sing, many buildings constructed during the colonial period are in a serious state of disrepair and a few are on the verge of collapsing. The symbolic, gridded urban layout of Muang Sing Town itself that dates to the late-seventeenth century is under threat too, as new roads and reorganization of the original plots of land found within the city walls takes place. Resembling the former Burmese capital of Amarapura that also had a square plan with 12 gates cut into a low earthen wall, Muang Sing’s original urban layout was probably inspired by mythical and religious beliefs and is the only known planned settlement in the province that follows this design.

\(^5\) For an in-depth study of the situation regarding HIV/AIDS and trafficking of women and children along the north-south corridor, see Chamberlain (2006) Preventing the Trafficking of Women and Children and Promoting Safe Migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.
In Vieng Phoukha, as large swathes of vegetation are cleared to make way for commercial plantations, more and more previously unmapped archaeological sites that include Buddhist monasteries, pagodas, kilns and metal foundries are being discovered. Without protection and management, or even knowledge of their existence by heritage management authorities, some sites have already been claimed as private land, and others have had artefacts removed or damaged during road and building construction. There is an urgent need to conduct a detailed inventory and mapping of the districts’ archaeological sites so that they can be safeguarded and possibly opened up as tourist attractions in the future.

In terms of threats to natural heritage, the Nam Ha National Protected Area Management Unit reports that its main concerns are the loss of forest cover due to shifting cultivation, illegal logging and conversion of natural forest to industrial tree plantations (Nam Ha NPA Management Unit, 2004). Unsustainable harvest of non-timber forest products and illegal wildlife hunting also threaten a large number of plant and animal species. Problems associated with the loss of natural forest cover such as flooding, increasing scarcity of wildlife and declining harvests of non-timber forest products have been exacerbated by the fact that the tree plantations that are replacing natural forest and swidden fields will not produce a revenue stream for 7-10 years. In the interim, farmers are still compelled to clear land for food production, which likely doubled the rate of forest clearance between 2003 and 2007.
Box 4. *Hevea brasiliensis*: Luang Namtha’s Rubber Boom

Following what has been a successful rubber planting experiment by Hmong families in Hat Yao Village, the hills along nearly all of Luang Namtha’s main transportation arteries are filled with neat rows of rubber saplings, giving this once diverse landscape a curiously uniform appearance. More than 10,000 hectares of land that was previously a mosaic of older growth evergreen forest and regenerating swidden fields were converted to commercial rubber plantations by 2007, with much of this land cultivated under contract farming or through concession agreements held by foreign investors. While prices for latex remain high, rubber offers attractive financial returns to smallholders and international investors. But without proper agricultural extension services, access to credit, and enforcement of contractual agreements, it will be difficult for local farmers to secure long-term benefits from Luang Namtha’s rubber boom. At best, rubber offers a path out of poverty and an opportunity for farming families to diversify their livelihoods if they can secure the necessary technical and material inputs. At worst, unchecked expansion of large land concessions for industrial plantations will result in local people losing tenure over ancestral lands, exacerbating the issue of rice shortage, destruction of watersheds and disappearance of the existing natural forest that provides food, medicine and income from non-timber forest products to a high proportion of the local population.

Sustainable Tourism Practices and Policies in Luang Namtha

Luang Namtha is widely recognized as one of the leading sustainable tourism destinations in Lao PDR. It is the site of the community-based ecotourism model developed by the UNESCO-LNTA Nam Ha Ecotourism Project between 1999–2007 with funding from New Zealand. The project, cited in the National Growth and Poverty Alleviation Strategy and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for its success in promoting alleviation and natural resource conservation, has become the standard by which national ecotourism development initiatives are measured against. Also recognized internationally for its gains in the fight against poverty and in the sustainable use of biodiversity, the Nam Ha Project has won several international awards, including the 2001 United Nations Development Award, a British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award, and was a finalist for the United Nations Development Programme’s Equator Award in 2006.

*For a comprehensive assessment of the rubber boom in Luang Namtha, see Alton, Bluhm, and Sazanikone (2005) Para Rubber Study: Hevea Brasiliensis.*
The World Conservation Union (IUCN) defines ecotourism as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impacts and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.” (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996)

In the framework of these criteria, ecotourism in Luang Namtha has created economic and employment opportunities for local people, while at the same time ensuring that tourism activities contribute to natural and cultural heritage protection. Factors enhancing the sustainability of tourism in Luang Namtha include extensive information and education campaigns about ecotourism and forms of sustainable tourism that are targeted at policymakers, the private sector and local communities. As a result of these campaigns, local leaders have the knowledge and information they need to formulate enabling policies and create regulations that protect the cultural and natural resources that underpin the province’s growing and profitable ecotourism sector.

Since the introduction of the first community-based ecotourism programmes by the Nam Ha Project in 1999, there are now more than 30 established tour circuits, involving some 50 communities. Participating communities that have been prepared to provide services to tourists as part of the Nam Ha project’s community-based ecotourism development methodology report high levels of satisfaction with the way tourism operates in the province. This is in sharp contrast to areas such as Vang Vieng in Vientiane Province or Muang Ngoi in Luang Prabang Province where large numbers of tourists arrived before local people were prepared to deal with the social and environmental impacts that tourism can cause. Residents in Vang Vieng and Muang Ngoi report an increasing number of conflicts between local business owners, an increase in petty theft and drug abuse among youth, too many visitors and environmental problems such as water pollution and excess trash that have largely been avoided in Luang Namtha.
Box 5. Behavioural Guidelines for Tourists in Luang Namtha

**Dress Modestly**: Please wear shirts that cover shoulders and trousers or skirts that cover your knees. Shirts with a low neckline are not appropriate.

**Public Bathing**: Please do not bathe nude or wear revealing swimsuits in public. Women should cover up with a *sarong* when bathing in public.

**Photographs**: Please ask before taking close-ups or portraits. Respect those who choose not to be photographed.

**Gifts**: Please do not give anything to children as this practice encourages begging. Also, do not give medicine to anyone but a doctor or nurse.

**Environment**: Please do not take anything from the forest. Do not litter on land or in water; take all your garbage with you when trekking. Do not buy wildlife or wildlife products.

**Body Language**: In Lao PDR, your head is “high” and your feet “low”. Do not gesture with your feet and do not put your feet on furniture. Also, do not touch someone else’s head. Kissing and hugging in public is impolite; please be discreet.

**Respect Local Traditions**: Please do not touch anything that may be of religious significance, such as Buddha statues, altars and burial grounds. Please take off hats and shoes when entering temples.

**Purchasing Local Crafts**: Please support local producers by purchasing newly-made quality handicrafts. Do not purchase unique items such as antiques or family heirlooms that are irreplaceable.

**Drugs**: Please do not take illegal drugs in Lao PDR. Drug tourism does damage and sets a very bad example for Lao youth.

Information and Education Campaigns

Tourists in Luang Namtha are targeted by information and education campaigns too, which encourage them to be culturally and environmentally sensitive visitors. Publications such as the *Do's and Don'ts in Laos* poster and booklet, the website www.ecotourismlaos.com and written behavioural guidelines (see Box 5) displayed in tourist information centres and in brochures send clear and consistent messages regarding appropriate behaviour in a number of languages. Most of the content of these messages comes from suggestions provided to the project team by local residents.
Heritage Preservation in Luang Namtha

Community Concessions

In Luang Namtha, management of many cultural and natural tourist sites is performed directly by local communities that have historically been stewards of these resources. For example, the Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Department has authorized concessions to Nam Dee and Nam Eng villages to operate the Nam Dee Waterfall and Nam Eng Caves. A portion of revenues generated from entrance fees is shared between the Tourism Department and community to fund marketing activities, publication of interpretative materials, monitoring and operations and maintenance of infrastructure at the sites. The day-to-day management of the waterfall and cave is in the hands of village authorities, as opposed to the common practice of handing out concessions to outside investors. The latter scenario often leads to conflicts between the investor and the surrounding community because local people miss out on tourism’s economic opportunities or investors place restrictions on their livelihood activities like grazing livestock or collecting non-timber forest products.

Monitoring

Regular contact between officials and communities to monitor the economic, cultural and environmental impacts brought about by tourism is another factor that is supporting the sustainability of tourism in Luang Namtha. Monitoring activities measure impacts at three levels: (i) the wider macroeconomic effects of tourism on the provincial economy, (ii) the collective impacts of tourism at the village level and (iii) individual household perceptions of tourism’s economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts. Staff members of the Tourism, Forestry and Information and Culture Departments, as well as local guides, have been trained in data collection and analysis. Ongoing monitoring activities provide a flow of information to decision-makers and community leaders that allows them to identify problems and fine-tune tourism management practices when the need arises.

Cooperative Agreements

Monitoring the relationship between the community and tour operators in Luang Namtha is effective and simple because of the way the Provincial Tourism Department grants permission to operate individual tour programmes through cooperative agreements. These agreements are co-signed by the Provincial Tourism Department, the village and the tour operator. They assign a single operator exclusive access to a community-based tour circuit or host village, based on straightforward rules governing the maximum size and frequency that tour groups may visit the community. Provisions require the operator to perform a cultural
orientation for guests before they visit the village and set a schedule
of fees the operator must pay the village for food, lodging, village-
based guides, transportation, handicrafts, trail maintenance, etc. The
agreements define the areas that are off-limits to tourism activities
and sets fee schedules concerning user permits, entrance fees and
taxes. By allowing a single tour operator to serve as a gatekeeper
to a tour circuit or host village, if a conflict arises between the
operator and the community, the Tourism Department can more
easily identify the parties involved and work with them to solve
the problem. An in-depth discussion on how the agreements are
formulated is presented in Parts II and III.

Guide Training

The high degree of cultural and natural interpretation that is
provided by local guides, information centre staff and community
members participating in tour programmes also helps to enhance
the sustainability of tourism in Luang Namtha. Guide training
involves a component on how to facilitate culturally-appropriate
interaction between tourists and host communities. This makes
visitor-host interactions more enjoyable for both parties, and also
allows the visitor to obtain accurate information directly from local
people. Guides benefit from better relations with communities,
satisfied clients and thus higher earnings from more gratuities.

Heritage Interpretation

Printed interpretative materials like guidebooks, information
centre displays and brochures are another way that tourists, guides
and information centre staff obtain information to accurately
interpret Luang Namtha’s heritage. Lao language publications have
been produced on many subjects, ranging from non-timber forest
products, handicrafts, history and ethnic minority cultures. Guides
and heritage managers are given a platform to discuss these and other
tourism management-related topics at the province’s Sustainable
Tourism Network meetings that the Tourism Department hosts
each month.
National Legislation System for Heritage Conservation

The main government agencies responsible for heritage conservation in the Lao PDR are the Ministry of Information and Culture (MIC), the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), the Lao Front for National Construction that is primarily involved in managing ethnic affairs with the MIC, the Water Resource and Environment Agency (WREA) that was formerly the Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA) and the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA).


The country’s first Heritage Law was passed by the National Assembly in 2005. This law has articles on the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, historic heritage and natural heritage. The Heritage Law classifies cultural and historic resources as local (district or provincial), national or World Heritage sites. Natural heritage has an additional category at the regional land. In Luang Namtha, the majority of monuments, for example, That Phoum Phouk and That Xieng Teung, are designated as provincial heritage sites. Luang Namtha does not presently have any properties on the World Heritage List. The Nam Ha National Protected Area was listed as an ASEAN Heritage Site in 2004.

Prior to the adoption of the national Heritage Law, the 1997 Decree of the President on the Preservation of Cultural, Historic and Natural Heritage set out the framework for the protection of national heritage in Lao PDR. This decree, along with the Forestry Law (1996), Environmental Protection Law (1999), MAF’s Regulation on the Management of National Protected Areas, Aquatic Resources and Wildlife (2003) and the Prime Minister’s Decree 164 that established the country’s system of National Biodiversity Conservation Areas in 1993 (now referred to as National Protected Areas), are the primary legal documents concerned with heritage protection as it relates to tourism development and management.

The Tourism Law that was passed by the National Assembly in November 2005 provides the legal framework for tourism. Various
IMPACT: Luang Namtha, Lao PDR

decrees issued by the LNTA, the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and the Committee for Planning and Investment (CPI) provide the regulations for hotels and guesthouses (Decree 195/PMO and 1107/CPI), travel companies (Decree 1150/PMO), tour guides (Decree 626/CPI) and foreign investment (Foreign Investment and Business Law of 1994).

At the provincial and village level, the authorities and village leaders are able to formulate rules and agreements concerning the utilization, conservation and protection of local heritage assets. A basic overview of the legislative hierarchy in Lao PDR is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Legislative Hierarchy in Lao PDR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Approving Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constitution of Lao PDR</td>
<td>National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treaties and conventions</td>
<td>National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laws</td>
<td>National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolutions of the National Assembly Standing Committee</td>
<td>National Assembly Standing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Ordinances/Decrees</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolutions of Government</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister’s Decrees/Orders</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister’s Notifications/Instructions</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Regulations</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Decisions/Orders/Appointments</td>
<td>Minister or Vice Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Instructions/Guidelines/Notifications</td>
<td>Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Governor’s Orders</td>
<td>Provincial Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Governor’s Instructions/Guidelines/Notifications</td>
<td>Provincial Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Governor’s Orders</td>
<td>District Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Rules</td>
<td>Village Chief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the national level, the government approved the Lao National Tourism Strategy 2006–2015 in late 2005. The National Tourism Strategy (NTS) aims to make tourism a leading sector of the Lao economy and calls for three million visitors by 2020 (LNTA, 2005).

Protected Heritage Values in Luang Namtha

To protect the cultural and natural heritage values that underpin Luang Namtha’s tourism industry, the Provincial Tourism Department works actively with tour operators and communities to ensure that tourism’s negative effects on local culture and the environment are minimized. One way this is accomplished is by maintaining an open line of communication between the tourism office, tour operators, guides and communities through regular meetings and systematic monitoring efforts, and most importantly, by taking action to address any problems that arise.

The Provincial Governor’s Office has issued a set of orders on the operation of ecotourism activities in the province that includes specific guidelines about tour group size, the use of trained guides, prohibitions on the sale of antiquities and wildlife, forest protection along specified ecotourism circuits and the collection and use of taxes and permit revenues. These orders, shown in Box 6, which are backed by national laws and decrees discussed in the previous section, are the primary legal tools that the Tourism, Forestry, and Information and Culture Departments use to support heritage management actions in the province.

