

Table of Contents

A Message from the Provincial Tourism Officep3
General Information
Travel Information
Paksep33
Vat Phou - Champasak Heritage Landscapep36
Four Thousand Islands (Si Phan Don)p41
Xe Pian National Protected Areap45
Bolaven Plateaup51
Ban Saphai, Don Kho & Surroundingsp58
Khong Mountain & Phou Xieng Thong NPAp63
Maps



A Guide to Champasak Province

Editors – Paul Eshoo, Phouvanh Lohapasert, Robert Tizard and Steven Schipani.

Sources – Xe Pian NPA Management Plan, UNESCO Vat Phou-Champasak Management Plan, Champasak Provincial Tourism Office, Lao Mountain Coffee.

Photography – Dr. Robert Lee, Steven Schipani, Rob Tizard, Paul Eshoo, Jim Johnston.

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A Message from the Provincial Tourism Office

The Provincial Tourism Office of Champasak Province would like to extend to you a warm welcome and would like to thank you for choosing to visit our beautiful and peaceful province. At the heart and centre of southern Laos, Champasak Province is world renowned for its ancient heritage of former kingdoms and civilizations as evidenced by the Vat Phou-Champasak Heritage Landscape, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its 7 - 11th century Khmer temples and ancient city ruins. In the southern region of the province are the 4,000 Islands (Si Phan Don), a majestic maze of wetlands, islands and giant waterfalls, excellent for relaxation and outdoor activities such as rafting and kayaking. Located in the 4,000 Islands is the pearl of the Mekong River, Kone Pha Pheng Waterfall, which is the largest waterfall by volume in Southeast Asia and an impressive natural site not to be missed. The Bolaven Plateau, located in the north-eastern region of the province, is famous for its world class coffee and tea plantations and for its numerous cool, cascading waterfalls. Day trips can be arranged to learn about coffee production and to view many of the waterfalls that dot the plateau. For those interested in nature and ecotourism such as trekking, elephant riding, canoeing, birdwatching, or camping, visit any one of our three, internationally recognised natural protected areas, Xe Pian, Dong Hua Sao and Phou Xieng Thong.



To purchase or learn about handmade silk and cotton weaving, we recommend that you visit villages such as Ban Saphai and Don Kho where weaving techniques can still be seen firsthand. We also invite you to enjoy our local food specialties, most notably our many varieties of fresh fish, and to join us in celebrating our traditional festivals, of which the annual Vat Phou festival held in February is the largest.

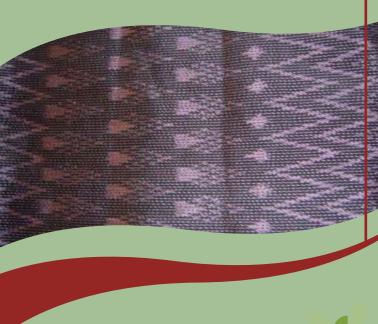
To ensure that your stay in Champasak is mutually beneficial for both you and your gracious hosts, we ask that you respectfully observe Lao customs when visiting Buddhist temples or participating in local religious ceremonies or rituals.

While the people who live here warmly welcome visitors, we kindly ask that you make an effort to be culturally sensitive, always keep your cool, and set a good example for Lao youth by dressing modestly and not using illegal drugs.

Wishing you a safe and exciting journey in Champasak.

Mr. Khamphone NUANESENGSY

Director, Champasak Provincial Tourism Office



Important Phone numbers in Pakse

Bank (BCEL)	031-213 204
Bus Station	031-212 981, 251 508
 Hospital 	031-212 018
Lao Airlines Check-in	031-251 460
 Lao Airlines Reservations 	031-251 460
Lao Telecomm	031-212 294
Museum	031-212 501
Police	031-212 641
Post Office	031-212 293
Provincial Tourism Office	031-212 021





Location & Geography

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, commonly referred to as Laos is located at the centre of the Indochinese Peninsula, stretching 1,700 km from north to south. At its broadest point the country spans some 500 km from east to west. Laos has a total land area of 236,800 square kilometres characterized by three distinct regions – North, Central and Southern Laos. The country's main geologic features include low calciferous mountains, limestone karst formations, the Xieng Khouang and Bolaven plateaus and the Mekong River Valley. The mountains and plateaus make up three-quarters of the total land area. Laos shares borders with China to the north, Cambodia to the south, Viet Nam to the east, Thailand to the west and Myanmar to the northwest.

Champasak is situated in the southern part of the country, sharing borders with Thailand to the west, Salavan, Sekong and Attapeu provinces to its north and east, and Cambodia to the south.

The province has ten districts (Bachieng, Champasak, Khong, Mounlapamok, Pakse, Paksong, Pathoumphone, Phonthong, Sanasomboun, and Sukhuma) and a total land area of 15,415 square kilometres. Champasak is the largest province in Lao PDR.



The province can be divided into three geographic subregions. The first and defining subregion which links the province's landscapes together is the mighty Mekong River. This amazing river, which starts from a trickle of ice melt in the high Himalayan mountains of Tibet, stretches the length of the entire province, from Sanasomboun district in the north all the way down to the 4,000 Islands (Si Phan Don) and the Lao-Cambodian border in the south.

The second geographic subregion is the Bolaven Plateau, a large expanse of land sitting 1,300 meters above sea level and spreading over four provinces, Attapeu, Champasak, Salavan, and Sekong. The Plateau is important for its rich volcanic soils excellent for planting agricultural productsmost notably coffee—as well as for its many rivers (and waterfalls) which eventually flow into the Mekong River. Thirdly, below the Bolaven Plateau is a complex of river networks located on what is known as the Xe Khampho Plains, which receives water flowing down from the Bolaven Plateau. This area, where the Xe Khampho, Xe Pian and Xe Kong rivers converge, is a very important habitat and haven for large waterbirds and endangered large mammal species.



Climate

In Laos there are three distinct seasons; rainy (May to October), cool (November – February) and hot (March – April). During the rainy season the country is very green and cool, with emerald rice paddies and forested mountains stretching as far as the eye can see. In November the rains give way to the cool season and it gets quite hot in March and April. The climate in Champasak Province is typically warmer than that of Vientiane, with temperatures ranging from 16°C to 35°C. However, the Bolaven Plateau, in particular, is known for its relatively mild climate due to its high elevation, with temperatures 2-3 degrees cooler than Pakse. The Bolaven Plateau is also the most rained on area of Laos, getting up to 3,700 mm per year.

History

History in Champasak begins prior to the Angkor Period, with the first settlements appearing in present day Champasak around the 6th century. The remains of a once grand city and temple complex, today known as Vat Phou, as well as by many other Khmer artefacts are found throughout the province. The first Lao kingdom, Lane Xang, was founded in the 14th century by King Fa Ngum after he conquered and unified the lands north of and including Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang and the Khorat Plateau—including the area of present-day Champasak Province.





Luang Prabang remained the administrative seat of Lane Xang until King Saysethatirath moved the Kingdom's capital to Vientiane in 1560. First contact with western emissaries occurred in the mid 17th century during the reign of King Surigna Vongsa. After the death of Surigna Vongsa in 1694 Lane Xang broke up into three separate Kingdoms; Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Champasak. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Champasak was ruled by a royal family, separately from Vientiane and Luang Prabang. When Laos was colonised and became part of French Indochina during the 19th - early 20th century, Champasak, too became part of the colony. During this period, the royal family of Champasak continued to rule under the new colonial administrative system. At the beginning of the twentieth century, political administration was moved to Pakse, while the royal family remained in Champasak Town. In 1975, the last king of Champasak, Jao Boon Oum, fled to take refuge in France. Laos achieved complete independence in 1975 with the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Today Lao PDR is comprised of 16 provinces, with the capital situated in Vientiane.

