

The effects of tourism on culture and the environment in Asia and the Pacific



IMPACT

Tourism and Heritage Site Management
in the World Heritage Town of

Luang Prabang

Lao PDR

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Tourism and Heritage Site Management

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**IMPACT: The Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment in Asia and the Pacific:
Tourism and Heritage Site Management in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR.**

UNESCO, Bangkok, 2004.

x + 130 p.

1. Cultural tourism. 2. Cultural heritage. 3. Tourism Management. 4. Community development 5. Environmental conservation. 6. Heritage conservation. 7. Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. 8. Sustainable development.

915.9404

ISBN 92-9223-033-6

Published jointly by:

Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO Bangkok and
School of Travel Industry Management University of Hawai'i, USA.

Printed in Thailand

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IMPACT - The Effects of Tourism on Culture and the Environment in Asia and the Pacific: Tourism and Heritage Site Management, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, is first in a new series of studies, jointly undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), to examine the impact of tourism on culture and the environment of selected heritage towns and sites in Asia and the Pacific. This publication was conceptualized, researched, and created over a three-year period through the cooperation of many institutions and individuals. UNESCO and PATA would like to acknowledge and thank all who contributed to this publication, and to mention in particular:

The School of Travel Industry Management, University of Hawai'i and the Canadian Universities Consortium Training and Technology Transfer Program at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand for financial resources and specialized input into the project. Special thanks are due to Programme Director, Professor Walter Jamieson, who joined the project as a co-sponsor and lent considerable amounts of his time and expertise in developing the concept, writing and critiquing the final product.

The Royal Netherlands Embassy to Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar in Bangkok for their financial support under the Embassy Small Grants Scheme.

Thai Airways International for becoming the first corporate partner of IMPACT, demonstrating their commitment to sustainable tourism and setting a standard that we hope will become an industry norm. Special thanks are due to Mr. Serm Phenjati, Director of the Commercial Promotion Department of Thai Airways International, and his team for their support for this project.

Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation for financial support and the provision of information.

The National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR for statistics on tourist arrivals and tourist facilities in Luang Prabang.

The Department of Information and Culture of Luang Prabang, for information about the heritage resources of Luang Prabang and the surrounding areas.

La Maison du Patrimoine, Luang Prabang, for contributing maps and expertise.

Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme for contributing information.

And a special thanks to the **people of Luang Prabang** for sharing their knowledge and insights on the culture and heritage of their community.

The printing of this publication has been made possible by the **School of Travel Industry Management, University of Hawai'i and the Historical Resources Intern Program of University of Calgary, Canada, by Alberta Community Development.**

The team in charge of writing and editing this book should be thanked individually: *Richard Engelhardt, Walter Jamieson, Beatrice Kaldun, John Koch-Schulte, Pawinee Sunalai and Ellie Meleisea*. They were ably assisted by *Sirisak Chaiyasook, Claudia Del Bubba, Rachel DeSallis, Montira Horayangura Unakul, David Keen, John Koldowski, Pattarapong Kongwijit, Pallavi Mandke, Leanne Mitchell, Heather Peters, Khamtanh Somphanvilay and Sally Wright*.

Thanks also to those who shared their time and expertise: *Amphay Dore, Francis Engelmann, David Feingold, Yushi Kawaguchi, Bhounkhong Khuthao, Oupadith Patthavong, Martin Perenchio, Rik Ponne, Laurent Rampon, Steven Schipani, Jonathan Sweet, Savanh Vongsonephet and Minja Yang*.

Photographs are provided courtesy of: *Vanessa Achilles, Sirisak Chaiyasook, Richard Engelhardt, Ricardo Favis, David Feingold, Montira Horayangura Unakul, Delphine Jamieson, Tara Johns, Beatrice Kaldun, John Koch-Schulte, Pattarapong Kongwijit, Heather Peters, Rik Ponne and Walter Unger*.

Drawings were created by: *Thananart Kornmaneeeroj*.

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FOREWORD

Message from Richard Engelhardt, Peter de Jong, and Walter Jamieson

The heritage of Asia and the Pacific is under threat. The passage of time and the effects of harsh climates render already-fragile places of culture and tradition ever more vulnerable. When coupled with neglect, poor maintenance, inadequate financial support, unregulated urban development, and the exponential growth of tourism, the very survival of the region's most special places is at risk.

Archaeological sites, historic monuments, traditional towns and villages, cultural landscapes, handicrafts, rituals, traditional music and performing arts are all endangered. How has this happened? And what can be done to rescue the disappearing cultural heritage of the Asia-Pacific region?

Both the physical heritage and intangible expressions of the region's history and culture are widely acknowledged to be of immeasurable value to its citizens. The heritage of Asia and the Pacific is also of immense interest and appeal to visitors. It is on the basis of this appeal that the region's tourism industry is founded and flourishes. While the value of the heritage resources of the cultures of the Asia-Pacific region is unquestioned, this recognition is not always, or even frequently, translated into action to safeguard the heritage from decay, degradation or over-use. All too frequently, tourism has been the unwitting agent responsible for the accelerating the demise of the region's heritage.

At its best, tourism can generate the financial resources needed to invest in the rehabilitation of historic buildings and conservation areas. Tourism can help to revive dying or lost traditions, arts and cultural practices and can provide the impetus for artisans to continue their traditional crafts. Tourism can also provide new livelihood opportunities for large numbers of people in local communities. Unfortunately these positive impacts are often negated by the unintentional destructive impacts of tourism that rob a community of its ancestral heirlooms, undermine traditional cultural values and alter the physical character of a tourism destination through inappropriate development and infrastructure.

In order to ensure that future generations are able to access their authentic heritage and, at the same time, to provide reason and motivation for visitors to continue to want to visit the Asia-Pacific region, all stakeholders must work together effectively to safeguard the wide range of heritage resources that exist across the region. Tourism can - indeed, tourism must - become a partner and a driving force for the conservation of the tangible and intangible cultural and

natural heritage of Asia and the Pacific. If tourism does not contribute to the preservation of the region's environments, cultures and traditions, then there will be no place for tourism in the future development of the region.

This publication demonstrates that cooperation among local and international stakeholders is possible and can succeed in developing a community's tourism potential while safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage resources on which that tourism is based. In this volume, UNESCO, PATA, The School of Travel Industry Management - University of Hawai'i and the Canadian Universities Consortium join forces to examine the tourism and culture interface in one of the Asia-Pacific region's most rapidly-developing yet extremely fragile tourism destinations – the World Heritage Town of Luang Prabang in Lao PDR.

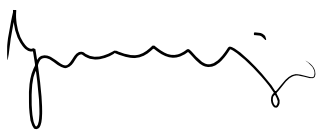
In examining the impact of tourism on the culture and environment of Luang Prabang, we provide guidelines for identifying and measuring the types of impacts - both positive and negative - that tourism has on the town's heritage. In addition, we suggest how to derive an overall strategy that manages tourism in Luang Prabang in such a manner that tourism becomes a positive force for heritage conservation as well as contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of the town's inhabitants.

This publication is the first in a series of studies examining the impact of tourism on culture and environment at selected UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Asia-Pacific region. Taken as a whole, this series of in-depth case studies is designed to provide communities with an approach and structure for managing sustainable tourism in heritage environments. Given the considerable importance of tourism to the national economies of many countries, this series can be used by both government and the industry to better manage tourism in a way that maximizes the positive benefits from sustainable tourism and minimizes the negative impacts.

The development of the publication itself is an indication that sustainable tourism in heritage environments benefits from the participation of all concerned stakeholders. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), the Canadian Universities Consortium Training and Technology Transfer Program which was based at the Asian Institute of Technology, the School of Travel Industry Management, University of Hawai'i, and UNESCO have worked together with people from all walks of Luang Prabang local life to produce this publication.

The ideas and strategies put forth in this publication have been tested and proved during the UNESCO project, Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation among Stakeholders. This recently-completed four year project, supported by the Royal Norwegian Government (NORAD), the Nordic World Heritage Foundation, and the World Heritage Committee, developed and tested community-based models for the sustainable management of cultural tourism. The project involved eight different pilot sites across the Asia-Pacific region, one of which was Luang Prabang. Luang Prabang's experience with and contributions to this regional project are the starting point for this publication.

The support of a number of organizations, acknowledged earlier in this document, has been crucial in ensuring the completion of this publication. We trust that this IMPACT document will prove useful both to the people of Luang Prabang as well as to others involved in similar heritage conservation and tourism initiatives in their own communities. We hope that those wanting to develop tourist-related business opportunities at heritage places will also be able to make productive use of this document. Finally, we look forward to the support of other stakeholders in the development and publication of similar case studies documenting the effects of tourism on the culture and environment of the Asia-Pacific region.



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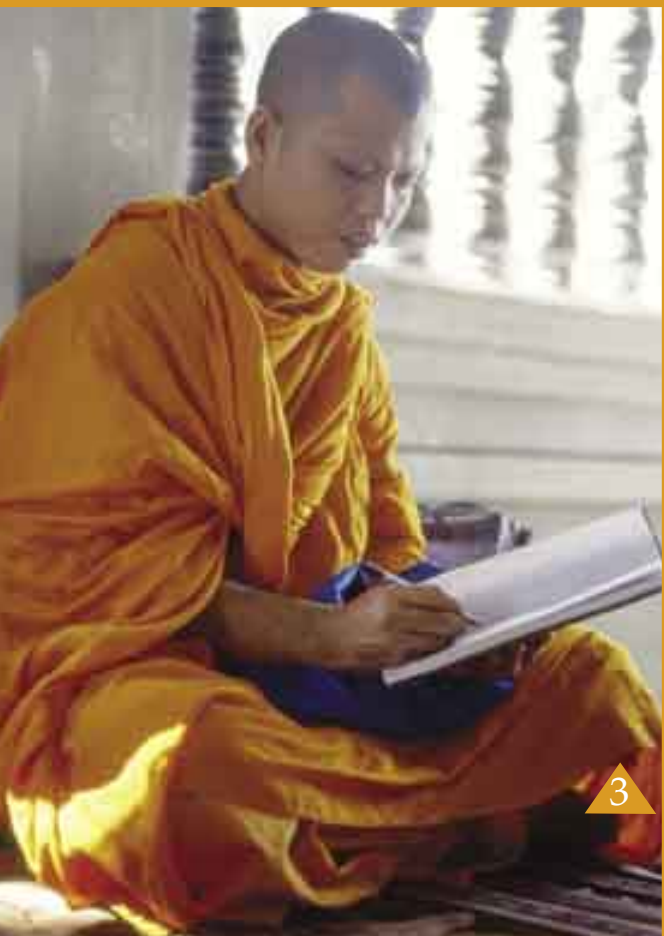
INTRODUCTION
TO LUANG PRABANG:
A Special and Fragile Place







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INTRODUCTION TO LUANG PRABANG: A Special and Fragile Place

Hidden away amid lush, wooded hills, the ancient Laotian capital of Luang Prabang is one of the truly special places of Asia. Graceful arched roofs of temples emerge from the morning mist and the chant of Buddhist monks resonates through quiet streets at dawn.

The royal capital of the former kingdom of Lane Xang, Luang Prabang has retained its historical authenticity and still embodies the serenity of its Buddhist heritage. Glittering temples, traditional teak houses and stately French colonial-era residences grace this lush, tranquil place, described by nineteenth-century French explorer Henri Mohout, as “a delightful little town.”

A Short History of Luang Prabang

Archaeological, historical and linguistic research indicates that Tai-speaking populations moved into the Southeast Asian peninsula sometime between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, co-habiting with the original Austro-Asiatic speaking populations. However, Lao legend traces the origins of its people to earlier times and in more mystical ways.

Legend

According to one legend the Buddha left a number of footprints when travelling through the land that is now called Luang Prabang and told his disciple Ananda that a rich and powerful capital would be erected on the land upon which he was standing.

Another legend about the origins of Luang Prabang traces the history of the region to Khun Borom, the mythical ruler of the principality of Teng and the son of the King of the Celestial World. According to this legend Khun Borom was sent to Earth to oversee the Tai and Austro-Asiatic people living in the region. Khun Borom had seven sons who formed seven principalities of their own and the eldest, Khun Lo, founded the principality of Luang Prabang.

Photo captions

1. Where rivers meet and mountains rise - Luang Prabang's natural setting is one of its most spectacular features. *(Photo: Richard Engelhardt)*
2. The town of Luang Prabang. Aside from traditional-style houses and temples, Luang Prabang features an array of fine French colonial buildings. *(UNESCO file photo)*
3. An ordained monk studying in the monastery. *(Photo: Heather Peters)*
4. One of the most beautiful temples of Luang Prabang, Vat Xieng Thong, decorated with the 'tree of life' mosaic. *(Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)*

History

Remains of stone tools excavated at Tham Hua Pu Cave suggest that the region of Luang Prabang has been inhabited since 8000 BC, while bronze pieces and cord-marked pottery exist as evidence of habitation of the region during the second millennium BC. A variety of beads has been found that indicates the area had trade links with India, probably dating from 500 BC.

Precise information about Laotian history dates from the fourteenth century, when King Fa Ngum conquered and united the regions of today's Xieng Khouang, Khorat Plateau (in northeastern Thailand) and Luang Prabang to establish the Lane Xang Kingdom, or the 'Land of One Million Elephants'. King Fa Ngum adopted Theravada Buddhism and accepted the golden Prabang statue – an image of the Buddha – as a gift from the Khmer Kingdom to the south. Luang Prabang, which derives its name from this sacred Buddha image, became the capital city of the Lane Xang Kingdom. In the sixteenth century, under the rule of King Setthathirat, the capital moved to Vientiane because Luang Prabang was considered vulnerable to attack by the Burmese.

In spite of the move, Luang Prabang remained the kingdom's religious and spiritual centre. The city's dozens of temples, filled with hundreds of sacred Buddha images, continued to thrive. The first European travellers arrived in Lane Xang Kingdom during the reign of King Sourigna Vongsa (1638-1695). After the death of the king, the land was divided into three separate kingdoms: Luang Prabang in the north, Vientiane in the centre and Champasak in the south.

In 1752, Luang Prabang sided with Siam as they anticipated a Burmese invasion. However, Luang Prabang was captured shortly after the Burmese sacked Ayutthaya. In 1778, Siam supplanted Burmese rule in Luang Prabang and controlled the city until the late nineteenth century. In 1887, the city was sacked by Haw Chinese bandits, called the Black Flags, and many sacred Buddha images, temples and historical documents were destroyed.

After this loss, Luang Prabang continued to hold special importance locally, remaining the home of its own royal family. And in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries Luang Prabang emerged as an important place for artistic training. It was during this period that King Sisavang Vong (1904-1959) undertook numerous preservation, restoration and beautification projects in the city.

The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw the expansion and development of the French colonial territories in Indochina. The French established a presence in Luang Prabang with the signing of the Franco-Siamese treaty of 1893, which transferred a vast and varied region to French administration. From 1893 to 1907 a series of Siamese-French treaties were negotiated that resulted in the Siamese relinquishing control over the land lying east of the Mekong River. It was around this time that the French united the Lao principalities under colonial rule and the present boundaries of Lao PDR were created through joint commissions with China, Great Britain (for the

Lao-Burmese border) and Siam (now Thailand). To the French, Laos was more important as a buffer state than anything else. It never provided the economic riches of Viet Nam and French physical presence was minimal. In 1940, only 600 French citizens lived in the country.

In 1941 the Japanese occupied Indochina and at this time Thailand reoccupied parts of Laos that it felt had been unfairly taken from them during Franco-Siamese negotiations in 1904. In April 1945 King Sisavang Vong declared independence but when the French returned to Laos the protectorate was reinstated. During this period the Lao Issara (Free Lao) movement grew in popularity and strived to uphold the April 1945 declaration of independence. In 1946 the movement split into three factions: one faction supporting full independence on their own terms, another supporting independence through negotiation with the French, and the third allying itself to Ho Chi Minh's movement in Viet Nam.

Laos eventually received full sovereignty in 1953. By then the Lao Issara faction that supported Ho Chi Minh had gained prominence and became known as the Pathet Lao (Land of the Lao). By this time Kaysone Phomvihane, who was to become Secretary-General of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the first Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) had emerged as an important figure.

From 1953 until 1975, when Lao PDR was formed, the history of the country was one of constant struggle and shifting alliances. Domestic politics were shaped by global geo-political forces as the war in Viet Nam secretly spilled over into Laos. On 23 August 1975, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party was declared the ruling party of the new Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Vientiane came under the control of Lao PDR on 2 December 1975. Upon the formation of the new government, Sisavang Vatthana (the son of the late King Sisavang Vong), who was still residing in Luang Prabang at the time, relinquished the throne.

Luang Prabang today is a palimpsest of centuries of social, political and cultural exchange, negotiation, and synthesis. The town's 34 temples stand alongside French colonial government buildings; artwork reflecting the distinctive traces of Sukhothai, Tai Lue and even Burmese culture can be found in the town's monuments and religious artifacts; and the former Royal Palace is now a museum.



▲ In the 1920s tourism had just begun in Luang Prabang. This photo shows the main street at that time. (Photo: Reproduced with courtesy of the publishers of “Treasures of Luang Prabang”: the Institute of Cultural Research - Lao PDR, and the Cultural Association of the Silk Routes)



▲ The same street today. Much has changed in recent years and the influence of tourism is evident. Vendors display their wares for tourists on Luang Prabang’s main street every evening. (Photo: Rik Ponne)

Luang Prabang Today

The town of Luang Prabang is an agglomeration of villages, each a separate administrative area, and the combined populations of these villages totals around 16,000. Luang Prabang Province, of which the town of Luang Prabang is the political, administrative and trading centre, has a population estimated at around 400,000, comprising many different ethnic groups.

Luang Prabang combines a spectacular natural setting and distinctive built heritage with traditional arts and crafts, food, language, festivals and rituals.

With its isolation having served as a shield against the forces of globalization, Luang Prabang is one of the few remaining historically authentic places in Asia. However, since it was ‘rediscovered’ by travellers a little over a decade ago, Luang Prabang has become subject to the pressures of an ever-growing tourism industry.

Because of its outstanding heritage values, Luang Prabang was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. This drew international attention to the town and sparked a tourism boom. Since 1988, tourist arrivals into Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) have increased from a few hundred intrepid backpackers to more than 600,000 in 2003, with Luang Prabang being Lao PDR’s second most popular destination after Vientiane, the capital.

Tourism brings with it the potential to boost the economy of rural Lao PDR and has already contributed to a new sense of identity and local pride in the culture and heritage of the town of Luang Prabang. Tourism brings money and jobs but inevitably the issue of cultural change arises and must be addressed. The historical heart of Luang Prabang, with a resident population of only 3,000, is a place of fragile beauty that is especially vulnerable to change brought from the outside.

The rapid increase in visitors to Luang Prabang has resulted in a correspondingly rapid and largely unplanned expansion of transportation infrastructure and accommodation facilities. In addition to the stress placed on the town's public utilities – electricity, water, sewage and garbage collection -- the construction boom has created a demand for land within and around the town's historic core. This combination of development pressures has placed critical stress on both the environment and the historic cultural resources of Luang Prabang, and threatens to overwhelm them.

Luang Prabang's residents have very quickly taken advantage of the economic benefits of tourism by finding work in many new tourism-related enterprises. However, traditional skills and long-established ways of life are at risk of being abandoned and ultimately forgotten. With the loss of the unique cultural values and practices of Luang Prabang, the attractiveness of the place as a cultural tourism destination will also fade.

It is important, therefore, to ensure the cultural survival of historic Luang Prabang and to protect the serenity and beauty of this unique place, part of 'humankind's common heritage'. In order to achieve this, there are a number of pressing uncertainties that need to be addressed:

- How can the essential components of Luang Prabang's cultural, spiritual and built heritage, together with its traditional arts and cultural practices, be preserved for future generations?
- How can cultural heritage – the cornerstone of Luang Prabang's tourism – be promoted in a sustainable way?
- How can the residents of Luang Prabang become the primary beneficiaries of tourism development?
- How can densities and the number of users of Luang Prabang's historic sites be regulated so as to ensure the protection of heritage resources?
- How can traditional social and economic patterns – which created the heritage resources of Luang Prabang and have kept them alive – be maintained?

Tourism development must be carefully managed to avoid turning Luang Prabang into another tourist town where soft-drink billboards dominate the landscape, where the sound of tour buses drowns out the soft temple prayers, and where the town's residents are reduced to the roles of bit-players in a cultural theme park.

This IMPACT publication will assist tourism planners and operators to work with heritage managers and local residents and balance the demands of tourism with the needs of the community. The goal of this publication is to provide concepts and techniques to guide the development of tourism in Luang Prabang in order that everyone enjoys the benefits of tourist activity, while preserving the unique cultural treasures that attract visitors to Luang Prabang.

This publication was written for everyone with a stake in Luang Prabang's tourism industry. It is divided into two parts as illustrated in Figure 1.

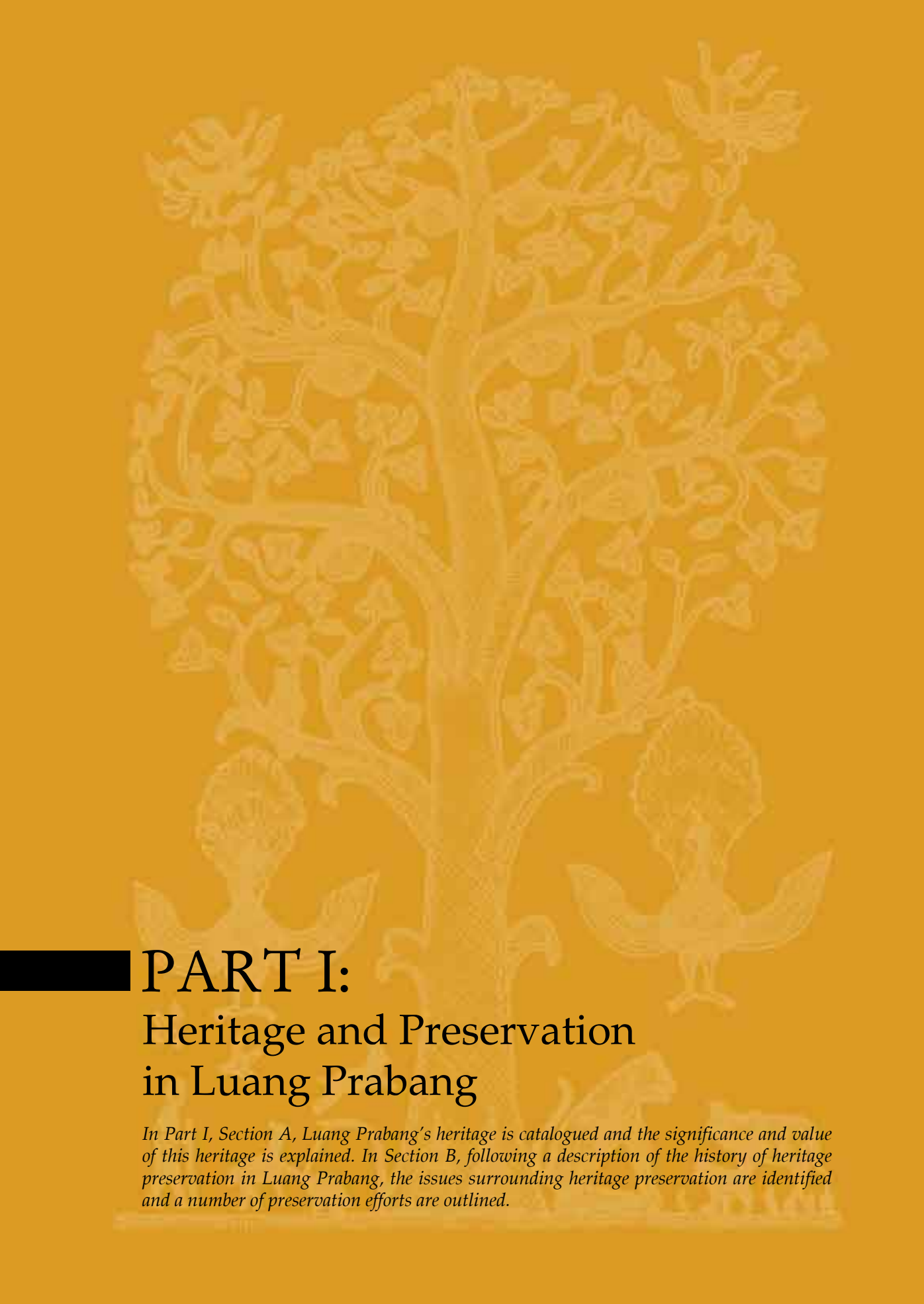


Figure 1: Outline.

Part I identifies the major cultural significance of Luang Prabang, provides an in-depth background description of the heritage of Luang Prabang and outlines the preservation efforts made so far in the town.

Part II identifies the major issues and impacts of tourism on heritage resources and explores the wider economic, environmental and social impacts of tourism. It is important to note that this is not a comprehensive environmental or social impact assessment study. Its intention is to identify major issues and impacts based on the research team's extensive experience and observations. It then provides the basis for establishing a tourism destination plan and strategy that can be adapted and used by all members of the community, from large-scale government initiatives to the smallest individual business ventures.

By focusing on best practice management models and drawing attention to the warning signs that indicate when the carrying capacity of Luang Prabang's fragile heritage will have reached its limit, IMPACT Luang Prabang provides a practical guide for the preservation of the town's cultural heritage and the development of a sustainable tourism industry on which to build a prosperous future for the town's inhabitants.



PART I:

Heritage and Preservation in Luang Prabang

In Part I, Section A, Luang Prabang's heritage is catalogued and the significance and value of this heritage is explained. In Section B, following a description of the history of heritage preservation in Luang Prabang, the issues surrounding heritage preservation are identified and a number of preservation efforts are outlined.







A. UNDERSTANDING THE HERITAGE OF LUANG PRABANG

It is essential that well-intentioned outsiders who wish to contribute to the conservation of Luang Prabang's heritage, or to take advantage of the opportunities provided by these unique cultural resources, understand what constitutes the core asset-value of Luang Prabang's culture, as expressed by its creators and inhabitants. Without a common understanding of the value of what is to be preserved and how this can be appropriately shared with visitors, both heritage conservation and tourism development will fail to achieve their full potential.

Part A provides a basic introduction to the elements of Luang Prabang's heritage. It begins with a snapshot of the people, their lifestyles and their beliefs followed by an inventory of the town's natural, built and cultural heritage.

COMMUNITY LIFE This section provides an understanding of the residents of Luang Prabang, their typical way of life and daily activities, which are all strongly influenced by their religion – Theravada Buddhism. The town's religious heritage is an essential part of the local culture and is one of the major features attracting tourists to Luang Prabang.

The People The Lao ethnic group constitutes the majority of the population and consequently it is Lao culture that primarily shapes the fabric of Luang Prabang and its society. The Lao belong to the larger ethno-linguistic family of Tai speakers. The Lao language is closely related to Thai as spoken in Thailand, the country with which it shares a long common border as well as many cultural and historical connections.

Lao traditional settlements are characteristically located in lowland valleys near water sources, surrounded by rice fields and vegetable gardens. Vernacular dwellings are constructed of wood and bamboo and are raised on piles. Traditional Lao society is usually bi-lateral, i.e. kinship ties are equally strong on both the mother's and father's side. Although ancestors are respected, Lao pay little attention to genealogies and are rarely able to trace ancestry back for more than three generations.

Photo captions

1. The town of Luang Prabang, with its precious temples sits like a jewel in a green, mountainous setting, bordered by the Mekong and Khan rivers. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)
2. Monks decorating a boat as part of the Heua Fai festival. The festivities involve parading the decorated boats through the streets, then launching the boats on the river at night and setting them on fire as an offering to the spirits. (Photo: Rik Ponne)
3. The Royal Funerary House, Hohng Kep Mien at Vat Xieng Thong, glittering in the sunlight. This carved and gilded building houses the royal funeral barge, cremation urns and the royal puppets. The woodcarvings on the exterior depict scenes from the Ramayana. (Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)
4. The former Royal Palace, or Golden Hall (Ho Kham), which now houses the Luang Prabang National Museum, was built between 1904 and 1909 as a residence for King Sisavang Vong. The building shows the influence of the 'Beaux Arts' school of Neo-classical architecture. However, Lao, French, Vietnamese and Thai artisans all helped to construct the building, adding their own influences to the final structure. (Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)

Theravada Buddhism in Lao PDR



▲ Young monks paying respect to the Buddha.
(Photo: Water Unger)

Theravada Buddhism is predominantly practiced in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, the Sipsongbanna region of Yunnan in China and Lao PDR. The rest of Asia's Buddhists are Mahayana Buddhists. Theravada Buddhism arrived in Southeast Asia from India and Sri Lanka.