Box 6. Provincial Ecotourism Specific Regulations in Luang Namtha

• Governor’s Order on Forest Trekking No. 03/LNT issued on 28 October 2003
• Governor’s Guideline on Provincial Tour Guides No. 44/LNT issued on 28 October 2003
• Governor’s Agreement on the Establishment of the Provincial Tourism Office’s Village Development Fund No. 96/LNT issued on 24 February 2003
• Governor’s Guideline on the Establishment of District Tourism Offices No. 25/LNT issued on 16 October 2003
• Provincial Tourism Office Instruction on the Use of Provincial Tourism Office’s Village Development Fund No. 09/PTO issued on 9 March 2003
• Provincial Tourism Office Regulation on the Operation of Provincial Guide Services No. 038/PTO issued on 20 March 2003

At the national level, the government approved the Lao National Tourism Strategy 2006–2015 in late 2005. The National Tourism Strategy (NTS) aims to make tourism a leading sector of the Lao economy and calls for three million visitors by 2020 (LNTA, 2005).
The stated objectives of the NTS are to:

- Develop Lao PDR in a sustainable and participatory manner to become a globally well-known tourist destination based on culture, nature and history that can strongly contribute to socio-economic development and poverty reduction of poor people from all ethnic groups.
- Develop and promote tourism in compliance with actual capacity and aim to maintain the good image and reputation of the country.
- Develop and promote tourism that is in line with local socio-economic development priorities.
- Develop tourism that reflects priorities related to protection of culture, nature, ethnic traditions and national security.
- Develop tourism that integrates with related sectors and authorities and strives for international and regional integration, especially with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, ASEAN and the Greater Mekong Sub-region.
- Continue to update regulations and conditions that are necessary to facilitate entry-exit procedures, in-country travel and travel to neighbouring countries in order to make Lao PDR an integrated regional transport hub.
- Continue to improve tourism organizational mechanisms and management, including tourism development plans, development of marketing and promotion materials, development of tourism products, tourism awareness raising, human resource development, investment promotion and collaboration with other sectors and localities.

To compliment the NTS, LNTA has also developed a vision and guiding principles for Lao ecotourism as part of its National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan. The vision is "Lao PDR will become a world-renowned destination specializing in forms of sustainable tourism that, through partnership and cooperation, benefit natural and cultural heritage conservation, local socio-economic development and spread knowledge of Lao PDR’s unique cultural heritage around the world." The guiding principles of the National Ecotourism Strategy are to:

- Minimize negative impacts on Lao nature and culture.
- Increase awareness among all stakeholders as to the importance of ethnic diversity and biodiversity conservation.
- Promote responsible business practices and work cooperatively with local authorities and local people to support poverty alleviation and deliver conservation benefits.
- Provide a source of income to sustain, conserve and manage the Lao protected area network and cultural heritage sites.
- Emphasize the need for tourism zoning and visitor management plans for sites that will be developed as tourist destinations.
- Use environmental and social baseline data and long-term
monitoring programmes to assess and minimize negative impacts.

- Maximize economic benefits for the Lao national economy, especially for local businesses and people living in and around the protected area network.
- Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits of acceptable change as determined by researchers in cooperation with local residents.
- Promote local styles of architecture and infrastructure that are developed in harmony with the Lao culture and environment, use local materials, minimize energy consumption and conserve local plants and wildlife.

Based on the objectives of the National Tourism Strategy and vision and guiding principles of the Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan, the Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Department, in cooperation with heritage managers in the province, has developed a strategy for ecotourism development in and around the Nam Ha NPA that sets out the following objectives:

- Raise awareness of local communities in terms of protected area management and natural resources conservation.
- Use a participatory approach to allocate and manage NPA resources, with an aim to increase wildlife populations and biodiversity.
- Improve the quantity and quality of human resources to cope with tourism growth and ensure the sustainable use of heritage resources.
- Continue to improve, expand and diversify ecotourism products to attract more visitors to Luang Namtha province and to generate more income for local people and the public sector.
- Use community-based ecotourism as a tool for creating jobs, contributing to poverty alleviation and creating a balance between development and conservation activities.
- Publicize information about tourist sites in and around the Nam Ha NPA.

**Principles in Conservation**

While the laws, regulations and strategies that are in place to protect the heritage in Luang Namtha offer a very good framework upon which to help manage tourism and tourism-related activities, implementation of the documents has proven difficult because many local heritage managers lack the capacity to interpret and enforce them. Luang Namtha, unlike provinces that have a World Heritage site such as Luang Prabang and Champasak, does not have a provincial heritage management committee and approaches heritage management in an *ad hoc* manner. Insufficient budgetary allocations from the provincial and national treasury and a shortage of well-trained public sector heritage managers further impedes the implementation of international conventions, national laws and local ordinances.
Community Involvement in Protection and Management

Communities are encouraged to take the lead in heritage management and protection in Luang Namtha, as seen at the That Phoum Phouk Stupa. Here, the Tai Yuan population organizes annual rites that involve removing vegetation from the sacred grounds around the monument and also holds a religious ritual that reaffirms the sanctity of the site. The sale of entrance tickets is managed by the Tai Yuan community and a portion of the revenue is used to finance these activities as well as to pay a local person to perform day-to-day maintenance and trash removal.

Another example is at the Lanten village of Nam Dee that effectively manages the Nam Dee Waterfall and protects the watershed around it (see Box 7). In 2007, there were more than 5,000 visitors to the site, but because of good management practices, villagers report minimal negative impact on the environment or village solidarity. In Vieng Phoukha, the Kmnhmu village Nam Eng enforces a behavioural code for visitors who enter the Nam Eng Caves, with visits to the site’s third, sacred cave being strictly prohibited by the village.

One of the tools that has been developed in Luang Namtha to enhance local people’s involvement in heritage protection and formalize tourism management systems in their communities are the co-management agreements between communities, tourism and heritage management authorities and tour operators that were discussed briefly in the previous section. These agreements clearly define diverse stakeholder roles and responsibilities as they relate to the operation of community-based ecotourism programmes and protection of the cultural and natural resources that underpin them.

The process behind the development of the agreements revolves around a series of meetings between villages, authorities and tour operators to co-draft and negotiate the content of each customized document. Meetings are conducted at the village level to encourage a high degree of local participation. A working draft of an agreement passes a final review by its signatories, and is then co-signed by the village leadership, tourism or heritage management authority and concerned tour operator. The content of the agreements clearly defines each party’s responsibility in terms of operating and protecting the tour programme’s tangible and intangible attractions. Articles are concerned with the sale of antiquities and wildlife, provision of food and lodging in the village, trail maintenance, waste management, collection and management of permit and site entrance fees, use of local guides, village fund allocations, training opportunities, monitoring, tourist education and orientation and conflict resolution.
Lao PDR’s first pilot co-management agreements were implemented in Luang Namtha and, following their introduction, inbound tour operators and participating villages report a substantial increase in tourism revenues, with minimal negative effects on the environment and very low negative effects on the cultural heritage of host communities. The Nam Ha Ecoguide Service, for example, grew revenues from US$31,745 in 2005 to US$56,940 in 2006. During the same period the branch office of Green Discovery Laos, another local inbound tour operator, increased revenue from US$18,108 to US$88,833, with about half of these figures paid to local tour-service providers. At the same time, the public sector tourism and heritage management authorities benefited from increases in revenue from permits, taxes and concession fees, and received assistance from tour companies and communities to conduct monitoring.

The increase in revenue was likely due to two factors. First, Luang Namtha’s reputation for well-managed tourism is helping to fuel an increase in total tourist arrivals and those interested in purchasing community-based ecotours. Second, Green Discovery and the Nam Ha Ecoguides have exclusive user rights to the tours they operate and the Provincial Tourism Department has so far been able to prevent other tour operators from taking clients on these tour circuits unless they too purchase the tour from the company that has negotiated user rights. The Nam Ha Ecoguides and Green Discovery therefore feel secure to invest in training, marketing and promotion and other good business practices because they have confidence that they will recoup their investment and not lose out to unauthorized operators.

Although it will take many years to determine the long term benefits of the co-management agreements, an immediate benefit to the environment is that the threat of converting natural forest to industrial plantations has been averted in some areas because of articles in the agreements that prohibit forest clearance within 200–500 metres of established trekking trails. These small corridors of forest along the trails are some of the last stands of natural vegetation in the expanding plantation lands that surround the Nam Ha NPA.

One likely reason that the co-management agreements are proving effective in Luang Namtha is because many stakeholders are consulted and involved in their conception, thereby creating local ownership and accountability. Each party also has a vested financial interest in making the agreements work. Although the agreements are mainly self-enforced by the signatories, they are created within existing legal and regulatory frameworks, so the rule of law can be applied if they are broken or if disputes cannot be settled amicably. For participating villages, the clear and tangible benefits of the agreements provide a strong incentive to honour them. The
benefits include the right to exercise control on the way tourism is conducted in their communities, income generation, increased local employment and training opportunities.

**Box 7. The Nam Dee Waterfall**

The Nam Dee Waterfall is located about six kilometres from Luang Namtha Town. This small waterfall is about 10 metres high and set in an attractive forested landscape. What is special about the site is that it is managed by the Lanten and Sida people living in Nam Dee Village under a concession agreement with the Luang Namtha provincial authorities. Nam Dee has a population of 389 people living in 68 families that each participate in site management activities on a rotational basis. Under the present concession agreement, the village is permitted to retain 80 percent of all entrance fees to the waterfall, and has set up a financial management system that pays a monthly dividend to all families living in the village, ticket sellers and maintenance staff. During the first eight months this arrangement was implemented, ticket sales amounted to over US$2,000. Nam Dee received assistance from the Provincial Tourism office to construct walking trails, a handicraft shop, toilets, a ticket booth, bridges and pavilions at the site. The Department takes 10 percent of site revenues, with the remaining 10 percent going to the provincial treasury. In return for permission to operate the attraction, the village enforces a strict watershed protection regimen around the falls and performs a number of other management actions including site security and trash pick-up that are outlined in the co-management agreement.
Part 2
Tourism Impacts and Management in Luang Namtha

This chapter provides an overview of the tourism industry in Luang Namtha and discusses the main issues related to managing tourism and its impacts. An overview of tourism impacts is presented in section A and tourism planning and management is discussed in section B.
IMPACT: Luang Namtha, Lao PDR

Cover of the “Do’s and Don’ts in Laos” a guide to culturally sentitive travel in Lao PDR published by the Lao Tourism authorities.
A. Tourism in Luang Namtha

Luang Namtha’s main tourist attractions are the Nam Ha National Protected Area, the historic town of Muang Sing, caves and archaeological sites in Vieng Phoukha, more than 20 officially recognized ethnic groups, and the Nam Tha River and its tributaries. Underpinning these attractions are a wealth of diverse tourism resources that were presented in Part I, including forested mountains in and around the Nam Ha NPA, the indigenous knowledge and traditional culture of the multi-ethnic population, and local artisans producing quality handicrafts such as textiles, paper and baskets.

There has been much international acclaim given to Luang Namtha as an ecotourism destination, and ecotourism constitutes the majority of tourism activity in the province. Luang Namtha is featured prominently in the main international guidebooks about Lao PDR and articles about ecotourism-related developments and tour products appear intermittently in the international media, especially regional publications such as the Bangkok Post, Vientiane Times and tourism-industry magazines and newsletters. There are three registered tour companies in the province: Green Discovery, Xieng Teung Tours and Exotissimo Travel. Xieng Teung Tours is mainly involved in bringing Chinese tourists across the border and does not actively promote or sell ecotourism products. On the other hand, Green Discovery is very active in developing, operating, marketing and promoting ecotourism, offering a broad range of tours. Besides the three tour companies in Luang Namtha, there are also three provincial guide services that mainly serve the walk-in market and are only permitted to operate tours in the district in which they are based: (i) Nam Ha Ecoguide Service in Namtha District, (ii) Muang Sing Guide Service and (iii) Vieng Phoukha Ecoguides. Table 2 shows a list of ecotourism products available in the province in 2006.
The demographic characteristics of tourists in Luang Namtha fit the “backpacker” image: travellers are young, tend to stay in-country for a long period of time (averaging over 20 days) and report modest average daily expenditures of US$17 per day. Since the late 1990s, the number of tourist arrivals has more than doubled from 20,700 in 1999 to 47,778 in 2006 (LNTA, 2007a). Luang Namtha’s main long-haul international markets are the United Kingdom (16 percent), Canada (11 percent), Netherlands (10 percent), France (8 percent) and the USA (8 percent) (LNTA, 2007b).
Visits to Luang Namtha and participation in community-based tourism activities are highly seasonal as shown in Figure 2 with arrivals during the peak months (October-March) likely to be more than twice as high as visitor volume during the low season (April-September).

Most tourists begin their journey to Luang Namtha at either the Houei Xay international immigration checkpoint in neighbouring Bokeo Province or in Luang Prabang. The percentage of tourists that come on package tours is very low, at less than two percent of total arrivals. About 12 percent enter or exit through the province’s Boten border that links Lao PDR to Yunnan, China (LNTA, 2007b). The provincial airport was closed from 2004–2007 while a new facility large enough to accommodate the ATR-72 turboprop aircraft was built on the existing site. Prior to 2004, approximately 10 percent of annual arrivals travelled to Luang Namtha by air on scheduled service offered by Lao Airlines, the only airline serving the province.

Figure 2. Number of Tourists Participating in Tours, 2004

![Figure 2: Number of Tourists Participating in Tours, 2004](image-url)

Source: Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Department
Visitor surveys reveal that international tourists are most interested in activities that involve visitation to the Nam Ha National Protected Area, trekking and ethnic minority villages. Other major interests are waterfalls and caves, kayaking, mountain biking and bird watching (Table 4). There has been no market research done on domestic tourism in Luang Namtha, but observations and discussions with the Provincial Tourism Department and guesthouse owners suggest that domestic tourism is mainly confined to major festivals such as the That Xieng Teung Festival in Muang Sing, Lao New Year in April and family visits by relatives living outside the province.

Table 4. Main Interest of International Tourists in Luang Namtha (2004–2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trekking</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic villages</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caves</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterfalls</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird watching</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafting/kayaking</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safari</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain biking</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural shows</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Tourism in Luang Namtha is managed principally by the 13 staff members and seven contracted employees of the Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Department. The Provincial Tourism Police, in cooperation with the Department of Information and Culture and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, also play a role in tourism management, especially concerning tourism activities in the Nam Ha NPA and at historic and religious monuments and museums.

Investment in the tourism sector is overseen by the Department of Planning and Investment and the Tourism Department. If a foreigner wishes to invest in a hotel or resort the project must have a minimum of 16 rooms and the holding company may be 100 percent foreign owned. However, foreigners are not permitted to own land in the Lao PDR. The new tourism law permits foreigners to enter into joint ventures with Lao nationals to form
tour companies, but foreign ownership cannot exceed 30 percent. All foreign investment in the tourism sector must be reviewed by the Lao National Tourism Administration and cleared by either the Vientiane-based Foreign Investment Management Committee or its provincial counterparts.