People

Laos is the least populated country in Southeast Asia, with about 6,000,000 inhabitants in 2005, or some 20 people per square kilometre. In comparison, Viet Nam has a population density of 230 people per square kilometre, and Thailand 120. Roughly 85% of the population lives in rural areas. Although few in absolute numbers, within the population of Laos there is tremendous ethnic diversity with 49 officially recognized ethnic groups speaking hundreds of languages.



The population of Champasak Province in 2005 was estimated at approximately 600,000, or some 39 people per square kilometre. Most people in Champasak live in small rural villages and practice agriculture, livestock raising, and fishing as their main occupations. The main ethnic makeup of the province is Lao Loum or "Lowland Lao", with Lao as their main language and paddy rice farming and fishing as their traditional livelihood. In addition to this main group, there are an estimated 17 ethnic minority groups in the province that are mostly classified as Mon-K hmer, known for living in hilly regions of the country and practicing rotating agriculture. Some of the main groups include Lavae, Laven, Nge, Suay, Tahov, Katu and Katang. The main concentrations of ethnic people in the province are located on the Bolaven Plateau in Bachieng District and in the Xe Pian NPA of Patoumpone District. Champasak also has a sizeable population of people with Vietnamese origin, who mainly live in Pakse.



Economy

The largest contributor to Laos' Gross Domestic Product is agriculture which provides a living for 80% of the population. The principal crop is sticky rice but corn, tobacco, cotton and coffee are also grown. Raising livestock for domestic and regional consumption is an important economic activity. In Champasak, perhaps the most important agricultural products are coffee and tea, while fishing is an important source of food and income for common people-especially those living along the Mekong River.

Harvest of non-timber forest products such as resins, herbal medicine and forest foods for commercial and home use are also very important contributors to the Lao economy and rural people's livelihoods. The primary national industries include hydropower, garment manufacture, agro-forestry, tourism, mining and production of some common consumer goods. In Champasak Province, the two major, non-agricultural industries are electricity and tourism.

Languages

The official language is Lao as spoken in Vientiane, which is derived mainly from Sanskrit and Pali. The southern Lao dialect spoken by Champasak natives is distinct from other regions in Laos. It is characterised by a stronger and more staccato sound, as opposed to the more gentle tones of the north. English and French are spoken in Pakse, Champasak District and other areas that normally receive tourists



Festivals & Events

Almost every month of the year there is either a local festival or celebration in Champasak. If you are in Champasak while any of the festivals are taking place you will surely be welcomed and asked to join the fun. Please feel free to participate, however do remember that as most of the festivals are based on religious beliefs your local hosts will appreciate it if you respect local codes of behaviour.

Major Festivals

February

Boun Vat Phou (Vat Phou Festival) – This is the largest festival in the province and one of the largest in the entire country. This festival attracts thousands of people each year, who gather at the base of the ancient Vat Phou Temple for prayer ceremonies and to enjoy the festivities.

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

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

April

Lao New Year (Pi Mai Lao) — This is the biggest celebration of the year throughout the country and is a fun event to take part in. During the New Year, people partake in a ritual of splashing water and powder on each other in what seems to be a giant water fight.





The New Year celebrations officially last three days, however, many children eager to start the water throwing begin celebrating early. On the second day people go on a pilgrimage from temple to temple making offerings to each. Annual village celebrations are also celebrated during April, not necessarily coinciding with the official New Year's holiday. Be advised that during Pi Mai Lao most businesses and government offices are closed.

May

Boun Visakha Bousa – This festival celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Lord Buddha. It is held on the 15th day of the sixth lunar month. Beautiful candlelit processions take place in the evening.

May - June

Rocket Festival (Boun Bang Fai) – During this exciting festival, giant rockets constructed out of bamboo are shot into the sky making quite a spectacular site and a lot of loud bangs. Each village traditionally parades its rocket to the temple first, making offerings, before setting it into the sky.

July

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

August

Boun Khao Padap Din – Special offerings are made to the deceased on the new moon of the 9th lunar month.





Forests & Protected Area's

There are two main forest types in Champasak Province. First are the dry deciduous forests, which are located mainly in the province's northern region, in the Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area and parts of the Bolaven Plateau, and in its south-western corner bordering Thailand. These forests have rather tall, straight trees with large leaves, which typically lose their foliage during the dry season (November – April). On the edges of the Bolaven Plateau and in the province's south-eastern region, mainly Xe Pian NPA, are large tracts of evergreen jungles, which stay green all year and are valued for their rich biodiversity in both plant and animals species.

Champasak Province has three national protected area's covering a total of 309,000 square hectares: Xe Pian NPA (165,600 square hectares), Dong Hua Sao NPA (110,000 square hectares), and Phou Xieng Thong NPA (34,000 square hectares). The province also has seven provincial protected forests accounting for an additional 167,340 square hectares: Phou Khao-Phou Malong, Phou Ja-Phou Dang, Phou Bachieng, Phou Luang (Don Khong), Phou Set, Phou Houay Champy, and Phou Luang Houay Ho.

Mammals & Reptiles

Champasak Province's diverse habitats are very important areas for the protection of nationally and globally threatened wildlife species. The main concentration of wildlife is located in Champasak Province's National Protected Areas, most notably Xe Pian NPA which has many important species including Tiger, Banteng, Irrawaddy Dolphin, Asian Elephant, Gaur, Sun Bear, Asiatic Black Bear, Dhole, Sunda Pangolin, Smooth Coated Otter and Yellow-checked Crested Gibbon.



September

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

October

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

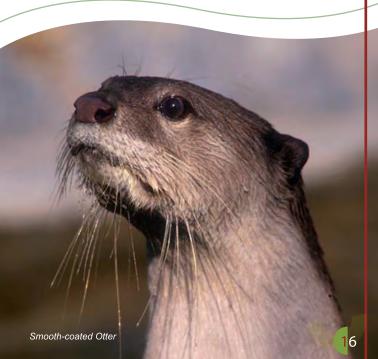
Boat Racing Festival (Boun Souang Heua) — This festival follows Boun Ork Pansa and is celebrated throughout the province (in addition to other provinces in Laos). Teams from each village and each district compete with each other, racing in long boats that seat up to twenty paddlers. Pakse is typically the location of the first boat races in the province and where the largest races occur between district teams. After the Pakse races, each district opens its own competition between village teams, making this festival go on for days throughout the province.



The Xe Pian – Dong Hua Sao NPA gibbon population is of major global significance, as well as the Siamese crocodile population found inside and just outside its northern boundary. Xe Pian is also home to at least two turtle species, the Asiatic Soft-shell Turtle and Asian Giant Soft-shell Turtle.

Small wildlife, such as squirrels, snakes and lizards, can be seen on locally-guided walks through forests, especially on canoe trips and early morning walks. However, luck is required to see most animals, as they are typically shy and hide immediately after even the faintest sound of humans. Most wildlife is seen during early mornings or evenings on long distance surveys of at least 2-3 hours away from villages and human settlements. Areas notable for wildlife are the Xe Pian-Xe Khampho plain located in the eastern part of Xe Pian NPA, the panhandle of the southern area of Xe Pian NPA (near Khone Pa Phaeng Waterfall), and the Xe Pian-Dong Hua Sao corridor—most notable for Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon.

Guided walks to/from Ban Ta Ong hold possibilities for hearing/seeing monkeys and possibly deer species. Boat trips in the 4,000 Islands from Veun Kham can be arranged to see Irrawady Dolphins, although due to their small population and other environmental factors sightings are not guaranteed.