The ultimate goal of Theravada Buddhism is *nibanna* - which is commonly known by the Sanskrit word *nirvana*. *Nibanna* is the extinguishing of *dukkha* (suffering) and is a state of freedom from the endless cycles of existence. *Nibanna* can be achieved through the cultivation of wisdom, morality and meditation and through good *karma* (action), such as righteous self-conduct and earning merit. Merit can be earned in many ways, including through fulfilling one's duties as a Buddhist layperson. One example is the daily practice of *binthabat*, in which monks receive alms from the people early in the morning. As most Buddhists are not able to reach *nibanna* in this lifetime, the accomplishment of good *karma* may lead to a better next life or lessen the number of rebirths.

One attribute of Buddhism is that merit can be transferred to others. This is often done at funerals to ensure that a deceased person's *karma* is improved. The transfer of merit plays an important role in community as it strengthens the sense of responsibility towards one another.

Buddhism and animism have blended in Lao PDR. This is why there is a strong belief in *khuan* - certain spiritual powers that are part of every person and object. The *khuan* are called upon in ceremonies such as *baci*, which is also called *sou khuan* ("calling back the powers").

Local protective spirits (*phi*) also play an important role in community life. You see spirit houses in private home gardens and in temple grounds at which offerings are presented to the *phi*.

Some Brahmanic rituals are also to be found in Luang Prabang, mixed with Buddhist traditions. An example of this is the ceremony of wrapping a white cord around the Buddha image during the transferring of merit to the dead. A local tradition that has been integrated into Laotian Theravada Buddhism is the worshipping of the *naga* (mythical snake water god).

Buddhism in Everyday Life



▲ Residents of Luang Prabang at their village temple during a festival.
(Photo: Rik Ponne)

The Lao practice Theravada Buddhism, and incorporate some Brahmanistic beliefs and indigenous animism. In Luang Prabang, it is the practice of Theravada Buddhism that dominates and sets the rhythms of daily life. Theravada Buddhism is the core of Luang Prabang's heritage, as it provides the basis for the norms, beliefs, social activities and cultural practices of the community.

The prevalence of Theravada Buddhism means that temples are an important feature in the Lao landscape, serving as physical and social landmarks in villages and towns. Each village has its own temple/monastery (*vat*) where monks from the community reside. In addition to its religious functions, the community *vat* often serves as a school, library, health clinic, social centre and residence for orphans or visitors. In the past the monks were not only spiritual leaders but were the teachers in village society.

Temples continue to play an important educational role within lowland Lao village society today. The buildings themselves are educational tools and document evidence of Buddhist teachings and local knowledge. Most temple walls, ceilings and doors are decorated with elaborate woodcarvings and painted murals that illustrate the stories of the life of the Buddha and his teachings, as well as many aspects of local knowledge including architecture, arts and crafts, farming, animal husbandry and medicine.

In Theravada Buddhism it is expected that every man will ordain as a monk at some time during his life. While some will remain monks for their entire lives, many young men join the monastic community, called the *sangha*, for only a brief period of time. Before the existence of public schools, boys stayed longer in the temples, where they acquired basic literacy skills in addition to the fundamentals of Buddhism. It was in this context that many also received training in the artistic skills of woodcarving, sculpture, mosaic inlay and mural painting, crucial for the task of visually transmitting the message of Buddhism to the people. Those who chose not to remain within the *sangha* for a lifetime took these skills with them when they returned to their secular lives in their villages. There they assumed positions of social importance, received a special title (*thit* or *acharn*), assisted the monks in officiating at local village ceremonies and contributed their artistic skills when needed by the community.

The monks of Luang Prabang traditionally held a pivotal role in the preservation of Luang Prabang's heritage. In addition to their role in creating an intimate spiritual



▲ The daily activities of monks vary depending on the *vat*. Common activities include meditation, the chanting of *mantras* and reading from sacred texts. Twice a month - on the new moon and full moon - monks gather for the reading of the *pratimoksa* (the rules that govern the religious and moral behaviour of members of the *sangha*). The monks also have duties to perform including maintenance of the buildings in the monastery complex, sweeping of the temple grounds, assisting pilgrims and visitors, and guiding worship.

(Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)

bond between the communities and their temples, they are responsible for constructing, decorating, maintaining and restoring temples.

Because the town of Luang Prabang is an agglomeration of small neighbouring villages, its urban landscape is punctuated by numerous temples located at close intervals to one another. The town's distinctive streetscape is revealed in the historic peninsula where a row of temples lines the main street from one end to the other. This settlement form recalls the ancient pattern visible in the archaeological ruins of many important historic Tai cities such as Si Satchanalai, Kaphaeng Phet and Chiang Saen.

In accordance with Buddhist beliefs, communities and individuals in Luang Prabang traditionally make merit by providing temples with the much-needed support for undertaking building projects – through donations of time, labour and funds. Therefore, the management and preservation of temples also has an economic function – providing artisans with a form of income.

Political turmoil in the 1960's and 1970's disrupted the lives of the Laotian people, and the new government set up in 1975 altered social, economic, educational and religious institutions. Throughout the country, many Buddhist temples were physically damaged and a number were destroyed. The intangible effects on the institution of the *sangha* were even stronger. The number of boys and men entering the *sangha* diminished, and many senior monks left the temples, returning to secular life in their villages. In Luang Prabang, most of the temples were physically spared, although the two major training centres for Buddhist arts which had been located in Vat Mai and Vat Siphouththabat were closed. The practice of Buddhism, the thread of continuity holding together the social fabric of Luang Prabang, was considerably frayed, with alarming consequences for the temple-based knowledge of traditional medicine, arts and crafts.

As government restrictions on religion relaxed, Buddhism began to regain its vigour. During the 1990's, when the government of Lao PDR embarked upon a new policy of economic openness and development, more young men returned to the monasteries, and communities and individuals began dedicating themselves to reconstituting the *sangha*.

Language used to describe temples

In this book, the words 'monastery' and 'temple' are used interchangeably in a generic sense. Sometimes, depending on the context, the words refer to the entire monastic compound, while at other times the words refer to a single building within the compound, usually the *sim*.





HERITAGE This section presents a catalogue of Luang Prabang's wide range of natural, built and cultural heritage, including the numerous festivals throughout the year, traditional arts and crafts, performing arts and cuisine. It is this living heritage that makes Luang Prabang a unique destination in Southeast Asia.

Natural Heritage Luang Prabang's natural resources form the foundation on which the area's cultural heritage is based, and provide a unified setting for the different village communities. The Mekong River and its many tributaries serve as the primary communication and navigation backbone for the country. The waterways that pass through Luang Prabang bring trade, and increasingly visitors.



▲ The Mekong River, the 'Mother of Waters' is a complex ecosystem and an important part of life and spirituality in Southeast Asia. (UNESCO file photo)



▲ Boat-racing on the Mekong River, as part of the *Souang Heua* festival. (Photo: Rik Pomme)

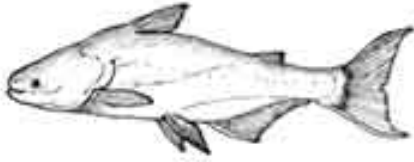
Luang Prabang is a mountainous province, characterized by numerous caves and soaring limestone formations. Elevations vary between 297 and 2257 metres. Thick upland evergreen forests, with diversity in both flora and fauna, provide abundant resources, such as wood, which figures prominently in local buildings and art. The hills are also home to Luang Prabang's many ethnic groups, particularly the Hmong and the Khmu.

Built on a small peninsula at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan Rivers, the town of Luang Prabang is located in a majestic and scenic position against the backdrop of forested mountains. Before man-made structures were constructed, natural landmarks defined this sacred site. The hill (*phou*) in Luang Prabang (Phousi) is the physical and spiritual centre of the town. It is worshipped as the representation of Mount Meru, the sacred mountain which sits at the centre of the universe in Buddhist cosmology. Urban wetlands, riverbank gardens and limestone caves are as integral to the spatial identity of the town as built and architectural elements, creating a unique cultural landscape and strong sense of place.

Photo captions

1. The temples of Luang Prabang play an important role in the daily life of residents. Boys and young men enter the temple to become monks, while laypersons use the temple grounds for community and leisure activities. (Photo: Vanessa Achilles)
2. The colourful royal puppets are believed to each have a spirit. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)
3. Heritage zoning includes the protection of ponds and urban wetlands, which are an important ecological component of Luang Prabang. Ponds with palm trees, waterlilies and wildlife are interspersed with houses throughout the town. (Photo: John Koch-Schulte)
4. Women giving alms to monks in the *binthabat* ceremony. This ceremony usually lasts for an hour at daybreak, during which the monks proceed in a long line around the town. As a sign of respect, men and women often drape a scarf over one shoulder during this ceremony. (Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)

The Mekong River and Giant Catfish



- ▲ The Giant Catfish, known as *pa beuk* in Lao, is the largest scaleless freshwater fish in the world. Due to damage to its habitat, the Mekong River, *pa beuk* is now a rare and endangered species. (Drawing: Thananart Kornmaneeeroj)

At 4909 kilometers in length, the Mekong River is the twelfth longest river in the world and the longest river in Southeast Asia. Its source is in northwest China's Qinghai Province and it empties into the South China Sea through the Mekong delta in southern Viet Nam. The fisheries of the Mekong River and its tributaries are estimated to be worth \$1 billion a year to the 73 million people who live within this river system and depend upon it as their main source of protein. There are 1,300 species of fish living in the Mekong River and its tributaries, making it the second most biologically diverse river system in the world, second only to the Amazon. One such species is the Giant Catfish.

The Giant Catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*) is the largest scaleless freshwater fish in the world and was once a central part of the lives of people living along the Mekong River. Due to its importance, a number of ancient beliefs and rituals surround this species. One such ritual is the *liang luang* held at the start of the fishing season in April, during which fishermen stand on the riverbank amidst the smoke of candles and incense and make offerings to the water spirits in order to seek their permission to catch the Giant Catfish.

The fact that these beliefs and rituals are today dying out in Lao PDR is indicative of the dramatic drop in Giant Catfish numbers in recent years. This reduction has come about because of the declining environmental health of the Mekong River – the only remaining habitat of this critically endangered species - which has resulted from such things as damming, dredging and overfishing.

The dramatic decline of the Giant Catfish bodes ill for the future of people in the Mekong River basin. Changes in the Mekong River flow and ecology have meant that total fish catches have decreased, threatening the livelihoods of villagers dependent on river resources and, by forcing villagers to relocate, contributing to social and cultural upheaval.

The rivers play an essential role in the life of the local communities. For centuries, the Tai and Lao people have relied on and integrated their cultures into the lowland water systems of Southeast Asia. When the rivers recede during the dry season, gardens are planted along the banks of both the Mekong and the Khan rivers. Rivers provide the water needed for daily life and for the rice fields. Fish from the rivers and streams provide an important source of protein for the population.



- ▲ The wetlands of Luang Prabang provide important ecological services as well as being attractive and tranquil spaces within the town. (UNESCO file photo)

In recognition of its importance, water and its surrounding elements are integrated into the ritual and festival calendars of the Tai and Lao cultures. *Pimai*, or Lao New Year, is an important annual ceremony combining water, water spirits, religion and social events with the reaffirmation of traditional kinship.

An extensive system of interconnected wetlands is found in the town of Luang Prabang. These wetlands resulted from the digging of clay for city wells 200 to 300 years ago. They serve an important function in the annual cycle of flooding, providing retention capacity for excess water. As the water recedes, the wetlands allow water to drain gradually and be absorbed back into the ground as much as possible. In addition to hosting wildlife, the wetlands are often put to use by the local residents as breeding areas for ducks or fish. The fish are a vital part of the wetlands as they reduce mosquito larvae. Within the larger urban landscape, the wetlands provide attractive open spaces and green buffer zones inside the town.

Built Heritage



- ▲ This aerial view of Luang Prabang shows the array of building types nestled within the lush greenery of the town. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

The heritage value of Luang Prabang is derived largely from its rich architectural endowment: the individual buildings, their elaborate embellishments and their urban assemblage. The vernacular and colonial architectural influences can be traced in both the monumental and secular structures, in some cases forming a distinctive hybrid urbanism.

Luang Prabang's urban layout preserves in living form the ancient Tai settlement pattern known elsewhere only from archaeological remains. This planning principle is distinctive because it has no defined urban core. Instead, the town is composed of a cluster of small villages, called *ban*. Each village is centred around and defined by its own temple, which takes the name of that village. In Luang Prabang, the villages are arrayed very closely along the banks of the two rivers. The resulting proximity of each village temple thus creates an impression of a continuous string of temples along the central east-west axis of the town.

During the French colonial period (1893–1954), nineteenth-century European and hybrid European-Laotian architecture was introduced to Luang Prabang. However the original town plan was retained and is still apparent today. In particular, temples continue to dominate the townscape of Luang Prabang because of their height, central location and size.

Religious Architecture



- ▲ The temples provide open spaces where community members can engage in leisure activities and sport. (Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

The Buddhist temples and monasteries are the most culturally significant architectural feature in Luang Prabang. Over the centuries, the Buddhist faithful of Luang Prabang, both royal patrons and local villagers, focused their funds and efforts on building these temples. Luang Prabang's Buddhist temples are known throughout Southeast Asia for their distinctive style: tiered roofs and pillared porticos, embellished with ornamentation of the highest quality, including wood carving, stucco moulding, dry fresco wall painting, lacquer work, and glass mosaic work.

The monastic compounds are the focal point of community life in Luang Prabang. They traditionally serve two main functions: first as a centre for religious and community activities and second as a place that embodies and safeguards the community's cultural heritage. In addition, the temple complexes provide tranquil areas for children to play and adults to relax, quite similar to the role played by public parks in other communities.

As shown in Figure A.2, Luang Prabang monasteries usually contain a number of elements. These may include a *sim* (ordination hall), a *that* (reliquary stupa), a *sala* (open-sided room used for meetings, dining and casual ceremonies), a *ho la khang* (bell tower), a *ho kong* (drum tower), and a *ho tai* (manuscript library). Part of the compound is dedicated to the *sangha* (Buddhist fellowship), containing the *kouti* (sleeping quarters for the monks) and a well for bathing. Many monasteries also provide funeral services and because Lao Buddhists practice cremation, rather than burial, some monasteries have a crematorium. There may also be small *that* monuments which contain the ashes of monks and devotees. Finally, monastery grounds often have school buildings, a traditional medicine clinic and herbal sauna, shrines to local spirits and a shed to house the long boats used by the community in river races on festival days.



- ▲ Monks relax with their friends in the temple grounds during their leisure time. (Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

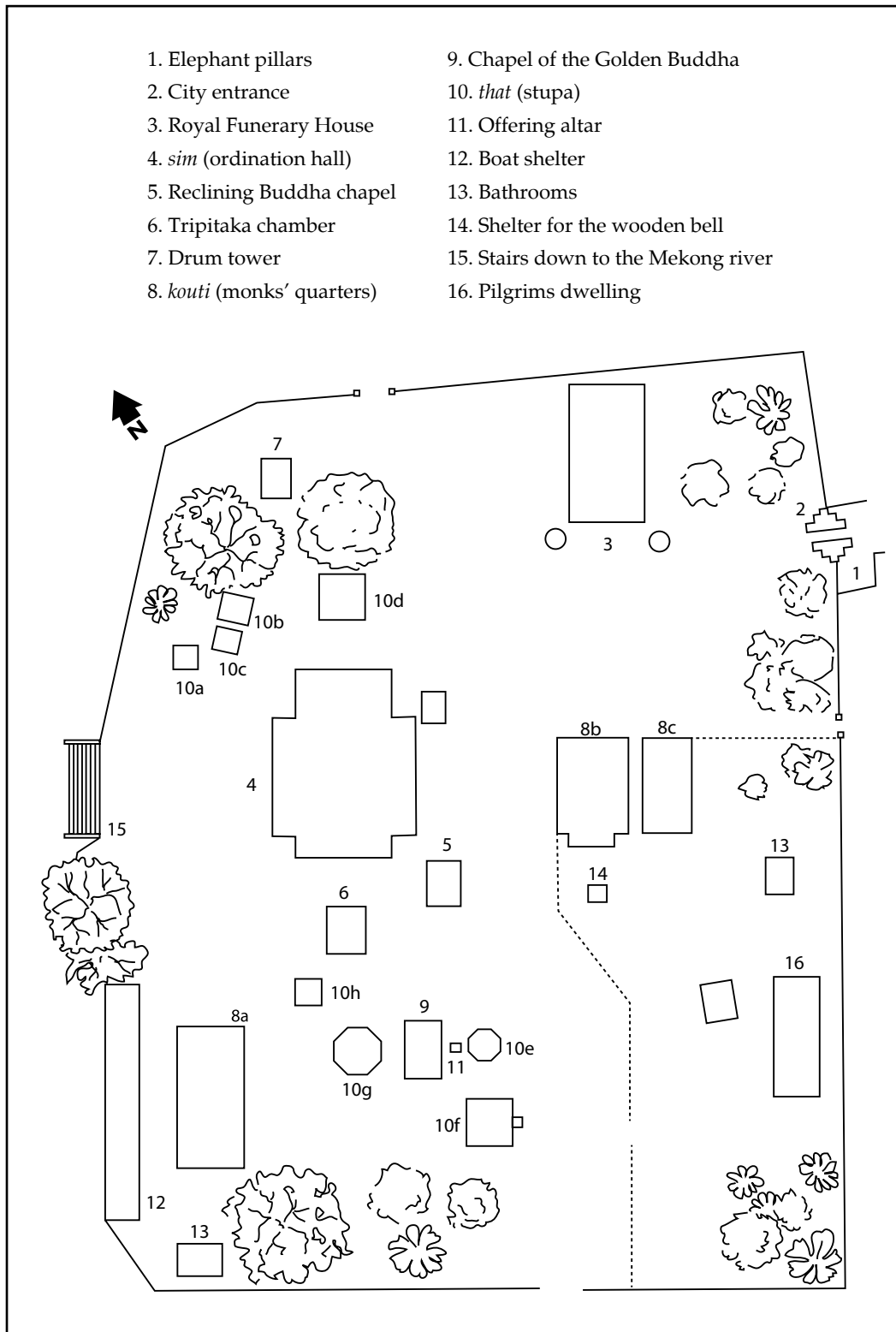


Figure A.2: Elements of a Luang Prabang Monastery. Example: Layout of Vat Xieng Thong.

Architectural Styles



- ▲ The earliest style of temple architecture (Luang Prabang Style I) is typified by Vat Visoun, which was originally built in 1512 by King Phothisarath. The current structure is a reconstruction of the original and was built in 1898 after the original was destroyed by the Black Flags in 1887. The original building was made of wood, while the reconstruction is a brick and plaster structure.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

The architectural styles of Luang Prabang temples can be classified into four main types as follows:

- The earliest temple architecture (Luang Prabang Style I)
- Luang Prabang (Luang Prabang Style II)
- Xieng Khouang (Luang Prabang Style III)
- Vientiane (Thai Style)

The earliest style is represented by temples in which the foundations are smaller than the roof, such as in Vat Visoun. Drawings from the nineteenth-century Garnier Expedition show that the *sim* at Vat That Luang also had this distinctive shape. The Luang Prabang style is characterised by multi-tiered sweeping roofs that represent the cosmological levels in Buddhist doctrine. The *sim* at Vat Xieng Thong is the archetype of Luang Prabang style II. The Xieng Khouang style (Luang Prabang Style III) has a low, sweeping roof, as seen in Vat Paphay and Vat Long Khoun. The so-called Vientiane style (also called Thai style) is characterized by tall, narrow walls with shorter eaves. See Figure B.3: *Temple Architectural Styles*, in section B which classifies each of the temples of Luang Prabang into their respective category.



- ▲ Believed to have been built in around 1560 by King Setthathirat, Vat Xieng Thong, the Temple of the Golden City, is one of the best examples of the Luang Prabang Style (Luang Prabang Style II) and is one of Luang Prabang's most impressive temples. The distinctive Lao roof ornamentation, *dok so fa*, can be seen in the middle of the roof ridge.

(Photo: UNESCO file photo)



- ▲ Vat Pa Phay is an example of Xieng Khouang Style (Luang Prabang Style III). This graceful style is rare but several examples remain in existence in Luang Prabang.

(Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)



- ▲ Vat Pa Huak is an example of Vientiane Style (Thai Style) and is located on the western edge of Phousi in Ban Choum Khong. The nineteenth century murals of Vat Pa Huak are very beautiful and depict the story of the Taming of Jambupati.

(Photo: Water Unger)



▲ The *dok so fa*, a particular feature of Laotian *sim*, is located at the centre of the *sim* roof ridge.

(Photo: Richard Engelhardt)

A wide range of materials, construction and decorative techniques are deployed in the construction of monumental structures such as temples. Unlike traditional secular dwellings, which are largely limited to impermanent materials including wood and bamboo, temples use a combination of wood and masonry construction. Foundations and walls are masonry, while the roof structure is wood. Pillars are usually wood, encased with brick and plaster. Most notably, the temples are lavishly decorated. Door panels, hanging screens in the portico area, and gable ridges are adorned with exquisite wood carvings of floral and religious motifs. Stucco moulding can be found on the base of platform supporting the main Buddha figure or in door surrounds. Columns and doors are lacquered and gilded and are decorated with geometric patterns or allegorical scenes. Murals are either painted or painstakingly constructed from coloured glass mosaic, exemplifying the talents of royal-trained artisans.

The spires on the roof of the *sim* symbolize the universe, and indicate royal patronage in the building of the temple. A distinctive feature of *sim* in Lao PDR is the metal ornamentation located in the middle of the roof ridge, the *dok so fa*.

Secular Architecture



▲ Traditional Lao houses are built with bamboo, thatch and wood, with the quality of the materials depending on the wealth of the owner. They are usually free-standing structures, rectangular in plan and elevated on piles.

(Photo: Beatrice Kaldun)

The early dwellings in the Luang Prabang area, similar to vernacular houses throughout Lane Xang and neighbouring kingdoms, were built from wood and bamboo, and raised on piles. A lightweight framework of wood or bamboo was constructed, with panels of woven bamboo strips used for infill. Thatched roofing provided protection against the elements and could be easily replaced as necessary. Later, a plaster finish made from lime, straw, sand, palm sugar and boiled buffalo skin was introduced by the Tai Dam, a Tai-speaking group whose homeland is in northern Viet Nam. These construction techniques and materials are still predominant in the villages surrounding Luang Prabang and in some areas of the town itself.

The construction technique of vernacular dwellings is consistent throughout different levels of society. Higher status is revealed only through location, larger size and better quality of construction materials. As such, a village chief's house was, traditionally, stylistically identical to the house of an ordinary resident.



▲ Villa Santi is a colonial-era house that has been renovated and converted into an upmarket guesthouse. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)



▲ Chinese-style shop houses, which were introduced into Luang Prabang via imported Vietnamese builders, line many of the roads in Luang Prabang. (Photo: Water Unger)

Festivals and Daily Rituals



New secular building styles were introduced between 1893 and 1907 as the French gradually assumed administrative control of Laos. In constructing administrative buildings and houses the French introduced European construction techniques and materials. For instance, the restriction on the use of bricks, which were previously used only for temples, was lifted. The French, however, did not merely transplant European styles into Luang Prabang. Instead, they employed styles developed in Viet Nam and produced designs inspired by vernacular temple architecture and secular wooden structures that were better suited to the warm and humid Laotian climate.

As a result, a new Laotian architectural style emerged, based on indigenous domestic architecture but freely incorporating French and Vietnamese design elements along with European and Chinese technical innovations. The Laotian royalty and aristocracy, who had previously lived in wooden houses, had their new masonry residences constructed in this style. The former Royal Palace (see page 14, photo 4) which today houses the Luang Prabang National Museum, was built between 1904 and 1909 and serves as a fine example of the French-inspired architecture that was popular at that time.

The French introduced some elements of Chinese architecture and urbanism indirectly. To execute French public works, skilled Vietnamese labourers were imported. These labourers settled near the foot of the peninsula and built their own commercial quarters which were brick, Chinese-style shop houses in rows that faced directly onto the street, with living accommodations on the upper floors. All of these architectural styles can still be seen today in Luang Prabang.

Rituals and festivals, whether they occur once a day or once a year, convey the spirit and essence of a culture, identifying what is unique to a locality. In Luang Prabang, the ritual cycle is dominated by Theravada Buddhist customs and traditions, integrated with tributes paid to the animistic spirits (*phi*) of the land and water. Because it is the traditional centre of religion in Laos and the seat of the former royal family, annual festivals (*boun*) are often organized on a grand scale in Luang Prabang. Festivals are governed by the different phases of the moon, but in general are held in the same month each year, as outlined in the box below.

◀ This *pimai* street parade features ceremonial dancers dressed as the *devata luang*, servants of the mythological Khun Borom, guarding the sacred *prabang* image. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)

Luang Prabang Festivals

January *Boun Khoun Khao* – Harvest festival, celebrated after the rice has been harvested, in which a ceremony is held to give thanks to the spirit of the land and to ensure the next harvest will be plentiful.



Boun Pha Vet – A temple-based festival when the *jataka* or story of Prince Vestsantara (the Buddha's penultimate life) are recited. The festival lasts for three days and three nights. Visiting fortunetellers are also a popular attraction at this time.

February *Boun Makha Bous'a* – A temple-based festival held during the full-moon commemorating the speech given by Buddha to 1,250 enlightened monks. Temple goers circumambulate the *vat* three times with candles in a ceremony known as *vien tian*.



Boun Khao Chi – Special bread of sticky rice, coated with egg and then grilled, is made and offered to the monks. This offering occurs during *makha bous'a*, but is no longer widely practiced.

April *Boun Pimai* – New Year festival beginning in mid-April and lasting three days. Held before the onset of the rainy season, it recognizes the importance of water in people's lives. It is also a purification festival during which Buddha images in the household and the temples are ritually cleaned with sacred water. The Prabang image is moved out of the National Museum during the festival to be purified in the grounds of Vat Mai. The water from the cleaning ceremonies is then poured or splashed by people on to each other to cleanse them of bad luck and to bring them luck for the coming year. The most elaborate New Year festival rites in Lao PDR are held in Luang Prabang with processions of the legendary guardian spirits of the town. Traditionally, *boun pimai* also served to reaffirm Lao kingship.



May *Boun Visakha Bous'a* – Falling usually on the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month, this festival celebrates the birth, death and *tatsahou* (enlightenment) of Buddha.



Boun Bang Fai – This festival is a rain-making and fertility festival. Held just before the rainy season, it is a wild and happy ceremony, involving music, dance and street processions, culminating in the firing of rockets. Rockets are fired to tempt the gods to produce rain needed for rice cultivation and also to send the *naga* from the river bank into the rice field in order to attract rain.

July *Boun Khao Phansa* – Held on the full moon, this festival marks the beginning of Buddhist lent, the three month period of monastic seclusion and meditation during the rainy season, when monks are required to stay within their *vat*. Monks are traditionally ordained during this period and when they are ordained, are expected to remain in the *vat* for the entire three months.



August *Boun Khao Padab Dinh* – Held on the full moon. During this festival people make special offerings to all of the deceased, not only their own ancestors.



Boun Souang Heua - In Luang Prabang this festival is held during the ninth Buddhist lunar month and is an important part of the traditional agricultural cycle. The festival pays tribute to the *naga*, (mythical snake water deities) with the intention of attracting the *naga* from the inundated rice fields back into the river. This festival also commemorates the end of the rainy season and brings luck for an abundant harvest. Similar to the *Loy Krathong* festival in Thailand, this festival involves the ritual launching of small offerings, made of banana leaves and flowers, onto the river. These offerings are launched at night and are lit with candles in order to cleanse the giver of bad luck and to give thanks to the water spirits. On the following day, boat races take place on the river. By holding boat races, people ritually reclaim the land from the *naga*, chasing them out from fields and streams and back into the Mekong River.

September *Boun Khao Salak* – Held on the full moon, this festival involves the giving of offerings to a specific monk (decided by a lottery system). Offerings include daily necessities such as books, pens, sugar, coffee and cigarettes. Laypeople also give *tung peng* (wax flower candles) to the monks. This ritual brings merit to the givers.



October/November *Boun Ok Phansa* – Held on the full moon ending of the three-month rainy season period of monastic seclusion. Monks who were ordained for the *phansa* period leave the *vat* and rejoin their families. This festival also involves launching candle-lit offerings on the river at night.



Boun Heua Fai – A festival for the *phanga naga* to bring good luck. Each village makes and decorates a boat. These boats are then paraded through the town and at night are launched on the river and ceremonially set on fire as offerings to the spirits.

December *Kinh Chiang (Peb Caub)* – Lao Sung (Hmong) new lunar year festival.





2



3



4

Binthabat Every morning the monks walk in single file through the streets, carrying their alms bowls to receive a daily offering of glutinous rice from people. The donors offer rice to the monks in order to gain merit. This daily ritual is known as *binthabat*. This simple gesture symbolizes the unique psychological and physical bond Buddhism creates between the people and monks. It is a communal, public ceremony in which everyone can participate.