The accommodation sector in Luang Namtha is currently drawing the most foreign and domestic investment, with international investors securing permission in 2007 to construct a three-star, 200 room property in the main town. This is the first large hotel in Luang Namtha Town. At present the 61 existing Lao-owned guesthouses and three hotels in the province have a total of only 671 rooms (LNTA, 2007a), with an additional 266 rooms opened during the first stage of construction at Golden Boten. Neither Muang Sing nor Vieng Phoukha has a lodging establishment with more than 25 rooms.

Table 5. Accommodation and Restaurants in Luang Namtha (2005 and 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of establishment</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guesthouse and resort</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lao National Tourism Administration, 2007

In 2007, Luang Namtha began to see its first influx of mass tourism in the form of chartered buses travelling between northern Thailand and Yunnan, China. As news spreads about the convenience of overland travel between these two popular tourist destinations, Luang Namtha is bracing itself for a jump in arrivals from the Thai and Chinese source markets. A new night market was completed in 2007, adding a new attraction to the main town, and a few handicraft shops opened about the same time as the night market. Table 5 shows the sharp increase in the number of restaurants between 2005 and 2006 which is further evidence that tourism investment, visitation and local affluence is accelerating in this once sleepy province.
B. Tourism Impacts

This section describes some of the direct and indirect impacts that tourism is having on Luang Namtha’s cultural heritage, the environment, local economy and society.

Impacts on Cultural Heritage

As described in Part I, Luang Namtha’s built heritage is not its primary tourism asset. Very few non-religious heritage buildings are left standing in the province. Those that are, for example, the Muang Sing Exhibition Centre or the old French army garrison in Muang Sing, have seen a loss of authenticity that occurred during restoration and routine maintenance, which was more a result of pragmatism by their owners rather than an attempt to alter their appearance to meet tourist tastes. This situation is also true for religious structures such as Muang Sing’s monasteries or Vat Luang Kone, where local communities have used modern building materials which have diminished the authenticity and character of these sites.

One example where tourism has been able to positively contribute to built heritage conservation efforts is at That Phoum Phouk. This seventeenth-century monument was badly damaged after a bomb was dropped on it during the 1960s. In the late 1990s, the local Tai Yuan community mobilized funds both locally and from relatives living abroad to finance the construction of a new cement and steel structure on top of the old one. Upon learning of this plan, the provincial Tourism and Information and Culture Departments worked with local religious leaders and persuaded them to build the new structure adjacent to, but not on top of, the original That Phoum Phouk, so that this historic site could be kept for future generations. Today, the new and old That Phoum Phouk stand side by side on a hilltop overlooking the Namtha Valley, frequently visited by both religious pilgrims and tourists.

Regarding tourist accommodation, the majority of local business owners have constructed hotels and guesthouses of cement, steel and corrugated iron that do not incorporate traditional architectural themes and do not appeal visually to international visitors. This is one factor that has prevented local hoteliers from accessing higher spending markets, as is reflected in the international tourist’s daily average expenditure of a mere US$17 in 2006 (LNTA, 2007b). Only recently have local business owners in Luang Namtha begun to understand the tastes of international tourists and a few have started to construct lodging establishments using local materials and architectural themes. Some local foods have also started to appear on the menus of Luang Namtha’s restaurants and have been
Tourism Impacts

The Boatlanding Guesthouse

received well by both international and domestic visitors. The first, and arguably one of Lao PDR's best examples of a small business that has pioneered the use of local materials, labour, food and architecture is the Boatlanding Guesthouse in Ban Khone.

There are positive and negative impacts on other forms of cultural heritage that are arising from tourism, but again, because of the low number of visitors to Luang Namtha, these impacts have been limited. One of the most notable is the trade in antiquities that has drained the province of much of its material heritage, partially through sales to tourists but mostly as a result of professional antique hunters targeting the province. As antique musical instruments, ritual masks, palm-leaf manuscripts and other important artefacts leave the area, the collective memory of the local population's cultural heritage goes with them. Provincial heritage managers are trying to stop the trade in antiquities by implementing education and awareness campaigns, but because of widespread poverty and weak enforcement, their efforts have not been very successful.

One of the policies of the Lao PDR Government is to promote the arts of the multi-ethnic Lao people. In Luang Namtha, this is primarily done by the provincial Information and Culture and Tourism Departments. At the new night market in Luang Namtha, the Tourism Departments also periodically sponsors Hmong and Kmhmu performers from the province to present music and dance performances to local and international guests. It is hoped that the newfound interest and official support for traditional performing arts will help to ensure that Luang Namtha's youth take an interest in carrying them forward.

Environmental Impact

Direct environmental impact from tourism in Luang Namtha such as solid waste, traffic and generation of wastewater are minimal because there are still a relatively small number of visitors to the province. There are problems, however, in carrying out regularly scheduled trash pick-up for resident as public waste removal services do not exist outside of the provincial capital. In most villages, trash is burned, producing noxious emissions and toxic residues. An increase in visits to rural villages is exacerbating this problem, especially with the introduction of non-organic waste such as polystyrene lunch boxes and plastic bottles. Nonetheless, this remains limited because of a low volume of visitors. However, with the opening of new hotels and the increase in tourist arrivals, this issue will have to be addressed.

Luang Namtha has no public facilities to treat wastewater. Sewage is stored in poorly-maintained individual septic tanks or discharged untreated into the environment. While at the moment it is not
a serious public health issue yet, wastewater management will eventually become a pressing one for the authorities to address when visitor numbers grow and tourism infrastructure continues to expand.

Because the population in urban areas is growing quickly, municipal water supplies are strained and sometimes unable to keep up with demand. During the high season, guesthouses and restaurants experience regular water outages and many have devised elaborate storage systems to hoard water to ensure there is enough for their guests, which of course, diminishes supplies available for local inhabitants.

Environmental impacts stemming from economic development and urbanization in Luang Namtha are much more pronounced than the minor negative visual impacts such as increased litter that can be directly linked to tourism. Increasing affluence from trade and tourism is fuelling a building boom, sometimes in ecologically sensitive areas such as wetlands or along riverbanks. More disposable income is also leading to increased purchases of packaged consumer goods, which adds to increasing volumes of solid waste. Bicycles are being replaced by motorbikes, and the well-off have replaced their motorbikes with trucks and cars. This scenario will eventually lead to traffic congestion and a rise in motor-vehicle related injuries, but at this stage heavy traffic in Luang Namtha seems a problem for the distant future. What is more urgent in terms of environmental issues that need to be addressed is to halt the trade in endangered wildlife and massive forest clearance. While tourism is not the driving force behind these two persistent problems, it will certainly be negatively affected if local authorities are unable to effectively address them.

Some examples of where tourism is having a positive impact on the environment can be seen along the province’s established trekking trails and at certain natural tourist sites such as the Nam Dee Waterfall. Here, tourism and heritage managers and local communities are strictly protecting the forest, endangered orchids and wildlife in an attempt to conserve the environmental resources that support tourism. On trekking tours, the consumption of wildlife and wildlife products is strictly prohibited and guides are required to “pack out” all non-biodegradable trash produced on each tour. At individual tourist sites like the Nam Dee Waterfall, waste disposal areas have been designated and specific persons have been given the responsibility to maintain cleanliness and monitor trash pick-up. Although these efforts are small within the context of the province’s larger problems with urban trash removal, waste water disposal, the illegal wildlife trade and deforestation, they are an important factor in raising awareness and changing people’s behaviour towards more sustainable environmental management.
Economic Impact

Recognizing that tourism is one of the country’s major engines of economic growth and poverty alleviation, the Lao PDR Government has included it as one of its 11 priority sectors to support national socio-economic development. In 2006, tourism ranked second in terms of foreign exchange earnings, producing US$173 million or 8 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (LNTA, 2007a). In Lao PDR the recurrent domestic multiplier is estimated to be 1.5 (UNDP, 2006) but because the country relies heavily on imported goods, services and managers to supply its tourism industry, foreign exchange leakage is estimated to be over 40 percent (Asian Development Bank, 2005). In terms of employment, the Lao tourism industry is a major employer, generating some 17,000 jobs nationwide. Estimates of indirect employment range from 5,000–300,000 with the true figure probably closer to the mid-range of these estimates, equivalent to about 167,000 people or 10 indirect jobs for each full time job in the sector (ibid).

The current structure of the Lao tourism industry, especially tourism in Luang Namtha, is inherently “pro-poor”, meaning that a high percentage of tourist spending benefits poor people. This is happening on three levels: (i) the poor are employed in unskilled and semi-skilled positions in the tourism and peripheral construction industry, in particular lodging, transport, restaurants, along with selling handicrafts and cultural entertainment, (ii) on community-based tours, villagers provide goods and services such as food, lodging, transport and guiding services directly to tourists in their communities and (iii) by supplying agricultural goods, raw materials and services to local markets that serve tourist needs.

A major challenge facing the Lao tourism industry is to provide local people with skills and knowledge to help them move up the tourism value chain by providing higher quality goods and services to produce higher economic yields, and thus greater poverty reduction.

In Luang Namtha, leakage estimates are not likely to reach 40 percent because of the high level of local ownership of tourism businesses and the fact that visitors, whether by choice or necessity, consume mainly locally-produced products and services. An exception would be at the Golden Boten hotel and casino complex on the Lao-Yunnan border that serves mainly Chinese tourists who come to gamble and be entertained on the premises. This facility was built almost entirely with foreign investment and is staffed with a high percentage of Chinese expatriates. A more typical accommodation establishment in Luang Namtha is usually a small, family-owned and operated guesthouse of 15 rooms or less.
Gross provincial tourism earnings derived from international visitation to Luang Namtha was equivalent to US$3,249,584 in 2006, up from US$2.4 million in 2004. These figures were calculated by multiplying international visitors’ daily expenditures by total arrivals and average length of stay. Domestic tourism revenue, that is mainly generated during the provincial festivals described in Part I, is not included in this estimate. Average daily expenditures by international visitors have been steadily increasing over the past decade, from a base of US$9 per day in 2000 (Schipani, 2000) to approximately US$17 per day in 2006 (LNTA, 2007b).

Regarding employment, the Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Department estimates that the accommodation sector employs more than 300 people. There are 172 full- and part-time guides active in the province. Hundreds more village-level food and accommodation providers derive part-time employment from community-based tourism activities. Add to this the people working in restaurants, on tourism-related construction projects, in tour agencies, the transportation sector, in handicrafts production or the supply of agricultural products to tourism supply chains and it is clear that tourism plays a prominent role as a local employer and engine of economic growth.

**Social Impact**

At this point it is very difficult to determine to what extent tourism is driving changes in local people's lifestyles, and whether or not the changes are positive or negative. Very few people in Luang Namtha would object to rising standards of living that have been partially brought about by increases in foreign exchange earnings and employment in the tourism industry. At the same time, very few would condone reports of tourists using drugs or seeking out commercial sex services with young men and women.

The Provincial Tourism Department and Information and Culture Department have made attempts to try and raise awareness about tourism and its potential positive and negative effects on society through weekly radio programmes, but because the programmes are in the Lao language only, they reach a limited percentage of the population and not the most vulnerable groups such as ethnic minority women and youth.
One example of tourism’s positive economic but negative social effect on a prominent ethnic minority is with a group of Akha women that aggressively sell handicrafts around Luang Namtha and Muang Sing. This well-meaning group of about 15 women is ostracized by merchants for disturbing customers and is often the target of complaints to the tourist police. While they are now earning income from this new economic activity, doing so has caused them to leave children and families behind in what they view as a painful but necessary trade-off to try and escape from poverty.

Educating tourists about how to be a culturally-sensitive visitor and limit their negative influence on society is one area where Luang Namtha’s tourism and heritage managers have focused a lot of effort. Information and education materials such as the Do's and Don'ts in Lao PDR poster and booklet have been produced in Lao, English and Chinese.

Guidelines on how to visit villages in a culturally-sensitive way have been compiled through interviews with village leaders representing different ethnic groups. This information is explained to tourists during a pre-tour orientation, published on promotional materials and also incorporated into provincial guide training. To gauge whether or not local people perceive tourism is having a negative effect on their community and to identify other problems associated with community-based tourism, the Provincial Tourism Department, in cooperation with staff from other government departments, conducts annual impact monitoring surveys in a sample of communities located on tour circuits. The questions and responses shown in Table 6 are part of the monitoring data that were gathered from Sam Yot Village, a Hmong community of 21 families that has been receiving between 200–600 tourists per year since 2004.

The methodology used to collect the data shown in Table 6 involves interviewing the head of household, or if the head of household is not present, a prominent family member that may be a man or a woman. While it is recognized that the person being interviewed may not be the person that is primarily interacting with tourists, because villages targeted for monitoring are generally small and tight-knit, responses are thought to be fairly representative of villagers’ feelings about tourism in their community. Limiting the initial responses to yes and no answers allows for efficient, standardized data collection by staff from various government departments that often do not have advanced interviewing skills. However, results should be interpreted with caution as the monitoring system does not collect nuanced opinions.
Table 6. Summary of Responses to Survey on Tourism Impact in Sam Yot Village Indicating Percentage of 21 Families Interviewed that Answered Yes to the Following Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the behaviour of tourists is rude or offensive?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel tired or bored with seeing tourists?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that tourists come to your village too often?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel uncomfortable with tourists taking photographs?</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel satisfied with the level of income you get from tourism?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever seen tourism causing conflicts between people / families in the village?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think tourism is having a bad effect on your children?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think tourism is having a bad effect on your culture?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that tourism is causing negative effects on the environment?</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any other problems with tourism which haven't been described above?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LNTA-ADB Mekong Tourism Development Project Annual Monitoring Report

In Table 6, the 2004-2006 results of monitoring data shows that the community is generally satisfied with the way tourism is conducted in their village and report very few negative impacts. One notable exception is that only one-third are satisfied with the level of income they receive from tourism. It is also interesting to note that at first, the entire village was uncomfortable with tourists taking photographs in the village, however, as the community gained experience with managing tourists and began receiving some of the photographs that tourists send back to them through tour operators and guides, they were no longer camera-shy.

Villagers have gradually accepted tourists into their community
(Photo: Kees Sprengers)
The main national policy-level document underpinning the development of the tourism sector is the Lao PDR National Tourism Strategy (NTS) 2006-2020 that was discussed in detail in Part I. The NTS is very much in line with the current trajectory of Lao tourism, as it is estimated that more than half of the value of the Lao tourism industry is derived from nature- and culture-based activities (Bouttavong, 2002). The positive role tourism plays in national development, with specific reference to sustainable tourism models in Luang Namtha, has been identified and elaborated in the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, the Sixth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006–2010), the National Tourism Strategy, the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan (2006–2010) and the National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020.