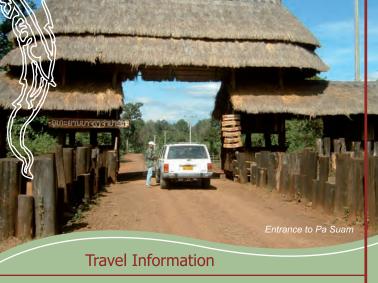




Birdlife

Champasak Province holds some of Southeast Asia's most important areas for birdlife, particularly the river network of the eastern sector of Xe Pian NPA, where the Xe Pian, Xe Khampho and Xe Khong rivers converge. In fact, Xe Pian NPA has the highest recorded number of bird species for any protected in Lao PDR, seven of which have not been recorded from any other protected area in the country. The 4,000 Islands Wetland system is another very important habitat for birdlife. Perhaps the most impressive species found in the province are large water birds including Giant Ibis, White-shouldered Ibis, Sarus Crane, Woolly-necked Stork and Lesser Adjutant. The province is known to have three species of vulture, namely White-rumped Vulture, Slender-billed Vulture and Red-headed Vulture. Xe Pian NPA is a stronghold for a range of larger ground birds like pheasants, partridges, jungle fowl and pittas, including the key species of Siamese Fireback, Blue-rumped Pitta and Bar Bellied Pitta. It is also important for protecting Green Peafowl, River Tern, Masked Finfoot, Great Hornbill, Wreathed Hornbill, and White-winged Duck.

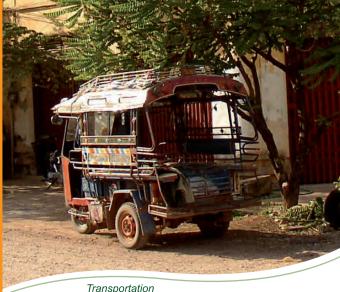




Getting to Champasak Province

Champasak Province is accessible from Thailand, Cambodia, Vientiane (the capital of Laos), and Viet Nam. Lao Airlines (www.laoairlines.com) offers flights to Pakse International Airport from Siam Reap, Cambodia and from Vientiane. Visas are available on arrival at the airport (see "Visas" below). From Ubonratchatani Province in Thailand, cross overland at the Chongmek-Vang Tao border, which is open seven days a week, from 8:30am to 4pm. Visas are available on arrival at the border. (Note: On weekends it may be necessary to pay an overtime fee for crossing the border.)

For details on travel to/from Ubonratchatani contact the Tourism Authority of Thailand http://www.tourismthailand.org/). From Chongmek-Vang Tao border, you can either take public transportation or hire a taxi to take you to Pakse, located just 54 kilometres east. There is also a daily bus shuttle travelling from Ubon town to Pakse, a very convenient and cheap way to travel. Check at the main bus terminal in Ubon for schedules. If you're travelling from Vientiane, you can either take a bus, which leave from the Southern Bus Terminal, or hire a private van. The trip follows the paved Route 13 southbound and takes approximately 8-12 hours, depending on the inclinations of your vehicle and driver. Buses also run daily from Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces. From Viet Nam, you can enter southern Laos in Attapeu Province. From Attapeu, buses run daily via Route 11 to Pakse, a 2-hour ride (116 km).



Transportation

Travelling within the province, there are a few options: public transport, tuk tuk, motorbikes, private hired car, and boat.

Public Transport

This is the cheapest option and allows one the opportunity to get to know Lao people better. However, bear in mind that most public transport does not leave or arrive on specific time tables. Public trucks typically leave once they are full, which may be later than scheduled, and they often make many stops picking up and dropping off passengers along the way. It is also important to understand the legroom and space on public vehicles is very limited.

Prices for public vehicles are often pre-determined, so bargaining is not necessary. Public transportation is available from five different bus terminals. Service locations for each bus terminal are as follows:

Central Market Terminal (Que Lot Soun Kan Ka): This market is located in the centre of town and serves areas north of Pakse on Route 13, including Ban Saphai (boats to Don Kho), Ban Nakeo, Ban Boungkha (boats to Ban Mai Singsamphan/Khong Mountain). This is also the terminal where you catch "VIP" night buses bound for Vientiane.



Km8 Northern Bus Terminal: This terminal has buses that run during the day bound for Vientiane, Khammouane, Savannakhet, and Viet Nam. These buses are typically cheaper than the VIP night buses and may or may not be air conditioned. This terminal is located across the old bridge, 8km north of Pakse (past the airport).

Km2 Dao Heuang Market Terminal: This terminal has daily transport to Champasak District, Vang Tao-Chongmek border, Paksong (Bolaven Plateau), and Bachieng District (Pa Suam). Private, four-door taxis can be hired here to take you to the Lao-Thai border or other areas. The terminal is located near the main bridge at the Mekong River, which connects Pakse with the road to the Lao-Thai border at Vang Tao-Chongmek.

Km2.5 Talat Lang (Kieng Kai) Terminal: This is the bus terminal for taking the daily coach to Ubonratchatani, Thailand. It also has late-afternoon VIP buses bound for Vientiane and is the location of Kieng Kai Bus Company. This terminal is located on the main road on the left-hand side of the street when heading south out of Pakse Town, past Dao Heuang Market.

Km8 Southern Bus Terminal: This terminal serves both the province's southern region and the Bolaven Plateau. It is located at the junction between Routes 13 and 23. This terminal serves Champasak District, Khong District and the Lao-Cambodia border, Patoumphone District and Xe Pian NPA (Kiet Ngong, Pha Pho, Palaibok), Moun District, Bachieng District (Pa Suam) and Paksong. You can also get buses heading for Salavan, Sekong, and Attapeu provinces.





Tuks tuks: Tuk tuks are privately operated small, three- or four-wheeled covered pick-up trucks, which offer more flexibility and a much faster way off getting around. Tuk tuks with English-speaking drivers can be found in Pakse town, often waiting in front of the main restaurants and hotels. You can also hire a tuk tuk at one of the bus terminals listed above. There are no set prices for tuk tuks, so you will need to bargain a bit.

Wheel Motorbike Buggies: Akin to a tuk tuk is the motorbike carriage, a two-seater carriage attached to a motorbike. These vehicles can be seen mainly scooting around Pakse taking people to/from the market. Although motorbike buggies can be hired to go out of town, it is not recommended, as they are unsafe at high speeds and on highways.

Motorbikes: A popular mode of transportation is motorbike, available for rent in Pakse town. To rent a motorbike you will typically be required to provide your passport and an international driver's license. It is highly advised, as well as required by law, to wear a helmet when riding a motorbike. There are hundreds of accidents per year, so it is important to take care and wear a hardhat.

Remember: drive on the right-hand side of the road; drive at moderate speeds according to speed limit signs; and keep a keen eye out for small children and animals wandering out into the street. It is especially important to slow down when riding past villages and through towns.



Private Van: If you would like to hire a private van with air-conditioning or a four-wheel sport utility vehicle, contact any of the major tour companies or hotels in town (for a list of tour companies and contact information see "Tour Services" on page 25).

Boat: Not long ago, people in Champasak Province mainly travelled from place to place by boat, using the Mekong River as their highway. But with better roads and an increase of public trucks and buses, water travel has been reduced to more than but a trickle. Henceforth, public boats heading down the river to Champasak and further to Don Khong and the 4,000 Islands do not run regularly, as there are often not enough passengers to make the trip profitable. To check for boat availability from Pakse to Champasak, go to the boat pier located just down the street from the Governor's Office, across the way from the post office (look for the sign for the "Tourist Restaurant"). If there is not a public boat available, it is possible to rent the boat—although this may be more expensive. Alternatively, you may book a cruise with a tour company. For information about boat transport leaving from Champasak District south to Khong Island, contact the Tourist Informa-





1	Destination	Distance	Road	Condition
	Attapeu	163 Km	Routes 16E, Route 11	All weather paved roads
	Attapeu (southern corridor)	n/a	Routes 13, 18A	All weather paved road on Route 13. Route 18A dirt road and not passable in the rainy season.
	Champasak	37 Km	Route 13	All weather paved roads, boat ferry
	Don Khong	135 Km	Route 13	All weather paved roads, boat ferry
	Khone Pha Pheng	150 Km	Route 13	All weather paved roads
	Nakasang	144 Km	Route 13	All weather paved roads, 3km dirt road, boat ferry to Don Det (passengers & bikes only)
	Paksong (Bolaven Plateau)	45 Km	Route 23	All weather paved road
	Salavan	144 Km	Route 23 & Route 20	All weather paved roads
	Saphai	15 Km	Route 13	All weather paved roads
	Sekong	139 Km	Route 16E	All weather paved roads
	Vang Tao	44 Km	Route 16W	All weather paved roads
	Veunkham	163 Km	Route 13	All weather paved roads, 8 km dirt road to Dong Calor border.
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Where to stay

There are many guesthouses and hotels of varying class and style throughout Champasak Province. Prices range from \$1.5 to \$150 per night. For a full listing of hotels and guesthouses by district visit the Provincial Tourism Office.