Daily Offerings Daily offerings to the spirits of the household are a private affair for family and close family friends. A visitor should never enter a home uninvited to observe or photograph this daily ritual. Many of these ceremonies are commemorations for deceased parents or grandparents.

Offerings Offerings to Buddha images are made to remind us of the Buddha's teachings. It is common to see a variety of offerings in Luang Prabang. These include the following:

- *Candles*, which are offered to drive away darkness. They symbolize enlightenment and the light of knowledge which dispels the darkness of ignorance.
- *Incense*, which provides a fragrant smell and symbolizes pure moral conduct. It reminds us to conduct ourselves well.
- *Water*, which symbolizes purity, clarity and calmness.
- *Fruit*, which symbolizes the fruit of enlightenment, which is our goal, and is representative of all actions having a reaction.
- *Flowers*, which represent impermanence because their beauty and smell eventually wither and die.
- *Lotus flowers*, which represent the potential or actuality of enlightenment as the lotus grows out of mud and rises above the water. Likewise, the Lord Buddha rose above his suffering and defilements to gain enlightenment.

Photo captions

1. As well as being of religious and spiritual significance, *pimai* is a celebratory time in which everyone has fun throwing water and playing in the streets. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)
2. This offering includes: marigold flowers, orange candles, rice, limes, ginger, garlic, salt, cigarettes and an egg. (Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)
3. Cooked rice is stored in hand-woven baskets. Glutinous rice is the starch staple of the Luang Prabang diet. (Photo: Beatrice Kaldun)
4. *Sa* paper (mulberry-bark paper) is used to make colourful and decorative lanterns such as these, which are popular with tourists as souvenir items. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)



▲ Here a woman is participating in the *baci* ceremony (also known as *sou khuan*), in which strings are tied around her wrist. This ceremony is performed during special occasions or on the eve of journeys. In this ritual, the tying of strings around the wrist transfers good luck to the recipient. (Photo: Rik Ponne)

Baci *Baci* (also spelled *baisi*) is an ancient, pre-Buddhist ritual still practiced by Tai speakers all over the upper Mekong region. In Luang Prabang and other parts of Lao PDR, *baci* is performed on important occasions such as weddings, births and deaths. It is also carried out just before a family member or close friend departs on a long journey, to remind them of their ties to their hometown. The ceremony also takes place to welcome people back from a prolonged absence, to honour achievements and when people are recovering from illness.

The *baci* ceremony involves the calling back of spiritual powers (*khuan*). White strings, which serve to bind good luck and protection, are tied around the wrist of the individual receiving the *baci* and wishes are formulated whilst knotting these strings. The *mor phon*, a community elder who is knowledgeable about traditional Lao rituals, conducts the ceremony.

After the ceremony the participants share a meal, which usually includes dishes such as *koi and saa*, which are types of *laap*, a popular dish of spicy minced meat and herbs that is considered to bring luck. Outsiders can participate in a *baci* ceremony, but must be invited.

Performing Arts The performing arts of Luang Prabang include classical dance-theatre and puppetry.

Music and Dance Luang Prabang's classical dance and traditional music have their own distinctive style linked to the Royal Court. The origins of these arts date back to the fourteenth century when King Fa Ngum held victory ceremonies.



▲ Actors performing scenes from a traditional Laotian tale. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

Dance was once taught at the Royal Palace by trained masters, and the dancers were recruited from the town's youth. However in Luang Prabang there was no permanent performance troupe, as there were in Phnom Penh and Bangkok. One of the dances traditionally performed during religious festivals and other important occasions is the *Phalak Phalam*, an adaptation from the Indian *Ramayana* epic. The masks worn by the performers are made by a sole surviving craftsman in Luang Prabang. The *Phalak Phalam* performance at the Royal Theatre Hall now caters exclusively to tourists.

Puppetry The ancient art of puppet theatre also holds a special place in the cultural heritage of Luang Prabang. Puppetry started in the village of Xieng Thong and all puppeteers were traditionally from this village. The traditional puppets are very difficult to operate, thus extensive training is required to master the art. The puppets themselves are considered sacred, as they are believed to each contain a spirit.



- ▲ It is believed that each Royal Puppet has a spirit and preceding each performance offerings must be given to each spirit. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)

The ancient tradition of puppetry has recently made a comeback, and performances are held during festivals and weekly at the Royal Theatre Hall for tourists. After each performance the puppets are returned to Vat Xieng Thong. After every fifth performance the puppets receive a special offering and a religious ceremony is held honouring their spirits.

Traditional Arts and Crafts

As the former royal capital, Luang Prabang boasts a strong tradition of patronage of the arts. Residents of Luang Prabang are well-known for their skills in carving, silver work, blacksmithing, paper making, weaving, embroidery and pottery. To this day particular villages remain centres for specific crafts. Ban Pha Nom, for example, is a centre for weaving, while Ban Chan specializes in pottery and Ban Don Hat Hien in blacksmithing.



- ▲ These are some of the ingredients for making traditional lime plaster, which is used for rendering walls and for moulding Buddha and *naga* figures. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

The artistic traditions in the palace and the Buddhist temples were closely linked. The palace supported its own corps of artists and constructed their own royal temples which were decorated by the royal artists.

Some of the most skilled artisans and performers in the region lived or were trained in the town. In particular, the temples of Luang Prabang traditionally served as artistic training grounds. Many young monks learned the crafts which form the hallmark of the Luang Prabang temples. The monk craftsmen then brought their skills with them to their home villages when they left the *sangha*. As a result, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Luang Prabang emerged as an important artistic training centre.

Buddha Image Carving and Casting



Buddha image carving and casting are skills learned within the temple. Three basic types of Buddha images are produced in Luang Prabang – carved wooden images, cast bronze images, and large images made from a combination of materials, including brick, mortar, lacquer and gold leaf. Many wooden images are carved not only by monks, but also by village men who learned the skill as young men in monasteries.

- ◀ Monks combine metals to create bronze for the formation of Buddha images. Here a monk is pouring bronze into a mould.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

Woodcarving

Woodcarving flourished in Luang Prabang during the late fourteenth century when King Fa Ngum began promoting the arts. Many of the temples of Luang Prabang feature wood columns, doors, shutters and architectural details adorned with intricate carving.

Both the Fine Arts School in Luang Prabang and UNESCO's Training Centre for Laotian Traditional Temple Arts and Building Crafts at Vat Xieng Mouane employ local woodcarving artists to teach traditional woodcarving, thereby ensuring the transmission of this important element of the local arts.

Silversmithing



Silversmithing in Luang Prabang also dates back to the late fourteenth century. According to legend, a king wanted to have the most beautiful and complex designs for his utensils and decorations. As a result, the silversmiths in Luang Prabang became known as the most talented in all of Laos. Today, silversmithing takes place around Ban That, with two extended families involved in the craft. The items produced, though expensive, are very popular with tourists due to their high quality and attractive traditional design.

- ◀ This Luang Prabang silversmith is creating an intricately decorated silver bowl. *(Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)*

Blacksmithing

Blacksmithing is based in Ban Don Hat Hien. The village produces knives, sickles and agricultural tools for markets in town. All the items are locally hand-made. These traditional crafts may face future difficulties as cheaper factory-produced tools can be imported from China, Thailand and elsewhere. However there is a possibility that the blacksmiths can shift to producing more profitable tourist-oriented crafts.

Sa Paper Making Paper making has been practiced locally since the seventeenth century. The traditional method uses mulberry bark to create mulberry or *sa* paper. Originally, *sa* paper was what residents wrote on, especially when copying Buddhist religious texts. Today the traditional paper is made largely for artistic purposes or for sale to tourists, local hotels and souvenir shops. New uses for traditional *sa* paper have made this product very popular amongst tourists.



◀ Locally-made *sa* paper is used by artists and by the general public for a range of purposes. (Photo: Beatrice Kaldun)

Silk Weaving and Dyeing Women from all Tai ethnic groups, including the Lao, are accomplished weavers. Silk weaving was introduced from China, and today many Lao weavers produce their own silk by raising mulberry trees and silkworms. They then dye the threads using natural dyes made from local plant products. Traditionally, each Tai ethnic group and even each village had its own distinctive designs, which were readily identified. However, this kind of uniqueness has not been maintained, and women now use a wide repertoire of techniques and patterns. In Ban Pha Nom, a 300-year-old weaving village that used to supply the king of Luang Prabang, the Tai Lue weavers create designs that draw on influences from all over the country, catering mostly for the tourist market.



▲ Silk fabric in a variety of colours and patterns, displayed for sale. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

Embroidery Embroidery in Luang Prabang is a specialty of the Hmong ethnic group. In addition to intricate geometric patterns, during recent years they have used embroidery to 'tell their histories', creating narrative themes in the design. Embroidery is mainly sold by Hmong women in the so-called Hmong market in Luang Prabang, but is also found in small shops around town. Most of these women come from Ban Na Sampam.

Basketry Basketry is primarily produced by the Khmu ethnic group, who live in villages surrounding Luang Prabang. They are expert basket makers, and create a range of beautiful products, all of which are functional. There are baskets for storing rice, for serving sticky rice, for carrying things, for storing textiles, etc. Baskets have become a popular item in Luang Prabang's souvenir shops.

Pottery In the Luang Prabang area, pottery is only produced in Ban Chan because of the special clay found in that village and the limited availability of clay elsewhere. Although pottery is not a popular souvenir, due to its fragility and bulkiness, pottery and porcelain can be found in souvenir shops in Luang Prabang. However only a small proportion of this is produced in Ban Chan - most comes from Vientiane. Nonetheless, Ban Chan benefits from tourism because they produce pottery for hotels, restaurants and guesthouses.

Cuisine A range of distinct regional cuisines exists across Laos and the dishes found in Luang Prabang are particular to the region. Because of the Royal Court's presence, Luang Prabang's food is considered more refined and complex than that found in other regions. Luang Prabang cuisine takes full advantage of the local vegetation and fauna. It is prepared with relatively mild seasoning which allows the flavours of the fresh produce to dominate.



▲ The distinctive cuisine of the region can be sampled in Luang Prabang.
(Photo: Patarapong Kongwijit)

A remarkable asset for understanding and appreciating Luang Prabang cuisine is the surviving recipes that belonged to one of the last royal chefs in Luang Prabang. Saved by an incredible fluke of fate, these recipes have been published as a book, *Traditional Recipes of Laos*, published by Prospect Books, London.

A common feature of the food in Luang Prabang is the use of fermented fish sauce (*padek*) and the bitter and spicy nature of the condiments used. Typical dishes include *khai phaen*, a dried river moss which is sautéed in seasoned oil and topped with sesame seeds, and *jaeo bong*, a jam-like condiment made from chillies and dried buffalo skin. The two dishes are frequently served together.



▲ This roadside stand sells a variety of local, precooked dishes, including *ourlam*, fish wrapped in banana leaves (*khanappa*), pickled vegetables (*som phak*) and sticky rice (*khao niew*).
(UNESCO file photo)

Another typical Luang Prabang dish is *ourlam*, a thick stew made from eggplant, mushrooms and buffalo or other meat, which is flavoured with chillies, local herbs and spices. Its unique flavour derives from a bitter-spicy wood called *sakhan*. *Ourlam* is eaten with glutinous rice, the primary starch staple in Laos.

Although all Laotian cooks make *laap*, a spicy dish of finely minced water buffalo, chicken or fish, people in Luang Prabang prepare two similar dishes called *koi* and *saa*. Traditionally, *laap* is eaten uncooked, and is prepared by blending minced meat, chicken or fish with eggplant, coriander, mint, chillies and powdered sticky rice. *Koi* is usually made from fish, chicken or duck and is prepared by mixing beans, chillies, lemon and coriander with the



▲ The Luang Prabang markets sell a variety of locally grown vegetables.
(Photo: Beatrice Kaldun)

minced meat base. *Saa* is made from pork which is mixed with chopped banana flowers as well as chillies, lemon and coriander. *Koi* and *saa* are chopped more coarsely than *laap* and are cooked.

The most important spice used in traditional Luang Prabang cuisine is fresh ginger root (*Zingiber officinale*), a plant native to upland Southeast Asia. In addition to the use of ginger as a flavoring, the plant has a ritual significance and is an important element in offerings to the spirits. In the world of spirits, where things are valued by their smell and taste, *Zingiber officinale* is deemed to represent gold, while another type of ginger, *Zingiber zerumbet*, represents silver.

The world's largest river fish, the Giant Mekong Catfish (*pa beuk*) was formerly a major source of protein for the residents of Luang Prabang and, like ginger, is regarded as having sacred significance. Unfortunately, upstream dams and other disruptions have changed the ecology of the Mekong River and have brought this noble fish to the brink of extinction.

Bananas, eggs and rice also have ritual significance to the residents of Luang Prabang and are part of traditional ceremonies.



▲ Many different local dishes are sold at the night market.
(Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

Because of the many years of French influence in their country, many Laotians are quite comfortable with elements of international cuisine. Coffee and baguettes, for example, are consumed widely in Luang Prabang. As the number of tourists increases in Luang Prabang, the range of cuisine has expanded dramatically. Not unexpectedly, small French bistros have led the way. Usually owned and run by young returned Laotians who were raised in France or by French expatriates and their local partners, the food they offer is often a mixture of classic French and local Lao. Recently, based on the growing business possibilities in Luang Prabang, Western bakeries and cafes from Vientiane have opened branches in Luang Prabang.

In spite of the growing variety of international food available in Luang Prabang, the ritual link between traditional foodstuffs and important life ceremonies ensures that local cuisine retains its popularity and is readily available in restaurants where visitors can enjoy its unique flavours.

B. HERITAGE PRESERVATION IN LUANG PRABANG

Part B examines the history and key strategies for heritage preservation in Luang Prabang and outlines the preservation efforts to date.

HERITAGE PRESERVATION SO FAR This section outlines some of the major milestones in the history of heritage preservation in Luang Prabang, including an explanation of how Luang Prabang became a World Heritage site.

There has been much progress in heritage preservation in Luang Prabang over the past 18 years. Several of the initiatives are highlighted in Figure B.1 on page 41. Some of the major milestones are discussed below.

Legislation and Assessment of Historic Buildings In order to cope with existing and potential issues of heritage conservation, the Government of Lao PDR has, since 1989, begun to create new heritage legislation and has established institutions and developed relationships with institutions specializing in heritage conservation, with international organizations and with donor countries.

In 1994, the Ministry of Information and Culture, with support from the French Government, employed the French architectural firm, Ateliers de la Peninsule, to undertake an architectural assessment of the historic buildings in Luang Prabang. The project resulted in the identification and listing of 33 *vat* and 11 secular buildings as heritage buildings. Following this, the Government of Lao PDR listed Luang Prabang as a national heritage site. The building inventory was also used as a basis for determining heritage protection zones and formed part of the supporting documentation for the submission to UNESCO for World Heritage listing.

World Heritage Inscription The Lao PDR Government recognized that Luang Prabang met the criteria for cultural properties outlined in the World Heritage Convention 1972 (ratified by Lao PDR in 1987). In their submission for World Heritage inscription, the Government argued that a new concept of urbanization was introduced into the traditional Lao morphology of Luang Prabang in the early twentieth century as a result of exchanges between three cultures – the Lao, the Vietnamese and the French. This created the present-day city with a fusion of styles and materials from traditional Lao timber buildings to European construction with introduced materials, as well as Vietnamese and Chinese influences.

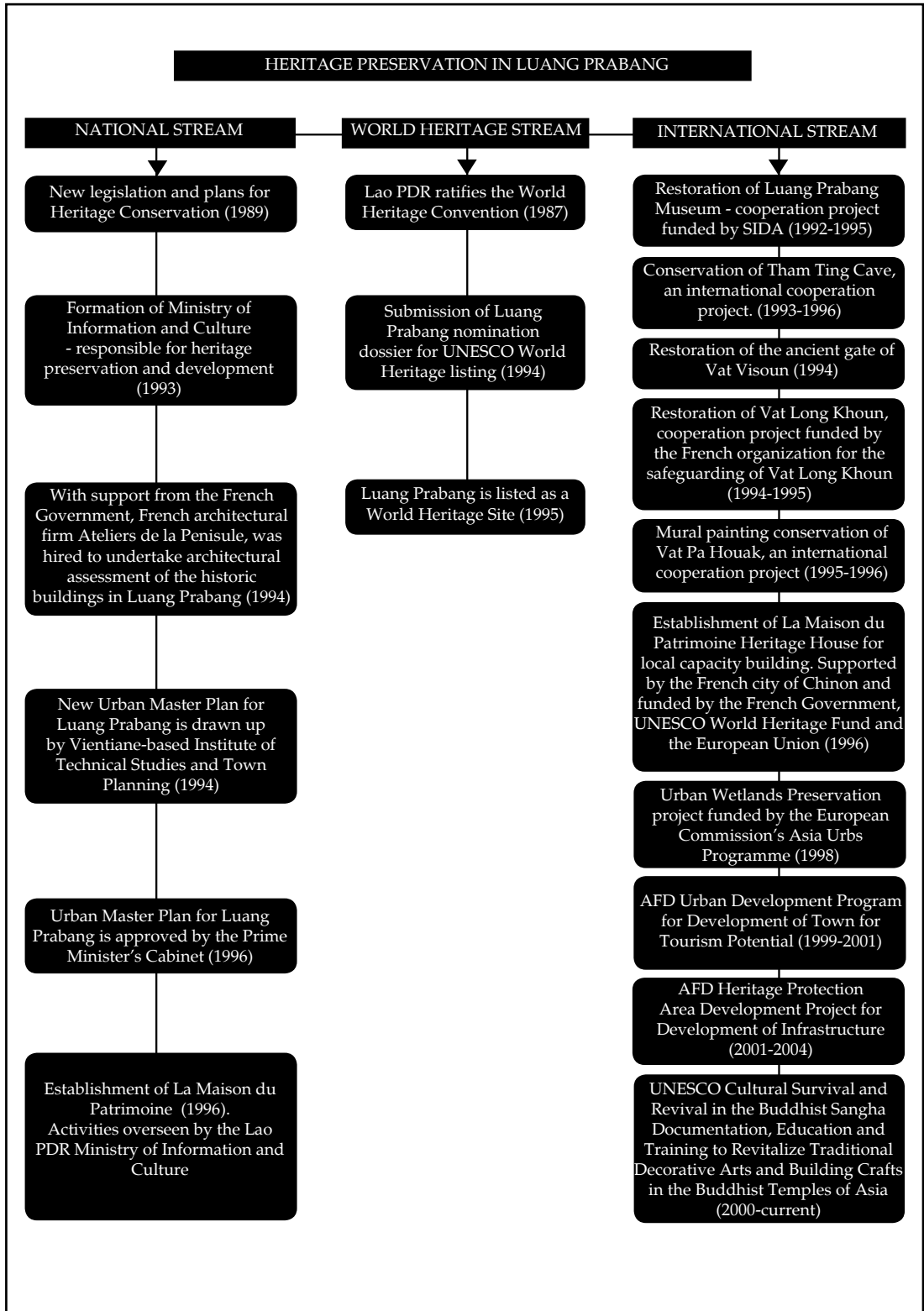


Figure B.1: Heritage Preservation in Luang Prabang.



▲ Carved timber decorative reliefs depicting religious scenes adorn several of the temples of Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)

In its review of the nomination of Luang Prabang, the World Heritage Committee found that the level of authenticity in temples was higher than that found in domestic buildings where many introduced techniques and materials, especially concrete, had been used to replace traditional materials. Nonetheless, the World Heritage Committee found that the overall townscape and urban fabric of the town still preserved a high degree of authenticity. Moreover, it was the combination of diverse communities, rural and urban, royal and religious, sacred and secular, within a defined geographical area that the World Heritage Committee found as a main justification for inscription.

Luang Prabang was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995. The town was noted for its *“outstanding universal value, representing the harmonious relationship between the built and natural environment, and for the successful fusion of traditional Lao architectural and urban structures with those of the nineteenth and twentieth century French style”*.

The area under the protection of the World Heritage Convention is extensive. It not only covers the historic town, but also the banks of the Mekong and Khan rivers on the other side of the peninsula. The protected area incorporates examples of all the architectural styles as well as the evolved town layout.

A Master Plan for Heritage Preservation

In 1996, the Prime Minister’s Cabinet approved a revised urban master plan for Luang Prabang. This plan was drawn up in 1994 by the Institute of Technical Studies and Town Planning which is part of the Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction. This legally-binding plan covers an area of five hectares, divides the town into conservation and non-conservation zones, and is used by local authorities as a framework for preserving heritage and controlling development.

A major provision of the plan is the designation of a 1.4 hectare heritage preservation zone centred on the historic peninsula area of the town. This heritage zone includes major Buddhist temples, French-influenced administration buildings, Chinese-style shop houses and traditional wooden houses. The banks of the Mekong and Khan Rivers across from the peninsula are also protected under the regulations of this zone. See Figure B.2: *Map of Luang Prabang: Administrative Villages and Buddhist Temples*.

As a result of heritage regulations, no monuments can be destroyed, moved or modified externally or internally. Restoration must adhere to original architectural specifications including facades, roofs, materials, finishes and colours. Obstruction of vistas with new structures and signage is not permitted and all electricity and telephone cables and water pipes must be hidden wherever possible.

A non-conservation zone, with greater flexibility in land use and development, surrounds the protected zone. This perimeter zone is divided into suburban areas, riverbank settlements, economic zones, agricultural and natural zones, and areas for possible future expansion.

La Maison du Patrimoine: The Luang Prabang Heritage House

In August 1996, La Maison du Patrimoine (the Heritage House) was established as a joint venture between the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Information and Culture and the French city of Chinon. It is supported by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.



▲ Formerly the French colonial Customs House, this building was restored and converted for use as the offices of La Maison du Patrimoine. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

La Maison du Patrimoine is a local capacity building organization which is overseen by the Lao PDR Ministry of Information and Culture and reports to the Local Heritage Committee and the National Committee for the Management of Cultural, Historic and Environmental Heritage.

The purpose of La Maison du Patrimoine is to ensure that conservation work undertaken in Luang Prabang is carried out in accordance with international World Heritage standards. It serves as an advisory service to the municipal government and the local community, providing advice and management on issues of heritage conservation in Luang Prabang.

The technical staff members of La Maison du Patrimoine are from Lao PDR and are assisted by advisors and volunteers from France, Japan and elsewhere.

All construction work, whether for new structures or for renovation of old buildings, can be legally undertaken only after a permit has been issued by the Luang Prabang Department of Construction, Transport, Post and Communication (CTPC). Prior to issuing the permission for any construction, the Department consults with the Department of Information and Culture and La Maison du Patrimoine.

Infrastructure Development



- ▲ Urban development projects have involved improving and beautifying the small side streets of Luang Prabang, including the provision of new drainage systems, brick edging and wooden benches. (Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

A large infrastructure construction project entitled the “Heritage Protection Area Development Project” was launched in 2001 and will be completed in 2004. Its goal is the integrated improvement of the drainage and sanitation of the Heritage Protection Area. The 5,500,000 Euro (US\$6,850,000) project, funded by the French Agency for Development, is directed at electricity cabling, public lighting networks and the road, alley and traffic system. A network of walkways and promenades is planned in order to create links between ten urban villages in three neighborhoods of Luang Prabang. As part of the programme, Luang Prabang citizens whose property borders the walkways must invest in their own property. This includes fixing their fences along the alleys and other property improvements.

The Heritage Protection Area Development Project follows the 1,800,000 Euro (US\$2,250,000) Luang Prabang Urban Development Programme that took place between 1999 and 2001. One of the main goals of the Urban Development Programme to develop the potential for tourism in Luang Prabang.

PRESERVATION ISSUES AND EFFORTS

This section examines some of the issues surrounding the preservation of natural, built and cultural heritage and several of the initiatives being undertaken.

Natural Heritage



- ▲ Phousi – the mountain at the physical and spiritual centre of Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)

As an integral part of Luang Prabang’s character, the town’s natural heritage needs to be conserved. The main initiatives undertaken in this regard have focused on the management and protection of the urban wetlands because in recent years these wetlands have been encroached upon for housing, roads and irrigation canals. A project is underway, funded by the European Commission’s Asia Urbs Programme, which is for mapping and researching these wetlands and developing ways in which they can be restored to their original condition. A system of trails through the wetlands is being proposed in order to enable better understanding of the ecological functioning of natural environment of the historic town for visitors and residents alike. It is hoped that by raising local awareness, sustainable preservation measures can be encouraged.

Since 1992, there have also been preservation efforts in the culturally important caves in the area around Luang Prabang, taking into account their natural and architectural significance as well as their archaeological importance. Work has been carried out in Tham Ting cave at Pak Ou, with expert support and Australian Government funding.

Built Heritage: Religious Buildings



- ▲ The Ho Prabang, located on the grounds of the Luang Prabang museum, will, upon its completion, house the sacred *prabang* image. This new building was constructed in the Luang Prabang style but using modern materials and techniques. (UNESCO file photo)



- ▲ In the mid-1990s, Vat Xieng Mouane was restored using non-traditional materials and techniques. In 1999, the UNESCO Cultural Survival and Revival Project was established, with the aim of ensuring future restoration work is carried out using traditional materials and methods in order to revive and maintain cultural traditions and skills. (Photo: UNESCO file)

Years of external and internal conflict have disrupted the continuity of monastic traditions. With little or no religious activity for two decades, there has been a growing gap between the older and younger generations of monks, which has resulted in the loss of traditional building and decorative arts skills. Today, it is difficult to achieve the high standards in woodcarving, painting and sculpting for which the temples of Luang Prabang are famous.

At the time of inscription of Luang Prabang on the World Heritage List, it was stated that the monasteries, more than the secular structures, had managed to maintain a relatively high degree of authenticity. Unfortunately, since Luang Prabang's inscription, the authenticity of many of the smaller temples has been compromised by well-intended but ill-informed efforts to 'beautify' the temples – often to attract tourists. Wealthier communities hire construction companies to do the necessary work while work in poorer communities is often carried out by monks and novices. The construction companies and monks frequently lack the knowledge and skill needed for appropriate restoration and they have used materials and techniques with varying degrees of authenticity.

Some of the inappropriate work being undertaken in temples in the Luang Prabang area include finishing with cement instead of traditional lime-based plaster and whitewashing of damaged murals which are then repainted with modern Buddhist images based upon non-traditional Indian and Cambodian models.

Traditional arts, such as the famous Luang Prabang technique of inlaying glass mosaic to depict elaborate scenes in great detail, are now rarely practiced. However, the artistic skills and knowledge of traditional building techniques are not completely lost. Some of the skills, especially woodcarving, are being taught by the Schools of Fine Arts in Luang Prabang and Vientiane. These trained artists and artisans are sometimes commissioned to perform specific tasks in new construction and restoration.

While monks can, in theory, attend these classes, they face a number of obstacles. Most significantly, they are required to defrock if they wish to attend. In addition, the formal education level of many of the novices is not high enough to pass the required entrance exams. Moreover, these young men are quite often not interested in pursuing the full-length degree programmes in fine arts that are offered. Instead, many are interested in simply acquiring



- ▲ As part of the UNESCO 'Cultural Survival and Revival' project, monks learn a variety of skills. (Photo: David A. Feingold and UNESCO project team)

the skills needed to maintain and restore their temples, which are acts of devotion and part of their responsibility as monks. These factors point to the need for non-formal teaching methods for building, restoring and maintaining monastery complexes that should be set within the context of the Buddhist community.

A UNESCO project entitled 'Cultural Survival in Luang Prabang' is revitalizing traditional temple arts and building crafts within the Laotian Buddhist *sangha*. Monks, novices and local artisans are participating in this project, which concentrates on skills training in order to ensure the survival and continued social and economic relevance of the traditional system of fine arts in Luang Prabang. See page 97 for more information about this project.

Built Heritage: Secular Buildings



- ▲ Many traditional wooden houses in Luang Prabang are in a serious state of disrepair, owing to lack of funds to restore them or to a lack of appropriate materials and construction know-how. (Photo: Heather Peters)

Most of the restoration effort directed at secular buildings has targeted Luang Prabang's French-inspired secular buildings. Many have been transformed either from civic buildings or private residences into guesthouses or restaurants to cater for the city's growing tourism industry. Often these projects have involved joint ventures in which foreign investment has contributed to the restoration work.

Luang Prabang's historic Customs House, which was constructed in 1925, was renovated with funds provided by the French Government (1998 - 1999). The Customs House now functions as offices for La Maison du Patrimoine and houses its various urban planning and conservation programmes.

The strong interest in preserving the colonial-era buildings in Luang Prabang has not benefited the traditional wooden houses and Vietnamese shop houses, which have yet to receive much attention from either the government or private sector, and some are now in a serious state of disrepair. The desire for cheap, modern construction methods poses another threat to the traditional secular architecture of Luang Prabang. 'Modern' buildings are usually constructed from concrete and often resemble modern Thai houses, with little reference to Luang Prabang's traditional local and architectural vocabulary.