At the regional level, Lao PDR is a member of ASEAN and is a signatory of the 2002 ASEAN Tourism Agreement that aims to facilitate the growth of tourism by granting visa exemptions for intra-regional travel by ASEAN nationals, strengthening human resources in the tourism sector and marketing ASEAN as a single destination. In the Greater Mekong Sub-region, Lao PDR, Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam have adopted in principle the ADB-supported Greater Mekong Sub-region Tourism Sector Strategy as a road map to steer tourism development in the GMS towards the Millennium Development Goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable development. By implementing the strategies mentioned above, tourism will continue to play an important and central role in assisting the Lao PDR to achieve its main development objectives of sustaining broad-based economic growth, eliminating poverty and lifting the country out of Least Developed Nation status by the year 2020.
C. Tourism Management and Planning

An Overview of Tourism Management

The Lao National Tourism Administration is a ministerial-level organization within the Prime Minister’s Office and the main government line agency concerned with guiding the development and regulation of Lao PDR’s tourism industry. In practice, the LNTA cooperates in some way with nearly all line ministries and government organizations at both the national and provincial level. Administratively, the LNTA is overseen by a Minister and has four Technical Departments and one Administrative Department, each led by a Director-General. There is the Department of Planning and Cooperation, Department of Marketing and Promotion, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Tourism and Hospitality Training Centre and the Department of General Administration. The country’s 16 provinces and Vientiane Capital each have a Provincial Tourism Department/Office that is further sub-divided into administrative units following the institutional framework in place at the LNTA. An organizational diagram of the LNTA is shown in Figure 3.

At the provincial level, there are many other stakeholders involved in the development and management of tourism. Luang Namtha’s Provincial Tourism Development Strategy identifies a list of stakeholders and summarizes their main roles and responsibilities related to tourism management. This information is presented in Table 7. The Luang Namtha Guesthouse and Restaurant Group was only established in 2007 after the Provincial Strategy was approved, therefore the hospitality sector does not appear in Table 7, but of course plays an important role in the provincial tourism industry.
Figure 3. Organizational Chart of the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA)
Table 7. Primary Tourism Stakeholders and Their Roles and Responsibilities in Luang Namtha

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Stakeholders</th>
<th>Roles and Responsibilities in Tourism Management</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Governor's Office</td>
<td>• Set tourism development policy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Approve rules and regulations on tourism development and management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provincial Tourism Department / District Tourism Offices</td>
<td>• Plan and manage tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• License and regulate tourism businesses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Promote tourism investment, including investment in small-scale community-based tourism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Provide tourism-related training to the public and private sector</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Market and promote destinations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitor impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam Ha NPA Office</td>
<td>• Manage NPA, establish environmental conservation-related rules in the NPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enforce rules and regulations regarding the use of NPA resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote ecotourism</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Conduct research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Monitor impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>• Actively participate in and benefit from tourism activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participate in creating operational rules and regulations for tourism in villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conserve and manage natural and cultural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Stakeholders</td>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities in Tourism Management</td>
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| Land Use Planning and Management Office      | • Undertake land use planning and land use allocation  
|                                               | • Register land and issue land ownership certificates |
| Tour Companies                                | • Develop tour products                          
|                                               | • Undertake marketing and promotion              
|                                               | • Training and career development                
|                                               | • Help in impact monitoring                      
|                                               | • Collect data                                    |
| Tour Guides                                   | • Serve as a link between communities and tourists |
|                                               | • Accurately interpret cultural practices and the environment |
|                                               | • Ensure tourists’ safety while on tours          |
| Tourists                                      | • Respect local customs and engage in appropriate behaviour |
|                                               | • Avoid purchasing wildlife, wildlife products and antiques |
|                                               | • Follow the laws and regulations of Lao PDR     |
| Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices  | • Regulate tourism development and management in the NPA  
|                                               | • Supervise conservation and management of the NPA |
| District Agriculture and Forestry Offices    | • Monitor and enforce forestry and land use laws  
|                                               | • Disseminate rules and regulations on the conservation and management of the NPA for local people |
|                                               | • Identify tourism development zones             
|                                               | • Promote agricultural extension and food production activities |
| Department of Information and Culture        | • Promote conservation activities related to local culture and traditions, archaeological and historic sites  
|                                               | • Manage cultural tourism resources, including museums, cultural tourism sites and antiquities |
|                                               | • Build awareness about tourism for society       
<p>|                                               | • Monitor impacts                                |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Primary Stakeholders</th>
<th>Roles and Responsibilities in Tourism Management</th>
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| Water Resource and Environment Department (formerly Science, Technology and Environment Office) | • Oversee the environmental impact assessments process  
• Collaborate with PTO to set up environmental management plans and regulations  
• Establish systems for managing solid waste and wastewater  
• Monitor impacts  |
| NGO’s and Donor Agencies                                   | • Provide technical and financial assistance where needed and requested                                           |
| Department of Planning and Investment                     | • Review and approve investment licenses  
• Promote investment in the tourism sector                                                                     |
| Department of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction | • Survey, design and approve construction of tourism infrastructure  
• Construct appropriate public tourism infrastructure                                                         |
| Tourist Police                                              | • Coordinate with PTO to regulate tourism businesses  
• Issue rules and regulations on safety and security for visitors  
• Regulate tour guides according to the government rules  
• Assist tourists with legal matters or lost property claims                                                   |
| Army                                                       | • Is consulted when zoning areas for tourism  
• Involved in controlling access to and patrolling the NPA                                                    |
| Lao Women’s Union                                          | • Promote gender equity and gender mainstreaming in the tourism sector  
• Encourage local participation by women and ethnic minority women in tourism activities                  |
| Department of Industry and Commerce                       | • Promote handicrafts and local products  
• License small businesses  
• Construct and regulate marketplaces                                                                         |
| Lao Front for National Construction                        | • Help encourage local participation to protect and conserve natural and cultural resources  
• Help resolve conflicts within and between villages                                                            |
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<th>Primary Stakeholders</th>
<th>Roles and Responsibilities in Tourism Management</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lao Youth Union</td>
<td>• Conduct awareness-building activities on how to prevent or mitigate negative impacts of tourism among youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Finance</td>
<td>• Approve entrance fees for tourist sites and revenue distribution mechanisms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| Department of Energy and Minerals | • Participate in land use zoning to avoid overlap between areas zoned for tourism and mining  
• Regulate investment in, production of and distribution of electricity |
| Department of Education | • Develop human resources and prepare the population for entrance into the workforce through vocational and academic training |
| Department of Public Health | • Control infectious diseases  
• Promote food safety and hygiene |

Source: Luang Namtha’s Provincial Tourism Development Strategy
First launched in Luang Namtha in October 1999, the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was implemented in two three-year phases between 1999-2002 and 2005-2008. Today, as a result of the project, there are several community-based tours that deliver economic benefits to local people and contribute to heritage conservation. This section elaborates the steps involved in the Nam Ha community-based ecotourism model and highlights key issues and lessons learned in developing and applying the model.
A. How and Why the Nam Ha Project Was Initiated

Following introduction of the “new economic mechanism” of the late 1980s that encouraged a shift to the market economy and an opening to the outside world, Lao PDR began to embrace international tourism as one strategy to alleviate poverty and generate much-needed foreign exchange. By the middle of the 1990s, the number of international arrivals was growing exponentially, and the national authorities responsible for managing the tourism industry found themselves lacking the experience and resources to manage the cultural and environmental impacts that were arising from rapid tourism growth. Of particular concern was the situation in the northern provinces, where young, independent travellers were venturing out to remote districts and ethnic minority villages that were the least prepared to deal with large influxes of international visitors.

Quickly realizing that tourism could bring as many social problems as economic benefits, the Lao National Tourism Administration approached UNESCO in 1996 and expressed the need to develop and test a community-based tourism development model that could stimulate much needed local economic growth, minimize negative impacts on the environment and contribute to natural and cultural heritage protection. UNESCO, in turn, secured financial resources to design the project from the Government of New Zealand, and worked with the New Zealand-based firm Tourism Resource Consultants on the initial project design.

Because of its high degree of ethnic diversity, growing number of visitors, strategic geographic location and the presence of the Nam Ha National Protected Area, Luang Namtha Province was selected as the site to implement Lao PDR’s first community-based ecotourism project, the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project. The main objectives of the project’s first phase (1999-2002) were to: (i) ensure that tourism contributes to the conservation of Lao PDR’s natural and cultural heritage, (ii) involve local communities in the development and management of tourism activities, (iii) use tourism as a tool for integrated rural development, (iv) provide training and human capacity building skills to tourism providers and local communities, (v) integrate public and private sector investment in culturally- and environmentally-sustainable tourism and (vi) assist communities to establish cultural and nature tourism activities in and around the Nam Ha National Protected Area. During the project’s second phase (2005-2008), the objectives were reviewed and a stronger emphasis was placed on ensuring that women, especially ethnic minority women, were involved in the operation and management of tourism in Luang Namtha. The institutional capacity of the Provincial Tourism Department to manage and regulate community-
based tourism was strengthened, as were conservation initiatives in and around the Nam Ha NPA. The private sector’s role in partnering with communities to expand pilot tour programmes that were developed in the first phase of the project was enhanced. During both phases of the project, there was a sustained effort to use community-based ecotourism as a tool to stimulate heritage conservation, rural development and poverty alleviation.

The Nam Ha project design was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team composed of anthropologists, ecotourism planners, environmental specialists and the Lao authorities, who ensured that the project’s goals and objectives would represent a broad range of interests and draw upon lessons learned from the region. Extensive consultations with provincial authorities in Luang Namtha, local communities, the Lao National Tourism Administration and the Ministry of Information and Culture helped produce a project document with practical and realistic objectives that were in line with national tourism and heritage protection policies. This inclusiveness and local participation in project design laid a solid foundation for subsequent project implementation.

Looking back on the project design, an important lesson learned is that the team who drafted the project came from diverse backgrounds, built in sufficient mechanisms for project implementers to exercise flexibility and adaptive management, set achievable objectives in line with national policy and avoided the introduction of overly burdensome bureaucratic procedures.

B. The Groundwork

Identification and Selection of the Project Implementation Team

The first phase of the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was implemented by the Lao National Tourism Administration through the Luang Namtha Provincial Tourism Department, with technical assistance from the UNESCO Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific based in the UNESCO Bangkok Office. The project’s principle funding agency was the Government of New Zealand through New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Agency (NZAID), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Government of Lao PDR. During Phase II, funding came from NZAID, UNESCO and the Government of Lao PDR. Recruitment and contracting of international advisors was done by the UNESCO Bangkok Office with local project staff selected by the Government of Lao PDR. Three full-time national counterparts were seconded to the project by the Lao National Tourism Administration and two provincial counterparts, one from the Provincial Tourism
Establishment of a National Supervisory Committee and Provincial Steering Committee

At the national level, the Nam Ha project was supervised by a National Supervisory Committee, comprised of one person from each of the following institutions: Lao National Tourism Administration; Lao National Commission for UNESCO; Science, Technology and Environment Agency (now the Water Resource and Environment Agency); Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; Ministry of Information and Culture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee for Planning and Investment. The supervisory committee met once per year in Luang Namtha to review project progress and provide guidance on policy issues.

At the provincial level, a Provincial Steering Committee was established to provide feedback on project work plans, facilitate implementation of project activities and participate in annual project review missions. The Provincial Steering Committee included the Provincial Tourism Department; Department of Information and Culture; Lao Women's Union; Department of Science, Technology and the Environment (now the Water Resource and Environment Department); Department of Agriculture and Forestry; Nam Ha NPA.
Management Unit; Provincial Police; Department of Foreign Affairs; Department of Planning and Cooperation; Lao Front for National Construction and the Lao Youth Union. The Provincial Steering Committee met twice per year, timed to coincide with the formulation of bi-annual project work plans. Private sector representation was not formalized at the national or the provincial level, but local tour operators and the Luang Namtha hotel and restaurant trade group were invited to attend steering committee meetings as observers.

**Public sector stakeholders were broadly represented and regularly involved in project planning and implementation, which helped to raise their understanding of community-based ecotourism development and heritage conservation.** Because of a lack of private sector representation on the Supervisory or Steering Committee, opportunities for closer collaboration with the private sector may have been missed.

**Inaugural Project Meetings**

After a series of internal meetings between the Lao National Tourism Administration and the Luang Namtha provincial authorities to review the project’s goals and objectives, the project team organized public inaugural meetings in Luang Namtha during the first month of project implementation during both phases, inviting a full range of public and private sector stakeholders. International development organizations active in the province were also invited. The main intention was to introduce the project’s staff, work plans, and overall project objectives to a wide audience. At the project’s outset, local understanding of tourism in Luang Namtha, especially community-based ecotourism, was very low. When the project team first proposed the development of several locally-managed multi-day forest treks to ethnic minority villages and suggested the potential benefits that this type of tourism could bring, many people in the room openly expressed reservations about what they were hearing. After citing several successful examples of community-based ecotourism in the region, meeting participants were still skeptical, but did come away with a better understanding of the economic potential of ecotourism and how it could contribute to heritage protection and management in the province.

Prior to beginning project activities, it is critical to explain project intentions to a wide range of stakeholders and introduce where and how the project intends to work. This is an important step in garnering local political support and ensuring that decision-makers clearly understand, or at least are informed, of the contribution that well-designed tourism initiatives can make to socio-economic development and heritage protection. Success should be publicized later to verify the benefits of new modalities of tourism development and management.
Training for Project Staff in Administration and Implementation Procedures

To ensure that project staff understood the planning, reporting and monitoring requirements of UNESCO, donor agencies like NZAID and IFC, and the Government of Lao PDR, short orientation workshops were conducted by UNESCO and the LNTA regarding administrative management of the project. Although this sounds like a routine procedure hardly worth mentioning, at the time, the LNTA had little experience in implementing internationally-funded projects and it was very important to establish clear administrative procedures that satisfied the requirements of UNESCO, project donors and the Government of Lao PDR.

As a result of these workshops, it was decided that implementation of the project would revolve around six-month work plans guided by the approved project document. The project team drafted work plans for the LNTA-based National Project Supervisor to approve and then submit to UNESCO. UNESCO, in turn, would refer to these work plans to establish periodic activity-financing contracts with the LNTA, and release funds to the project team after mutually agreed-upon milestones were met under each contract.

Establish and promulgate clear project administrative procedures early on or else project implementers will spend a disproportionate amount of time on administrative issues, which can undermine their enthusiasm and prevent them from achieving the project's objectives.