Food

In Pakse, there are many local restaurants that offer Lao, Thai, Indian, Italian and Vietnamese food. Local food specialities include Mekong fish dishes, such as fish salad (laab paa & goi paa), sour fish (paa dek), and puree fish (pon paa ka tao sai pak ee koo). Don't miss out on the fresh coffee grown and picked on the Bolaven Plateau. Champasak Province is also the home of the second national beer, Lao Biere (as opposed to the more famous Beer Lao), which is uniquely made from palm juice.



Post and Communications

The General Post Office, located on the corner facing the Mekong River down the street from the Governor's Office, offers postal services, faxing and public telephone for local, national and international calls. Phone cards can be purchased at many shops in Pakse Town. There are a couple of internet shops in town for e-mailing and some guesthouses offer phone services. Sending packages home through the normal mail service is inexpensive and generally reliable. For urgent or valuable mail (either to or from Laos) it is advisable to use EMS or another reliable courier service such as DHI or FedEx.

Tour Services

Booking a tour through one of the local tour companies is a great way to see Laos, as it offers the opportunity to learn from experienced guides who have extensive knowledge and understanding about Champasak Province's history, culture and natural sites. Tour companies can also help arrange for visa extensions, airplane tickets, private vans and 4-wheeled drive vehicles, boats down the Mekong, and trips to new destinations within and outside the province. Most of the companies are located on the main street and in the centre of town. In addition to tour companies, there are local guide services, which offer English-speaking guides at reasonable prices. The tourism office in Pakse and the tourism office in Champasak District can arrange for local guided trips to community-based ecotourism sites.

For more information, contact:

Provincial Tourism Office	031 - 212 021
Champassak Travel	031 - 214 473
Champa Mai Travel	031 – 212 932
Diethelm Travel	031 – 212 596
Green Discovery	031 – 252 908
Indochina Travel	031 – 252 138
Indocruise	031 – 251 446
Inter Lao Travel	031 - 212 778

Jumping Travel	020 - 541 3655
Lanexang Travel	031 – 212 281
Natural & Cultural Tours	031 – 212 906
Pudoi Travel	031 – 251 314
Savan Ban Hao Travel	031 – 213 418
Sedone Travel	031 - 900 419
SV Travel	020 – 553 2249
Lao Youth Travel	020 - 565 4506



Basic Vocabulary

Hello - Sabaidi

Thank you – Kopchai

Yes - Chao

No – Bo 0 : soun 1 : neung

Good bye – *La kone* 2 : song

Hotel – Hong hem 3 : sam

Toilet – Hong nam 4 : see

Hospital – Hong mo 5 : ha

Rank Tanakhan 6 : hok

Bank – Tanakhan 6: hok

How much? – Tao dai?

8: paet

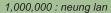
Dollar – *Dolla* 9 : gao

100 : neung hoi

10 : sip

1000 : neung pan

10,000 : sip pan





Currency

The official currency in Laos is the Kip. Denominations of 500, 1.000, 2.000, 5.000, 10.000, 20.000 and 50,000 are available. Thai Baht and US dollars are commonly accepted in big towns, but less so in rural areas. Credit cards are accepted in only a few major hotels. There is one ATM machine in Pakse, at BCEL Bank, which dispenses Lao Kip only. Cash advances on credit cards can also be made at major banks.

Working Hours

Government offices and banks are generally open Monday to Friday from 08:00-11:30, and from 13:30-16:00. Shops and private businesses usually are open longer.

Keeping Healthy

No vaccinations are presently required. Visitors should take care to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes and seek medical advice on whether or not to take Malaria prevention medications. Drinking bottled beverages or boiled water, and eating only well-cooked food should help you avoid getting any stomach ailments.

Visas and Immigration Checkpoints

30-day visas are available in advance of arrival at Lao embassies. Please check with the Lao embassy or consulate in your country regarding visa requirements. Visa information is also available on the Lao National Tourism Administration's website at www.tourismlaos.gov.la or www.ecotourismlaos.com. 30-day visas are available on arrival at Pakse International Airport and at the Lao-Thai land border (Chongmek-Vangtao). Visa is not yet available at the southern Lao-Cambodia border (although Cambodian visa is available for those leaving to Cambodia).



The following is a list of all international border checkpoints in Laos detailing if visas are available on arrival or not. If visa on arrival is not available, you can obtain a visa at a Lao embassy abroad in advance and then enter at

By air the border point.



Wattay International Airport (Vientiane)

– visa on arrival available

Luang Prabang International Airport (Luang Prabang Province)

– visa on arrival available

+

Pakse International Airport (Champassak Province) – visa on arrival available

--- By land

Cambodia – Laos

- Dong Calor (Champasak Province) visa on arrival not available

Viet Nam – Laos

- Dene Savanh (Savannakhet Province) visa on arrival available
- Nam Phao (Bolikhamxay Province) visa on arrival not available
- Nam Kan (Xieng Khouang Province) visa on arrival available
- Na Phao (Khammouane Province) visa on arrival not available

China – Laos

- Boten (Luang Namtha Province) visa on arrival available

Thailand – Laos

- Mittaphab (Friendship) Bridge (Vientiane Nongkhai) visa on arrival available
- Houei Xay (Bokeo Province) visa on arrival available
- Thakaek (Khammouane Province) visa on arrival available
- Dan Savanh (Savannakhet Province) visa on arrival available
- Vang Tao (Champassak Province)



Visa extension is not available directly in Champasak Province. If you need to extend your visa, you can contact a local tour company to send your passport to Vientiane for visa extension. Visa extension (US\$ 2 per day) can also be done on your own by going directly to the Lao Immigration Office in Vientiane (021) 212 520. Overstaying your visa will result in fines of US\$ 10 per day, paid at the border crossing.

Embassies in Lao PDR

Cambodia: (021) 314-952 China: (021) 315-100 Cuba: (021) 314-904 Brunei: (021) 352-294 Belgium: (021) 222-712 France: (021) 212-253 Germany: (021) 215-253

Australia: (021) 413-602

India: (021) 352-302 Indonesia: (021) 413-910 Japan: (021) 414-400

Korea PDR: (021) 315-261

Korea Republic: (021) 352-031

Malaysia: (021) 414-205 Mongolia: (021) 315-220 Myanmar: (021) 314-910 Philippines: (021) 452-490 Poland: (021) 312-940 Russia: (021) 312-218 Thailand: (021) 214-582

Singapore: (021) 416-853 Sweden: (021) 313-772

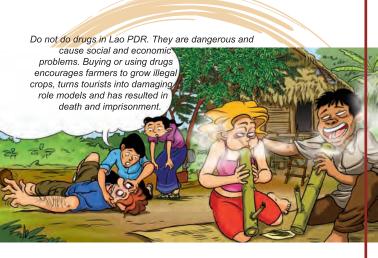
USA: (021) 212-582

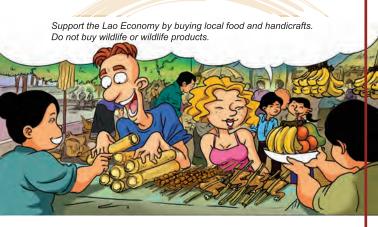
UK Trade Office: (021) 413-606 Viet Nam: (021) 413-400



Do's and Don'ts

Respecting the following customs and principles will help make your visit a positive experience for both you and your Lao hosts. Using your eyes and common sense will help guide you. While in Laos try to do as the Lao do and you will be rewarded with hospitality and friendliness.