Traditional vs Modern Building Materials

The replacement of traditional construction materials with more modern, often imported, materials is not only problematic from an aesthetic point of view, but also compromises the durability and functionality of the buildings and ultimately their authenticity. For example, the use of cement instead of traditional lime-based plaster has a number of consequences. Unlike plaster, cement does not allow evaporation of moisture and will not allow the walls to breathe properly. This can lead to rising damp as ground moisture seeps up the walls, causing plaster to flake off and mould to grow. In this way, frescoes and decorative artwork on the buildings' interior walls deteriorate and are often destroyed. Furthermore, when moisture is trapped in the building it often moves up to the roof beams where it contributes to decaying the timber.

When modern paint is applied to the external plaster or cement of the building, the porosity of the walls is further decreased. Traditional lime-wash, on the other hand, unlike most modern paints, allows evaporation of moisture.

Another modern item often used in construction is corrugated iron sheeting, but the use of this metal as roofing material, instead of the traditional locally-made tiles, causes buildings to heat up much more than they normally would and this warmth accelerates the rising damp and deterioration process, with disastrous effects.

Traditional local building materials, unlike their modern counterparts, have been chosen and developed with local climatic conditions in mind. Furthermore, the techniques for the use of these traditional materials have been refined over many generations. Buildings made with traditional materials, being better suited to the climate are, contrary to popular assumption, cooler than those built with concrete.

In addition to the adverse aesthetic effect and their impact on the durability of buildings, the use of modern materials unfortunately often leads to the loss of local knowledge and traditional methods, with adverse consequences for local skills development and cultural pride.



▲ Before Restoration.
(Photo: David A. Feingold,
Ophidian Films Ltd.)



▲ After Restoration.
(Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

◀ The Ban Xieng Mouane restoration project demonstrates how conservation of traditional houses is a viable alternative to demolition.

One successful example of a secular building restoration project can be found in Ban Xieng Mouane. In this project, a traditional Lao wooden house was restored by Lao tradespeople through on-the-job training and workshops provided by the Ecole d'Avignon, a French conservation school. The restoration project was undertaken to demonstrate viable alternatives to demolition. The project showed how modern comforts could be accommodated into traditional houses without detracting from the historic fabric and how restoration could be accomplished using traditional materials and techniques.

Handicrafts and Performing Arts



▲ Beautifully embroidered fabrics are sold at the markets in Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)

In addition to the considerable interventions to protect the built heritage of Luang Prabang, there are also efforts to preserve other forms of heritage. Until recently, many of Luang Prabang's traditional performing arts and crafts had fallen out of practice and were facing extinction. In the late 1990s, efforts commenced to revitalize traditional arts and crafts, primarily to meet the growing demands of tourists.

The government is encouraging the revitalization of traditional dance, music and performance art, such as puppet shows, by providing seed funding to community members to re-establish dance, music and puppet troupes. There is some difficulty, however, in attracting youth to train in these traditional arts, particularly as the funding from the government and income from the performances is minimal. Conflicts arise when troupe leaders use the funds raised through performances to purchase better costumes or repair equipment, while the younger members of these troupes and trainees generally want the modest income distributed among performers. Such issues need to be addressed if the traditional arts are to be successfully revitalized in Luang Prabang.



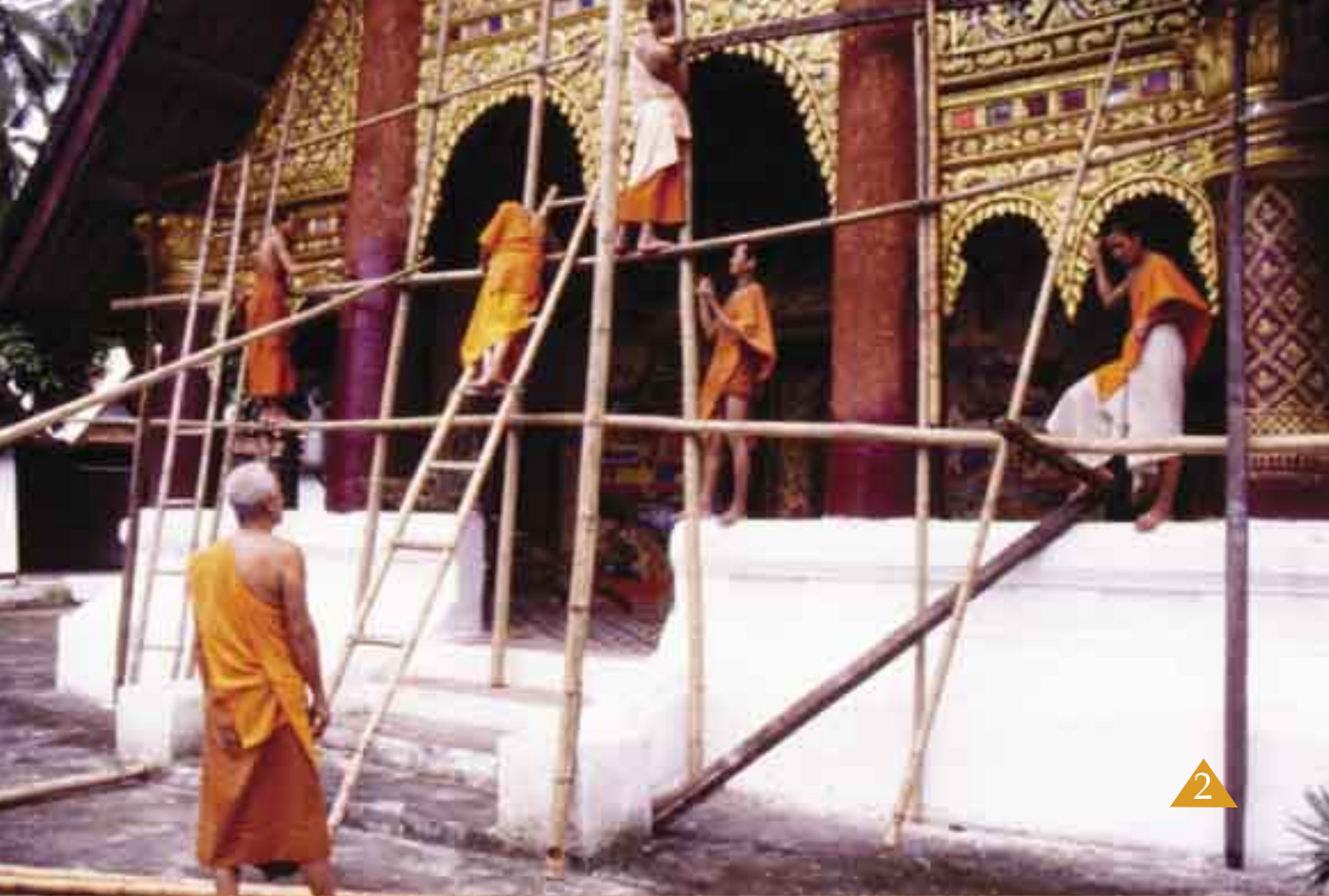
PART II:

Tourism Impacts And Management In Luang Prabang

Part II is concerned with identifying the positive and negative impacts that have resulted from tourism in Luang Prabang since its inscription on the World Heritage List in 1995 and suggests a strategy for managing tourism in Luang Prabang in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner.







C. TOURISM ISSUES AND IMPACTS IN LUANG PRABANG

This section outlines the principal issues related to tourism in Luang Prabang and the reasons why these issues need to be considered and understood by the local community and other stakeholders. The impacts of tourism are then examined in detail.

TOURISM IN LUANG PRABANG



▲ This chapel contains a gilded standing Buddha with the Buddha's hands in the typically Lao *mudra* 'Calling for Rain'. (UNESCO file photo)

The distinctive natural, built and cultural heritage, discussed in Part I, is the basis for tourism in Luang Prabang. The scenic surrounds, the authenticity of its architecture and urban form, the skillful embellishment of monuments and the traditional social practices, arts and crafts all combine to give the city its heritage value and tourism appeal.

World Heritage inscription and the consequent increase in tourism have drawn the attention of both residents and the government to the unique cultural and physical fabric of Luang Prabang. There is a welcome renaissance in the traditional arts and an increased appreciation of the natural and built environment. At the same time however, there is also increased pressure on the town's heritage.

Largely as a result of tourism, there has been a boom in construction and there have been a number of other changes that have altered Luang Prabang's appearance. Unplanned or inappropriate construction and development poses one of the greatest threats to the heritage of Luang Prabang and paradoxically, threatens the tourism industry, an industry upon which the town is becoming ever more dependent.

Like other cultural tourism destinations, Luang Prabang faces the dilemma of ascertaining acceptable levels of change and determining its carrying capacity for absorbing and managing tourism. The challenge is how to avoid compromising the natural, built and cultural heritage of Luang Prabang in the pursuit of the benefits of tourism.

Photo captions

1. The rivers of Luang Prabang wind their way through a lush, green landscape. (Photo: Walter Unger)
2. These monks, working on bamboo scaffolding, are carrying out conservation and restoration work on the temple exterior. (Photo: David A. Feingold, Ophidian Films Ltd.)
3. A monk looks out of the window of the Reclining Buddha Sanctuary at Vat Xieng Thong. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)
4. This coloured glass mosaic of the *bodhi* tree on a red background is on the exterior wall of the *sim* at Vat Xieng Thong. The *bodhi* tree is the tree under which the Buddha was sitting when he achieved enlightenment and is a symbol of the Buddha's presence and an object of devotion. (Photo: Heather Peters)



▲ Strolling through the temple grounds and visiting a range of different types of ancient monasteries is a popular activity for tourists in Luang Prabang. (Photo: John Koch-schulte)

While tourism does bring benefits, the Luang Prabang community must evaluate those benefits in terms of the costs of tourism. Therefore it is important that all stakeholders understand both the positive and negative impacts made or accelerated by tourism on Luang Prabang's heritage, environment and society. It is important that the community is aware that while tourism may offer short-term financial rewards, it is the perpetuation of Luang Prabang's valuable historic and cultural resources that will ensure a sustainable future for its people.

It is also important to recognize that not all of the changes, positive or negative, in Luang Prabang have been brought about by tourism. Both positive and negative changes have occurred as Luang Prabang evolves in the global context.

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF TOURISM

This section examines how tourism has impacted different facets of Luang Prabang, including the impacts on built and cultural heritage, the economic situation, environmental conditions and on society.

Built and Cultural Heritage



▲ This temple roof was recently restored using imported Thai roof tiles. While the end result may be attractive to some, the authentic Laotian heritage value of the site has been lost. (Photo: Rik Ponne)

According to a Netherlands Development Organization (SUNV) survey, the top three reasons for visiting Luang Prabang are culture (71%), the residents' way of life (60%) and temples (55% of respondents). The built and cultural heritage is therefore the prime attraction for tourists. Unfortunately a significant amount of built heritage in Luang Prabang has been altered in response to tourism, with the result that its character, authenticity and cultural significance are often diminished or even falsified. Similarly, cultural heritage and ways of life have been affected by the presence of tourists and the tourism industry's response to their presence.

Tourism has impacts on built and cultural heritage through its effects on authenticity and character and on demand for new elements that threaten heritage. Tourism also leads to cross-cultural interaction where, in cases where there is a lack of understanding and appreciation of the differences in social mores, offence can be caused and cultural heritage can be negatively impacted.

Authenticity and Character



- ▲ These monks have applied concrete and modern paint to the exterior of this temple and are applying gold paint to the columns instead of using traditional gilding techniques. Such renovation work compromises the durability of the building and decreases the heritage value of the site.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

With the forces of globalization and homogenization affecting cultures around the world, authenticity of heritage (credibility and truthfulness) is more threatened than ever before.

The concept of authenticity is a controversial and complex notion. It may be applied to built heritage such as monasteries, palaces, houses, public monuments and town layout; movable cultural property such as handicrafts; intangible heritage including rituals and traditional performing arts and practices; and unique local practices ranging from cooking methods to medical practices to agricultural techniques. Authenticity is a particularly complex concept as culture is constantly in flux and draws vitality from the ability to adapt to inevitably changing circumstances. However, while being a difficult concept to describe, cultural authenticity is recognizable and is a key defining feature of World Heritage sites such as Luang Prabang. For World Heritage sites, ensuring authenticity is one of the major criteria for inscription. Luang Prabang is one of the most authentic traditional town sites in Southeast Asia, comparable to Hoi An in Viet Nam and Vigan in the Philippines.

Cultural heritage must be presented in an authentic manner or its value can be undermined for both tourists and the local community. An example of ill-conceived, artificial presentation is the scheduling of festivals and events to be in line with the needs of the tourism industry as opposed to conforming to the traditional cultural and social calendar of these events. By scheduling these events at inappropriate times or outside of their relationship to various religious activities and community functions, festivals can be deprived of their seasonal and ritual meaning. These festivals could then become irrelevant in the lives of the local community and therefore no longer practiced (except for tourists). In this way the community could lose part of their unique and valuable heritage.

While such scheduling may be argued to be justified by the financial benefits from meeting tourist demands, it must also be argued that tourists desire experiences which are based on genuine local cultural practices, and would like to be provided with the opportunity to observe and experience something unique. So if the Luang Prabang community alters their rituals in order to satisfy what they believe tourist demands are, it could be counterproductive in that tourists will be deterred by the artificial nature of the town and will no longer be interested in visiting.



- ▲ The walls of this old house were originally built using woven bamboo strips, finished with a lime-based plaster. But the house is being restored using cement instead of traditional plaster, compromising both the durability and heritage value of the building.

(Photo: Rik Pomme)



- ▲ The damaged areas of the plaster walls of this building have been repaired with concrete, which apart from being aesthetically unappealing, diminishes the building's heritage value.

(Photo: Montira Horayangura Unakul)

In Luang Prabang, a significant number of monasteries, the linchpin of the town's cultural assets, have recently been renovated. While tourism is not the only reason temples are being restored, it is a significant factor. Unfortunately a lack of attention to authentic and traditional materials can already be seen in these renovations. Imported cement roof tiles and acrylic paints have already compromised some artistically unique and noteworthy sites. Monasteries are not the only built heritage sites being compromised; conservation work being carried out on public buildings and private homes suffers from the same authenticity problems.

Many explanations and excuses have been put forth for this use of inappropriate materials and techniques in restoration works. One reason is that local residents are often unaware of the value and uniqueness of their built heritage. Given this lack of awareness, they are then unable to appreciate those structures and do not understand why they should be preserved or why traditional materials and techniques should be used. Also, as a result of the influence of marketing and of television images of buildings abroad, which are constructed from steel and concrete, many local people perceive modern materials to be more prestigious. Furthermore, the influence of Thailand's modern lifestyle on Lao PDR society is such that many people in Luang Prabang have a quest for modernism and a belief that modern buildings are somehow better than traditional ones. People often falsely assume that modern buildings offer technological advantages and greater comfort but this is not necessarily the case. Contrary to popular belief, concrete buildings are not cooler than traditional structures, for example.

Another reason for using modern materials and techniques is that even when residents wish to use traditional materials, the costs may be prohibitive. The dwindling demand for traditional building materials often results in their being more expensive than mass-produced modern products. Also, mass-produced products enjoy ill-conceived government subsidies, making them even more attractive and pricing the traditional materials out of the market. Therefore, given the financial situation of the local residents, using traditional methods and appropriate materials is often unaffordable.



▲ Luang Prabang has stringent building restrictions for the exterior of shops. However, this travel agent has two large message boards on the sidewalk and a smaller yellow sign hanging beside the door. The operators have also added stickers to the newly added glass doors and original wooden doors thereby changing the historic character of the building and detracting from the public streetscape.

(Photo: Montira Horayangura Unakul)

A further reason is that it is difficult to find crafts people skilled in traditional techniques of applying lacquer, making glass mosaics, whitewashing, woodcarving and plastering. Other reasons put forth include: the durability of modern materials and the perception that renovations can be completed more quickly and be less labour-intensive with modern materials.

The lack of awareness and appreciation of built heritage among residents is an obstacle which can be overcome through awareness-raising and educational means. This must be a critical component of heritage management in Luang Prabang but will require significant effort on the part of managers to engage all members of the local community.

Many of these obstacles to authenticity can be overcome through regulatory means. For example new restoration regulations in Luang Prabang, controlling the types of materials and methods to be used, have spurred an increased demand for products such as traditional tiles and have therefore stimulated the production of traditional materials, bringing the cost of these materials down to a more affordable level. Regulatory means are only effective, however, when they are enforced. Enforcement of regulations requires commitment by officials along with public understanding and cooperation.

The UNESCO-supported project 'Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha' project is another means by which the obstacles to authenticity can be overcome. As discussed in Section D, this UNESCO project seeks to build capacity and revitalize traditional skills among monks in the Theravada Buddhist *sangha*, thereby enabling restoration of temples using authentic methods and materials.

Managing New Elements

Presumed demand by tourists for Western or modern services, along with a lack of building development controls, has resulted in many buildings in the main streets of the historic area of Luang Prabang being altered inappropriately and losing many of their traditional uses and much of their local value. For example, traditional houses have had incompatible alterations made to them in order to convert them into guesthouses, travel agencies, cafes and souvenir shops. Furthermore, sometimes these souvenir shops sell items and trinkets which are not culturally relevant to the region and are not even manufactured locally.

This 'hijacking' of local culture, buildings and gathering places by the tourist industry has caused resentment among some locals and many now jokingly refer to the main street in the historic peninsula area as '*Ban Falang*' (Foreigners' Village).

Cross-cultural Interaction



▲ Tourists and local residents watching the parade during the *pimai* festival in Luang Prabang.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

Cross-cultural interaction can become problematic if there is a lack of cultural awareness or understanding of heritage on the part of visitors. Many visitors to Luang Prabang are not aware of appropriate behavior in terms of local social norms or how to use sensitively the unique heritage resources that they are privileged to share. Without this knowledge, it is difficult for the visitor to appreciate the value of Luang Prabang's heritage or respect local lifestyles and traditions. Also, it is difficult for visitors to understand that they need to fairly remunerate the local community for the use of their heritage and in the purchase of their crafts.

An example of lack of cultural awareness and resulting misuse of Luang Prabang's heritage is the practice of tourists taking alcohol up to the top of Phousi, a popular site for watching the sun set over the town and the Mekong River. Many tourists are unaware that Phousi is the site of That Chom Si, a particularly sacred temple, and are therefore unaware that the consumption of alcohol there is extremely offensive to locals.

This example demonstrates the need for the significance of cultural practices, buildings and locations to be brought to the attention of tourists. It is vital that policies are developed to ensure effective tourist education or interpretation. The importance of interpretation is discussed in greater detail on pages 108 to 111.

Review of Heritage Issues and Impacts

Clearly the demands of tourists, the lack of building controls and the inadequate implementation of existing regulations have begun to seriously change the essence of the Luang Prabang community's built heritage. Similarly, the lack of cultural awareness of visitors and the inappropriate presentation of local heritage have combined to alter intangible heritage resources. In response to this situation, all stakeholders must determine the value of their heritage and adopt measures that will allow the community to realistically deal with the pressures of tourism as well as the ongoing process of social change within the community.



- ▲ The addition of electrical boxes and other wires to the exterior of this colonial-era house diminishes the aesthetic and historic values of this property.
(Photo: Rik Pomme)

While it is beneficial to attempt to maintain and, in some cases, reintroduce lifestyles and skills in order to maintain the historical fabric of the community and to ensure an authentic experience for the tourist, there also must be recognition that the ultimate decision-makers are the people of Luang Prabang. If the community chooses not to retain aspects of cultural heritage or preserve built heritage they are free to make that decision. This decision needs to be an informed one however, and the Luang Prabang community must be made aware that if they choose not to follow UNESCO World Heritage guidelines for protecting the essence of the town, one of the consequences may be the delisting of Luang Prabang as a World Heritage site and the loss of Luang Prabang's attractiveness as a global tourism destination.

It is therefore necessary to facilitate the protection of Luang Prabang's heritage by putting into place a set of sustainable and realistic regulations and incentives and by fostering a sense of pride in the community's built heritage. Without such facilitation it is unrealistic to expect residents to choose to preserve built heritage.

Economy Since the revival of international tourism in Lao PDR in 1988, the country has rapidly gained an increasing share of the Asian tourism market – growing from 600 arrivals in that first year to 636,361 in 2003. According to the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) this number is expected to rise to 923,616 in 2005 (see Figure C.1).

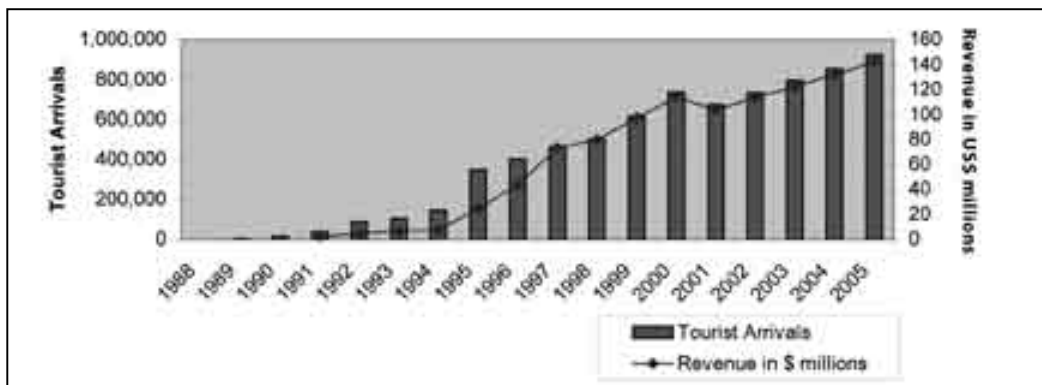


Figure C.1: Forecasted Visitor Arrivals to Lao PDR and Revenues.

Given this activity, tourism is an increasingly important contributor to the economy of Lao PDR. National tourism earnings are substantial, earning the Laotian economy US\$87 million in 2003.

Tourist arrival numbers in Luang Prabang have risen even more rapidly than the national rates. Statistics compiled by the Luang Prabang Provincial Tourism Office, indicate that the number of international (foreign) tourist arrivals has increased by over 300 per cent since 1995 (see Figure C.2).

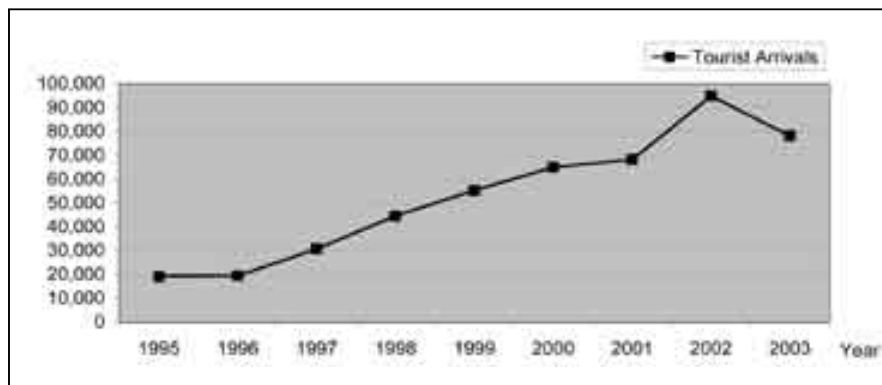


Figure C.2: Luang Prabang International Tourist Arrivals (Foreign Tourists) 1995-2003.

By using tourism as an economic development strategy, Luang Prabang is prospering within a national economy that is otherwise stagnant. Prior to the advent of tourism activity, the economic strategy pursued in Luang Prabang was based on the production of agricultural products. The growth in tourism-based industries, including the sale of handicrafts and other local products to visitors has presented local residents with new options and an alternative source of income.



▲ Luang Prabang women transporting goods to and from the market. (UNESCO file photo)

Although there is not yet an accounting system in place in Lao PDR to determine the economic effects of this new income source, there is no doubt that the financial returns from tourism activity are having an effect on the society. However, in the absence of baseline information and until professional economic development studies are carried out, it is very difficult to determine the overall economic benefit of tourism for the community. When considering the economic benefits of tourism however, it is important to remember that in developing economies a significant proportion of the money spent by tourists leaves the country in the form of economic leakages through foreign-owned businesses and outside tour operators.

Tourism and Employment



▲ People operating street stalls sell popular handicrafts, including jewellery, to tourists. (Photo: Rik Ponne)

One effect of the increase in tourism is the creation of new employment opportunities. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that in 2003 the employment generated by the travel and tourism industry nationally in Lao PDR was 145,500 jobs or 6 per cent of total employment. By 2013, it is expected that tourism will create 269,000 jobs or 9 per cent of total employment.

In Luang Prabang, a local government survey conducted in early 2000 found that the number of people employed directly in Luang Prabang's tourism industry was 1,950 or 5 per cent of the labour force. Direct employment in tourism is not the only type of employment that tourism brings, however. While official figures record the number of persons with salaried jobs in tourism agencies and related services, they do not, for example, take into account persons earning a living from handicraft production and restaurants or from construction jobs created by the demand for new tourist hotels or the expansion of the airport and other forms of transportation. Staff employed in new business ventures, such as internet cafés and souvenir shops that have opened recently in response to the increased number of visitors, are also missing from the figures.

It is obvious that the real impact of tourism in creating employment opportunities for local people is much greater than the government estimates. One indicator of the economic impact of tourism in Luang Prabang is the growing number of hotels and guesthouses, which has grown from 29 in 1997 to 135 in 2003. Another indicator is the number of people employed in various tourism-related sectors. According to the Luang Prabang Tourism Office, the accommodation sector, for example, employs 650 people of which 420 are women. The tour guiding sector employs 86 official guides but there are at least eight other unofficial guides. Likewise, the 65 restaurants and 21 travel agencies have numerous employees.

Diversification of the Local Economy

For communities such as those in and around Luang Prabang which have traditionally relied on agriculture, the emergence of tourism has provided many opportunities for economic diversification. While tourism is still not the main source of income for local residents, it offers an alternative or supplement to farming which, like tourism, can be an insecure livelihood, given that crop failures can devastate entire communities.

Many opportunities exist for enterprising residents in Luang Prabang. However, education in researching, establishing, and operating business ventures is crucial. Unfortunately it is already too late for some residents, who have sold their farms or homes to establish new tourism-related businesses. Failed attempts at new enterprises have proven devastating for some families who entered new markets with no experience and no extra collateral to rely upon.

It is already too late, also, for many residents who were unaware that the unpredictable and seasonal aspects of tourism could make it difficult for them to earn a year-round living from tourism activities. Too often entrepreneurs achieve satisfactory results with their businesses during high season but suffer from dramatic falls in income when tourist numbers decline in the low season or at times of political stress or regional outbreaks of disease, as occurred from 2001 to 2003. Finding alternative means of support during such down-times can be difficult, especially when families have sold other assets such as farms or other businesses.



- ▲ A taxi driver sleeps in his vehicle while waiting for tourists. During the low season many taxi drivers find it difficult to make a living.
(Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

While tourism numbers are affected by a variety of factors, including international conflict and disease outbreaks, the main predictable factor influencing variations in tourist numbers is the seasons, such as the rainy and dry times of year. Figure C.4 illustrates the influence of climate given that the November to February period has the coolest and driest weather. Popular festivals such as *pimai* in April also cause peaks to occur.

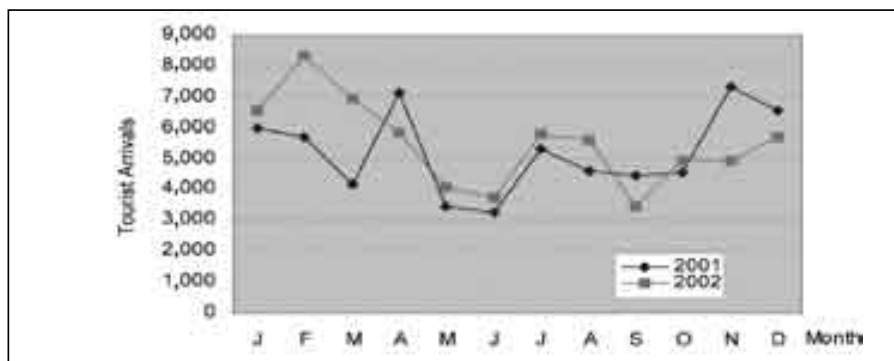


Figure C.4: Tourism Seasonal Variations in Luang Prabang

The handicrafts industry is one industry in Luang Prabang that has clearly benefited from tourism due to the fact that handicrafts are popular souvenir items and because the handicraft industry supplies articles to hotels and participates in the construction of tourist facilities. By raising the awareness of local handicrafts, tourism has also



▲ Women preparing bamboo material for weaving.
(UNESCO file photo)

helped to increase exports of handicrafts and associated marketing activity.

However, the growth of the handicraft industry and entrepreneurial activity in this sector - for example the creation of new souvenir products - does not necessarily bring benefits to local residents. Unfortunately for the local people, many entrepreneurial activities involve foreign investors or businesses from Vientiane and therefore the economic gain for Luang Prabang residents from such activities is minimal.