C. Assessing Project Feasibility

Training in Participatory Appraisal Methodologies

Much of the Nam Ha Project was carried out using a learning-by-doing approach, especially activities that involved the development of community-based ecotourism programmes. To train the national project team in participatory rural appraisal techniques, a series of field trips were organized to a Khmu Rok ethnic minority village called Sop Sim, located approximately 20 kilometres south of Luang Namtha on the banks of the Nam Tha River. The purpose of these visits was to collect socio-economic data on the village and plan the development of a community-managed picnic area (identified as a good opportunity by the Provincial Tourism Department and project team) just north of the village on the bank of the Nam Tha River bordering the Nam Ha NPA. Prior to collecting field data, the project's international advisors conducted seminars with the project team to familiarize them with rural appraisal techniques. A series of visits to the village followed and the project team quickly became familiar with the community, its livelihood systems, cultural practices and development priorities.
Even though the development of the Sop Sim Picnic Area was not identified as a village development priority and offered little potential in terms of producing economic benefits or conservation gains, the project team went on to support it and was eagerly backed by the villagers who provided labour and some construction materials to build it. After about two weeks of clearing vegetation, installing latrines, erecting signage and building picnic tables, the site was opened with much fanfare by the provincial authorities and the village. The project team congratulated themselves on what was perceived as an early success, and moved on to their next planned activity, surveying trekking trails in and around the Nam Ha NPA.

As for the picnic area, it was hardly used again. After the opening party, the village found visitation and commercial activities at the site too unreliable to warrant spending much time there, and without on-site security, the picnic tables were soon stolen. During the rainy season six months later, a flood washed away the latrines, and when the road that ran parallel to the site was expanded, the signage demarcating the site was torn down. Today, any physical evidence that the project ever worked there has disappeared.

The best way to train people, especially in rural appraisal methods, is to allow them the opportunity to apply their learning in real-life situations. In this case, valuable lessons were learned in terms of how to collect data in a participatory way, but there were not adequate provisions made for collecting and verifying the type of information one would need to properly plan a community-based ecotourism programme.

Development of Community-Based Ecotourism Development Survey Tools

Mindful of their experience with the Sop Sim picnic area, the project team set out to develop a more comprehensive set of planning tools to support the development of future community-based ecotourism programmes. Over the ensuing months, a number of survey tools were created and refined that include: (i) Community-Based Ecotourism Site Selection Matrix, (ii) Visitor Survey, (iii) Community-based Ecotourism Village Resource Mapping Exercise and (iv) Village Tourism Capacity Assessment. Examples of these survey instruments are shown in Annex A.

The Community-Based Ecotourism Site Selection Matrix was created to allow surveyors to assess 12 key subject areas that should be considered when selecting a site for community-based ecotourism development. Each subject is scored on a scale of 1 through 10, and then added to produce a raw score for the site or potential tour circuit. The numeric score is then compared with
other sites and circuits assessed by the same survey team. Since there is an element of subjectivity in using this tool, the Selection Matrix score should be considered along with an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) as well as the results of market surveys. The Visitor Survey is intended to gather general information on tourists' demographic characteristics and their interest in participating in community-based ecotourism activities at a destination. It also measures spending patterns and willingness to pay for varying types of tour programmes. When a proposed site or circuit shows promise after these three initial levels of analysis (Selection Matrix, Visitor Survey, SWOT analysis), a community-based ecotourism resource mapping exercise and capacity assessment of the village's ability to host tourists follows.

Information to create a community-based ecotourism village resource map is collected directly from the villagers and augmented with observations by the survey team. Besides a map of physical resources such as waterfalls, temples and historic buildings, this map should also contain an inventory of the community's intangible heritage. For example, it should identify people knowledgeable about local history, legends and rituals and should record information on local festivals. The map will also note the cultural do's and don'ts in a village, the agricultural calendar and where and when tourists are permitted to visit the community.

To assess the local communities' potential and ability to receive tourists, the Village Tourism Capacity Assessment looks at issues related to village demographics, organization and solidarity, sanitary conditions in the village and existing hospitality skills. A survey team would use this tool to determine if the village has enough labour available to host tourists, record initial ideas on to how the village proposes to provide food and accommodation to tour groups, identify what type of handicrafts or local products are available for sale in the village and record who might like to work as a tour guide or provide other services for tour groups.

There are many internal and external factors that must be considered when selecting an area for community-based ecotourism development. To avoid making inappropriate investments that will waste time and financial resources, a systematic effort that employs a wide range of tools should be applied when surveying potential sites. Most importantly, tour programmes should be surveyed and designed with an aim to fit the needs and aspirations of target communities, local authorities, tour operators and tourists.
Market Research

Without tourists, there would be no community-based ecotourism. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the type of tours that visitors are seeking in order to develop programmes in response to market demands. In Luang Namtha, visitor surveys revealed that more than 70 percent of tourists were interested in community-based ecotourism activities such as trekking to ethnic minority villages, while more than 80 percent were interested in visiting the Nam Ha NPA. When asked about desired length of proposed tours, in the year 2000, when the project team began developing the first trekking programmes, more than half of visitors responded that they preferred two-day, one-night forest treks that involved lodging in a village, and only about 10 percent would purchase a tour that lasted more than two nights. Through 2007, trekking and visits to villages were still the activities in highest demand. In terms of willingness to pay, a figure of US$15–20 per day was the price range that tourists were initially prepared to pay for community-based ecotours, quite a bit higher than average daily expenditure in 2000 which was only US$9.

The basic market research served two purposes. First, it was applied to the design of the project's first community-based ecotour, the two-day Ban Nalan Trek. Second, the project team was under a lot of pressure from the Provincial Tourism Department and provincial authorities to develop “culture shows” in the villages around Luang Namtha Town that involved staged performances where ethnic groups would perform singing and dancing routines. Because they had seen this type of tourism draw large crowds of domestic tourists in neighbouring countries, it was thought that it could be successfully introduced in Luang Namtha. However, at the time, there was virtually no domestic tourism in the province and market surveys showed that less than 5 percent of international tourists expressed interest in attending a cultural show of this nature. Armed with this data, the project team was able to avoid pursuing the development of this type of tour programme. This is not to say that well-done, authentic cultural performances could not be a viable tourism product in Luang Namtha, however, it was not found timely in 2000. Later on, in 2006, Vieng Neua Village, with assistance from the Provincial Tourism Department, organized a traditional Tai Yuen music and dance performance troupe that today regularly performs for groups of domestic and international tourists.

Market research is a very important step in the development of community-based ecotourism. It allows tourism planners to better understand market trends and design tour programmes appropriately. It can also counter political pressure to develop inappropriate tourism products that are not aligned with market demand. Market demand is not static, therefore, it is important to track changes in tourists’ interests through periodic data collection and analysis.
Tourism Awareness Seminars for Policy Makers

Using the results of the survey data, market research and knowledge of tourism’s positive and negative effects in the region, a series of tourism awareness seminars were held at the provincial and district levels. Individually tailored for each audience, these seminars focused on explaining the general information about the tourism industry and reported on tourism trends at a multitude of levels. The seminars outlined the potential positive and negative impacts of tourism development, introduced ecotourism principles and put forth ideas on how negative impacts could be limited and the benefits of tourism maximized. At the provincial and district level, the focus of the awareness seminars was mainly to raise awareness among policymakers and those responsible for regulating the local tourism industry. The meetings opened a forum for two-way communication, whereby participants were given the opportunity to provide suggestions on tour design, regulatory frameworks and the prioritization of target areas.

Ecotourism and community-based ecotourism are relatively new segments of the global tourism industry, especially in emerging destinations like Lao PDR. To give decision-makers the knowledge they need to formulate and promote supportive policy that will allow ecotourism to flourish and contribute to economic development and heritage protection, adequate investments need to be made in information and education campaigns. The tourism awareness seminar is one important component of such campaigns.

Village-Level Tourism Awareness Seminars

At the village level, tourism awareness seminars discussed the positive and negative aspects of tourism with the entire community in an open forum and in the local language when possible. Messages were kept direct and simple, and visual props were used to make the seminars more interesting. Because the project team frequently spent the night in the village where the seminar was held and shared a meal with community leaders, they were able to develop good rapport with target audiences. This allowed villagers to express concerns and ask questions that they might not have asked had the discussions taken place in a more formalized setting or outside of their community.
When working with communities, especially rural, marginalized, ethnic minority communities, special efforts should be made to work with the community in a manner that is considerate of local sensibilities. This can mean holding informal discussions over a meal instead of in a meeting room and using local languages whenever possible. Enough time should built into the village seminar for questions and discussion, keeping in mind that the most meaningful exchanges will probably take place outside of the actual seminar itself.

Secondary Logistic Surveys of Potential Tour Circuits

Following the initial surveys and scoring of a number of potential circuits, secondary surveys were undertaken to further discuss and confirm that village leaders would like to develop tourism in their community. The secondary surveys also verified walking times and access. Information was gathered on costs for village-based services such as food, lodging and guides, as well as transportation costs to and from the trailheads. Base costs were calculated and a price determined for the first trial tours, with commercial viability heavily influencing where the project would develop its first tour programme. During secondary logistic surveys, the project team spent considerable time gathering information on cultural and natural attractions along the walking trails that could be used later in interpretative materials and guide training.

It is necessary to visit a community many times during the preparatory stages of establishing a community-based ecotourism programme and listen to their concerns, especially in areas that have little experience with tourists. The high initial investments in time and technical advice proved to be worthwhile as monitoring data shows that villages which received adequate preparation later reported very few problems with tourism and retained a high-degree of control regarding the way tourism is conducted in the village.

Trial Tours

After receiving informed consent from four villages (Chalensouk, Nalan, Nam Koy and Nam Lue) to conduct trials on the first proposed tour circuit, about 50 tourists were recruited in groups ranging in size from two to eight people. These groups were led by the project team to solicit feedback from tourists on the proposed two-day trekking tour and to allow the villages and tourists to exchange ideas about what each group expected of the other in
terms of service and behaviour. Probably the most important aspect of the trial tours was that the project team set up a forum in which tourists would ask the villages directly for advice on what was and what was not culturally appropriate behaviour in the village, and the villagers were in turn given the opportunity to ask what were international tourist’s main concerns and aspirations while in their community.

The project team carefully made notes of these discussions and incorporated relevant information into the design of the tours. For example, when discussing sleeping arrangements, more than half of the village indicated hosting tourists in their homes might get tiresome and suggested a purpose-built lodge should be built in the village. The project later co-funded the construction of a traditional Kmhmu-style house in Nalan Village for tourists to sleep in. In regard to meals, many of the tourists that went on trial tours happened to be vegetarians, and suggested that non-meat dishes also be prepared for guests, much to the surprise of the village who considered it mandatory to serve chicken or pork to guests. Both villagers and tourists also suggested that there should be an opportunity for the host and visitor to communicate so each could learn about the very different lifestyles each other led. These are just a few examples where feedback from the host and tourists was incorporated into the final design of a tour, which made it more enjoyable and educational for both parties.

Trial tours with small groups of international tourists allowed the project staff to collect valuable information from both tourists and participating communities that was later incorporated into the design of tour programmes. Tourists were, and should be, charged a fee to participate in such trial tours. This will result in more constructive feedback. Not charging a fee for trial tours is more likely to produce a positive bias as a result of being given a free tour and thus may prevent planners from identifying potential problems.
Box 8. Why Trekking?

Since the first community-based trekking programme to Ban Nalan was set up, many more trekking tours have been developed in Luang Namtha. Some experts ask, “Are there too many treks in Luang Namtha?” and suggest that the province should diversify its tour programmes. While the Nam Ha Project team does not disagree with this advice, there are several reasons why there is a focus on trekking in Luang Namtha. First, there is high market demand for this type of tour. In fact, even before the project began, tourists were trekking out to villages. Without systematic community preparation and trained guides to accompany tour groups, there were many misunderstandings between tourists and villagers, and communities were largely missing out on the economic opportunities available from tourism. The model introduced by the project has reversed this problem, and now it is the villages that approach the Provincial Tourism Department and request that they be included in new treks.

Second, trekking tours as they are practiced in Luang Namtha are one of the best ways to ensure that the poorest people in remote villages gain employment and direct economic benefits from tourism, without having to migrate out of their community. For example, a typical trek employs two or three guides, and food, lodging and some transportation is purchased directly in the village. Handicrafts are also frequently bought directly from producers at the village level, which gives an economic boost to the most needy communities while helping to ensure that the traditional knowledge used in craft production is passed on to the next generation of young men and women. In Nalan Village, a four-hour walk from the main road, the village now earns more than US$5,000 annually, which is making a substantial contribution to poverty alleviation for the 34 families that live there. Nalan is only one example of many villages that are realizing benefits of this magnitude.

Finally, the trekking tours in Luang Namtha have led to the province’s establishment as a popular ecotourism destination, helping to nearly double arrivals from 24,700 in 2000 to 47,788 in 2006. Trekkers typically stay in Luang Namtha for an additional two nights because of the logistics involved in participating in a trekking tour. Although the knock-on effect of the incremental increase in arrivals and longer length of stay has not been studied in-depth, it is certainly driving demand for local agricultural products, lodging, handicrafts and tourism-related services such as transportation and the internet.
Training Local Guides

In Luang Namtha, local guides are trained as either town-based guides or village-based guides. Town-based guides consist of lead guides and assistants that are typically paid US$9–15 per day. All town-based guides must participate in a 30–45 day training programme and pass a written and oral examination administered by the Provincial Tourism Department before receiving certification as a Provincial Tour Guide. The provincial tour guide curriculum developed by the Nam Ha Project team is approved by the Lao National Tourism Administration, and consists of subjects ranging from history, ethnic groups, nature interpretation, guiding techniques, community participation, first aid, tourism and protected area laws and regulations, tourism impacts and monitoring as well as English language instruction.

Guide training consists of four hours of technical instruction and two hours of English language training each day. There are several field trips to existing tourist attractions and established trekking trails during the training. At the end of the course each trainee is required to create and lead their own tour programme as part of their practicum.

Provincial tour guides are mostly young men and women who live in the main towns and villages surrounding Luang Namtha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha. There are also a number of government staff from the Provincial Tourism Department, Information and Culture Department and Nam Ha Protected Area Management Unit who were trained and actively work as tour guides to supplement their government salaries. Village-based guides receive an abbreviated version of the provincial guide training, lasting a total of seven days. This training touches on guiding techniques and how to work with provincial guides, an introduction to the tourism industry, safety, tourism and protected area laws and regulations, nature and culture interpretation, hygiene, basic English and a one-day field practicum. Village guides are required to create emergency evacuation plans in case a tourist or guide is injured while on tour.

In 2005, Luang Namtha had a total of 119 trained provincial guides, of which 21 were women. Ninety-five percent of the provincial guides in Luang Namtha identify themselves as an ethnic minority, with most being Tai Dam, Tai Yuan, Kmhmu and Hmong. There were 53 certified village-based guides in 2005, all of whom were ethnic minorities. Only eight village-based guides are women. Village-based guides are paid US$5 per day and may advance to become a provincial guide if they enrol in the training course and pass the examination. A number of village-based guides have
moved on to become provincial guides, especially young men from Chalensouk Village. All community-based tours in Luang Namtha are required to employ at least one provincial and one village guide on each tour, who complement each other. This is regardless of whether or not the tour group is accompanied by a third-party guide that agents based outside the province often send to Luang Namtha with groups booked through their company. Some of the guides are employed exclusively by a single tour operator like Green Discovery, but most work freelance for all operators in town and are registered on the rotational work rosters that each tour operator typically maintains. A provincial or village guide will lead anywhere from one to eight trips per month depending on the season, their skill level and the availability of other guides.