Please ask before taking photos.



Wearing revealing clothing and showing your flesh (for women and men) is offensive to Lao. Whilst you may see some tourists wearing bikinis, crop tops, high shorts or taking their shirts off in public it does not mean that the Lao find it acceptable. Clean clothes are also





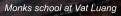




Pakse

Pakse District is the capital of Champasak Province and is the centre for trade and economic activity in southern Laos. Pakse Town is located at the confluence of the Se Done and Mekong Rivers and is at the crossroads between the northsouth highway (Route 13) and the east-west highways that connect the province with Thailand and the southern provinces of Salavan, Sekong and Attapeu. The province's largest temple (excluding Vat Phou, of course), Vat Luang, is located here in the centre of Pakse Town on the banks of the Se Done River (to the left of the old bridge). This temple, which was built in 1849 by Ajaan Ku Khom Mak Now Keo, is the home of the province's head monk and is an education centre for monks from around the region.

Some of the temple's fascinating features are its library, which was built in 1933 and houses an extensive collection of Buddhist manuscripts; the intricately hand-carved wooden doors of the main chapel; and the arts and sculpture room where young monks learn to create traditional-style Buddha images and designs. Another interesting temple to visit in Pakse is Vat Phabaht, which is named after the sacred footprint of the Lord Buddha ('hov Phabaht') found many years ago on the grounds of the present-day temple. To see this amazing rock footprint, ask one of the monks to open the chapel gate for you. (Please, remember to remove your shoes before entering the temple. If you would like to show your appreciation, you may place a donation



the chapel

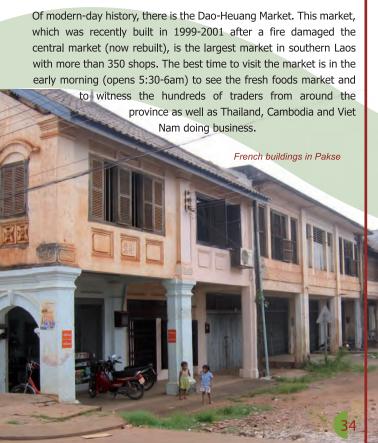
in the donation box located inside of the 'hov

Phabaht')



Pakse Town became the capital of

Champasak Province during the French colonial period at the beginning of the 20th century. Old, French-style buildings lay testament to this history, as can be seen in the old quarter of town located near the Se Done River (to the right of the old bridge). Another interesting historic building is the Champasak Palace Hotel, which was originally constructed to be the palace of Jao Boon Oum, the last King of Life of Southern Laos (Jao Ma Ha Chee Vit). The palace, which began being built in 1969, was not finished before Jao Boon Oum left Laos to take refuge in France in 1975. This seven-story building can be seen from any viewpoint in Pakse and is known as the "Thousand-room Pavilion"—and in fact has 1,900 doors and windows! If you would like to take a look around the hotel, please ask for permission first at the front desk. For those interested in learning about the history of Champask Province and the Lao PDR, visit the Provincial Museum, open Monday - Friday, 8:30 - 11:30/13:30 -16:00. The museum has an interesting collection of ancient Vat Phou-Khmer artefacts, colonial era pieces, and displays that tell the history of modern Lao PDR.





Another daily event in Pakse, which happens in the evening, is after-work relaxation and dining along the banks of the Mekong River. Local people gather here at small food stands and restaurants to drink Beer Lao, enjoy the taste of fresh Lao foods, take in the scenery of the Mekong River, and rehash the day's events. From this riverside location you can see the Lao-Japanese Bridge, spanning 1380 metres, which has revolutionised economic activity in the region by making direct overland transport possible between Pakse and Thailand's Ubonratchatani Province.

For those looking for something more adventurous and natural-oriented to do near town, a one-day walk or an overnight camping trip to Phou Bachieng Mountain is possible. The views from atop this mountain—a provincial protected forest—are quite spectacular and well worth the hike. Please note that it is required to hire a local, certified guide to make this trip. For more information contact any major tour company in town or visit the Provincial Tourism Office.

Champasak Palace Hotel







Vat Phou – Champasak Heritage Landscape

The Vat Phou – Champasak Heritage Landscape, a UNESCO World Heritage Site is most noted for the existence of the Vat Phou Temple complex, a major example of both early and classical Khmer architecture dating from the 7th to the 12th centuries AD. Recent research has demonstrated that Vat Phou is the focal point of a complex cultural landscape centred on the Champasak Plain and taking in Phou Kao Mountain to the west and the banks of the Mekong River to the east. Other features include temples, water tanks (baray), water channels, quarries, field systems and settlement sites as well as an ancient road to Angkor. The area includes a planned, early Khmer period city (referred to as the Ancient City) of some four hundred hectares on the west bank of the Mekong River as well as a second urban settlement directly to the south of Vat Phou dating from the Angkor period. The site is not only a historic landscape with archaeological monuments, but it also represents one of the world's best examples of the planning and engineering of a landscape to reflect the religious beliefs and economic concerns of the ancient Khmer city-states of Shrestapura and Lingapura.



While the monumental complex of Vat Phou is the most famous of the archaeological sites in Champasak, it is only one component of a rich and dense archaeological and cultural landscape. To truly appreciate this site you should take the time to explore all of the elements of this vast cultural landscape including its vernacular architecture, Buddhist temples and French colonial buildings, as well as to enjoy and experience local life style, cuisine, festivals and special events.

Getting to and Around Vat Phou - Champasak

From Pakse take Route 13 southbound, turning right at Km 30 (look for the sign pointing the way to "Wat Phou"). Follow the road to its end at Ban Mouang village. From Ban Mouang, take a ferry across the Mekong River to Ban Phaphin (Champasak District). Public transportation leaving from Pakse to Champasak is available from the Km2 and Km8 bus terminals all day starting from 8am to approximately 4pm. To allow for more flexibility in your travel plans, you may consider hiring a tuk tuk to take you directly there, or rent a motorbike in Pakse and ride there yourself.

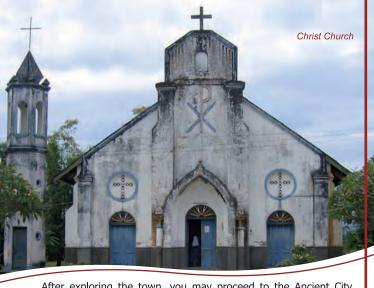


Champasak District Tourist Information Centre

Exploring the Heritage Landscape of Champasak

There are many activities you can do while in Champasak. Leaving the Visitor Centre, you can explore the two parallel streets of the Champasak Town where Buddhist temples, French colonial houses, traditional shop-houses, vernacular residences and local eateries are located. Observe the lifestyle of the local people quietly going about their daily lives. Enjoy the scenic beauty of the Mekong River where water buffalos and fishermen continue to live in harmony as they have for centuries.





After exploring the town, you may proceed to the Ancient City, which is a rare example of an ancient urban settlement in Southeast Asia.

Your next stop should be the Exhibition Hall where archaeological material and relics from archaeological excavations and local collections are exhibited. The collection consists of sculptures and ceramic ware from the Khmer period (7th to 13th centuries AD), as well as Lao-Buddhist art (18th to 19th centuries AD), and miscellaneous objects, including copies of original relics and folk statues produced during the 20th century. From the Exhibition Hall, you can proceed to explore the monumental complex of Vat Phou.

There are other archeological sites within the Champasak Cultural Landscape, such as the Nang Sida Temple, Thao Tao Temple and Tomo Temple on the east side of the Mekong.

For a local, English-speaking guide visit the tourist information office. Guides offer ½-day and full day trips to the many sites of the Vat Phou-Champasak Heritage Landscape.





Champasak Town

Guesthouses line the two parallel streets within Champasak town and local restaurants can be found in some guesthouses, along the main streets and near the entrance to the Ancient City.