Locally-owned entrepreneurial handicraft businesses should be encouraged, and if the entire community is to benefit it is important to ensure that local residents are employed in these businesses and local materials are used. One example of an entrepreneurial activity which successfully utilizes local materials is a business which produces 'star lanterns'. These lanterns, which are sold at shops throughout Luang Prabang, are based on a traditional design and utilize locally produced *sa* paper and bamboo.



▲ Tourists outside one of the many travel agencies in Luang Prabang.
(Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

Currently no comprehensive post-secondary tourism instruction exists in Luang Prabang. It is therefore obvious that more resources need to be devoted to tourism education. The only course in tourism training offered locally is a short-term session held twice a year by the Luang Prabang Tourism Office in cooperation with the National Tourism Authority. Anyone wishing to study a full course at the post-secondary level in tourism must go to Vientiane or abroad, which is difficult for all but a few privileged individuals. Even if post-secondary education were available however, it would be difficult to access since less than 4 per cent of the population has completed secondary studies. Not even 1 per cent has reached upper secondary levels. Although over 90 per cent of the population has primary schooling, almost 20 per cent of the provincial population is considered illiterate.

Currently the inadequate access to secondary, tertiary and vocational education and training limits the ability of locals to take on more skilled and higher paying jobs in the tourism industry and limits their capability to develop their own tourism businesses and related livelihood opportunities. The recent completion of a university near the town of Luang Prabang, Souphanouvong University, the first major tertiary-level institution in northern Lao PDR, is the first step toward building the capacity of local residents to take up a wider range of employment options.

Prices and Affordability As tourist numbers have grown, demand for food in Luang Prabang has increased accordingly. This has resulted in an increase in the price of food in the town which, while being appreciated by provincial farmers, has adversely impacted on local residents, particularly the poor. Similarly, because tourists can afford to pay higher prices for consumer goods, the prices of those goods, already in short supply in the area, have been pushed to a level that is unaffordable for many. Furthermore, land prices have increased in the area as a result of tourist facility development, leaving many local people unable to afford to purchase land.

Tourism Revenues According to 2003 statistics from the National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR, 81 per cent of total tourism revenue in Lao PDR came from international tourists, whereas only 19 per cent was derived from intra-regional visitors. Not only does the bulk of tourism revenue come from overseas visitors, these visitors tend to spend more money per person per day (pppd) and stay longer. In 2003 intra-regional visitors spent around US\$26 pppd and stayed for three days on average, while international visitors spent US\$60 pppd and stayed an average of 6 days.



- ▲ Temples collect an entrance fee, providing a source of funds for the maintenance of temple buildings and also providing a local resident with a job.
(Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

Tourism development has therefore substantially increased the government's foreign exchange reserves, and has led to the injection of capital and new money into the local economy in Luang Prabang. The national government reinvests money back into the province of Luang Prabang, as evidenced through its involvement in projects such as road upgrading, wastewater treatment and street paving. These have been coordinated or funded by the Government of Lao PDR and also by conservation organizations, and donor governments. Projects by La Maison du Patrimoine, for example, have improved streetscapes and this organization has overseen the renovation and restoration of several buildings in Luang Prabang. Unfortunately however there is no direct correlation between the number of people visiting Luang Prabang and the amount of money that filters back into the community to fund heritage preservation or public services.

Tourism is seen as a very good earner for the Lao PDR Government through entry fees and other charges levied on visitors. According to studies undertaken in 2000 by the Department of Culture and Information, the total income from fees and donations at Luang Prabang's four main religious destinations (Vat Xieng Thong,



▲ Visitors at the lower Tham Ting cave.
(UNESCO file photo)

Vat Visoun, Vat Aham and That Chom Si) averaged US\$2,700 per month. Only a fraction of this income is reinvested in the site, however. Official reports indicate that only 20 per cent of this money (around \$540) was spent on heritage conservation. A further 20 per cent was spent on administration and the remainder was allocated to the Government.

In the case of the Tham Ting caves, where only 10 per cent of revenues, or \$1500, is reinvested every year, many tourists are voicing displeasure about the condition of the site. In this case reinvestment must be increased dramatically in order to ensure continued visits by tourists to the site. If deterioration continues and proper preservation does not occur tourists will simply stop visiting the caves. If such deterioration of sites occurs on a large scale it would affect the image of Luang Prabang and its attractiveness to its target market, which would obviously not be in the interests of the tourism industry of Luang Prabang.

Finding ways to reinvest local tourism revenue into heritage conservation, urban conservation and upgrading efforts is an area that requires further development. One means of ensuring local tourism revenue is redirected to fund conservation projects is to fund such efforts with provincial tax revenue. In addition, if more detailed information was made available on the income generated locally through taxation and foreign exchange, the local government would be better able to identify and fund areas that require special conservation assistance.

Review of Economic Issues and Impacts

There is a need to ensure that the actual economic impacts of tourism are understood and managed and that the benefits of tourism accrue to the local population. It is also important to ensure that tourism does not in fact constitute an overall negative economic impact on the community. Sound economic data and monitoring techniques are essential in making this happen.

While official job creation figures in the tourism sector appear to be strong, it is necessary to consider exactly what types of jobs are created through tourism in Luang Prabang and to consider who benefits from these jobs. Though employment opportunities have increased for local people, many of these jobs are low-paying and are unskilled or semi-skilled in nature. In addition, because of the limited educational opportunities locally, residents of Luang Prabang have few opportunities to gain more skills

and therefore higher-paid jobs. Moreover, business people from outside the province and the country represent a significant proportion of those profiting from high-return tourism investment projects.

Foreign exchange earnings are valuable to any destination but the challenge lies in keeping the money in Luang Prabang and not losing it to a foreign or externally-owned company or to the government coffers.

Given the currently small amount of reinvestment in heritage assets, greater amounts of government revenue from tourism industry entrance fees, income-taxes and other sources should be invested in heritage conservation in order to adequately maintain the heritage assets on which the tourism industry depends.

Environment Increasing population, rural to urban migration, rising density and rapidly changing lifestyles are at the heart of a number of environmental issues in Luang Prabang. Too often the environment is the ultimate victim of development and expansion. Growth pressures have seen Luang Prabang's boundaries encroach on untouched and cultivatable land and a growing population stretch infrastructure and services beyond their limits.



▲ The many waterfalls around Luang Prabang are beautiful and popular swimming spots.
(Photo: Rik Ponne)

If the natural heritage of Luang Prabang is destroyed, a vital element of community life will be lost forever. Already 70 per cent of the province's forests have been lost, mainly to slash and burn agriculture. In order to safeguard Luang Prabang's environment, targeted government policies are needed to control development and heighten community awareness of the importance of environmental concerns.

Rapid changes that place significant stress on the environment of Luang Prabang have been brought about by increased incomes, changing consumption patterns and an expansion in the range of economic activities available. But these changes are not necessarily all a result of the development of tourism in the town. Other industries and developments would place stress on the environment, even in the absence of tourism.

While tourism is not the only causal factor, tourism and associated development have definitely intensified environmental problems. Therefore, when determining the ideal pace and form of tourism development, the capacity of Luang Prabang's environment and ecological systems to sustainably accommodate an increasing

residential and tourist population must be considered. A number of increasingly alarming issues demonstrate the pressure on local carrying capacity as a result of tourism. These include waste disposal problems, increased traffic and pollution and the destruction of wetlands and waterways. These are by no means the only impacts but are seen as major issues that must be resolved.

Solid Waste Management



▲ The garbage collection truck makes its rounds. As tourists arrivals increase and local residents have more disposable income the amount of solid waste is growing significantly.
(Photo: Beatrice Kaldun)

Luang Prabang did not have a formal waste collection service until 1997, when a modern solid waste disposal system was put in place by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), funded by the Norwegian Government. Currently 33 out of 53 villages and most of the central town area receive collection services. Although the current waste disposal system is a vast improvement on the situation prior to 1997, the system is now reaching the limits of its ability to adequately perform its functions. Since its implementation, with increasing incomes and rising use of plastic and other packaging, the amount of solid waste collected in Luang Prabang has increased at a rapid rate, putting pressure on employees and equipment. In addition, the combination of insufficient equipment, poor roads and the likelihood of less revenue for more work means that outlying areas are unlikely to receive collection services in the near future. Unfortunately in villages where solid waste is not collected, rubbish is often burned or dumped in waterways.

Aspects of the waste management system also need improvement, as it does not provide a mechanism for recycling of waste and does not directly encourage waste minimization. Community education about reuse and waste minimization and exploration of recycling options could be ways to improve waste management in Luang Prabang.

It is important that the waste collection system is maintained and regularly upgraded in order to keep up with changes in Luang Prabang. It is clear that without a suitably funded and effective solid waste management system the impact of increased tourism and consumption in the community could lead to serious aesthetic and ecological impacts.

Traffic and Pollution



- ▲ Traffic conditions are continuing to get worse, with increasing congestion. With no division of parking or driving lanes, few signs, and no coordination between modes of transport (bus, car, bicycle, etc.), as traffic volume increases the situation on the road will become increasingly chaotic.

(Photo: Montira Horayangura Unakul)

The increase in motorized vehicles in Luang Prabang has been one of the most significant changes in the town. The congestion and chaos caused by this increase in traffic has brought to the forefront a serious debate on how traffic should be controlled. While one side calls for a reversion to a more historically authentic situation where all non-residential and non-emergency vehicles are banned, others argue that such restrictions will hinder development, suppress property values and force local populations out of the historic centre.

While the increase in traffic cannot be traced solely to tourism there is no doubt that tourism is seen as the major cause of what is becoming a major transportation and pollution issue. Certainly large buses outside hotels, taxis lining the main tourist routes and three wheeler 'tuk-tuks' are the consequence of tourism activity.

It is not only the ground traffic situation that has changed, air traffic is also increasing. With the opening of the international airport in Luang Prabang, planes now bring in the upper-end tourists, with up to seven arrivals a day. This is an important mode of transport given that embassies often issue warnings concerning travel between Vang Vieng and Luang Prabang, on the main road to Vientiane. Furthermore, with continued tourism growth, this greater transport capacity is required in order to cope with rising tourist numbers.

Aside from chaos and congestion, the increased traffic and uncoordinated transport system in the town has led to greater air pollution, with potentially damaging consequences for local ecosystems and community health. The traffic, particularly air traffic, has also caused noise pollution which diminishes the tranquility of the area and is disturbing for local residents.

These traffic and transportation impacts indicate a need for a broad-based planning process that seeks to find transportation solutions that are acceptable to all stakeholders.

Wetlands and Waterways



- ▲ Wetlands and waterways are at risk from pollution and building encroachment.

(Photo: John Koch-Schulte)



- ▲ Riverbanks are being eroded due to loss of vegetation on the banks and increased boating activity.

(UNESCO file photo)

The heritage zoning of Luang Prabang recognizes the unique cultural and natural aspects of this town, including the important wetlands and waterways. The wetlands aligned throughout the town are vital to the ecology of the flood-prone town. These ponds provide a vital retention capacity for excess water during the rainy season. They are also areas where local people cultivate vegetables and fish. Unfortunately, in spite of heritage regulations, in recent times some landowners have filled-in ponds to extend or construct new buildings thereby jeopardizing fragile ecosystems. Not all land reclamation is related to tourism but the majority of it is due to tourist-related construction or to increased incomes brought about by tourism.

Luang Prabang's wetlands and waterways are also being seriously damaged due to the dumping of raw sewage and other waste products, which in part can be traced to tourism. Guesthouses, restaurants and laundries generate substantial amounts of wastewater, which is not currently being adequately managed. The pollution caused by waste dumping and wastewater not only damages local ecological systems and reduces biodiversity but can make the wetlands breeding grounds for infectious disease. Dumping of waste into waterways also puts the town's freshwater resources in danger.

The waterways of Luang Prabang are also being impacted by the additional water traffic brought about by tourism activity. Currently over 500 boats ply the local rivers, transporting people and goods. Many of these boats are used primarily for transporting tourists. The boats cause significant noise pollution which is very disturbing for residents and is having an adverse effect on the nesting and mating habits of birds in the area. According to local residents the increased number of boats is also intensifying riverbank erosion.

A Maison du Patrimoine wetlands programme, supported by the European Commission, has focused on the preservation and rehabilitation of Luang Prabang's urban wetlands. The strategy deals with the prevention of pollution, not only through ensuring proper drainage techniques and the treatment of toxic wastes but also through local public education activities. The project seeks to demonstrate that protection of wetlands can enhance social development and generate new community resources.

Review of Environmental Issues and Impacts



▲ The number of boats on the river has grown as population and tourism increase in Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)

While tourism intensifies environmental problems in Luang Prabang, a number of factors exist to create or perpetuate these environmental problems in the first place. One such factor is the lack of public awareness of the environmental consequences of everyday actions. There is insufficient understanding, for example, about the ecological and health effects of disposal of waste and wastewater into wetlands and waterways. Another factor is the flawed solid waste management system that not only is not keeping pace with changes in the town but does not directly encourage waste minimization practices such as reuse and recycling. A further factor is the lack of effective government control and lack of enforcement of environmental regulations.

There is no doubt that without adequate and enforceable regulations dealing with waste, the transportation system and wetland and waterway issues, the environmental conditions in Luang Prabang will be seriously threatened in the future. The establishment of effective government controls (and enforcement thereof) is therefore a vital aspect of dealing with the environmental impacts of tourism. There is also a need for a community-wide educational effort to enable the local population to recognize the importance, for the tourism industry and for ecological reasons, of maintaining Luang Prabang's natural assets, and to recognize the growing demand among tourists for environmentally-friendly facilities. It is also important to focus attention on how the lifestyles and consumption patterns of the local residents affect the environment and what they can do to minimize their impact.

Society Social change is a dynamic process with numerous internal and external factors contributing to this change. In Luang Prabang it is difficult, but important, to isolate the impacts of tourism in a rapidly changing society. There can be no doubt that the people of the local community of Luang Prabang are both positively and negatively affected by their interaction with tourists and their observation of tourist behavior. Many residents of Luang Prabang link the increase in crime and drug abuse to the rise of tourism in the town and perceive that these will increase as tourism numbers grow. Tourism is not the only influence on Luang Prabang society, however. The behavior, speech and attire of community members are also influenced by Thai and Western music and Thai satellite television programmes.



▲ Young women in Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)



▲ These girls are dressed in the traditional dress of the various minority groups of the Luang Prabang region, as part of a cultural performance for tourists. (Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

It is also difficult to gauge whether overall changes in behavior or values are negative or positive. It very much depends on the perspective of the person doing the assessment and it can be argued fairly convincingly that for many people in the community the social changes are desirable. There remains a general optimism in both the community and government regarding the future of tourism. However, it may be only through careful sociological studies and community education that residents can be made aware of the true impacts of tourism on their society and can make informed decisions about whether they need to adopt more measured means of tourism development.

While yearly tourism targets are increasing, relatively little attention has been paid to the capacity of Luang Prabang to host increasingly larger numbers of visitors, in terms of water, sanitation, food and other basic services. Although there are plans to expand these capacities, the expansion is not keeping pace with the increase in visitors. Unless improvements are made, this shortfall in infrastructure and services will mean that the standard of public services throughout the town will decrease, lowering the community's standard of living, while increasing the cost of services, for visitors and residents alike.

Even more serious is the fact that no community-based dialogue has yet taken place in regard to the acceptable rate of social and cultural change in Luang Prabang. Likewise, little discussion has been carried out to determine an upper limit to the carrying capacity of the town's historic core and other popular areas. It is clear however, that some sites, such as the Pak Ou caves, have already reached their visitor capacity limits.

Luang Prabang as a Place to Live

It is important to remember that Luang Prabang is not just a tourist destination, it is the home of thousands of people. It is a place where people are born, grow up, have their own families and pass away and it is where people live, work, eat, socialize, attend school, worship and celebrate. Luang Prabang is, first and foremost, a living and evolving community exposed to all the opportunities and threats that the global environment presents.



▲ Local residents preparing food for the monks at their village temple.
(Photo: Rik Ponne)

Today, the familiar tasks of everyday life – offering alms at dawn, celebrating the birth of a child, planting a garden, weaving fabric, building a house – are assuming new meaning given their value as part of the community’s tourism product. The traditional culture of Luang Prabang is no longer the private and exclusive domain of the local community. Local inhabitants are now not the only ones experiencing their own heritage as this experience is now being sold to tourists.

It is important that the community understands the social impacts of having their culture and way of life viewed and sold as a commodity, so that they are able to make informed decisions as to how to manage the impact this has on their society.



▲ A spirit house located in a family’s garden in Luang Prabang. Offerings such as flowers and fruit are given to the *phi* (spirits).
(UNESCO file photo)

The community must also be made aware that attempts to present their culture in an authentic way brings with it pressure to freeze the social development of the community. However any attempt to freeze the community is inappropriate and must be avoided. Such an attempt can be illustrated by the episode during the *pimai* festival several years ago, in which barriers were erected at the street parades to deny entry to young Laotian girls not dressed in traditional dress. Such episodes can be regarded as negative impacts of poorly considered tourism policies. Given present-day values in Luang Prabang, it is difficult to determine how relevant the traditional style of dress is for young people in the community. Encouraging traditional dress is acceptable as a means of strengthening community pride in their customs and heritage but insisting that residents dress in traditional ways for special occasions in order to meet the demands of tourism belittles the choices of residents and disregards the evolving nature of culture. Furthermore, such insistence does not necessarily make the occasion more authentic. Unless the traditional style of dress and other cultural traditions are relevant to people’s modern lives, insistence upon them may degrade Luang Prabang and turn it into a kind of theme park.

It is important to develop approaches that allow the community to continue to grow and evolve while maintaining important dimensions of their culture. Maintaining aspects of culture is necessary both for the social well-being of the inhabitants and to preserve the basis on which tourism and associated livelihood opportunities depend. Of course, the only people who can determine the optimal balance between modernization and maintenance of cultural traditions are the residents



- ▲ After the monks have eaten, the community members who were involved in preparing the food gather to share a meal at the temple. (Photo: Rik Ponne)

themselves. Experts and advisors can provide them with alternatives and guidance but the decision is a community one.

It is instructive to note that with the onset of new regulations designed to protect local heritage and promote tourism, often developed by outsiders, some local inhabitants are voicing dissatisfaction. They feel that their needs and views are being overlooked and that regulations work against their interests. For example, zoning regulations and the differential applications of building codes and business licensing, although necessary to protect the historic precinct, make it more advantageous to operate outside the protected areas, and are forcing businesses out of the historic zone. On the other hand, there is growing understanding within the community of the link between heritage preservation and future economic well-being and of the ways in which businesses can be adapted to conform to heritage protection regulations.

Religious Community



- ▲ The early morning *binthabat* ceremony in which laypeople donate rice to the monks and earn merit. Here, tourists are participating in the ritual. (Photo: Beatrice Kaldun)

The religious community has experienced both positive and negative effects of tourism in Luang Prabang. On the positive side, because a high proportion of tourists visit Luang Prabang specifically to see the temples there is now greater community pride in their religion. And as a result of this strengthened pride, greater efforts are being made to preserve religious sites. Vat Xieng Thong, for example, is one of the most visited sites in Luang Prabang and a proportion of the entrance fees paid by tourists is retained by the temple and used to maintain the site and strengthen the religious community.

Unfortunately, tourism has eroded some aspects of religion in Luang Prabang. Some enterprising residents have commercialized the religious *baci* and *binthabat* ceremonies. The *baci* ceremony is traditionally performed for many occasions, including welcoming guests, and many tour operators are now performing the ceremony for tourists. Similarly, it is very common to see tourists participating in the *binthabat* ceremony, causing concern in the religious community that their tradition of making merit is being compromised.



Another consequence of tourism is that many monks now want to learn English and other languages in order to help them find work in the tourist industry. This has had the negative effect of a decline in the study of traditional subjects, as they are being dropped in favour of language courses.

Community members need to determine if their religious rituals are something they are willing to share with tourists and at the same time they also need to be made aware of the expectations and motivations of tourists in order to avoid resentment among residents of tourist activities and behaviour.

◀ Novice monks making decorations for a religious festival.
(Photo: Pattarapong Kongvijit)

Review of Social Issues and Impacts



Understanding and managing social change in the community is a very difficult and complex process. The challenge is how to preserve and present cultural heritage without having adverse impacts on the social development of the residents.

Baseline studies need to be undertaken that will allow the community to trace changes in social values and behaviours and better assess the impact of tourism. With this information the community can then determine what aspects of its heritage it wishes to preserve and the measures for carrying this out as well as the levels of acceptable intervention in order to meet tourism objectives.

▲ A local woman cutting up sugarcane for sale. Sugarcane has a number of uses. Apart from being eaten, as this child is doing, the juice can be extracted and is a popular drink in Luang Prabang. Also, the sugar derived from the cane is used in making traditional lime plaster.
(Photo: Rik Ponne)





D. DESIGNING A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR TOURISM IN LUANG PRABANG

The discussion in Section C of the impacts of tourism within the context of heritage conservation illustrates the need for a strategic approach to managing tourism in Luang Prabang. Section D suggests a plan for managing tourism in Luang Prabang in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner and explains why the development of a management strategy focused on protection of Luang Prabang's cultural and natural heritage will maximize the benefits while minimizing the negative impacts of tourism.

EXISTING TOURISM MANAGEMENT

This section illustrates why an improved tourism management strategy is necessary in Luang Prabang and also identifies the possible barriers to successful and sustainable tourism development.

The Need for Planning and for a Tourism Management Strategy

The experience of tourism to date in Luang Prabang has clearly demonstrated that strategic planning and sound management are crucial if optimal outcomes are to be achieved. The current lack of comprehensive planning, ad hoc construction and emphasis on capital investment has not always led to benefits for the community as a whole. Lack of effective management will cause problems to spiral out of control in the future.

Not only are planning and better management necessary, but it is also vital that there is active community participation in such processes. The Luang Prabang community must be given both access to information and the opportunity to contribute in the planning and management processes.

As part of these processes the Luang Prabang community must decide what their ultimate goals are and therefore what kind of tourism they want to promote in their town. The people of Luang Prabang need to determine if the current style of tourism development, which concentrates on infrastructure construction and on attracting a significant number of tourists, is appropriate in terms of their long-term goals. While some individuals in the community have benefited from tourism, so far most returns generated from investment in tourism in Luang Prabang have disproportionately benefited outsiders.



▲ Tourists visiting Vat Xieng Thong. (UNESCO file photo)

Photo captions

1. Monks participating in the early-morning *binthabat* ceremony. (Photo: UNESCO Project team)
2. Agricultural workers planting rice in a rice paddy. (Photo: Rik Ponne)
3. This woman is making *mak beng* from banana leaves. These conically-shaped votives are usually adorned with flowers such as *dok khout* (marigolds) and are presented in temples or shrines as offerings to the Buddha or to the spirits. (Photo: Rik Ponne)
4. Market display of locally grown vegetables. A variety of popular vegetables can be seen here, including chili, ginger, eggplants, mint and tomatoes. (UNESCO file photo)



▲ Tourists consulting a guidebook at one of Luang Prabang's many temples. (UNESCO file photo)

Given a choice, the Luang Prabang community may well choose to focus on sustainable use of their natural, cultural and built heritage assets rather than to continue indefinitely with the expansion of mass-market tourism. Because tourism does not necessarily have to be on a large scale to bring benefits to the community, an emphasis on small-scale tourism may help to keep the issues of heritage and environmental protection to a manageable scale.

Whatever the differences of opinion within the community, all stakeholders have a common interest in protecting their place of residence and preserving the resources that make Luang Prabang a unique and appealing tourism destination. And whatever style of tourism development they choose, the residents of Luang Prabang must endeavour to manage their town in such a way that Luang Prabang will continue to be viable in the long term both as a residence and a destination.

Once the Luang Prabang community has identified and agreed what their ultimate goals are, it is important that the community develops a tourism development plan for the town that leads to the realization of those goals and minimizes the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing the benefits. The plan should include a management strategy which outlines actions to be taken by government and donor agencies, special-interest and conservation organizations and members of the local community.

Through the efforts of UNESCO's Local Effort and Preservation (LEAP) programme and the associated UNESCO project on Culture, Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation Among Stakeholders Project, a preliminary action plan has been developed by local stakeholders in Luang Prabang and is employed in the Management Strategies section of this document. These management strategies are directed at those responsible for destination management in Luang Prabang and also at managers of other heritage sites, who can learn from Luang Prabang's experience.

Recognizing Barriers to Sustainable Tourism

An important starting point for any successful management strategy has to be the identification of the barriers that face the community in tourism development. In Luang Prabang these include:

- inadequate organization of the tourism industry
- lack of government programmes targeted at the informal sector
- lack of credit for starting up small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

- cumbersome regulations and red tape
- lack of education and training
- imbalance of power and lack of knowledge, including inadequate access to tourism market information.

The management strategies that are eventually developed for Luang Prabang must take these barriers into account.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT MODELS

This section discusses destination management models and outlines a general strategic framework for Luang Prabang, with five dimensions.

There have been few destination management models that meet the needs of the Asian and Pacific context or have dealt with the particular challenges of a historic town and World Heritage site such as Luang Prabang. Also, few of the models typically used by the tourism industry are designed to deal with the nature of the barriers identified in Luang Prabang, as outlined above. At a conference held at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok in November 2000, the subject of sustainable community tourism destination management of historic sites was carefully considered and the dimensions that should be included in any plan were agreed-upon.

As illustrated in Figure D.1 it is generally agreed that a strategic framework for destination management should have five main dimensions as follows:

- Stakeholder Identification and Organization
- Tourism Planning
- Product Development
- Management Strategies
- Monitoring and Evaluation.



Figure D.1: Dimensions of a Destination Management Strategy.

IDENTIFYING AND ORGANIZING STAKEHOLDERS

This section identifies the major stakeholder groups in Luang Prabang and discusses the important factors involved when organizing stakeholders.

Stakeholder participation and effective stakeholder organization are critical to the success of the management process. In the past there have been a number of tourism development projects in Luang Prabang that have not met their objectives because not all stakeholders were included or consulted in a comprehensive and appropriate manner.

There needs to be a process put into place to ensure that all stakeholders in Luang Prabang are able to participate in effecting direction and change in the community.

Identifying the Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders in Luang Prabang, each with an interest in the future of tourism development in the town and with a role in shaping that development.

Analysis of the community in Luang Prabang makes it clear that the following stakeholders must be involved in any process to develop a strategy for sustainable tourism.

Local Residents

Local residents of Luang Prabang are important stakeholders but are often under-represented in meetings and decision-making. As explained in Part I, Luang Prabang is in fact an agglomeration of many different villages (*ban*). The leaders of each village must be included in the planning and management processes. Other important leaders amongst the local residents are the monks, elders, teachers, scholars and artisans. It is important that residents and indeed all stakeholder groups, are aware, informed and educated in order to be able to actively participate and be part of the decision-making process. For this reason, information must be freely available to all.



◀ Local residents dressed in traditional clothes for a special occasion, pose for a photograph beside the Mekong River.
(Photo: Pattarapong Kongwijit)

Buddhist Sangha

The monks are an important group in Luang Prabang, with specific concerns relating to culture, society and heritage. Because of the cultural role played by the Buddhist temples in defining the cultural heritage assets of Luang Prabang, monks must be included in all consultations, not only as participants, but as leaders of the community consultation process. Monks have traditionally played such a leadership role and validating this traditional role in a modern context will ensure that the resulting tourism

development plan and management strategies will be culturally appropriate and socially sustainable.

Target Beneficiaries Women, youth, ethnic minorities and other groups which have not yet benefited from tourism in Luang Prabang must also have the opportunity to contribute to the planning and management processes so that they can share in the benefits of tourism development.

Private Sector The private sector comprises owners and operators of tour companies, resorts, hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, handicraft stores, souvenir stores and numerous other business enterprises. Also in this group are those entrepreneurs who would like to establish tourism-related businesses but have not yet had the opportunity to do so. The table below lists three types of tourism-related businesses operating in Luang Prabang and the number of operators in each category.

Luang Prabang Tourism Businesses (2003)

Type of tourism business		Number of operators
Tour operators		21
Accommodation	Basic	123
	Middle - upper end	12
Restaurants		65

Government It is important that there is close coordination between local, regional and national legislative and political structures. In Luang Prabang there are a number of government agencies and offices which are all stakeholders in tourism development, including:



▲ The Luang Prabang Travel and Tour office, one of the stakeholders in tourism development in Luang Prabang.
(Photo: UNESCO file photo)

- The Luang Prabang Provincial Tourism Office. This office is responsible for statistics and information management, product development, site improvement, training, licensing and supervision of the Tourism Product and Service Providers' Association.
- The Luang Prabang Department of Information and Culture is responsible for the promotion and preservation of Lao culture. It oversees the activities of the National Museum of Luang Prabang and the School of Fine Arts. The Department also directs the Children's Cultural Centre and the UNESCO-supported Cultural Survival and Revival temple arts training project.
- The responsibility of the Luang Prabang Department of Industry and Handicrafts is to provide handicraft



▲ Agricultural workers in Luang Prabang.
(Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook)

training, marketing and quality control. They work alongside the Lao Women's Union on many projects.