Before the Nam Ha Project, there were no opportunities for local people to receive training and certification as provincial or local tour guides. Training was held in Vientiane and certification was provided at the national level only. The current system of licensing national, provincial, village and site-specific tour guides was influenced by the Nam Ha model and is now included in Lao PDR's Decree on the Implementation of the Tourism Law.

While the project made a strong effort to recruit and train women as guides, many consider guiding forest treks to be men's work and are reluctant to enter into guide training programmes. Women are very much involved in managing tourism inside their villages, but the number of female guides in the province has never reached more than 20 percent. Other barriers that women have mentioned regarding entry to the guiding profession are concerns about safety, especially while on forest treks, lack of confidence and, for married women, a heavy domestic workload.

Local guides, in their role as the link between the community, tourists and authorities, are some of the most important community-based tourism stakeholders. When training guides, there needs to be a strong focus on sensitizing them about how to effectively work with participating communities. Mechanisms should be put in place to monitor their performance. Performance monitoring should assess both their ability to provide quality services to tourists and whether or not they are treating village hosts with respect and dignity.

Village-Level Hospitality Training

The Lao people's reputation for warm hospitality and kind treatment of visitors is well known in the region and is one of the country's great advantages. Since local people already have a longstanding tradition of receiving guests, organizing village-level service groups to provide food, lodging and guiding services for tour groups was not difficult. However, the service standards in
terms of sanitation, variety of food and cleanliness in general needed to be improved before a village was ready to accept tourists. To raise the standard of service in host villages, village-level hospitality training focused on teaching both men and women sanitary food preparation and presentation, meal planning, housekeeping and basic accounting. Hospitality training also involved a degree of cross-cultural instruction for host communities so they could better understand the preferences of international tourists and ways to ensure that hosting tours would be commercially viable. Village-level service providers were taken on study tours to Luang Prabang and given short practical exposure training in guesthouses in Luang Namtha.

Village-level hospitality training was designed to build on existing village traditions in terms of hosting guests and to encourage the participation of both men and women. The main challenge in working with communities regarding hospitality management was to increase their understanding of visitor expectations in regard to food, cleanliness and appropriate interaction between host and visitor.

Construction of Small-Scale Tourism Support Infrastructure

Tourism products developed by the Nam Ha Project did not require a lot of infrastructure investment because they are inherently small, community-operated enterprises. However, in many villages, because the level of development was typically very low, with a lack of clean water and latrines, the project provided assistance to construct some tourism support infrastructure. When planning small infrastructure projects the project team worked with village leaders to identify projects that could produce economic benefits for the community, improve health and sanitation, reduce workloads, especially among women and young children, or be used to support the conservation or protection of the community’s cultural heritage. With these criteria in mind, the project went on to build clean water supply, small suspension bridges, purpose-built village-based ecolodges, village museums, handicraft markets, viewpoints and tourist information centres. Construction projects employed local labour, maximized the use of local materials and architectural styles and utilized energy-saving devices such as solar panels. To fund operations and maintenance of small infrastructure, user fees and taxes were introduced that could be collected and managed by responsible individuals attached to village Tourism Management Committees.

Whenever possible, community-based ecotourism support infrastructure should be prioritized and built by the community itself, using local materials, labour and architectural styles. It is critical to ensure that there will be a source of revenue for operations and maintenance and that someone in the village is responsible for managing public revenues and maintenance of tourism-support infrastructure.
Creation of Local Regulations and Guidelines

When the Nam Ha Project started in 1999, there was no existing legal precedent or clear regulations to guide the development and operation of tourism activities in National Protected Areas, nor were there guidelines on visits to communities. In fact, it was not permitted for foreigners to sleep in villages at the time without first going through a lengthy process to obtain permission from the village and district authorities. Because the Nam Ha Project was proposing to develop a model that would bring tourists to villages, the project team first had to convince the provincial authorities to amend these regulations, at least for a number of initial target communities, using official channels that were already established though the project’s National Supervisory Committee and Provincial Steering Committee. The project later developed a set of regulations and guidelines for community-based tourism that addressed issues such as which villages are permitted to host tourists (this is regularly amended as new villages develop tourism activities), group size, frequency of visits, number of guides required in regard to group size, guide pay scales, how much villages are paid for food and lodging and prohibitions on the sale of wildlife and antiques. The regulations also include public revenue-sharing formulas and guidelines on the use of taxes, user fees and village development funds generated by tour programmes and tourist attractions. Luang Namtha was the first province in the country to develop and publish a set of detailed community-based ecotourism-related investment guidelines. These guidelines have been consolidated into a package with a comprehensive set of application forms and advice for investors interested in establishing community-based tour services in Luang Namtha.

The creation of regulations and guidelines was led by the Provincial Tourism Department, which crafted the documents over an eight-year period. The first set of temporary regulations on the operation of trekking tours, collection of protected area entrance permits, guide regulations and use of village development funds placed a disproportionate amount of decision-making authority in the hands of the Provincial Tourism Department itself, without creating adequate checks and balances. In 2005-2006, the temporary regulations were reviewed by the public and private sector and amended to create a more effective and enabling regulatory framework.

Although the Provincial Tourism Department has taken the lead in drafting and refining community-based ecotourism-related regulations, the Information and Culture, Forestry and Provincial Revenue Departments and the Governor’s Office are now more deeply involved in reviewing, approving and enforcing them at the provincial level. At the national level, aspects of the community-
based ecotourism regulatory framework developed in Luang Namtha have been incorporated into the Decree on the Implementation of Lao PDR’s Tourism Law, illustrating how modalities for tourism development and regulation have grown from the bottom-up in Lao PDR.

Institutions that are responsible for creating regulations and guidelines, including village-level leadership, should first gain experience in the development and operation of community-based ecotourism before they attempt to make rules to regulate it. The Nam Ha Project provided such experience to heritage managers and communities in Luang Namtha by involving them in each step of the development process and later involving them in the review, amendment and approval of various community-based ecotourism regulations and guidelines. As with any enterprise, community-based ecotourism needs to have regulations that check and balance power between the diverse stakeholders that it involves. There should also be mechanisms in place to conduct ongoing review and amendments in order to adapt to new challenges as they arise.

**Promoting the Establishment of Local Inbound Tour Operators**

Up until 2001, there were no tour operators with branch offices in Luang Namtha Province so the project assisted the newly-trained provincial guides to establish the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service to sell tours to walk-in clients and handle groups sent by tour operators based outside the province. This new Ecoguide Service was essentially an inbound tour operator under the supervision of the Provincial Tourism Department. Later on, similar guide services were formed in Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha. These three operators are able to marginally cover their operational expenses and generate a small profit, but because they are businesses managed by the public sector they lack the dexterity of a private sector enterprise. Supporting private sector tour companies to develop tour programmes in cooperation with the project from the outset may have been a better option but there were no companies active in Luang Namtha until 2001.

In 2001, Green Discovery, a Lao-managed tour operator, established a branch office in the province, and was soon working with the project to develop community-based ecotourism programmes of its own. Exotissimo Laos followed in Muang Sing, and today a number of other companies are active in the province. These operators were initially viewed as a potential threat by the public sector because they were private, profit-driven companies. It took a few years for the provincial authorities to understand that supporting a well-regulated private sector is a very efficient way to scale up models
developed by the Nam Ha Project. Today, while the Nam Ha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha guide services are still active, the private sector is the main driving force behind the expansion of community-based ecotourism. This paradigm shift was made possible by years of capacity building within the Provincial Tourism Department that has made it more confident in fulfilling its regulatory role and relinquishing its former position as both the primary tour operator and regulator of tourism in the province.

Promoting private sector investment in the community-based ecotourism sector proved to be difficult until the public sector regulatory authorities had the confidence, ability and a clear mandate to support such investment. In Luang Namtha’s case, it was necessary to forgo the business model of supporting private enterprises to first establish a state-managed inbound tour operator so the authorities could fully grasp what this type of business entailed. Once the public sector understood and was empowered to manage this new economic sector using an official regulatory framework and new skill set, private sector investment became possible and quickly expanded.

**Introduction of Village Development Funds, the Tourism Promotion and Development Fund and Protected Area Entry Permits**

Public sector heritage managers in Luang Namtha, like in many places in the region, lack a range of resources to carry out their duties effectively. This situation is particularly true regarding financial resources to manage the Nam Ha National Protected Area, conduct community development activities in and around the protected area and monitor the effects of tourism on culture and the environment. To address this problem, village development funds were created at the provincial and village levels, and Lao PDR’s first protected area entry permit system was established for the Nam Ha NPA.

Entry fees to the protected area are currently US$1 or 10,000 kip per day per person and the protected area management unit has issued guidelines on the use of entry permit revenue. These guidelines specify that permit revenues may be used only to fund the unit’s conservation outreach activities, cover administrative expenses and pay villagers to perform trail maintenance. By 2006, entry permits were delivering over US$7,600 in annual income to the NPA Management Unit, up from US$984 in 2001 when first introduced.

Eight percent of gross revenue generated by the Nam Ha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha guide services is earmarked for a village development fund that is collected by the Provincial Tourism Department. A separate regulation on the management of village...
development funds has been signed by the provincial governor. This regulation gives the Tourism Department a central role in administering the fund and processing proposals made by communities. Private tour operators also contribute a portion of their revenue to village development funds that are typically managed by communities themselves, often as specified in cooperative agreements that tour operators enter into with communities and the authorities.

The Tourism Promotion and Management Fund is a five percent tax levied on all tours sold in the province. Revenue is collected by the Provincial Tourism Department under an existing scheme approved by the Lao National Tourism Administration. Half of these funds must be remitted to the LNTA and the remaining half may be used by the Provincial Tourism Department to finance impact monitoring as well as pay for marketing and promotion activities.

To broaden tourism’s benefits for the entire community, it is worth exploring the possibility of allocating a proportion of the revenue from tour sales for communal funds that can finance activities such as public infrastructure and access to credit. In addition, because tourism activity will cause an incremental increase in cultural and natural heritage management costs, tourists should be prepared to pay a portion of management costs through taxes, entrance fees or other user fees. Tourists will generally not object to paying these fees if they see the funds are being used transparently for sound management actions.

**Community-Based Ecotourism Cooperative Agreements**

Cooperative agreements between villages, tour operators and provincial tourism, culture, environment and financial managers described in Part II, which outline each stakeholder’s role and responsibility in operating and managing tour circuits and destinations, are one of the most important legal mechanisms supporting sustainable tourism development in Luang Namtha. After the initial development of new ecotourism products and destinations, it was evident that various stakeholders had different interpretations of their roles and responsibilities in managing tours and destinations. For example, the Provincial Tourism Department and NPA Management Unit each claimed the other was responsible for trail maintenance. Some town-based guides were attempting to underpay villagers for food and lodging. Some villages in turn were not supplying adequate food to tour groups and some were clearing forest along trekking trails or illegally hunting in places designated as wildlife sanctuaries. Tour operators were attempting to avoid paying permit and entry fees whenever possible and, in some cases, did not send qualified guides on forest treks.
To address this problem, the Provincial Tourism Department and the Nam Ha Project Team developed model community-based ecotourism cooperative agreements and assisted the authorities to follow up on the implementation and enforcement of these agreements until their content became standard operating procedures. Two variations of the cooperative agreements exist: (i) one that sets rules for the way tour circuits are managed and (ii) one that focuses on the way destinations (i.e. individual caves, waterfalls, etc) are managed. The idea of formally assigning tourism and heritage management responsibilities to local communities under a cooperative agreement is an innovation pioneered in Luang Namtha that is being constantly improved as new tours and destinations are developed under this scheme.

Tourism and community-based ecotourism are dynamic activities that involve many actors, many of whom might not agree on their individual and collective responsibility in operating tours, managing heritage resources and sharing financial benefits. The formation of mutually-agreeable cooperative agreements through participatory discussions can produce a regulatory framework that serves as a tool to help protect each signatory’s interests, helps to arbitrate disagreements when they arise and helps to protect the cultural, historic and natural resources that attract tourists in the first place.

Distributing Financial Benefits Widely and Equitably

When a tourist walks into a tour operator’s office in Luang Namtha, one of the first questions he or she asks is, “Where does the money I am paying for this tour go?” Today’s discerning traveller is interested in social equity, environmental conservation and good value for money. With this in mind, the Nam Ha Team sought to develop tours that distributed financial benefits widely to the various stakeholders involved in their operation and management. A few simple rules such as insisting that all food on overnight tours was purchased from host villages, requiring each tour to use the services of a village guide, having tourists stay in purpose-built village-owned lodging or homestays, introducing trekking permits that raised revenue for managing the protected areas and including a handicraft product in the price of each tour are some of the simple but effective ways the Nam Ha model ensures that income is distributed to as many parties as possible. Rather than adding to tour operators’ costs, buying goods and services directly from the villages often results in cost savings. An analysis of the Nam Ha Ecoguide service’s cash flow for 2006 in Table 8 and Figure 4 illustrate typical tour sales revenue distribution for a community-based ecotourism operator in Luang Namtha.
Table 8: Cash Flow and Revenue Distribution for the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service in US$, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>No. tours</th>
<th>No. tourists</th>
<th>Gross revenue</th>
<th>Trip expenses</th>
<th>PTD 5%</th>
<th>Village funds</th>
<th>Permits</th>
<th>Provincial tax</th>
<th>Sales agent</th>
<th>Profit</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>6,676</td>
<td>4,804</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>5,581</td>
<td>4,009</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>448</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3,356</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>284</td>
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<td>3,271</td>
<td>485</td>
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<td>4,378</td>
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</table>

| Percentage of gross revenue | 72.1% | 4.0% | 6.3% | 5.7% | 0.9% | 3.1% | 7.7% |

Source: Nam Ha Ecoguide Service Financial Records

Table 8 shows the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service sold 359 tours with a total of 1,787 tourists, and generated some US$56,940 in gross revenue during 2006. In the same year, a total of 72.1 percent of revenue flowed back into participating communities, as seen under the “trip expenses” column.

Communities and Merchants Selling Food and Water

On all tours, food and water is purchased at a set rate of 15,000 kip per meal per person for a set menu. There is no bargaining for food in villages; the guide simply pays the village based on the set rate upon departure. The only meal not purchased in villages is lunch on the first day of overnight treks and lunch on some day tours. A small fee for cooking and firewood is included in this price.
Accommodation in Villages

The price of village-based accommodation was originally 10,000 kip per night per person on all tours and was raised to 20,000 kip in 2007. This money is paid directly to the village. Villagers pay themselves a portion of the fee immediately for housekeeping and the rest is set aside in village fund for lodge maintenance and other communal activities.