To move from Champasak town to the Ancient City and the Vat Phou temple complex, we suggest you rent a bicycle, and not a motorcycle, which pollutes the air and disturbs the tranquillity of the site. For small groups, you may hire small vans or lorries locally known as sawngtaew. If you wish to explore the Mekong River, boats can be hired from the visitor center or boat landings.

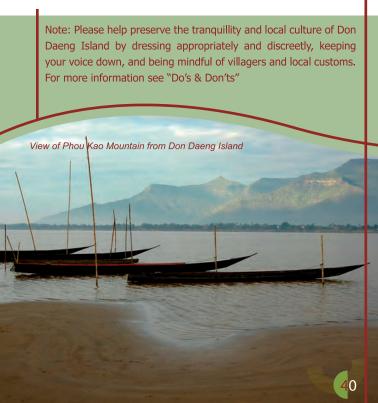
The Vat Phou Festival, an important religious event, which is celebrated yearly for three days in February, embodies the continuing sacred and communal role of the site. Each year, people from all over Laos come to worship at Vat Phou during the festival. Aside from religious Buddhist ceremonies, other traditional cultural activities, such as boat races, boxing matches and an elephant procession are organized to entertain visitors.

When planning a visit to Champasak during the Vat Phou Festival in February, you need to make room reservations ahead of time, due to the high number of visitors.





This peaceful island is located inside the Vat Phou - Champasak Heritage Landscape just across the Mekong River from Champassak Town. The island is an ideal location for walks and bicycle rides on its country path, which can be followed around the tree-shaded island. Along the way stop and enjoy the sweet taste of coconut or sugar cane juice and eat the fresh fruits that the island is famous for, Other sites along your walk or ride include traditional Buddhist temples, an ancient forest stupa, basket weaving villages and a protected forest. Local guides and bicycles are available in Hua Don Daeng Village. Don Daeng has three accommodation options: For a very reasonable price, you can stay in the community lodge, located on the secluded northern tip of the island and operated by twenty families in the village. For those looking for more cultural immersion, one can choose to stay with a family in a homestay setting. Alternatively you can stay at the private guesthouse easily seen across the river from Champasak Town. To get to Don Daeng, hire a boat from either Ban Mouang or Champasak Town. The ride is only about 5 minutes.



Four Thoushand Islands (Si Phan Don)

The breathtaking 4000 Islands or Si Phan Don are located in a section of the Mekong River just north of the border with Cambodia and start from Don Khong, the largest island and capital of Khong District. Si Phan Don is an important wetland habitat for both bird and aquatic wildlife species most notably the freshwater, endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin and also provides an important natural resource base that supports many local people through fishing and other indigenous activities. This area of the Mekong is unique from all others for its many islands, some of which are uninhabited and still remain in their pristine natural form. In fact, of the four thousand islands only 33 are inhabited, with the smallest settlement on Don Xang—which has only five families.



Khone Pha Pheng Waterfall

Just 13 kilometres from the Cambodian border and east of Don Khon on the Mekong River is the pearl of the Mekong, Khone Pha Pheng Waterfall. Here the Mekong cascades across a wide fault line, which slopes in a curvilinear pattern and causes the river to pass through with awesome power. Khone Pha Pheng is the largest waterfall by water volume in Southeast Asia and stands approximately 15 metres high. Due to its great power and steep descent, the waterfall renders this area of the Mekong unnavigable, before flowing peacefully south into Cambodia and Viet Nam.



√To get to Khone Pha Pheng

From Pakse take Route 13 south 150 km, turning right off the highway at the sign pointing to Khone Pha Pheng. Not far down this road you will see another sign pointing to Khone Pha Pheng, where you must turn left. Follow the road to the end to the waterfall.

Som Pha Mit (Li Phi) Waterfall

Accessible from tiny Don Lai Island, just 1 km from Don Khon, west of Ban Khon Tai Village, Som Pha Mit (Liphi) Waterfall is another amazing natural site to visit. Here you can relax, enjoy the scenery, watch people fishing, and enjoy a dish of freshly caught Mekong fish. This waterfall is named after a sacred Buddha image (Pha), which was dropped in the water—never to be found again—by the first King of Laos, Jao Fa Ngum, who was travelling the region by boat. Many people have erroneously called it Li Phi, which actually refers to the entire 20 km east-west stretch of waterfalls and rapids of Si Phan Don (including both Khone Pha Pheng and Som Pha Mit).

The name Li Phi was given to the area because it acts like a giant fish trap (Li) and will kill any of those who dare to navigate it (Phi means ghost or dead person). Hence, to avoid becoming like a fish in a giant fish trap, please be cautious around the falls and watch your step.



Don Khong is the largest and northernmost of the 4000 Islands. It is also the capital of Khong District and is the logical jumping off point for trips to the rest of the islands. The island boasts having 99 mountain tops; a rich heritage of temples (15 total) and French colonial buildings. It is 24 km long and 8 km wide and has a total of 19 villages, many of which derive their livelihood from fishing. The main market in Ban Kang Don is a great place to visit in the early morning to see the many varieties of fresh Mekong fish available.

Other specialty products of the island include palm sugar, palm leaf hats, and Lao Kao Gum - a potent alcohol. Two of the island's mountains, Phou Kyo and Phou Kew, each have sacred caves and offer a refreshing walk in the forest with clear views of the island. A fantastic way to see the island is by bicycle or motorbike, following the paved ring road around. To get to Don Khong, from Pakse take Route 13 south 131 km and turn right at the sign pointing to "Ban Hart and Ban Khinak". Follow the paved road straight ahead for 4 km to the boat pier from where you cross over by ferry to Don Khong.

Don Det & Don Khon

Don Det and Don Khon are the most popular of the islands after Don Khong. Both islands offer relaxing bungalow accommodation and a lazy, island pace of life. From Don Det rafting and kayaking trips can be arranged that take you into the heart of the 4000 Islands.





Don Khon is joined with Don Det by a historic railway bridge built by the French in 1910. Next to the bridge sits an old locomotive, one of the last remnants of the railway. In addition to the main activity of relaxing by the Mekong, visitors can walk or ride bikes to Don Lai Island to see Som Pha Mit Waterfall or take a trip to see the freshwater dolphins from the tip of Don Khon. To get to Don Det/Don Khon, from Pakse take Route 13 south about 141 km and turn right onto a dirt road at the sign pointing to Nakasang. Follow the road 3 km to the end. From the

boat pier you can take a boat to Don Det, which is about 15 minutes away. From the pier at Don Det, take a shuttle bus to Don Khon Island, about a 25 minute ride.

Irrawaddy Dolphin

The last remaining site of freshwater Irrawaddy Dolphins in Laos is located on the border of

Gid locomotive on Don Khon

These freshwater delphins, called NPa

Lao PDR and Cambodia. These freshwater dolphins, called "Pa Kha" in Lao, reach about 2.5m in length and likely number less than 20 total in Laos. Tourists can see the dolphins (although sightings are not guaranteed) by chartering boats from either Ban Khon (just a 5-10 minute ride) or from Ban Veunkham (30-minute boat ride) on the Lao-Cambodia border south of Khone Pha Pheng.





Xe Pian NPA was established to conserve biodiversity and is considered to be one of the most important areas in Indochina, particularly for its many species of large mammals and waterbirds. Its waterbirds include the critically endangered Giant Ibis and White-winged Wood-Duck, and other globally threatened species, like Whiteshouldered Ibis, Sarus Crane, and Lesser Adjutant, which may still visit Kiet Ngong marsh. Although Rhinoceros, Kouprey, Eld's Deer, and Hog Deer have already disappeared from the area, Asian Elephant, Tiger, Gaur, Banteng, Leopard, Sun Bear, Black Bear and Dhole (Wild Dog) are still found in the NPA. These reclusive species are very difficult to see, but their sign can be observed in the interior, along with impressive and more visible species, such as Yellowcheeked Crested Gibbons and hornbills. Biological surveys in Xe Pian have produced a long list of species, including 62 mammals, 334 birds, 44 reptiles, 21 amphibians and 176 fish, but many groups are still little known. Almost 10,000 people live within Xe Pian and close to 50,000 within 5 km of its boundary, many practicing traditional agriculture and collecting forest plants to supplement their diet. They benefit from the biodiversity of the area and are called upon to maintain it for future generations.