- The Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry offices have a mandate to eradicate slash-and-burn agriculture in Luang Prabang province by 2010. They are interested in tourism as it is seen as a revenue-generating alternative for villages which are currently dependent on slash-and-burn agriculture.
- The Luang Prabang Rural Development Directive Committee is charged with improving the living conditions of local people through development activities. Although the committee has been skeptical of tourism's potential for bringing money to rural villages, nonetheless projects are underway for village ecotourism projects in villages close to Luang Prabang.

Special-Interest Groups There are a number of special-interest organizations in Luang Prabang that have an interest in tourism development. The organizations range from rural development entities, to groups concerned with conservation of natural or cultural heritage (such as La Maison du Patrimoine), to community and religious organizations such as the Women's Council, the Youth Association, Council of Head Abbots (*satu nyai*) and village temple associations.

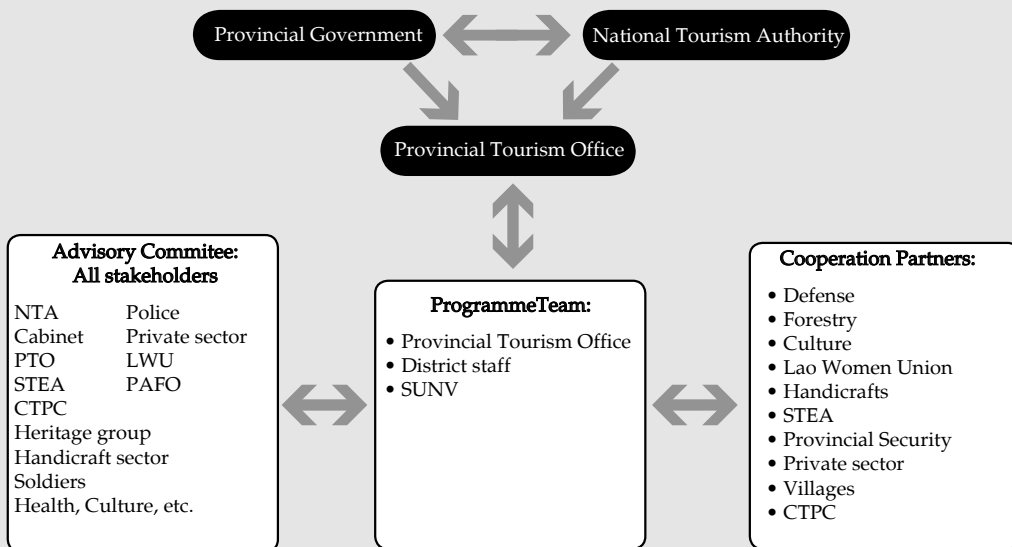
Development Agencies Development and donor agencies have a large presence in Luang Prabang and are involved to varying degrees in supporting a linkage between tourism and community development initiatives. These agencies contribute project funding or technical assistance for both physical development projects such as infrastructure upgrades as well as social development projects such as micro-credit schemes.

Organization of Stakeholders Stakeholders must be organized so that everyone's voice can be heard. In Luang Prabang, one way of approaching this would be to establish a council (or committee) to address tourism issues. Alternatively, an existing community body could be assigned this additional responsibility. Through this council the people of Luang Prabang would have a platform from which they could work together on issues of common concern.

This council must have an efficient management structure if it is to be effective. Within the council it is important to have mechanisms to ensure effective communication and understanding within and between stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Organization for SUNV Community-based Sustainable Tourism Programme.

The Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) project (in cooperation with the UN Volunteers Programme - together forming SUNV) in Luang Prabang, the 'Community-Based Sustainable Tourism Programme', is an example of a project in which there has been comprehensive stakeholder organization. At their meetings between 27 and 37 stakeholders were in attendance from all sectors and relevant organizations. The diagram below provides an illustration of the SUNV programme's implementation organizational structure.



CTPC: Communications, Transport, Post and Construction sector
 LWU: Lao Women's Union
 PAFO: Provincial Office of Agriculture and Forestry
 PTO: Provincial Tourism Office
 STEA: Science, Technology and Environment Agency

Through the council, public-private partnerships can be brokered. The council would benefit every stakeholder group by bringing together many different sets of ideas and points of view and various kinds of contributions.

Setting up the council structure involves the following tasks:

- identify membership of the council
- identify roles and tasks within the council
- create an innovative and inclusive organizational mechanism
- determine how information will be managed and disseminated
- determine how team decisions will be made.



UNESCO Culture, Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation Among Stakeholders Project

The UNESCO Culture, Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation Among Stakeholders project is a process designed to create sustainable tourism industries in historic towns, implemented with the participation of eight test pilot sites. Luang Prabang is one of these pilot sites.

The project focuses on facilitating dialogue between the tourism industry and those responsible for the conservation and maintenance of cultural heritage properties. The project addresses how heritage preservation and tourism development activities can simultaneously create new livelihood opportunities and aims to form mutually-beneficial alliances that are both economically profitable and socially acceptable to local inhabitants and other stakeholders.

Having completed surveys and workshops, the Luang Prabang team - consisting of representatives from all stakeholder groups including government, conservation, tourism and the community at large - are working on specific projects that are aimed towards a more heritage-friendly, community-based tourism industry, in which the benefits of tourism are retained by the local community. That community is also responsible for ensuring the sustainability of the industry.

The project has had five phases. In Phase I the test sites were identified and on-site analytical studies of both the tourism and heritage sectors were conducted at each of these sites. In Phase II, Action Plans were also drawn up at the community level at each of the pilot sites. These plans were designed to address the problematic issues of communication and coordination between the tourism and heritage sectors and to enable sustainable tourism. During Phase III, these Action Plans were under experimental implementation at each test site. During Phase IV a workshop was held in Lijiang, during which four 'Models for Cooperation' were constructed based on the outcomes and analysis of the results of implementation of the Action Plans in each of the eight pilot sites. Phase V involved evaluating the eight pilot sites in terms of what benefits the project had brought them. At the same time, the lessons learned from the pilot sites were reviewed and the Models for Cooperation were transformed into action-based policy that is applicable and replicable throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

For more information please refer to www.unescobkk.org/culture/tourism

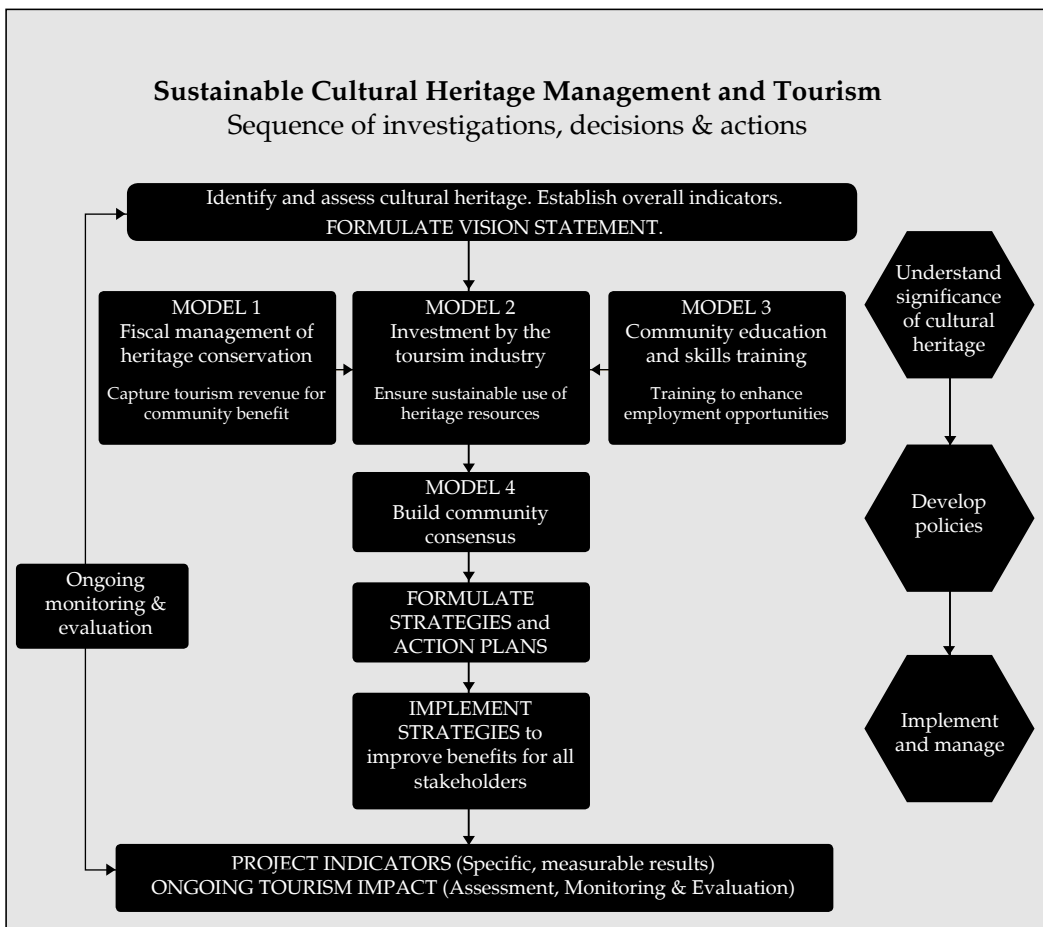
Stakeholder Cooperation Models

Stakeholder organization and cooperation are necessary so that all community members and others with an interest in tourism development in Luang Prabang have the opportunity to influence the planning and management processes. UNESCO's 'Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation among Stakeholders' project attempts to concretely address this need and has developed a set of models which aim to open and structure avenues of communication between the tourism industry and those responsible for the conservation and maintenance of cultural heritage properties.

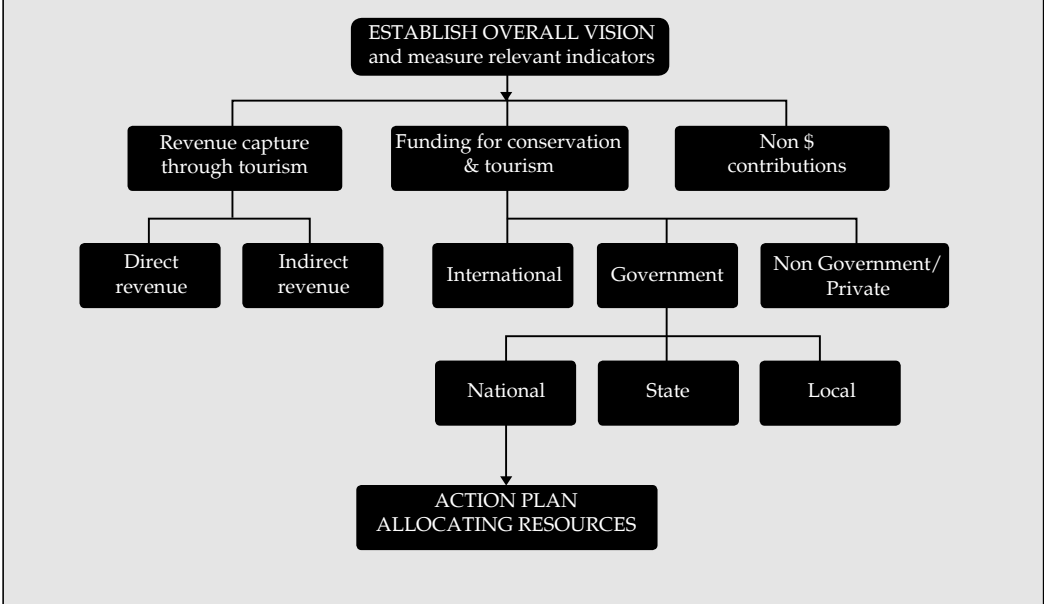
The box on page 84 provides more information about the UNESCO Models for Cooperation Among Stakeholders project.

Models for stakeholder cooperation:

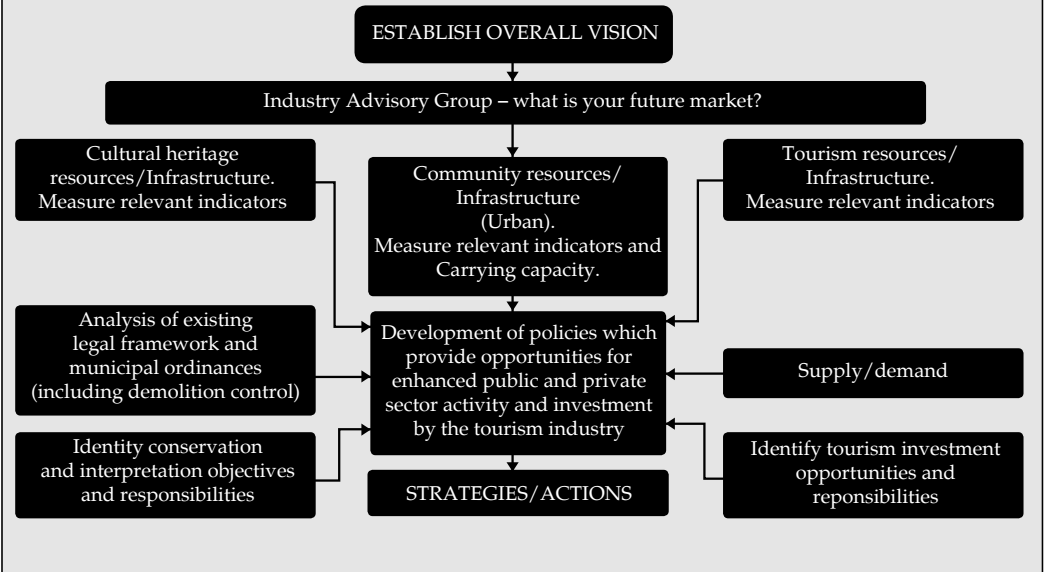
The models for stakeholder cooperation provide an operational strategy for developing tourism sustainably. Four specific models have been identified by UNESCO, along with a general model (see pages 86-88). The linkages between the four models are expressed in the diagram below.



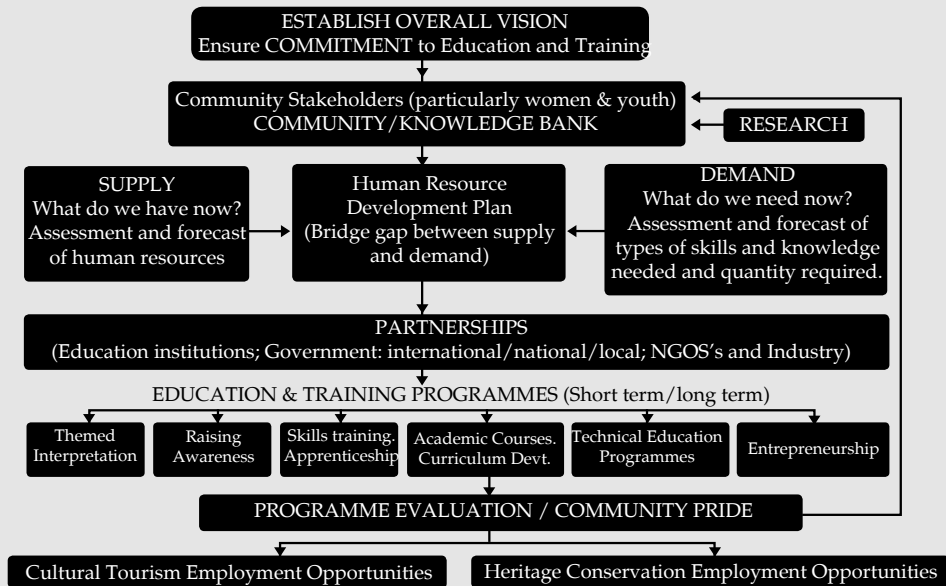
Model 1: Models for Fiscal Management for Heritage Conservation, maintenance and development at the Municipal level - achieved through analysing current income generating mechanisms and identifying and utilizing new opportunities



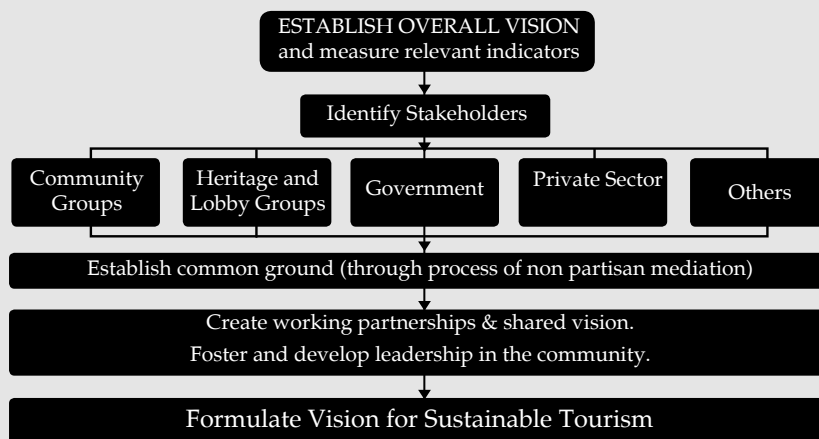
Model 2: Models for investment by the tourism industry in the sustainability of the cultural heritage resource base and supporting infrastructure - achieved by educating tourists and tourism operators about the value of cultural heritage and formulating means by which the tourism industry can contribute to preservation activities.

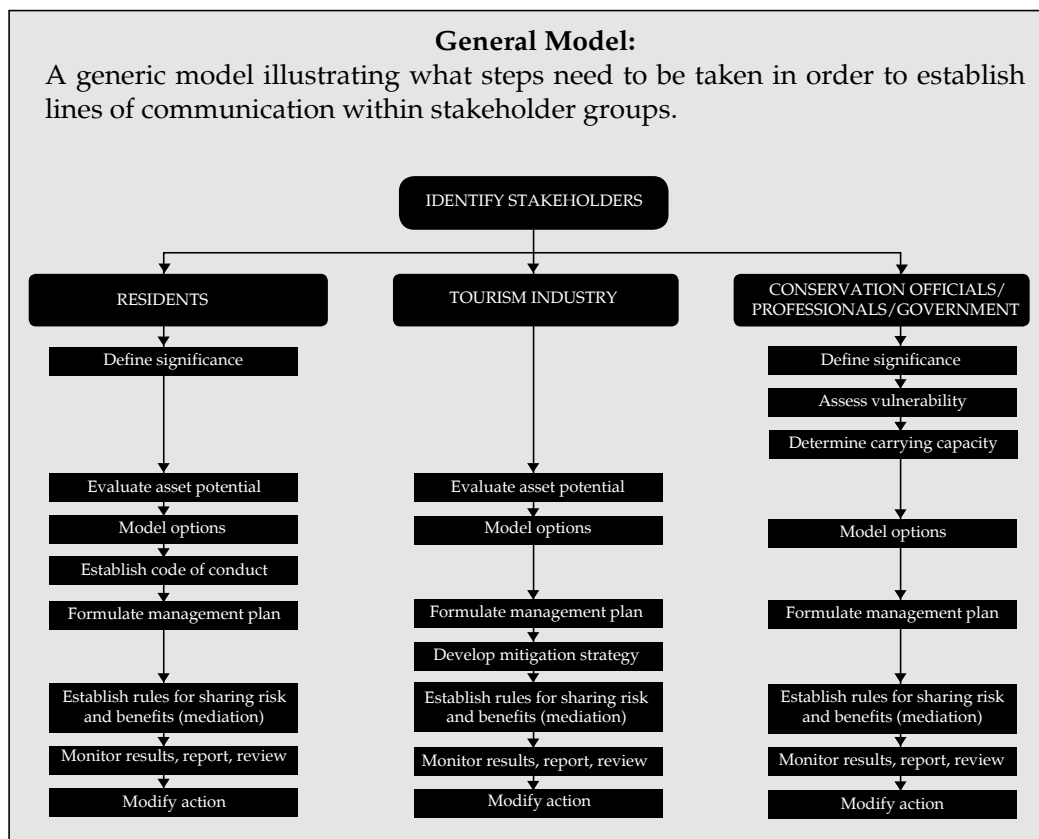


Model 3: Models for community education and skills training leading to employment in the heritage conservation and culture tourism sector, with emphasis on opportunities for women and youth - achieved by identifying equipment applications and training needs and designing programmes to meet these needs. Such a strategy would involve facilitating partnerships between the tourism industry (hotels, tour and transport companies, etc) and government so as to identify and fund training in tourism and heritage-conservation skills.



Model 4: Models for consensus building (conflict resolution) among tourism promoters, Government agencies, property developers, local residents and heritage conservationists - achieved by encouraging group participation in the formulation of case studies and activity implementation, and by providing a venue where all stakeholders can raise and discuss their concerns.





TOURISM PLANNING This section discusses the need for a strategic tourism planning approach in Luang Prabang and outlines two major steps: to prepare a vision statement and to define the overall community goal and objectives.

The complexity of tourism systems makes planning vital but also difficult. The character of the process should be dynamic and needs to be adaptable to the needs and concerns of Luang Prabang's many stakeholders.

In strategic destination planning it is essential that the disparate activities related to tourism in Luang Prabang be linked to a broad strategic tourism plan that provides an integrated framework for directing tourism.

A strategic planning approach should include:

- a long-term perspective
- a clear vision
- specific goals, actions, and an identification of the resources necessary to achieve these goals
- participation of all stakeholders and communication and cooperation between them.

Preparing a Vision Statement



▲ A local woman and baby at the handicrafts market in Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)

The first task of the proposed tourism council (or committee) referred to earlier should be to prepare a vision statement. Given the complexity and dynamism of tourism, a clear vision statement is crucial in order to ensure activities remain on track and are consistent with the Luang Prabang community's development goals.

In preparing a vision statement, the people of Luang Prabang should map out their values, aspirations and desires for the future. The vision statement should express what the community hopes to obtain as a result of the development of tourism in Luang Prabang.

Broad-based participation of all stakeholders, through such means as open community meetings and stakeholder working groups and forums, is critical to create a comprehensive statement of the community's vision for Luang Prabang.

Luang Prabang stakeholders need to answer fundamental questions in order to define what their shared vision is. Some key questions include:

- What is, or should be, the identity of Luang Prabang? How should the city describe itself?
- What changes need to be made in order for Luang Prabang's assets to be protected and developed in the direction desired by the community?
- What issues face the community and how are these issues likely to affect the future development of Luang Prabang's identity?
- Which issues are most pressing and should be tackled as a priority?
- Who should be the main beneficiaries of tourism in Luang Prabang?
- How will the benefits of tourism development be directed toward these chosen beneficiaries?

A possible vision statement is presented in the box on page 90.

Defining Goals and Objectives

Following the completion of a vision statement for Luang Prabang, an overall goal must be developed which summarizes the community's vision. Based on this goal, a series of objectives can then be developed. A possible goal and set of objectives are presented in the box on page 92.

Possible Vision Statement for Luang Prabang



▲ Residents of Luang Prabang gathered together on the bank of the Mekong River to celebrate the *pimai* festival.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

Luang Prabang has been known throughout Southeast Asia for centuries as a centre of natural serenity, Buddhist learning, beautiful temples and fine temple crafts. In light of tourism growth, the people of Luang Prabang recognize the opportunities that tourism brings and will utilize these opportunities to raise standards of living for everyone in the community. We will utilize the benefits that tourism brings to further renew local cultural and spiritual traditions so that these may survive intact and sustain community identity for future generations.

The community and people of Luang Prabang recognize that Luang Prabang's World Heritage status brings with it a responsibility to the people of the world and to future generations, to protect and preserve the valuable heritage of the town.

The community and people of Luang Prabang acknowledge that the conservation of our cultural heritage is allied to the long-term success of tourism development in Luang Prabang. Tourism in Luang Prabang is built upon the town's unique tangible and intangible heritage assets and maintaining these cultural and natural resources in an authentic way is of utmost importance to the residents of this town now and in the future.

Tourism development cannot be permitted to exceed the physical limits of Luang Prabang nor to interfere with the historic fabric of our society. Tourism should complement, not compromise, the city.

By regulating and guiding tourism development, the people of Luang Prabang will retain control of our community and economy, creating new opportunities for all sectors of society including the disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, women, youth and elderly persons.

All residents of Luang Prabang will have access to the opportunities afforded by tourism and should play pivotal roles in the planning and implementing of management processes. Tourism businesses should offer education and training opportunities for the people of Luang Prabang.

While looking to new economic opportunities through tourism businesses, the community and people of Luang Prabang recognize the value of maintaining our traditional ways of life and the uniqueness of our town's local culture and traditions. Cooperation between all stakeholders will ensure the benefits of tourism are maximized in Luang Prabang and strengthen cultural and traditional practices.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

This section discusses tourism product development in Luang Prabang and proposes several product diversification options and ways in which product authenticity can be maintained.

Luang Prabang as a Tourism Product



▲ The *sim* at Vat Xieng Thong, one of Luang Prabang's most visited temples.
(Photo: Richard Engelhardt)

Each destination has its own unique resource mix and should market itself in a way that reflects its values, needs and preferences. Luang Prabang, like other destinations, can in this way be viewed as a "product". However, approaching a destination as a product does *not* mean all its resources that appeal to tourists should be developed. Rather, *only* those resources which provide the community with sustainable livelihoods should be developed. Control must be exercised to prevent developments that do not benefit the community or that cause undesirable impacts. In World Heritage historic towns such as Luang Prabang, this process is more complex than with other forms of product development since tourism planners and managers must deal in the most sensitive ways possible with fragile and irreplaceable cultural and natural heritage resources.

The Existing Luang Prabang Tourism Market



▲ Tourists sightseeing aboard a boat on the Mekong river.
(Photo: Richard Engelhardt)

In 2003, 78,129 foreign tourists visited Luang Prabang. This equates to approximately 214 per day though given that most tourists visit during the high season (January to April), it is estimated that during the peak season there are as many as 400 visitors per day in Luang Prabang, a substantial number with a potentially high negative impact, considering the small size of the historic area of the town.

According to results from a survey by the Netherlands Development Organization, the average age of tourists is 32-33 years old with 49 per cent of tourists being over the age of 30. Females comprise approximately 57 per cent of tourists, while 43 per cent are male. 86 per cent of visitors are first-time visitors, of whom 95 per cent express the desire to visit Luang Prabang again.

Possible Overall Goal

The goal of the Luang Prabang community is to harness the economic power of tourism so as to improve the quality of life of all residents, particularly the poor, while ensuring the sustainability of the unique cultural and natural heritage resources upon which we depend and the protection of the spiritual traditions which sustain community identity.

Possible Tourism Management Objectives

Luang Prabang's serenity and charm, and the distinctive cultural practices and spectacular natural setting on which tourism in Luang Prabang depends, must be protected.

Tourism must not exceed the carrying capacity of Luang Prabang, in terms of both its environment and society, and tourist numbers must not exceed the limits of individual sites to accommodate them.

Tourism should not be detrimental to the traditional ways of life and livelihoods of Luang Prabang's inhabitants or to the cultural and religious institutions and buildings that underpin community identity and stability.

Tourism should contribute to community development and improved quality of life of residents, including those people living in the historic district, and particularly of underprivileged groups.

Tourism-business development should directly address the employment and social needs of the residents of Luang Prabang, in particular the needs of women, youth and ethnic minorities.

Luang Prabang residents should be assisted through education and on-the-job training so that they can establish business opportunities and take leadership positions in the tourism industry.

Survival of cultural and natural heritage should be facilitated through educational schemes which train Luang Prabang residents in the skills required for heritage protection, management and maintenance.

The heritage of Luang Prabang should be presented and interpreted authentically, with an emphasis on the involvement of the community, including the Buddhist *sangha*, in presenting that heritage.

Tourism should be managed such that visitors understand and contribute to the needs and goals of the residents of Luang Prabang and in particular that visitors respect the beliefs, property and privacy of residents and conform to local modes of behaviour.

In 2001 most international visitors to Luang Prabang were from Europe, accounting for 53 per cent of the total. The share of visitors from Asia and the Pacific was 28 per cent, the Americas 13 per cent, and Africa and the Middle East 5 per cent. These percentages are illustrated in figure D.3 below.