Transportation

Transport costs vary from about US$6–20 per trip depending on the distance and mode of transportation. Fees are paid directly to the driver, boatman or owner of the vehicle upon services rendered.

Guide Fees

At the current rates, lead guides are paid US$10-15 per day, assistant guides are paid US$9 per day and village guides paid US$5 per day. The number of guides depends on the size of the group. For instance, on boat trips, there is one guide per boat (2-5 people), but on treks there are always at least two guides. With trekking groups of four or more tourists there is a full complement of three guides per trip (lead guide, assistant guide and village-based guide).

Handicrafts

A simple traditional handicraft product is included in the price of each tour and is presented to the tourist as a “gift” by one of the villages on the tour route. Villages that are designated to supply handicrafts are usually the last village on a tour circuit. A set price of 18,000 kip for the handicraft was negotiated in 2006 between the tour operators and village producers. Additional sales are often made by the designated “handicraft village” or other villages that have handicrafts to sell.

Village Service Fees

Some villages on tour routes are asked to boil water, prepare picnic sites in the forest or perform other small logistic support tasks for tour groups. They are paid for these services each time.

The above categories of local services represent the US$41,069 in total “trip expenses” paid to local service providers in 2006. The balance of tour revenues went towards public fees, village development funds and operations and maintenance costs to keep the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service running. These other expenses are as follows.
PTD Five-percent Tourism Promotion and Marketing Fund

Based on regulations approved by the Lao National Tourism Administration at the central level, a five-percent tax is levied on each tour’s retail sales price to finance the Tourism Promotion and Marketing Fund. The Provincial Tourism Department remits half of the revenue it collects to the LNTA and retains control over the other half, which it uses to pay for marketing and promotion activities and some operational overheads. This tax is applied to all tour operators and all tours sold throughout the country and is not specific to Luang Namtha or the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service.

Village Development Fund

The Nam Ha Ecoguide Service adds an eight-percent premium to the price of each tour to finance a village development fund managed by the Provincial Tourism Department. This fund is earmarked to assist villages in and around the Nam Ha NPA with small-scale development activities and to support the expansion of community-based tourism activities in the province. Use of the fund must be approved by the provincial governor. The fund has been used to support the construction of small bridges, clean water systems, environmental awareness activities and cultural performances. Guide services in Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha that are under the District Tourism Offices also collect the eight-percent premium and administer their own village development funds.

Nam Ha NPA Trekking Permit

A Nam Ha NPA trekking permit fee of US$1 or 10,000 Lao kip per person, per day is imposed on all trekking tours, whether or not they actually enter the NPA. These funds are paid to the Nam Ha NPA Management Unit monthly and are earmarked to fund conservation activities in and around the protected area.

Provincial Tax on Net Income

The Nam Ha Ecoguide Service, through an agreement with the Provincial Tax Office, pays a flat tax of ten percent on net income which amounts to only US$485 in 2006. This is considerably less than the ten percent VAT that tour operators pay because the Nam Ha Ecoguides have pledged eight percent of their gross revenue to support the village development fund. In comparison, Green Discovery, a private tour company, paid over US$6,000 in taxes in 2006.
Sales Agents

Agents selling tours offered by the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service receive a US$1 per person commission for each guest that signs up and purchases a tour. Most tours are sold to walk-in customers in Luang Namtha by ecoguide service coordinators that share the commissions, paid monthly. The three ecoguide service coordinators also serve as tourist information officers and receive a small government salary.

Profits

Monthly overheads including the salary for guide service coordinators/tourist information officers, phone bills, communication costs, photocopying, fuel and electricity, miscellaneous small equipment and materials are paid for with profits the ecoguide service generates. Depreciation on computers, the ecoguide service office in the Provincial Tourist Information Centre, printing of promotional materials and most marketing costs are absorbed by the Provincial Tourism Department.

Figure 4. Revenue Distribution in Percentage for the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service for the Year 2006

A review of the financial records of Green Discovery and the Nam Ha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha guide services shows that tour sales revenue from 2001–2006 totals US$440,071. This is approximately equal to the implementing cost of the first phase of the Nam Ha Project. Operating costs, taxes and fees for these operators follow a similar distribution pattern shown in Table 8, with the exception being that Green Discovery pays higher taxes but does not earmark eight percent of sales for a village development fund. If 2007 tour sales revenue of the above tour operators is added to the 2001-2006 figures, the grand total climbs to US$636,819.
Marketing and Promotion

Tour programmes in Luang Namtha have been most effectively promoted through word of mouth by satisfied customers telling other tourists, friends and the media about their experiences. Besides relying on tourists to promote tours in Luang Namtha, a series of brochures, information boards, guidebooks and news releases were produced and promotional websites developed with assistance from UNESCO and the Lao National Tourism Administration. Familiarization tours were also held for the media and tour operators that distribute tours in Vientiane and abroad. Marketing efforts were focused on drawing the type of tourists and tour operators that show an interest in nature, culture and behaving in a way that shows sensitivity towards local sensibilities. There are as many messages in Luang Namtha’s promotional materials encouraging good behaviour as there are smiling locals and stunning landscapes.

Marketing and promotion efforts were boosted by the project being nominated for and winning several international awards. This generated a lot of free international media attention that helped to publicize Luang Namtha and the models developed by the project. Media attention has proven to be priceless in terms of promoting community-based ecotourism to tourists and policy makers in Lao PDR, and has generated a lot of pride for the national and provincial authorities responsible for supervising the project. Finally, tourism managers in Luang Namtha have been able to meet with authors of popular guidebooks such as the Lonely Planet to describe new tour products and destinations so they can be included in updated editions of the guidebooks.

By 2010 there will be some 1 billion tourist movements globally if current trends continue. A destination, especially in a small country like Lao PDR, needs only a miniscule percentage of this figure to support a sustainable and profitable local tourism industry. Tourism managers should be selective in who they target in marketing and promotion schemes, be skillful at cultivating good media relations, and make sure that tourists leave a destination satisfied with their experience. A word of mouth recommendation is a very effective and inexpensive promotional tool that is often the deciding factor determining whether or not someone will visit a destination.

Collaboration with the Private Sector

The Nam Ha Project set out to collaborate with the private sector to establish community-based ecotourism models that would benefit a wide range of stakeholders and make contributions to cultural and natural heritage protection. At the project’s inception, there were no private tour operators active in the province, so the project team was faced with the additional challenge of helping local people
to establish inbound tour services (the Nam Ha, Muang Sing and Vieng Phoukha guide services). Once the project demonstrated that community-based ecotourism could indeed be economically viable and pay social and environmental dividends, private sector tour operators were not far behind in expressing an interest to develop new tours in the province. Private sector strengths such as expertise in marketing, professional management and access to financing complemented the experience of provincial tourism officials and heritage managers in terms of training, community outreach, monitoring, access to policy-makers and international expertise. Public-private cooperation resulted in a rapid expansion of tour circuits and the economic, social and environmental benefits they deliver.

The lesson here is that in transitional economies like Lao PDR where the private sector is still becoming established, it may be necessary to find alternative business models in the tourism sector. This is in contrast to mature economies where the public sector acts as the “regulator” and the private sector is the “operator”. In Luang Namtha, the public sector was forced to serve both functions at first, but with experience and confidence, is growing increasingly comfortable in fulfilling its regulatory role and attracting private sector investment to expand sustainable community-based ecotourism models.

In Lao PDR, the private sector has the capital and now has the mandate to develop sustainable tourism products and the public sector should actively support them to do so. However, at the same time, there should be careful regulation of the private sector to ensure that the tourism products they develop are delivering environmental, social and economic benefits to local stakeholders. This will probably not happen if public sector management authorities do not proactively engage with or are not transparent in their dealings with the private sector.

**Collaboration with Other Development Partners**

Many international and national organizations collaborated with the Nam Ha project on a range of initiatives. The Wildlife Conservation Society was involved with training ecoguides and developing parts of the project’s monitoring protocol. International volunteers from New Zealand’s Volunteer Service Abroad and Canada’s Sustainable Development Research Institute helped to develop and market community-based ecotourism products and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) provided a handicraft design and marketing expert. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) helped to fund the original *Do’s and Don’ts in Lao PDR* poster. The European Union (EU) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) helped to co-finance small-scale infrastructure, training and marketing and promotion. The Institute for Cultural
Research conducted a range of initial research that was used to produce guide training handbooks and accurate promotional materials for tourists. Effective coordination and collaboration was made possible by a proactive project team that was able to leverage assistance from these organizations and also work closely with consultants from the Asian Development Bank on the formulation of the US$14.2 million Mekong Tourism Development Project. This project that ran from 2003–2008 incorporated lessons from the Nam Ha Project and successfully replicated and improved upon the Nam Ha model in Lao PDR's four provinces of Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha, Khammouane and Champasak.

Effective collaboration with development partners and national organizations allowed the project to leverage many additional resources that helped to ensure that its objectives were met and the project enjoyed a high degree of visibility.

Gender and Ethnic Minority Participation

In places where ethnic minority culture is one of the factors drawing tourists to a destination, as is the case in Luang Namtha, ethnic minority participation in tourism management and regulation is essential. This is especially true for ethnic minority women who can easily miss out on the benefits of tourism unless an effort is made to include them. In Luang Namtha, the Lao PDR National Tourism and Gender Strategy and the Ethnic Minority Participation Programme introduced by the Mekong Tourism Development Project is put into practice by a gender focal point embedded in the Provincial Tourism Department. This energetic young woman is charged with mainstreaming gender and ethnic minority issues into the province's tourism development activities. Female and ethnic minority participation is measured as part of the monitoring protocol introduced by the project that disaggregates data by gender and ethnicity.

E. Ensuring Quality

Careful monitoring and internal and external evaluations of the work done by the Nam Ha Project helped the project team and local partners in making evidence-based decisions on how to improve existing tours and work practices, as well as better plan for new initiatives. A community-based ecotourism monitoring protocol was developed over the course of Phase I of the project and has been improved upon during Phase II. An overview of the monitoring actions and responsible agencies is shown in Figure 5.

This monitoring protocol gauges community satisfaction with tourism, measures the distribution of economic benefits, identifies
threats to the environment and cultural heritage and assesses tourist satisfaction. It also calls for community workshops where data gathered during household surveys is reported back to the community to identify any problems that may be arising due to tourism in the village.

Figure 5. Nam Ha Community-Based Ecotourism Monitoring Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring Action</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Responsible agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitor feedback</td>
<td>Every trip</td>
<td>Provincial Tourism Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam Ha NPA wildlife and resource use monitoring</td>
<td>Every trip</td>
<td>Nam Ha NPA Management Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail maintenance survey</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village conservation team data collection (wildlife and outsider threats)</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Nam Ha NPA Management Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village household questionnaire</td>
<td>Biannual</td>
<td>Provincial Tourism Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community workshop</td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Provincial Tourism Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nam Ha NPA Management Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon returning from each tour, tourists are asked to fill out visitor feedback forms that are summarized and discussed at monthly guide meetings. This form provides useful information to monitor guide performance and tourists’ perception of the authenticity and quality of their experience. An example of the visitor feedback form is shown in Annex B. Because the type of tourist that visits Luang Namtha is often very sensitive to the negative impact tourism can have on participating villages, they can be very effective sentinels and data sources for tourism and NPA managers.

Experience in implementing the monitoring protocol shows that it can be a very helpful tool to ensure that tourism managers and NPA staff maintain regular dialogue with communities and identify problems early. This helps to build strong and trusting relationships with the participating communities and, in addition, helps to raise awareness about the philosophy and objectives of ecotourism at both the village and policy level.
One part of the monitoring protocol that has not been successful is the wildlife and resource use monitoring programme that was designed to be implemented by tour guides in cooperation with the NPA Management Unit. This well-designed programme was developed in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society and Nam Ha NPA managers to (i) provide the NPA Management Unit and the Tourism Department with comparative data over time that will indicate the impact of ecotourism on the presence of wildlife and scale of resource use inside the protected area and (ii) to provide the NPA Management Unit with regular patrolling information on the presence of threats along trekking trails and rivers inside the protected area. Activities that were intended to be monitored were hunting of threatened wildlife species, collection of protected NTFPs, fishing with explosives, illegal logging and new immigration into the NPA. Although the use of guides to monitor threats to the NPA seemed like a good idea at the outset, the programme did not receive adequate follow up because the NPA Management Unit did not have enough staff to backstop the programme and it ended soon after the first phase of the project.

Finding time, financial resources and staff to systematically implement the monitoring protocol as it was envisioned has also been a challenge for the Provincial Tourism Department. A final challenge in regard to monitoring is that reports of the positive and negative impacts of tourism and information on emerging problems often do not get passed on to decisions makers, or decision makers lack the resources to act on the data when it does reach them.

The monitoring protocol that was developed in Luang Namtha was very comprehensive but proved too difficult for local tourism and heritage managers to implement once the project ended. Perhaps a simpler or more focused approach would have been better, but without a commitment of financial and human resources by local authorities, no monitoring scheme can be effectively carried out.
Figure 6. Assessment Actions and Monitoring

1. Preliminary Steps
   - Establish national and local supervisory and steering committees
   - Implementing agencies identify and recruit project staff and advisors using effective selection criteria

2. Assessment and analysis
   - Assess the feasibility of new tours/products and the performance of ongoing tours/products (using monitoring data) by conducting and analyzing the outcomes of:
     - participatory appraisals and surveys
     - market research
     - logistic surveys
     - trial tours with tourists

3. Monitoring
   - Conduct monitoring
   - Feed outcomes of monitoring back into decision-making process

4. Action
   - Set/retain tour programmes
   - Publicize the initiative to a wide range of public and private stakeholders
   - Conduct ongoing project staff training in administrative and implementation procedures
   - Raise tourism awareness among stakeholders
   - Train local guides and hospitality providers
   - Construct and maintain support infrastructure
   - Create/update, raise awareness about and enforce regulations and guidelines
   - Promote establishment of local inbound tour operators
   - Establish and operate public revenue generating mechanisms
   - Negotiate and implement cooperative agreements
   - Market and promote tours, local products and the destination
   - Collaborate with the private sector and development partners
   - Create and implement gender and ethnic participation plans
Expanding the Model

The community-based ecotourism models developed in Luang Namtha have been expanded widely both at the provincial and national levels. From the first 16 local guides that formed the Nam Ha Ecoguide Service in 2001, there are now nine provincial guides services and many private tour companies operating dozens of tours in Savannakhet, Luang Prabang, Champasak, Khammouane, Xieng Khouang, Phongsali, Oudomxay and Houaphanh provinces. All have been on study tours to Luang Namtha. The Nam Ha Project’s international and domestic experts along with staff from the Tourism and Information and Culture Departments from Luang Namtha have been employed as trainers to support the expansion of the model throughout the country. A number have moved on to become Provincial Tourism Directors and National Project Directors of other internationally-funded ecotourism development projects. Financial and technical support to expand the model continues to come from NZAID, UNESCO, the Lao National Tourism Administration, the Asian Development Bank, SNV, GTZ, the EU, DED and a number of other national and international institutions.