Phou Asa Mountain & Kiet Ngong Wetlands

Atop Phou Asa Mountain, above Kiet Ngong Village, stands an ancient and magnificent stone structure called Vat Phou Asa. It is believed to be a temple and is surrounded by distinctive, unique columns made of plate-like rocks which stand proudly as if guarding the temple. The summit of Phou Asa opens out to provide a stunning view over large areas of southern Lao. The forests of Xe Pian and Dong Hua Sao NPAs appear to stretch out endlessly from the Kiet Ngong wetland. To the north is the Bolaven Plateau, and on a clear day waterfalls can be seen cascading from it. Ahead to the east is the Xe Khong floodplain in Attapeu, and lining the horizon is the Annamite Mountains on the Vietnamese border. At the top of the outcrop is a ring of stone pillars. Legends abound about these remains, but it is unknown if the structure was built for religious or military reasons.

Phou Asa is reached by a short walk with a local guide or elephant ride along a forest trail from the village. Elephant-back trips can also be arranged to other places such as nearby forests and wetlands. Village guides are available to take visitors on half- or full-day walks to Phou Asa and its surroundings, interpreting its many medicinal plants and non-timber forest products. The 7 km long eco-trail begins at the foot of Phou Asa and offers 3-4 hours of steady walking through tall semi-evergreen forest.



Also from Kiet Ngong Village is an extensive wetland, which is good for birdwatching and day hikes. During the dry season (November-April) there is a trail around the wetland to Donlay Island, which takes about two hours if walked slowly. Many waterbirds can be seen, so bring binoculars if you have them. On the way you will pass the Giant Rock (Hin Huoa Yak in Lao), a sacred place with a superb view.

The trail continues to Phapho Village, but you will probably want to return the way you came. Donlay Island can also be reached by canoe. Your boatman will take you slowly around the edge of the wetland, where a passage through the thick mats of floating vegetation is kept open by boats and water buffaloes. A canoe trip offers a closer look at the birds and local fishing techniques than a walk around the wetland.

Booking an Elephant Ride

It is best to book an elephant ride in advance. The simplest way to do this is to book through a tour company in Pakse. If you are travelling to the village on your own, without a guide or a tour company, you can visit the tourism office in Pakse or in Champasak District and ask for help to contact the village. If you show up to the village without a prior booking, please be aware that you may need to wait up to an hour for the villagers to prepare the elephant for your trip, as the elephant might be out in the forest or fields doing elephant things.

Note: All visitors to Phou Asa are asked to be accompanied by a village guide or ride atop an elephant. Cars, motorcycles and bicycles are forbidden on Phou Asa. Also, Please do not take or move any objects from Vat Phou Asa temple.

Accommodation in Kiet Ngong

There are three choices of accommodation in Kiet Ngong.

(1) Sleeping buts operated by the village, which sleep two

- (1) Sleeping huts operated by the village, which sleep two and overlook the wetland. (2) Home-stay with local families.
- (3) The Kingfisher Ecolodge, located just 1km outside the village, which offers luxury bungalows overlooking the wetland.





√Directions to Kiet Ngong Village

From Pakse, take Route 13 south to Km 48. Turn left at Km 48 (look for the sign pointing the way to Attapeu and Xe Pian National Protected Area). Follow the dirt road 8km down, until you see the sign to Ban Kiet Ngong where you turn right. The village is just a one kilometer from the turnoff.

Pha Pho Village

Pha Pho Village (pronounced Ban Pa Po) is regionally known as having skilled elephant tamers, with a long tradition of elephant domestication for the purpose of using elephants to work in forests and fields. This tradition has been falling out of practice, however, as the availability of wild elephants has been dramatically reduced due to habitat loss and, in fact, it is now forbidden to domesticate elephants who reside inside the Xe Pian NPA.

Ban Phao Pho to this day still has a few domesticated elephants and offers elephant rides to tourists who make the journey to their village. The village is located approximately 21km down the road from the more popular Kiet Ngong Village. Elephant rides take you to nearby wetlands, jungles and rocky outcrops inside Xe Pian NPA, as well as to the Dong Hua Sao NPA corridor known to have an endangered population of gibbons. Elephant rides can be booked at the guesthouse located in the village. Please, understand that upon arrival it may take some time for the elephants to get ready for your trip, as they may be out in the forests grabbing a bite to eat or helping out their human kin in the fields.

\(\int Accommodation \)

The guesthouse in Ban Pha Pho, operated by a local villager who speaks English, has simple rooms and basic food available. Elephant rides can be booked at the guesthouse.

√Directions to Ban Pha Pho

From Km48 at Route 13 (south of Pakse on the way to Don Kong/4000 Islands), take the dirt road all the way down, passing the turn off to Kiet Ngong 8 kilometres on your right, until you reach the three way intersection about another 7 kilometres from the Kiet Ngong turnoff. Here you will see a sign for the Pha Pho guesthouse with a drawing of an elephant and you turn right (going straight takes you to Attapeu on Route 18). Go about another 7 kilometres on the dirt road and you will arrive at Ban Pha Pho. The guesthouse is on the right in the middle of the village.

Ta Ong Trail (Two-day Trek)

This starts from a village (Ban Palai Bok) further down the road from Ban Pha Pho and is one of the more remote experiences in the Xe Pian NPA. During this two-day trek you will explore the protected area's diverse forests with knowledgeable village guides, who will teach you about its many medicinal plants and non-timber forest products and point out signs of wildlife (tracks, scat and habitat). The trek provides a unique overnight stay in an ethnic Lavae village, Ban Ta Ong in the village's community guesthouse. On the second day, rise early and take a walk to a nearby forest with local guides to listen to sounds of birds, squirrels and to possibly hear the song-like calls of the endangered Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon (weather permitting). In the afternoon you will finish your journey by riding canoes (water levels permitting) down the Ta' Euang River, which has a good variety of colourful birds, bamboo forests, and monkeys, too.







This trek involves approximately three to five hours of moderate walking per day, and although it is mostly flat with only a few short climbs, the trek can be difficult as the jungle is thick and wild. It is recommended that trekkers be in good physical condition and be prepared for adventure. It is also advised that trekkers be prepared for walking through small streams and be extra careful on river crossings, which can be dangerous.

√Booking the Ta Ong Trek

The Ta Ong Trail is very remote (approximately 80 km south of Pakse) and requires the assistance of a tour company or a certified guide. It is always required that you be accompanied by a guide. The trek can be booked at the Tourism Office in Pakse (031-212 021), at Green Discovery (www.greendiscovery.com) and other tour companies in Pakse, and at the Kingfisher Ecolodge in Kiet Ngong Village (030-534 5016 www.kingfisherecolodge.com).

Xe Khampho Watershed

The confluence of the Xe Khampho, Xe Pian and Xe Khong rivers offers some of the best possibilities for viewing large waterbirds and other animal species in southern Laos. The Xe Khampho and Xe Pian rivers may be accessed from Pakbo and Phonsaat villages, which are a bit down the road from Ban Palai Bok and Ban Pha Pho (see above "Pha Pho Village" and "Ta Ong Trail"). Although this area has not yet been developed for tourism, it may be possible to arrange specialty trips for canoeing on the rivers in search of birdlife. For more information contact the Xe Pian NPA Office located at Km 48 on Route 13 (031 213 446) or one of the major tour companies in Pakse.