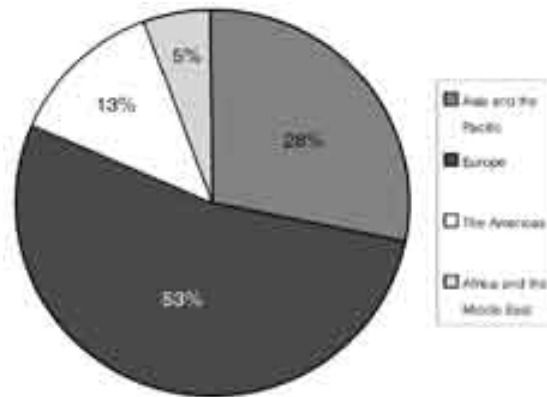
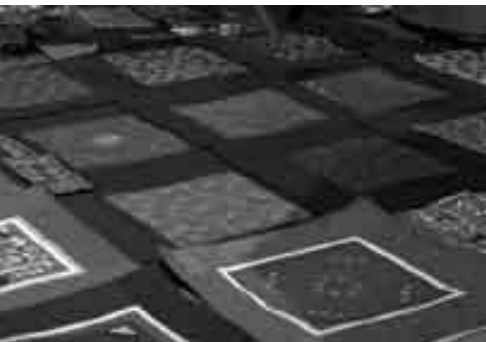


Figure D.3: International visitor arrivals to Luang Prabang, 2001.

Identifying the Preferred Market

If tourism development is to be successful, Luang Prabang's tourism plan must accurately identify the market that matches its heritage resources. Once the market is identified, tourism planners can focus more effectively on how best to develop tourism in the town, keeping in mind the necessity to remain true to the vision statement and community goals.



- ▲ Authentic designs and traditional skills have been used to create modern items that are popular with tourists, such as these cushion covers – on display at the market in Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)

It is important that tourism management is flexible. While traditional products may be viable for a time, fashions and tastes change over time which may lead to a requirement to alter these products. For example, while some handicraft items may currently be popular, these may not always be fashionable or may become too common and therefore decline in popularity. It is important therefore that the stakeholders understand the motivations and expectations of visitors to Luang Prabang and how those expectations may change. Tourism managers should regularly survey tourists who come to Luang Prabang and maintain a database of tourism trends in order to clearly understand how to best meet visitor expectations.

Product Diversification and Authenticity

The various natural and cultural resources of Luang Prabang should be investigated to determine which can be developed and which should *not* be developed for tourism purposes. These decisions should be based on the goal and objectives set by the Luang Prabang community,

and based on the careful consideration of whether the use of these resources for tourism contributes to providing sustainable livelihoods for the local community, without causing disruption to cultural traditions or damaging the social fabric of the community and the environment.

Similarly, product diversification possibilities should be examined with the community's goals in mind. Tourism managers must bear in mind that when dealing with complex, living religious and cultural traditions, as in Luang Prabang, not all heritage resources are appropriate for development as tourism products.

Some products and marketing strategies which could be considered by tourism managers are listed below.

- Agriculture: Farm Tours.

Luang Prabang remains a largely agricultural society and agro-tourism is becoming a popular niche market that has attracted popularity. Tours to local farms could be organized with demonstrations of farming techniques and samplings of food and produce. This would enable farmers to earn added income through tourism and would assist tourists in gaining an understanding of the importance of agriculture in the Lao PDR economy. At the same time, however, it is important that these tours do not become artificial. Tourists usually prefer to encounter real farms rather than model-farms. Also, these tours need to be organized effectively so as not to disrupt the farmers' activities and need to be timed in such a way as to fit in with agricultural cycles.

Furthermore, since the current popularity of such tours may not continue, those people engaged in providing these tours must be aware of the potential for demand to decline and have alternative employment options planned in case of such a change.

- Handicrafts: Demonstrations.

Arts and handicraft-making demonstrations by artists and craftspeople is an interesting and educational experience for tourists and may induce them to make purchases that they would not have otherwise made. Luang Prabang has a rich tradition of handicraft making and should develop this potential to its fullest. Demonstrations can be done in villages, government centres, private factories and shops.



▲ A woman works in her vegetable garden on the riverbank.
(UNESCO file photo)



▲ Villagers in Ban Chan, demonstrating how they make large pots. Villagers could also demonstrate the making of items that tourists buy (souvenirs), such as bowls and plates.
(Photo: Rik Ponne)

As discussed above in reference to farm tours, demonstrations should not interfere with handicraft production or the normal activities of artisans. In order to ensure minimal impact such demonstrations would need to be well-planned and organized.

- Cultural events: Tourist attractions.

Lao cultural events such as religious and seasonal festivals, art fairs, and dance, music and drama events can be significant attractions for both residents and tourists in Luang Prabang. Cultural events provide an important means for reviving and focusing interest on the preservation of the local cultural expressions that otherwise might be forgotten and lost. Cultural events can also become a source of regular employment for musicians and dancers.

There is however, an inherent danger in treating cultural events as tourist attractions. The authenticity of such events should not be compromised. The issue of authenticity is elaborated further below.



▲ Luang Prabang residents and tourists engaging in the *baci* ceremony. (UNESCO file photo)

Maintaining Product Authenticity

Having established which of Luang Prabang's resources have the potential to be developed into products for tourism and having ensured that the use of those resources is in keeping with the community's goals, it is important to make certain that the quality and authenticity of tourism products are maintained. This consideration is especially important for heritage 'products' such as temples and traditional performances which have ritual origins that give them their significance.

Cultural Events

As discussed earlier, when traditional cultural events or performances are developed into tourism products their value and meaning can be jeopardized. If cultural activities are not conducted according to traditional practices this can lessen their significance and compromise authentic cultural expression. To avoid this, Luang Prabang residents should determine which events and activities they are willing to share with tourists, how the authenticity of those events can be maintained and what methods can be used to explain them to visitors. To uphold authenticity, festivals can be kept on a small scale, for example, and regulations could prevent any alterations for tourism purposes. Alternatively, residents can choose to retain religious festivals for local enjoyment only and not market this resource to tourists.



▲ The *pimai* parade, going past the Luang Prabang National Museum. (Photo:Richard Engelhardt)

Built Heritage



- ▲ Monks using traditional gilding techniques to decorate a temple pillar. Such authentic and traditional methods are taught to monks in Luang Prabang through the UNESCO 'Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha' project. (Photo: David A. Feingold and UNESCO Project team)



- ▲ This colonial-era building has been converted for use as a guesthouse. (UNESCO file photo)

As mentioned in Section C when describing the impacts of tourism on built heritage, recent renovations of temples and other buildings in Luang Prabang have often lacked authenticity in terms of materials and techniques used. If Luang Prabang's built heritage is to continue to retain its cultural and aesthetic value, temples need to be maintained using authentic and traditional materials and methods. Likewise, if residents wish to continue to attract tourists to the town's historic architecture, secular heritage buildings must be maintained in an authentic manner.

As described on page 43, the office of La Maison du Patrimoine (the Heritage House) in Luang Prabang acts as a public advisory service on issues of heritage conservation and seeks to ensure that restoration work is carried out in accordance with World Heritage regulations. Unfortunately regulations and restrictions are not always complied with.

The UNESCO 'Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha' project, described in the box on page 97, is a project that ensures that temple restorations and maintenance will be carried out in an authentic manner in future. This project aims to revive traditional building skills and revitalize the traditional role of monks as custodians of Luang Prabang's cultural heritage, thereby safeguarding that cultural heritage for the benefit of both the local community and tourists and at the same time providing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods for residents.

Another UNESCO initiative which promotes authenticity in restoration work is the Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation. This programme encourages and rewards appropriate and authentic conservation and restoration of buildings by private individuals or by public-private partnerships. This recognition of excellence in conservation work provides the public with examples of what is possible and aims to inspire further restoration projects.

Some of the award-winning projects demonstrate not only best practice in the restoration of buildings, but how best to adapt buildings for reuse. For example, projects have involved the sensitive conversion of residential buildings into guesthouses. Such projects are useful as models for the restoration and adaptive reuse of houses, government buildings and shops in Luang Prabang.

The box on page 98 provides more information about the Heritage Awards programme.

UNESCO Project: Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha



- ▲ Monks learn traditional woodcarving and other skills as part of the Cultural Survival and Revival project.

(Photo: Monks project team)



- ▲ A monk learning to use gilding techniques on lacquerware. Bowls such as this are used in temples to present offerings to the Buddha.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

Launched in 2000, the project 'Cultural Survival and Revival in the Buddhist Sangha' is an innovative response to the problem of heritage conservation and the preservation of traditional arts. Initiated jointly by UNESCO, the Department of Information and Culture of Luang Prabang and the Laotian Buddhist *sangha*, with support from the Government of Norway, the project addresses the urgent need to revive the tradition of teaching temple arts and building crafts to monks and novices within the Theravadan Buddhist *sangha*. Such a revival of these traditions is necessary in order to assure the survival and continued social and economic relevance of the traditional system of fine arts and building crafts apprenticeship among the monks and novices. This project aims to ensure that the temples, which are the most important component of the Luang Prabang World Heritage Site, are authentically conserved and maintain their didactic, social and cultural functions as the centres and anchors of the communities in which they are located.

The goals of this project are to build capacity within the Buddhist *sangha* to undertake or upgrade such teaching and to embed the foundations for community-led management within the *sangha* in order to preserve intangible culture at the community level.

Phase I of the project has made great strides in reinvigorating the teaching of the traditional Buddhist arts and crafts such as woodcarving, gold stenciling and bronze casting within the Luang Prabang *sangha*, and the project has become a model for replication in other parts of Lao PDR. Monks and novices trained under the project are a new generation of artists and craftsmen who will be the caretakers of their Buddhist heritage and are now working together with communities to repair and restore temples in and around Luang Prabang and throughout northern Lao PDR.

From 2004, Phase II of the project builds on the skills reinvigorated by Phase I to build further capacity and encourage self-sustaining community management in Luang Prabang. Phase II will also, over three years, expand the project to other centres of Theravada and Vajrayana Buddhism. First to other places in Lao PDR such as Champasak and Vientiane, and then beyond Lao PDR to other Buddhist centres in Asia.

More information can be found at www.unescobkk.org/culture/monksproject

UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation



▲ Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (The Blue House) in Penang, Malaysia. The winner of the 'Most Excellent Project' Award in 2000, the inaugural year of the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation. As well as being restored, this mansion was adapted for use for owner-hosted homestays. (Photo: Cheong Fatt Tze project submission)

The Heritage Awards programme, now in its fifth year, recognizes the achievements of individuals and organizations within the private sector, and public-private initiatives, in successfully restoring structures of heritage value in the Asia-Pacific region.

The programme draws large numbers of entries every year from across the Asia-Pacific region. Eligible entries involve buildings more than 50 years old, including houses, commercial, cultural, religious, industrial or institutional buildings, gardens and bridges, which were restored within the last ten years. Public-private partnership projects such as historic towns, urban quarters and rural settlements where the essential elements are over 50 years old, are also eligible.

Entries are judged on the extent to which they demonstrate excellence in their understanding of the issues of conservation in relation to the cultural, social, historical and architectural significance of the building, employment of appropriate building and artisan techniques as well as use of appropriate materials. The degree to which the entries have contributed to the cultural and historical continuum of the community is a deciding factor in the judging.

Awards have gone to a range of types of projects, including the restoration of Wat Sratong Temple in Ban Bua, Thailand, Polsheer House in Isfahan, Iran, the National Archives Building in Jakarta, Indonesia; Jin Lan Tea House in Kunming, China and the Hoi An Town Preservation Cooperation project in Viet Nam.

Some projects have involved not only restoration of buildings but also their sensitive adaptation for reuse. The Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion in Penang, Malaysia, for example, formerly a residential building, is now used for owner-hosted homestays.

Many of the award-winning projects have set technical and social benchmarks for conservation in the region, while acting as catalysts for local preservation activity. Over the years, the projects submitted for the Heritage Awards programme have illustrated the increasing momentum and level of conservation in Asia and the Pacific.

More information can be found at www.unescobbk.org/culture/heritageawards

Traditional Handicrafts



- ▲ Tourists can find a variety of handicrafts for sale at the markets in Luang Prabang. (UNESCO file photo)



- ▲ Handicraft items on display at the Luang Prabang market. While such products, styles and designs are currently popular, handicraft makers need to be alert to changes in taste and fashion and, while maintaining product authenticity and quality, be able to adapt to variations in the market. (UNESCO file photo)

Luang Prabang has many locally-made handicraft products, including baskets, traditional silk cloth, Hmong embroidery and silver craft-work, which have the potential to meet tourist demands and some are available for sale to tourists. However, numerous imported handicrafts are also for sale, competing with local products and undermining the benefits that local artists and craftworkers are able to derive from tourism. The presence of these imports (from neighbouring countries) indicates a need for authorities in Luang Prabang to promote local products and discourage or ban the sale of imported handicrafts and other non-authentic, non-local 'souvenirs'.

In addition, it is vital for producers in Luang Prabang to improve the quality and maintain the uniqueness of locally-made handicrafts and to encourage the development of new, innovative products. Traditional skills in lacquer-ware, bronze casting and woodcarving could be put to use to create a range of unique and interesting items for sale.

It is important, also, that local handicrafts be authentic. That is, they must utilize traditional techniques, motifs, and local materials. To ensure authenticity of arts and handicrafts, an effective technique used by governments in some destinations is to establish comprehensive quality standards, inspect all handicrafts submitted to them and identify those items that meet the standards with a stamp or certification. Such certification of the authenticity and quality of craft production should be adopted in Luang Prabang.

The UNESCO 'Seal of Excellence for Handicraft Products in Asia' is an example of a means of recognizing, certifying and promoting quality handicrafts. The 'Seal of Excellence' seeks to encourage the production and sale of excellent, authentic handicrafts which express local traditions and cultural identity and are produced in an environmentally responsible manner.

The box on page 100 provides more information about the Seal of Excellence.

Performing Arts

Certification could also be extended to master artistes such as dancers and musicians. Professionals such as carpenters and chefs could also be licensed. In this way the value of the products of these people would be enhanced.

The establishment by governments of a 'Living Human Treasures' system is another means of safeguarding heritage and of ensuring its authenticity. The UNESCO

UNESCO Seal of Excellence for Handicraft Products in Southeast Asia

Since 2000, UNESCO along with the ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (AHPADA), have recognized quality handicraft products from ASEAN countries with the Seal of Excellence for Handicraft Products in Southeast Asia (SEAL). The purpose of the SEAL is to serve as a quality control mechanism and marketing device for the promotion of handmade, traditional, authentic and innovative craft products that conform to rigorous standards and to enhance international awareness of these excellent handicrafts.

Handicraft products can be submitted by any craft producer and are judged annually by a panel of experts to determine how well they meet the cultural, environmental and production (quality control and authenticity) standards. This judging process takes place annually and the five criteria which products must meet are as follows:

- Demonstrated excellence and standard-setting quality in craftsmanship.
- A creative and successful alliance of traditional skills and innovation in material, form or design.
- Expression of cultural identity and traditional aesthetic value.
- Respect for the environment in materials and production techniques.
- Marketability of the craft products and potential for the world market.

Products are given a rating for each of the criteria. Those products which receive ratings above a certain level are certified as meeting the standards and therefore receive the SEAL. This certification can then be used to promote the authenticity and quality of those products and product lines. In addition, all products with the SEAL are exhibited at trade fairs and are featured on the Handicraft Product Electronic Database website, which assists producers in raising awareness of SEAL products and accepts sales orders (www.ahpada.com).

Feedback is given to all producers on the products they have submitted which assists them in improving their products in terms of the criteria. Also, producers of products which receive the SEAL are encouraged to attend training workshops, conducted by UNESCO and AHPADA, to improve their skills in areas such as design and marketing of products.

More information can be found at www.unescobkk.org/culture/craftseal



- ▲ This certificate demonstrates that this silver bowl, similar to those produced in Luang Prabang, meets the quality criteria under the 'Seal of Excellence' and has been created in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.



- ▲ This cushion, made of traditional Lao fabric, has been certified as meeting the 'Seal of Excellence' criteria.



▲ Young women in local dress, performing a traditional dance.
(Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

initiative of Living Human Treasures systems protects intangible heritage by recognizing and supporting those people (artistes and craftspeople) who embody the traditional skills and knowledge that are necessary for the creation of cultural expressions (such as performing arts and handicrafts) and ensuring that the bearers of the heritage continue to acquire further knowledge and skills and transmit them to future generations.

In parallel to the process of establishing systems of Living Human Treasures, UNESCO has undertaken other initiatives to help raise awareness of the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its authenticity. One such initiative is the 'UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World', which seeks to preserve musical heritage. Music from Luang Prabang is part of that collection.

Tourist Establishments and Tours

Tourist activities and the establishments that service tourists in Luang Prabang should be licensed. The system of licensing can be used to monitor and encourage accuracy and authenticity. Making licenses renewable on a regular basis will enable the establishment and maintenance of service standards.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

This section discusses some of the factors to be considered when managing Luang Prabang as a destination and looks at the factors involved in managing the town's heritage sites and other tourism products. This section also identifies a number of action strategies.

Destination Management

Once the stakeholders of Luang Prabang have developed plans and identified tourist products, they need to develop management policies and procedures to ensure the ongoing attractiveness of the destination and the enhancement and protection of the local culture and environment.

Management Issues

Stakeholders need to discuss a number of specific issues relating to the interface between culture, heritage and tourism in order to determine what actions need to be taken in Luang Prabang. Questions include:

- What exactly do the people of Luang Prabang value about their heritage and what do they wish to retain of that heritage?

By determining the value of different aspects of their heritage stakeholders can determine which features of the heritage on which to concentrate preservation efforts.



- ▲ Intricately carved and gilded temple exterior. Stakeholders must decide how best to preserve such heritage and how to fund heritage preservation. (Photo: Rik Ponne)



- ▲ Young novice monks building a boat from bamboo in preparation for a festival. (UNESCO file photo)

- How should the community best preserve and promote Luang Prabang's heritage resources?

Stakeholders must agree on how to best preserve Luang Prabang's tangible and intangible heritage - the signature of Luang Prabang's tourism - for future generations. There should also be consensus on how heritage can be promoted in a sustainable way.

- How can heritage preservation in Luang Prabang be better funded?

Lack of funding is an ongoing constraint in the preservation of Luang Prabang's heritage. Stakeholders need to explore whether the government could establish more partnerships with international organizations and private sector groups in order to obtain funding assistance for heritage preservation and skills training. Similarly, stakeholders must explore how tourism operators can be encouraged to take a leading role in financing of heritage preservation as a way of demonstrating their commitment to the preservation of Luang Prabang. Tourism operators could be required, for example, to donate a percentage of their revenues to a heritage preservation fund.

- How much should be reinvested into heritage upkeep in Luang Prabang?

The quantity of investment in heritage upkeep must be agreed upon. For example, it needs to be established whether government regulations could be altered to allow a much larger part of temple entrance fees to be retained by the *sangha* and used specifically for the upkeep of the temples. It should also be established whether this amount should be a flat rate or an amount proportional to the number of tourists visiting each temple. The important point, however, is that tourism clearly *must* contribute to the maintenance of Luang Prabang's heritage.

Having reached stakeholder agreement concerning the above questions, and having established as far as possible what the social, cultural and environmental carrying capacity of the town is (through conducting impact assessments); action strategies must then be developed.

Heritage Appreciation



▲ Today temples are sometimes not treated with the respect they were given in the past. (Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

If tourism is to continue to bring benefits to Luang Prabang and if the residents of Luang Prabang wish to have sustainable development, then the town's built heritage, one of the main attractions of the town and therefore one of its most important resources, must be well managed and preserved.

Heritage can only be well managed and preserved when the community values that heritage. If historic buildings are not valued and relevant to the lives of residents it is difficult to motivate the community to preserve them.

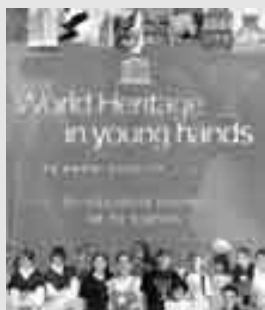
An important aspect of destination management, therefore, is to raise public awareness of the value of their built heritage. Managers will need to develop action-plans and educational strategies that provide residents with an understanding of the special features of their vernacular architecture and construction techniques and thereby build appreciation of and pride in that heritage.

At the same time, residents need to be informed that tourism development in their town can only bring sustainable benefits if built heritage is conserved. It perhaps needs to be made clear to many residents that one of the main reasons that tourists come to their town is because Luang Prabang is special and it features old, historic buildings that are a product of the particular cultural and artistic qualities of Luang Prabang society.

Another means of raising awareness and fostering heritage appreciation is to encourage full participation of the community in the tourism management process. By becoming part of this process and being involved in decision-making, community members of Luang Prabang will be exposed to the issues surrounding built heritage and can share their existing heritage knowledge.

Given the importance of safeguarding the heritage of Luang Prabang for the town's identity, its future development and for a sustainable tourism industry, education about the value and significance of cultural, built and natural heritage needs to be integrated into school curricula so that the future decision-makers of Luang Prabang become aware of the threats to their heritage and become equipped with the knowledge required for the management of that heritage. The UNESCO World Heritage Education project addresses this need directly and has developed resources such as the 'World Heritage in Young Hands' Educational Resource Kit to assist in educating youth and communities about World Heritage. The box below discusses the World Heritage Education project in more detail.

World Heritage Education



- ▲ The 'World Heritage in Young Hands' Educational Resource Kit, produced by UNESCO and ASPnet in 1999.



- ▲ The report from the 2000 Sukhothai 'World Heritage in Young Southeast Asian Hands' workshop.



- ▲ The report from the 2001 Vigan workshop on 'Introducing the Arts for Teaching on the Historic Environment'.

Coordinated by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the World Heritage Education project is designed to encourage and enable tomorrow's decision-makers to participate in World Heritage conservation, and aims to mobilize youth to respond to the continuing threats facing the survival of cultural and natural heritage. Under this programme, students learn about: World Heritage sites, the history and traditions of their own and other cultures, ecology and the importance of protecting cultural and biological diversity. The project also aims to develop effective educational approaches and teaching materials by creating a synergy among educators and heritage conservation experts in order to incorporate World Heritage education into school curricula and encourage extra-curricula activities within the community.

The Project is carried out in schools and training institutions active within the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet). Recognizing the importance of the role of teachers in achieving the goals of the World Heritage Education Project, UNESCO and ASPnet produced the World Heritage Educational Resource Kit, entitled 'World Heritage in Young Hands', in 1999. This Kit proposes activities and provides teachers with useful guidelines in developing innovative approaches for teaching about World Heritage. The World Heritage in Young Hands Kit has been distributed worldwide and is gradually being implemented by teachers in ASPnet affiliated schools.

The UNESCO Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific has sponsored two sub-regional activities, in Southeast Asia, to introduce and disseminate the Educational Resource Kit. The first was a workshop held in Sukhothai, Thailand in February 2000, entitled 'World Heritage in Young Southeast Asian Hands', which brought together experts in education and heritage from across Southeast Asia to evaluate the Kit and draw up plans for its implementation in their respective countries. The second workshop, held in Vigan, Philippines in December 2001 and entitled 'Introducing the Arts for Teaching on the Historic Environment', brought together many of the participants of the first workshop and focused on innovative teaching approaches and in particular on using the creative arts as a tool for teaching about World Heritage. These workshops have been effective in prompting action at a national level and were the first step in the sub-region towards the goal of mainstreaming World Heritage Education in school curricula.

For more information please refer to:
<http://whc.unesco.org/education/sindex.htm>

Action Strategies Action strategies need to be pursued in Luang Prabang in the areas of carrying capacity and heritage preservation; enhancing socio-economic well-being; and environmental conservation.

Addressing Carrying Capacity and Preserving Heritage Action strategies for ensuring that Luang Prabang's carrying capacities are never exceeded and heritage is preserved should include establishing limitations on:



▲ Vat Nong, one of the beautiful temples located in the historic sector of Luang Prabang.
(UNESCO file photo)

- both the number and the timing of visitors at each attraction. (Visitors to religious sites, for example, should not be allowed to disrupt times of religious rituals or meditation)
- the number and size of vehicles in the historic precinct
- the number of flights into Luang Prabang
- the scale of hotel development
- the number of hotel beds available in the town
- the number, size and operating hours of restaurants.
- the use of buildings within the historic part of Luang Prabang. Decisions need to be made regarding the optimal mix of commercial, residential, religious and community use of these buildings. Religious and community use should be given priority, followed by a judicious mix of visitor and commercial use.

Enhancing Socio-economic Well-being Action strategies in regard to social and economic issues could include:

- Increasing community education and participation.

Unless community members have an opportunity to improve their skills they will not be able to move into higher-paid positions in the developing tourism industry in Luang Prabang. It is important therefore that training and education are essential elements in any tourism development plan. Such training and education are one means to build the capacity of Luang Prabang's population.

In some cases capacity building can be of a modest nature but in other instances considerable work has to be done in order to ensure the full and effective participation of certain segments of society. The participation in this case is not only in decision-making and management but also in benefiting from the economic returns of tourism.



▲ Children cycling down the main street of the historic area of Luang Prabang. Exploring by bicycle is a pleasant way to see Luang Prabang's built heritage.
(Photo: Ricardo Favis)

- Informing the public of employment options in the local tourism industry.

Establishing public awareness programmes to make Luang Prabang residents aware of employment options available to them would enable local residents to be in a better position to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by tourism.

- Reserving employment opportunities for local people.

Stipulation that certain jobs such as crafts work, performing arts and tourism management positions are reserved either exclusively or in large part for people from the Luang Prabang Province would enhance the ability of local people to retain the benefits of tourism in the town.

- Encouraging locally-owned and operated businesses and establishing limits on the numbers or relative share of businesses in the historic precinct that are owned and operated by non-locals.

Such limitations would ensure that the residents of Luang Prabang are not disadvantaged by their relative lack of wealth and capacity to establish tourism-related businesses.

- Informing the Luang Prabang public of the risks associated with tourism businesses.

Providing information and education on the risks associated with tourism businesses would avoid the unwise abandonment of traditional means of income generation, such as farming. Those involved in tourism-related businesses should also be informed of the need to secure alternative jobs that can tide them over during low season.



▲ A busy internet cafe in the main street of Luang Prabang. In recent years many internet cafes have opened in areas of Luang Prabang frequented by tourists.
(Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

Improving Environmental Conditions and Quality of Life

A major task for Luang Prabang is to ensure that the physical surroundings are improved and the environmental resources of the town are protected. These improvements must address the following factors:

- solid waste disposal
- sewage disposal
- water supply
- drainage
- roads
- electric power
- telecommunications.

In order to address and manage these factors in Luang Prabang a number of actions are possible:

- Addressing waste issues.

Much can be done on a local government level to address waste management issues in Luang Prabang. In the case of solid waste for example, currently garbage collection fees are insufficient to cover the management costs. Centralized fees for collecting solid waste from businesses, such as hotels, restaurants and marketplaces, could be established to cover costs. In addition, reuse measures and recycling operations should be seriously encouraged to reduce waste (and costs).

Aside from government-led measures to deal with waste issues, there also need to be efforts made on the part of local tourist businesses. A document produced by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) entitled *A Manual for Water and Waste Management: What the Tourism Industry Can Do to Improve its Performance* suggests a number of action strategies that individual businesses, such as hotels, can follow in order to introduce waste and wastewater management measures.

- Traffic limitations in the historic centre.

In order to deal with increasing traffic volumes, traffic in the historic centre of Luang Prabang could be limited or banned for a trial period. Such restrictions would allow residents and merchants the opportunity to experience a pedestrian zone as well as assessing whether non-motorized vehicles could be a viable alternative.

- Zoning and building codes.

Enforcement of zoning regulations in Luang Prabang and the implementation of building codes which specify the use of local materials, would assist in preventing ad hoc construction and inappropriate developments. A building permit system that encapsulates heavy tariffs on the use of imported and modern materials, including cement, could be used to subsidize the higher costs of traditional materials.

- Raising environmental awareness.

Unless there is greater awareness of the need for natural heritage conservation in Luang Prabang, there will be little opportunity for tourism development to



▲ Traffic jams, once unheard of in Luang Prabang, are becoming more common. (Photo: Rik Ponne)



▲ A large electricity pylon obscures this temple in Luang Prabang and diminishes the aesthetic and heritage value of the site. (Photo: Rik Ponne)



- ▲ Plans exist for the opening of a wetlands information centre, at which residents and visitors can learn about the value of wetlands and about wetlands-related environmental issues. (Photo: John Koch-Schulte)

occur sustainably. Providing programmes to increase environmental awareness and providing education explaining the effects of environmental degradation on human health and quality of life would enable more informed decision-making about environmental issues.

- Waterway protection and agency training.

The strict enforcement of environmental regulations is essential to ensure the protection of waterways and natural habitat in Luang Prabang. In order to ensure enforcement the agencies in charge must be properly trained, informed and empowered.

- Community environmental ‘watchdog’ programmes.

The establishment of community programmes to report incidences of environmental pollution would enable better enforcement of environmental regulations in Luang Prabang.