Looking back on how the Nam Ha Community-Based Ecotourism model was adopted and expanded in Lao PDR, what seems most relevant is timing, cooperation and collaboration with a wide range of public and private stakeholders, focusing resources to develop a workable model and then refining and expanding the model based on accurate monitoring data. The hard work and dedication of the project team, which was supported by UNESCO, the New Zealand Government, the Lao National Tourism Administration and other Lao government supervisory agencies, was also instrumental to the success of this innovative project.
References


Luang Namtha Department of Information and Culture. 2006. *Luang Namtha 30 Year Anniversary*. Luang Namtha, Lao PDR.


Glossary

**Binthabhat** – Morning offering of food, usually plain sticky rice, given to Buddhist monks and novices by the laity as an expression of generosity and way of making merit.

**Boun** – Lao word for “festival” or “merit” depending on the circumstance. Lao Buddhists believe that by accumulating merit they will reborn under better circumstances in their next life.

**Buddhism** – A religious philosophy based on the teachings of the Lord Buddha, who lived approximately 2,550 years ago in northern India. Buddhism developed into a variety of schools as it spread first through the Indian subcontinent and later Central, East and South-East Asia. Theravada Buddhism is the school mainly practiced in Lao PDR.

**Burma** – Today known as the Union of Myanmar, the territory formerly known as Burma borders Bangladesh, China, India, Lao PDR, Thailand and the Andaman Sea.

**Dharma** – The teachings of the Lord Buddha.

**Ecotourism** – A form of nature-based tourism that encourages conservation, educates tourists about the places they visit and provides benefits to local people and the environment.

**Houay** – Lao word for stream or small creek.

**Kao** – Rice. In Lao PDR, the preferred variety among the ethnic Lao is glutinous rice.

**Kao soi** – A type of flat rice noodle that is served with savory pork broth. Kao soi is popular mainly in Tai Lue populated areas of northern Lao PDR.

**Kaen** – A woodwind musical instrument made from bamboo that is sometimes called the mouth organ.

**Khou vieng** – Earthen ramparts that were commonly constructed as defensive structures around Tai-populated towns. The orientation of some khou vieng is believed by scholars to have symbolic meaning related to cosmology.

**Kong bang** – Bronze drums that were used for ritual purposes and to show the status and prestige of their owners.

**Lao** – A branch of the Tai-Kadai linguistic family that settled in the valleys and plains of what is now Lao PDR.

**Lao lao** – Distilled rice spirits with a very high alcohol content.

**Lao PDR** – The Lao People's Democratic Republic. Also commonly referred to as Laos, Lao PDR is a land-locked country in South-East Asia that borders China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. It was established on 2 December 1975.
Mak khone – Small cloth ball that young Hmong men and women toss to one another as part of their courting rituals during Hmong New Year. The Tai Dam toss cloth balls similar to the Hmong version through a hoop suspended high in the air as part of sporting competitions during Tai Dam New Year and the Tai Dam festival in Luang Namtha.

Monitoring – A management technique used to assess success and failure of a policy, plan or strategy.

Mekong – The longest river in mainland Southeast Asia that rises on the Tibetan Pleateau and terminates in the South China Sea south of Ho Chi Minh City in Viet Nam.

Muang – Today translated as “district” in the Lao language, the muang were traditionally political units of Tai-speaking ethnic groups made up of several villages that were ruled by a hereditary lord.

National tour guide – A tour guide trained by the Lao National Tourism Administration who has passed the National Tour Guide Examination. National tour guides can lead tours in all provinces of Lao PDR.

National Protected Area – A series of conservation areas established in 1993 by Prime Minister’s Decree 164 to protect forests, wildlife and water; maintain natural abundance and environmental stability and protect natural beauty for leisure and research. They cover approximately 13 percent of Lao PDR’s land area.

Pa daek – Fermented fish paste made with freshwater fish and salt that is used as a condiment and flavoring in many traditional Lao recipes.

Pansa – The Buddhist rains retreat that lasts from the full moon in July to the full moon in October.

Pathet Lao – Name of the Communist forces that gained control of the Lao government in 1975. The literal translation is “Lao land” and is also used as a general term for the country.

Provincial tour guide – A tour guide trained by the Provincial Tourism Department, LNTA or another government-recognized organization who has passed an examination administered by the Provincial Tourism Department. Provincial tour guides may lead tours only in the province where they are registered.

Sai – A cylindrical fish trap made from bamboo and rattan that is placed in rice fields or slow-moving streams.

Siam – Previous name of Thailand until 1932.

Sin – Long tubular skirts made of silk or cotton that are worn by Lao women and many other ethnic groups in Lao PDR.

Tai – A large linguistic group that includes the Lao and Thai.

That – Lao term for a mound-shaped Buddhist monument that holds relics of the Lord Buddha or ashes of monks and the devout.

Vat – Buddhist monastery comprised of several buildings including the main chapel that typically houses an image of the Lord Buddha, monk’s quarters, a drum tower and an ordination hall.

Village-based tour guide – A tour guide trained by the Provincial Tourism Department, LNTA or another government-recognized organization who has passed an examination administered by the Provincial Tourism Department. Village tour guides may lead tours only in their village or on designated tour circuits.
### Annexes

#### Annex A: Community-Based Ecotourism Survey Instruments

**Community-Based Ecotourism Site Selection Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Score (1 is lowest, 10 is highest)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Access</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Community’s motivation to develop tourism</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Scenery and landscape</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural resources</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Variety of tourism resources</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Infrastructure</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ability to link to other tourist attractions</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Market demand (based on visitor surveys)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Safety</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Potential benefits for environmental conservation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Potential benefits for cultural heritage protection</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Poverty alleviation potential</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Score**
Visitor Survey

Welcome to Lao PDR! We would like to ask you to take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire below to assist the Lao National Tourism Administration plan for the development of sustainable community-based tourism. Thank you for your time!

1. Age_________________ Nationality ____________________ Sex M__ F__

2. Entry point into Lao PDR_________________ Exit point_________________

3. Total length of visit _______ days

4. Average expenditure per day (US$) ______ (including accommodation, transport, food, etc.)

5. Number of days in Luang Namtha Province________

6. How did you travel to Luang Namtha Province?
   Local bus/Truck __  Plane __  Boat __Van__

7. Main reason for visiting Lao PDR (please check):
   Nature__ Culture__Ethnic groups__ Monument and museums__ New destination__
   Food__ Handicrafts__

8. Are you interested in visiting any of the Lao PDR's National Protected Areas? Yes __ No__

9. Are you travelling on a group tour? Yes__ No__

10. While in Lao PDR, are you interested in participating in any of the following activities:
    Trekking__ Visit ethnic villages__ Visit caves__Visit waterfall__ Camping__
    Birdwatching__ Rafting/kayaking__ Viewing wildlife/safari__
    Mountain biking__ Cultural shows__

11. How many days do you suggest for an ideal community-based tourism programme (i.e. trek, boat trip, camping)?
    1 day__ 2 days__ 3 days__ 4 days__ 5 days__ More than 5 days__

12. How much are you willing to spend on locally guided community-based tourism programmes?
    (If not interested in category, please leave blank),
    Treks to ethnic villages/forest US$_______per day
    River trips __ US$_______per day
13. Please provide suggestions about how to improve or develop sustainable community-based tourism in the Lao PDR.

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Cost per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bird watching</td>
<td>US$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave exploration</td>
<td>US$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain biking</td>
<td>US$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife viewing/safari</td>
<td>US$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>US$________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community-Based Ecotourism Village Resource Mapping Exercise

1. Has the village ever received tourists? Describe the experience.

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

2. Make an inventory of do's and don'ts in and around the village:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do's</th>
<th>Don'ts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. How does the village feel about tourists taking photos?

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

4. What types of handicrafts are produced in the village? Are they for sale?

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

5. Discuss interesting sites inside the village.

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________
6. Discuss interesting sites around the village.

___________________________________________________________________________________

7. Discuss activities to do in and around the village.

___________________________________________________________________________________

8. Discuss any areas that are “off limits” to tourists.

___________________________________________________________________________________

9. Identify people who are knowledgeable about the trails and the forest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Identify people who are knowledgeable about the local culture and history:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

11. On a separate sheet of paper, draw a map of tangible and intangible tourism resources in and around the village.

**Tourism Resource Map**
12. Record the local calendar of festivals and agricultural activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Festivals</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Village Tourism Resource and Capacity Assessment

1. Name of village__________________ Location____________________ Ethnic group___________

2. Total number of houses_____  Total population_______  Average no. persons per house_______

3. Communication Facilities — Does the village have phones? Yes___  No___

4. Accessibility — What is the distance from road___km

   How difficult is it to access the village?

5. Education

   Literacy:   Men _____ %  Women _____ %  Average level of education:_____________________

6. Drinking water – Is there a good supply of water for drinking? Yes___  No___

   Comment__________________________________________________________________________

7. Cleanliness – What is the first impression of the village’s cleanliness?

   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

8. Food — Is the village able to sell food to tourists?

   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
9. Food — Assess availability of food in the village:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meats (Fish, poultry, pork, beef, etc)</th>
<th>Available for tourists?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Available for tourists?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forest products</th>
<th>Available for tourists?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Available for tourists?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Food — Traditional cuisine

What traditional foods are prepared? What are the specialty dishes? Could they be served to foreigners or adapted to foreign tastes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dish</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>7.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

11. Guide skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>No. of People</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife specialists – Is anybody knowledgeable about wildlife?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village elders – Can anyone tell stories about history, culture and religion?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign language ability – Can anyone communicate in English or other foreign languages?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
12. Handicrafts — What products are available? Are they of good quality? Marketable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handicraft</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Marketability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</table>

13. Accommodation — What are the proposed sleeping arrangements for tourists (if hosting overnight tourists)?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

14. Space for home stays – How many households have enough space to host 2-4 tourists?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

15. Area for camping – Does the village have space to install a camping area? Where?

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
16. Area for visitor lodge – Is there an appropriate place to build a community lodge? Where?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

17. Bathing facility – How convenient is bathing in the village? Where is the site?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

18. Toilets – How many toilets are there in the village? Would more be necessary for hosting tourists?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

19. Available time

Do villagers have enough time to participate in tourism activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
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<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Evening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harvesting season</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dry season</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rainy season</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

20. Village institutions — How is the village organized? How are group decisions made?
___________________________________________________________________________________
21. Community fund — Is there a community/credit fund? Yes___ No___

Total value of fund: __________________

What is it used for? ________________________________________________________________

22. How is it managed? How are decisions made on its use? ____________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

23. Have there been any problems with the fund? Explain. _____________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

24. Micro-credit savings — Is there a micro-credit savings programme? Yes___ No___

Total no. of participants: _____________   Total no. of groups: ________________

Total value of fund: ______________

25. What are these funds mainly used for? ____________________________________________

26. Have there been any problems with the fund? Explain. _____________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

27. Other resources or indicators of village capacity for tourism development.

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________
Annex B: Visitor Feedback Questionnaire

We would like to thank you for participating in the trek or river trip and hope you enjoyed your journey. Your feedback and suggestions are very important to the guides and to the Provincial Tourism Department in determining how this trip can be developed as a culturally-sensitive and successful ecotourism operation. We would therefore appreciate if you could spend a few minutes to answer the following questionnaire.

Date of your trek __________  How old are you?__________  What is your nationality?__________

Who were your guides?___________________________  Which trek did you take?_____________

1. Before leaving on your trek, did you receive a good orientation about what to expect and on the cultural do's and don'ts when in the village?  Yes___  No___

If “no”, please explain what aspects were not explained well:
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

2. While on the trail, did your guides keep your group together?  Yes__  No__

3. Did you take enough rest breaks?  Too many___  Enough___  Not Enough___

4. Did you feel safe on the trip?  Yes___  No___  If “no”, please explain:
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

5. Did you have enough water?  Yes__  No__

6. Was boiled water provided for you in the village?  No___  Yes, plenty___  Yes, but not enough___

7. Before every meal, were you provided with soap and water to wash your hands?  Yes__  No__

8. Were dishes, bowls, glasses and eating utensils clean?  Yes__  No__
9. How was the food? Great___ OK___ Not good (could be improved)___

   If “not good”, please explain:

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

10. Were you served any wildlife? Yes___ No___

11. Was the lodging in the village comfortable? Yes___ No___ If “no”, please explain:

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

12. Were you introduced to your village hosts? Yes___ No___

13. How was the information about the following:

    | Excellent | Good | OK | Not Enough | No Information |
    |-----------|------|----|------------|----------------|
    | Nam Ha Protected Area |   |    |            |                |
    | Plants and wildlife |   |    |            |                |
    | Ethnic groups /villages |   |    |            |                |
    | History of the region |   |    |            |                |

14. Did you experience any of the following in the village:

   Begging Yes___ No___ Rudeness / resentment Yes___ No___

   Aggressive selling of handicrafts Yes___ No___

   Insincere display of cultural tradition for monetary gain Yes___ No___

   If you answered “yes” to any of the above, please explain briefly:

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
15. Did you feel that the village(s) you visited had been negatively impacted by ecotourism in any way? 
Yes___  No___
If you answered “yes”, please identify which village(s) and explain.
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

16, Overall, how do you rate the quality of your cultural experience in the village(s) you visited?
___Amazing — as if I was the first one to ever visit.
___Very special — as though tourists had been there before, but still felt it to be relatively untouched.
___OK, but nothing special — like I was just another one passing through but still felt 
   comfortable in the village.
___Didn't feel comfortable — felt like a voyeur and that the people were bored with tourists.
Please feel free to provide another description if these don't fit.
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

17. How many nights will you stay in Luang Namtha township in total (not including the nights you 
spent in the villages on the trek)?_______________ nights

18. Did you come to Luang Namtha especially for ecotourism? Yes___  No___

19. How did you first learn of the eco-tourism activities here?
When you arrived___  Friends/other travellers___  The internet___  Brochures/books___

20. What is your estimated average daily expenditure while in Luang Namtha township?
US$ ________
21. Please suggest a fair price for the trek including food, transport, lodging, guides and trekking permits?
US$ ________

22. Lastly, what do you think can be done to improve the trip both for the ecotourists and the villagers?
___________________________________________________________________________________
Alleviating Poverty and Protecting Cultural and Natural Heritage through Community-Based Ecotourism in Luang Namtha, Lao PDR