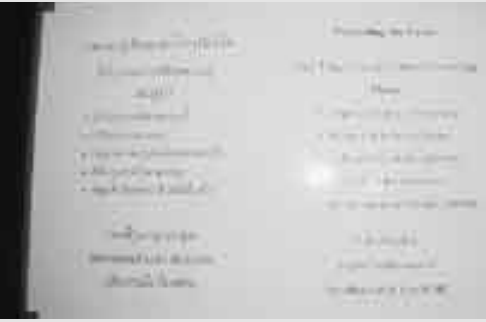
Interpretation in Luang Prabang

An effective visitor education, or interpretation, strategy needs to be developed in Luang Prabang in order to ensure that tourist impacts on built and cultural heritage are minimized. Stakeholders (through a mechanism such as the proposed ‘tourism council’) will need to identify themes, objectives and messages which tourists are to be educated about. Part of the educational content should include information on local customs and codes of conduct, which will help to guide visitors’ behaviour while they stay in Luang Prabang. Ongoing monitoring of interpretive programmes will help to evaluate their successes and areas for improvement.

The concept of interpretation is discussed in greater detail in the box below.

Interpretation

One of the main reasons for inscribing historic sites onto the UNESCO World Heritage List is to ensure that people continue to have the opportunity to learn about the past from these places and are therefore better equipped to mould their future. Viewed in this way, Luang Prabang can be seen as more than a tourist destination, it is a unique area preserved to facilitate the exchange of knowledge. Luang Prabang is an educational resource, like a book, which provides information both for the local community and for visitors. To utilize this educational potential, planners and stakeholders must provide visitors with the means to learn from their experiences in Luang Prabang.



- ▲ Recent restoration works in Tham Ting cave have also included the installation of interpretive signage. (Photo: John Koch-Sculte)



- ▲ These tourists outside the Tham Ting caves are perhaps unaware that they are dressed inappropriately for such an important religious site. Interpretive signage explaining cultural dress codes, displayed at key points in the town, would assist in informing tourists of appropriate forms of clothing at religious sites. (UNESCO file photo)

If the visitor is to learn about and appreciate the heritage of Luang Prabang, the value and meaning of that heritage must be accurately presented and explained. Interpretation is a means of presenting and explaining, which seeks to emphasise the most significant aspects of a site in an engaging and inspiring way. Interpretation can be provided through skilled guides, informative brochures and signage providing background and explanatory information, as well as through exhibitions and demonstrations. Currently, interpretation and development of interpretive skills and techniques has not yet reached its full potential in Luang Prabang. Many of the interpretive materials in existence have been developed by outside sources, are uncoordinated and are not always accurate. Posters such as the one on page 110, if prominently displayed in Luang Prabang's guesthouses and travel agencies, could be an effective way of informing tourists about cultural norms and acceptable codes of behaviour.

International tourists have a tendency to associate UNESCO World Heritage sites with history and knowledge. Recent research has shown that most international visitors to Luang Prabang are primarily motivated to visit the area by the prospect of learning about its heritage. Presently however, because interpretation in Luang Prabang is underdeveloped, many visitors are unaware of the significance and value of what they are seeing. For example, while wandering the delightful streets they are not provided with information explaining the various characteristics and history of local buildings and why they are worth preserving. Similarly, when participating in *binthabat* many tourists are unaware of the significance of the ceremony to the religious community. This may lead to very superficial visitor experiences where little knowledge is transferred from the people of Luang Prabang to the visitor. Unfortunately it also often follows that visitors who lack knowledge and understanding of a site do not treat the site and its local culture with the respect deserved.

The role of interpretation is crucial in ensuring greater cross-cultural understanding and thereby preventing the cultural heritage of Luang Prabang from being negatively impacted by the existence of tourism. For example, if the Laotian cultural reasons for wearing modest clothing are explained to tourists, these tourists are more likely to be sympathetic and follow local dress-code guidelines.

Luang Prabang, World Heritage Town

Please respect the following principles, so we can receive you happily as our guests:



ທິດຈຸດນັກບາດານ, ຜົວເມັດສາວ ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດ
 Respect the monks and nuns, women are not
 allowed to touch them



ໃນທີ່ສາວ ຫມັດບໍ່ໃຫ້ ສາວສາວສາວສາວ, ນາຍ
 ບໍ່ມີເສັ້ນເປົາເປົາ, ສາວສາວ ຈາກ ທີ່ນີ້ ມັກ ທຸກທຸກ
 ສາວສາວ
 In the Wat, cover yourself from shoulders to knees,
 take off hats and shoes



ຜົນຜະໂຫຼດຂອງການນຳ ນາໂຢນຢາເສບຕິດໃນ
 ສປປລາວ
 Please do not use drugs in Laos, it is illegal



ຜົນ ທີ່ບໍ່ມີເສັ້ນໂງ່ງ ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດບໍ່ໃຫ້ຄົນ ມີເງິນ
 ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດບໍ່ໃຫ້ຄົນອື່ນ ຫຼື ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດ
 ໃຫ້ສາວເກີດ/ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດ
 Support the village by giving through the elders -
 do not encourage begging



ຜົນ ມີຄວາມເຊື່ອມື ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດບໍ່ໃຫ້
 Do not be loud - it is offensive



ການຖະໜົນ ບໍ່ມີເສັ້ນໂງ່ງ ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດ ທຳການ
 ທຳການ
 Please ask before taking pictures



ການຖະໜົນ ບໍ່ມີເສັ້ນໂງ່ງ ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດ ທຳການ
 ທຳການ
 Showing flesh is offensive



ຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອໃຫ້ຄົນອື່ນ ມີຄວາມ ຈຳນວນຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອ
 Help us conserve our culture and heritage



ບໍ່ອະນຸຍາດ ທຳການ ທຳການ ທຳການ
 Please do not show affection publicly



ຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອ ໃຫ້ຄົນອື່ນ ຈຳນວນຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອ ທຳການ
 ທຳການ
 Support development by buying local products



ຜົນຜະໂຫຼດຂອງການນຳ ນາໂຢນຢາເສບຕິດໃນ
 ສປປລາວ
 Take care of personal hygiene, or be ready to be
 laughed at



ຜົນຜະໂຫຼດຂອງການນຳ ນາໂຢນຢາເສບຕິດໃນ
 ສປປລາວ
 Please refuse any antiques, you will be fined

ເມື່ອຄວາມຊີ້ງ ຈຳນວນສອດໄປ ຂອງຊາວ ຫລວງພະບາງ, ກະລຸນາທ່ານ ຜົນຜະໂຫຼດຂອງການນຳ
 May the only impact you leave behind be your footprint

This poster was made by the Provincial Tourism Office of Luang Prabang in collaboration with SUNV and the Royal Netherlands Embassy

For more information, please contact the Provincial Tourism Office, Luang Prabang Tel/Fax (071) 212 487

▲ An example of interpretive signage that should be prominently displayed at key locations around Luang Prabang.

Interpretation therefore not only enhances the tourist's experience but provides the local community with a means of managing tourists and engaging their cooperation and understanding in minimizing their negative impact.

Rather than adopting standardized programmes for tourists and risking loss of authenticity, heritage interpretation schemes need to be carefully planned and be site specific. The process of interpretation needs to start with an understanding of significance of sites and cultural activities. Planners need to familiarize themselves with the theory and practice of visitor behaviour and with effective communication techniques, and must develop an interpretation programme which can be maintained by the local community and takes due account of appropriate local themes. Programmes which balance heritage preservation, visitor needs, effective communication and economic, environmental and social sustainability, are on track to provide real opportunities for effective learning in a preservation environment.

Site Management Site management involves managing visitor impacts, ensuring adequate spending on maintenance, inclusion of stakeholders and the development of sustainable management strategies within the tourism industry.

Visitor Impacts One of the major site management tasks at any site is to deal with visitor impacts. Each site has a certain limit in terms of visitor capacity and Luang Prabang is no exception. When that limit is exceeded, damage begins to occur, the local population suffers and visitor enjoyment is reduced.



▲ A tour bus in the main street of Luang Prabang. While regulations exist to exclude large buses from the main street, such regulations are not always enforced.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

The extent of visitor impact depends on a combination of the number of people using a site, the types of visitor activity and behaviour, their timing, and the ability of particular environments to withstand use. Luang Prabang is a small town and its carrying capacity is therefore very limited.

The Luang Prabang site management team must attempt to ensure the least possible damage while guaranteeing the financial viability of the site and its contributions to the local economy and community. Overuse will invariably lead to site degradation and eventual loss of tourism income for Luang Prabang.



- ▲ This interpretive sign is the only one at this site. It asks tourists not to climb on the stupa but does not provide any information about the site and does not explain the fragility of the structure.

(Photo: Pattarapong Kongwijit)

In order to avoid exceeding the carrying capacity of Luang Prabang and of specific sites within the town, attractions should be selectively marketed, with lesser-known sites emphasized in marketing programmes, while the better known and heavily visited attractions marketed in a less aggressive manner. Tourism developers should be encouraged to promote a number of sites in and around Luang Prabang in order to divert tourists from the congested historic precinct. Developing a variety of sites will also encourage tourists to extend their stays and will draw repeat visitors who are looking for new experiences.

Problems of over-saturation have occurred at many UNESCO World Heritage historic towns in the region, for example, Hoi An in Viet Nam and Lijiang in China. In response to the issue, Hoi An managers have redirected tourist flows from the well-known and overused historic street to lesser known but equally interesting areas close by. Tourists are also limited to the number of sites which they are able to visit by a ticketing system. As a result tourists are more evenly distributed. Tourism managers in Luang Prabang need to consider such options.

Interpretive tools, as discussed above, are also vital in minimizing visitor impacts at particular sites. Signage explaining the fragility of structures, for example, can help to prevent visitors from touching or damaging sites.

Reinvesting Profits into Heritage Preservation

Historic towns throughout Asia and specific sites within those towns are deteriorating because of overuse by tourists and an insufficient re-investment of entrance-fee revenue into site maintenance. As well as following the management guidelines outlined above, Luang Prabang site managers should therefore ensure re-investment of an adequate proportion of the profits from admission fees into heritage preservation initiatives.

Heritage Sites and the Community

Heritage sites in Luang Prabang depend on the surrounding community for financial and social support. The surrounding community provides a wide range of visitor services and attractions essential in meeting the full visitor experience. The site management plan of Luang Prabang must take into account this relationship. It is useful to think of the Luang Prabang community as one of the many stakeholders involved in the overall site management process. Various forms of participation are possible but it is essential that the needs of the community are considered and incorporated into the management of tourism in Luang Prabang.

Environmental Management Systems (EMS)

As Luang Prabang develops, sustainable strategies must be encouraged throughout the tourism industry. One of the ways of accomplishing this objective is through the use of environmental management systems (EMS). An EMS is a system designed to assist facilities such as hotels and restaurants in improving their overall environmental performance. The main benefit of using a system such as EMS is that it takes a holistic approach to a facility by monitoring its environmental behavior from the beginning of the process (inflow of resources and products into the facility) through to the end. The EMS monitors all environmentally sensitive areas such as solid waste generation, consumption of water, disposal of wastewater and consumption of energy (electricity and other fuels).

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This section discusses the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation process to enable tourism managers in Luang Prabang to assess how well they have succeeded in achieving the community's overall goals and objectives.



- ▲ Stakeholder discussions or meetings such as this are a necessary component of the heritage and tourism management processes. (UNESCO file photo)

The monitoring and evaluation process is a stage in tourism management that in many places is forgotten or is inadequately performed. Without undergoing this process, however, it will be difficult to determine the success or failure of management strategies in terms of the Luang Prabang community's goals and objectives. Also, without this process goals and plans can become stagnant, rather than being dynamic in response to the changing needs in Luang Prabang. Through a monitoring and evaluation process tourism managers in Luang Prabang can keep track of changes in the community that are occurring as a result of tourism management strategies. Managers can then make adjustments accordingly and ensure that tourism in Luang Prabang is managed in such a way that it brings maximum benefits with minimal negative impacts.

There are five steps that should be followed in the monitoring and evaluation process, as illustrated in Figure D.4.



Figure D.4: Monitoring and Evaluation Process.

It is important to note that the monitoring and evaluation process should involve all stakeholders in Luang Prabang and that discussion of the issues should be encouraged. The process can be seen as a means of focusing attention on critical areas of concern to the residents of Luang Prabang and of stimulating cooperation between the various stakeholders.

- Setting Monitoring Goals and Objectives.

The first step in the monitoring and evaluation process is for tourism managers and stakeholders to set the goals they want to monitor and set targets for the monitoring and evaluation process itself. For example, Luang Prabang stakeholders may decide to monitor how effective the tourism management strategy is in terms of the goal “to increase the level of local ownership of Luang Prabang tourism businesses and to decrease the level of foreign and outside ownership”. So, having established that this is a goal they wish to monitor, targets need to be set for the monitoring and evaluation process, such as the date by which each evaluation should be completed.



▲ The current situation in Luang Prabang must be recorded in order to establish a baseline from which future changes can be measured.

(Photo: Rik Ponne)

- Identifying Impact Areas and Indicators.

Indicators need to be identified in order pinpoint where, how and to what extent tourism is causing change in Luang Prabang. Indicators also enable decision-makers to evaluate and make timely decisions on the effectiveness of tourism impact management activities, plans and strategies.

As part of this stage it is important that the current situation, including the condition of historic buildings and heritage sites, is recorded. A 'snapshot' of the original state of affairs will act as a baseline from which to measure what and how much change occurs in the future as a result of tourism and of the management plans designed to minimize the negative impacts of tourism.

When the goal being monitored is, for example, "to increase the level of local ownership of Luang Prabang tourism businesses", information about the current levels of local ownership should be recorded, so that changes in levels of ownership are measurable. In this case, a possible indicator would be the "number of local residents (and non-residents) owning tourism businesses". Therefore, over time, when this indicator is measured and compared with the baseline, tourism managers are able to determine how much (if any) progress towards the goal has occurred.

To provide useful information, indicators should be relevant, simple, understandable and practical. Provided they are measurable, indicators do not have to be quantitative but can also be qualitative.

The effective design and use of indicators requires joint action and involvement of all stakeholders. The process of identifying indicators can also be a means for the Luang Prabang community to analyze the impacts of tourism and identify the risks, opportunities and the acceptable limits to change.

Table D.1 presents a set of subject areas from which specific indicators could be developed.

Impact Areas	Subjects	Measure changes in:
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income • Employment levels • Business opportunities and growth • Tourist spending behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Income levels of residents - Expenditure patterns of people employed in the tourism industry - Expenditure patterns of people living in the heritage protection zone - Income distribution (from community cooperatives for local products – food, cloth, festivals etc.) - Number and types of employment in Luang Prabang - Number of local people employed in tourism (and non-tourism) businesses, and the types of tourism jobs they are employed in - Number and types of tourism businesses - Number of locally (and foreign) owned and number of locally (and foreign) controlled tourism businesses - What products and services tourists buy - How much tourists pay for products and services (and are willing to pay)
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health of residents • Education levels of residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infant mortality rates - Life expectancy - Literacy rates - Number of people with primary, secondary and higher education - Number of local people with training in tourism studies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land ownership patterns (non-resident/resident) • Prices and cost of living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of locals (and outsiders) owning land in the heritage zone of Luang Prabang. - Land prices (relative to income levels) - Cost of food and consumer goods (relative to income levels)
Cultural Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values and customs • Sense of community identity • Housing styles • Use of local knowledge and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation rates in temple events and traditional ceremonies - Number of cultural festivals (and authenticity of these events) - Amount of money donated by local residents to their community temple - Extent to which local residents value their community and participate in community events - Number of traditional-style buildings and buildings built with traditional materials and techniques - Number of people with traditional building and craft skills and number of people employed using those skills
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution • Ecosystem health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solid waste generated from tourism activities - Levels of water (river and wetlands), noise and air pollution - Species numbers, size of habitat and reproductive rates

Built Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage buildings and sites • Town spatial layout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Condition and level of damage to heritage sites (in relation to number of tourists) - Number of roads and parking lots built in response to demand for tourist buses and other tourism-related vehicles
Attractiveness of Luang Prabang as a Tourism Destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist satisfaction with Luang Prabang • Environment and Ambience (eg. Traffic congestion) • Authenticity of built and cultural heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Length of tourist stay - Number of repeat visitors - Qualitative visitor surveys - Number of vehicles in the heritage protection district per day - Extent of use of traditional materials and techniques in restoring heritage buildings - Extent of local people's participation in traditional cultural activities

Table D.1: Subject areas for the development of indicators.

- Establishing Databases and Collecting Information.

It is important to ensure that both baseline and indicator data are accurate since they form the basis for the monitoring process. Therefore data need to be collected in a reliable and professional manner.

As part of this stage of the monitoring and evaluation process, schedules for measuring indicators need to be designed, because the information must be collected and evaluated regularly. Also, methods for collecting information need to be determined. The selection of appropriate methods depends on several factors such as: objectives for collecting the data, quality and quantity of information required, the competency and skills of people who perform this task and the time and resources available. At the same time, databases - which record the data that has been collected - need to be designed carefully so that the information is clear and comprehensible and can be easily accessed.



▲ Local residents of Luang Prabang, gathered together to play a local version of the French game of *petanque*. (UNESCO file photo)

The proposed Luang Prabang tourism council (or committee) outlined on page 82, would be responsible for establishing the databases, while community and government organizations would collect the relevant social, cultural, environmental and tourism data (according to the indicators). Luang Prabang organizations involved in data collection and provision would include: La Maison du Patrimoine, the Department of Information and Culture, the Luang Prabang Provincial Tourism Office, the Department of Industry and Handicrafts, the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry office, the Rural Development Directive Committee, the Luang Prabang Buddhist *sangha*.

- Data Analysis and Evaluation.

The analysis stage of the monitoring and evaluation process involves examining the information that has been collected and determining what it means in terms of the stakeholders goals and objectives. For example, if the number of local residents owning tourism businesses has increased, this could indicate that tourism management strategies have been at least partly successful in terms of achieving the goal to “increase the level of local ownership of Luang Prabang tourism businesses”.

This stage of the process should involve the key stakeholder groups of Luang Prabang. Stakeholder perspectives must be considered when analysing and interpreting data. Certain groups in the community, such as the Buddhist *sangha*, would contribute valuable perspectives when evaluating the data concerned with cultural indicators, for example.

Data analysis and evaluation must be carried out carefully. It may be that changes are not directly related to tourism management but are a result of other events within the local, provincial or national setting. Therefore managers need to be sophisticated in dealing with the data generated by the monitoring process and caution should always be exercised when making evaluations.

The box below discusses the need for a holistic approach when using indicators and interpreting data.

Using Indicators and Interpreting Data



▲ A woman giving a donation at her village temple in Luang Prabang. The monks keep written records of amounts donated. (UNESCO file photo)

Indicators need to be considered in the wider context as they are often not useful on their own. For example, when evaluating indicator data in order to determine what that data mean in terms of the objective that “tourism should contribute to community development and improved quality of life of residents”, it is important to consider the entire range of economic, social and environmental factors. While the incomes of the residents of Luang Prabang may rise (indicating an increase in economic benefits), at the same time the amount of money these residents donate to temples may decrease or may not increase at the same rate, indicating a decline in ‘sense of community’ or a decreased valuation of culture. Also, the environmental indicators may demonstrate a decrease in biodiversity and increase in pollution. Overall, therefore, tourism may not be contributing to an improved quality of life of residents, in spite of the rise in incomes.

The stakeholders and Luang Prabang tourism council need to examine the interactions between the various indicators and, using their various areas of expertise and knowledge, interpret each indicator in relation to the others in order to gain a holistic understanding of the impact of tourism and of the success of management strategies.

- Developing Mitigation Measures and Remediation.

Aside from enabling managers to measure progress towards goals, monitoring is carried out in order to ensure that any negative change or trend is dealt with in a timely manner. Monitoring is also performed in order to ensure that if improvements are not occurring, appropriate adjustments are made to the management plans, programmes and activities. If the data indicate that the community’s goals for Luang Prabang are not being realized, tourism managers need to make changes to their plans and develop mitigation methods which will quickly improve the situation.

There is a clear need for skilled change agents to be involved in the monitoring and evaluation process, particularly at this stage. Possible change agents in Luang Prabang could be the local teachers or monks. These change agents would facilitate involvement by all stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process, ensure their support and commitment and facilitate communication such that information and feedback, including ideas about what changes should be made to management plans (to mitigate undesirable trends), are efficiently relayed to the tourism managers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS



▲ The *prabang* image, being paraded through the streets of Luang Prabang during the *pimai* festival. (Photo: Richard Engelhardt)

Tourism has offered new opportunities and benefits to the people of Luang Prabang. Customs and traditions once forgotten have come to life, temples have been renovated and festivals have gained new vigour. There has also been an opportunity for some people in Lao PDR to benefit financially from the tourist boom.

But while the outlook for the development of tourism in Luang Prabang is promising, there is evidence that the economic, social and cultural changes brought about by tourism are not all positive.

While some people have gained income from tourism, many of those benefiting are not from Luang Prabang or even from Lao PDR. New livelihood opportunities have been created but are often low-skilled, low-paid positions, with skilled work and profits going mainly to non-residents. Also, land and commodity prices are increasing but the incomes of most Luang Prabang residents are not rising in proportion.

And while the heritage of Luang Prabang is its biggest marketing tool, the cultural fragility of the town and the limited capacity of the built and natural heritage to accommodate greater numbers of tourists is being overlooked. While tourism has sometimes been an impetus for the restoration of temples, these buildings are being restored using inappropriate modern materials and techniques with the result that these buildings are diminishing in terms of durability and value. Most alarmingly, authenticity in heritage preservation and presentation is not being adequately addressed so that, paradoxically, heritage buildings are losing their appeal to tourists. Furthermore, while temples raise funds through entrance fees, only relatively small amounts are reinvested in conservation.

While greater numbers of tourists bring more economic opportunities, the increased number of people in the town is leading to problems of congestion and pollution, with potentially negative consequences for the quality of life and health of residents. In addition, the rise in tourism-related construction and associated development is leading to encroachment on wetlands and other natural areas, posing threats to wildlife and biodiversity.

And while tourism is opening the town to new technologies and ideas, unless tourism is managed with the residents' needs in mind it will threaten the relevance of their religious traditions and will excessively interrupt their daily lives and diminish their sense of community.



▲ The *binthabat* ceremony, one of Luang Prabang's precious cultural traditions. (Photo: Rik Ponne)

This publication demonstrates that successful tourism and heritage management in Luang Prabang will depend on an effective and comprehensive planning process, with significant stakeholder participation, and the clear articulation of the vision and goals of the people of Luang Prabang. The management strategies presented here focus on conserving and strengthening cultural traditions and heritage, the key resources on which tourism in Luang Prabang is based. These strategies are a means of ensuring tourism is a positive, rather than negative, force for cultural heritage preservation, one which contributes to safeguarding the precious and irreplaceable cultural traditions of the people of Luang Prabang.

These management strategies are designed to indicate to the major stakeholders in Luang Prabang (and those working in similar communities) the future directions they should take and the types of actions and initiatives that are necessary in order to successfully manage tourism to achieve sustainable development and to maximize the long-term benefits of tourism for the community.

By identifying the main issues in heritage preservation and tourism development and suggesting possible ways to proceed in creating sustainable tourism industries, it is hoped that **IMPACT: Luang Prabang** will provide support and direction in Luang Prabang and suggest approaches which can also be used at other sites in Lao PDR facing similar situations, and throughout the world.

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GLOSSARY

<i>baci (baisi)</i>	An ancient, pre-Buddhist ritual still practiced by Tai speakers all over the upper Mekong region. In Luang Prabang and other parts of Lao PDR, <i>baci</i> is performed at specific times during the life cycle, such as births and weddings among other occasions of celebration.
<i>ban</i>	Lao word for village
<i>binthabat</i>	Morning offering of food (usually rice) given to the monks and novices as a daily expression of generosity by the laity and a way of earning merit.
<i>bodhi tree</i>	The sacred tree under which Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, meditated at Bodhi Gaya, India, achieving his enlightenment, becoming a Buddha. Cuttings from the original tree have been transported to many places throughout South East Asia and planted in monastery compounds and other auspicious locations.
<i>boun (bun)</i>	Merit earned through Buddhist religious rituals; ' <i>boun</i> ' also means 'festival' in Lao.
Brahmanism	A modern term for what were originally Indian religious practices, an early form of Hinduism, that spread to other regions of Asia. Many Brahmanist rituals and beliefs blend seamlessly with Buddhist practices.
Buddha	In general, 'Buddha' means 'Awakened One', someone who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and sees things as they really are. A Buddha is a person who is completely free from all faults and mental obstructions. Usually, 'the Buddha' refers to the historical Buddha or Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism who was born in Lumbini, in present-day Nepal, approximately 2,300 years ago.
Buddhism	A philosophy based on the teachings of the Buddha, which developed into a variety of schools as it spread first through Indian cultural areas, developing further modifications in Central, East and Southeast Asia.
carrying capacity	A tool of management to identify the limits of a location in terms of its natural resources. In the case of tourism, this tool identifies the number of tourists a destination can accept before its environment begins to collapse.
<i>dok so fa</i>	Translated as "flower of heaven", the <i>dok so fa</i> is a metal decoration symbolising the universe with rising rings of small umbrella-shaped ornaments, placed on the roof of Lao <i>sim</i> .
Fa Ngum, King	The king that unified Laos in 1353.

interpretation	Explanation or educational information that facilitates understanding of a particular site or of cultural beliefs and activities.
<i>kouti (kuti)</i>	Monks' living quarters in monastery compounds.
Khun Borom	Ancestral figure in Laotian legend, said to have been born from a mystic gourd. According to legend, he had seven sons who formed seven principalities of their own. The oldest son, Khun Lo, is the mythical founder of the principality of Luang Prabang.
Lane Xang	Translated as "Land of the Million Elephants". Former name of Laotian Kingdom in the fourteenth century, when King Fa Ngum conquered and united the regions of today's Xieng Khouang, Khorat Plateau (in northeastern Thailand) and Luang Prabang.
Lao	A branch of the Tai-speaking linguistic family that settled in what is now Lao PDR. The Lao constitute the largest ethnic group of Luang Prabang.
Lao, Laotian	A person who comes from Laos or Lao PDR.
Lao Issara	Free Lao movement that was formed during World War II, from the time of Japanese occupation in 1941 until the French re-entered Laos in 1945.
Laos, Lao PDR	The People's Democratic Republic of Laos. A land-locked country in Southeast Asia bordered by Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
Mekong River	The most important river that runs through Lao PDR. Laotians derive the majority of their protein from the Mekong River and rely on it for transport.
monitoring	A management technique used in assessing success and failure of a policy, plan or strategies.
<i>mudra</i>	A symbolic gesture of the hands in Buddhist iconography.
<i>naga</i>	Mythical serpent deity that is associated with the life-giving powers of water throughout the Indian-influenced regions of Southeast Asia.
Pathet Lao	Name of the communist forces that gained control of the Laotian government in 1975; the literal translation is 'Lao Land' and is used as a general term for the country.
<i>phi</i>	Spirits or ghosts.
Phousi	Directly translated as "sacred hill". It is the hill in the middle of Luang Prabang.

<i>pimai</i>	New Year festival in April. In all of Lao PDR people splash water on each other to signify cleansing. Pimai is the biggest national holiday in Lao PDR and lasts for several days.
<i>pra (phra)</i>	Honorific term applied to esteemed persons and sacred objects.
<i>prabang</i>	Image of the Buddha that is the palladium and protectorate of Lao PDR. Luang Prabang derived its name from the <i>prabang</i> image.
reliquary	A container for a sacred relic such as a casket or shrine.
<i>sa paper</i>	Mulberry paper. Handmade paper - made from mulberry tree bark.
<i>sangha</i>	The organization of Buddhist monks and novices. One of the triple gems of Buddhism, the others being the Dhamma and the Buddha.
Setthathirat, King	King from 1548 –1571. During his reign he moved the capital from Luang Prabang to Vientiane.
Siam	Previous name of the Thai kingdom that encompassed much of Lao PDR including Luang Prabang.
<i>sim</i>	Ordination hall in a <i>vat</i>
Sisavang Vong, King	Laotian King (1904–1959) who collaborated with the French. He undertook numerous preservation, restoration and beautification projects in Luang Prabang.
<i>sou khuan</i>	“Calling back the spirits”. A common term for the <i>baci</i> ceremony in which the <i>khuan</i> (spiritual powers) are called upon to bring strength, luck and protection.
Sourigna Vongsa, King	The King of Laos when Europeans first arrived in Luang Prabang. He reigned from 1654-1712 and upon his death the kingdom was split into three separate kingdoms: Luang Prabang in the north, Vientiane in the centre and Champasak in the south.
stupa	Buddhist mound-shaped monument which houses relics or ashes of monks and the devout.
Tai	A large linguistic group including the Thai and Lao.
<i>that</i>	Laotian term for stupa.
<i>vat</i>	Laotian name for Theravada Buddhist monastery (temple).

Cover and layout designed by Sirisak Chaiyasook

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