The southern corner of Xe Pian NPA known as the Huoay Kaliang - Sayphou Kiou Area, located in the vicinity of Khone Pha Pheng, has been documented to having the highest biodiversity of large mammals in the protected area, with populations of Gaur and Elephant, as well as birds like Green Peafowl and Giant Ibis. This area has not been developed for tourism, yet. However, you might try contacting the Xe Pian NPA Office located at Km 48 on Route 13 (031 213 446) or asking one of the major tour companies in Pakse town for information on the possibility of making a trip out there.



Bolaven Plateau

With its nearly-perfect growing conditions of abundant rainfall, cool temperatures, rich volcanic soils and high elevations of up to 1300 metres, the Bolaven Plateau (named after the Laven, the largest ethnic group on the plateau) is known as one of the world's top coffee growing regions and accounts for nearly all of Laos' coffee production. The history of coffee in Laos began around 1915, when the first coffee trees were planted by French colonists, and after many years of trial and error, successful coffee harvest in Laos was on its way by the 1930's. The specialty of the Bolaven Plateau is the Arabica bean, which is known as one of the best in the world.



Of the current Lao coffee harvest, however, which amounts to roughly 15-20,000 tons per year, the majority is the Robusta bean, which is both cheaper and more commonly traded on the world market. One can distinguish between these two coffee trees by their size: the Arabica tree is the shorter one (about 2 metres in height), while the Robusta tree is quite tall (up to about 5 metres tall). In addition to these two varieties, there are now heartier and higher-yielding variants of the Arabica bean that are gaining in popularity, such as Kantimor bean. Although there are a few large companies that produce coffee commercially on the plateau, most of the coffee that you see in the area is grown by family farmers, who either sell their beans to the large companies or join together in cooperatives to sell it on the world market. Coffee and tea growing is, thus, a vital source of income for most of these villages and for the people of Champasak Province.



Picking coffee beans on the Bolaven Plateau

The Coffee Research Centre at Km 35 en route to Paksong offers coffee tasting upon request during regular office hours (8:30am – 4:00pm) Monday through Friday. Here you can also purchase fresh coffee or take a look at the experimental coffee plots on the grounds. Coffee and tea can also be found for sale outside the major waterfall sites on the Plateau (see below), and at select stores such as the Sala Bolaven near Km 12, which offers a superb variety of local farmers' products ranging from fruit jams to organic wines. To visit coffee plantations and learn about the production process, one can either hire a guide from a tour company in Pakse or visit villages directly (see "Nong Luang" below).



Paksong

Paksong Town, located approximately 45 kilometres northeast of Pakse, is the capital of Paksong District and is the hub for coffee trade on the Bolaven Plateau. This small town offers basic accommodation and eating facilities for those wishing to stay overnight on the Bolaven Plateau and is noteworthy for its interesting fresh food market stocked with an array of fruits, vegetables, forest products, and other natural commodities.

Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area

A significant portion of the Bolaven Plateau is covered by the Dong Hua Sao NPA, which extends across 1,100 sq km. This national protected area is home to key species including Elephant, grey-faced tit-babbler and Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon. Semi (dry)-evergreen forest is the dominant vegetation type in the lowlands and the uplands. Lowland plains comprise well over half of the protected area at elevations from 100 to 300 m. Steep to very steep slopes rise to the edge of the Bolaven Plateau at an elevation of around 1,000 m. Peaks near the plateau rim reach almost 1,300 m.







Dong Houa Sao is easily accessed from major hard-top all weather roads west (Route 13 south) and north of it (Pakse-Paksong). Another east-west road skirts the protected area in the south. Many of the major waterfalls, including Tad Fane and Nong Luang (see below) are located inside the Dong Hua Sao NPA

Tad Fane Waterfall

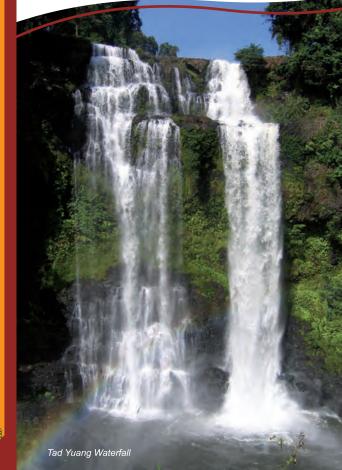
This natural tourism site is located within the Dong Hua Sao NPA at Ban Lak 38 Village (Km38) along Route 23 heading towards Paksong (look for the signs on your right). The Champy and Pak Koot rivers flow off the plateau and come together here to create the Tad Fane Waterfall, which falls an impressive 120 metres. The real beauty of this waterfall stems from its two branches of water, which divide as they spill over the steep cliffs. A seemingly endless flow of water is created and if windy, the mist sprays create spectacular rainbows. Visitors can sit and enjoy the view from the Tad Fane Resort (www.tadfane.com), which has a restaurant, in addition to comfortable cabin-like bungalows. One-day guided treks around coffee plantations and forests inside the Dong Hua Sao NPA can be arranged from the resort.



Note: Although it is encouraged to purchase local products such as fresh coffee and tea from local salespeople located at the entrance to Tad Fane, please DO NOT purchase wild orchids. These beautiful wild flowers are quickly disappearing due to over harvesting from the Dong Hua Sao NPA—a practice that is both illegal and unsustainable.

Tad Yuang Waterfall

Just a couple kilometres past the Tad Fane at Km 40 on Route 23 is the amazing Tad Yuang Waterfall. This waterfall is 42 metres in length, and offers up-close views from the top, middle and bottom of the falls. A path can be followed around the side to reach different lookout points good for picture-taking and or just plain marvelling at this extraordinary natural site. At the top of the waterfall are some well-maintained picnic areas popular with the locals.







Less frequented than the other main waterfall attractions on the Plateau, Tad Champee waterfall offers a quiet and peaceful retreat into nature, suitable for picnicking or quiet meditation. A path to the left of the parking lot can be followed down to the edge of the stream (watch your step on the handcrafted stairway), where you can relax on either long wooden benches or on its natural round boulders. The access way to Tad Champee starts from Km 38 on the left-hand side of Route 23, directly across the street from the Tad Fane Waterfall access road. The waterfall is a few turns and a few kilometres down the way. Follow the signs that point the way.

Pa Suam Waterfall

This majestic waterfall, located 33 kilometres north of Pakse in Bachieng District, gets its name from its rectangular room-like shape, as "suam" literally means "room" in Lao. The falls stand about 6 metres high and flow all year round from the Houay Champy River as it descends across the Bolaven Plateau from the north in Salavan Province. The beauty of this waterfall is mesmerizing and offers a great spot to spend a lazy afternoon and enjoy a picnic or dine at the nearby restaurant of the Uttayan Bachieng Resort. You can also stay here overnight in either the resort's unique tree-top bungalows or the cultural setting of a family homestay in an on-site ethnic Lavae village. To reach the waterfall, follow Route 23 north turning left at Km21 and following Route 20, heading towards Salavan Province, another 12 kilometres. Look for signs to Pa Suam on your left.



Nong Luang Village is noteworthy for being one of the few villages to participate in a coffee growing cooperative, which allows the villagers to sell their coffee bean directly on the world market in return for a fair trade price. The village works together with other villages in the area to pool their coffee beans together, process them, select the best product for market and ship the beans abroad to coffee roasters and retail packagers, effectively raising the value of their product to a level that yields a fair market price instead of settling for lower prices offered by local middlemen. The villagers of Ban Nong Luang Village are very happy and eager to share the beauty of their coffee growing fields and surrounding forests, waterfalls and caves with visitors who choose to make the journey up to Paksong. With the help of a Thai gentleman named Mr. Roongroin (aka "Roger") who runs a small café called the Traveller's Meeting Place on the highway in Paksong, the village has created a committee (The Committee for Natural Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development) to develop tourism and protect their natural surroundings.

There are a host of activities available, which are in the beginning stages of being developed (i.e. be patient as things are not well marked yet). Village guides can take you around their coffee fields and teach you about the growing process.







They can also take you on ½-day, full day and multi-day walks and hikes into the Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area and the Dan Nong Luang Highlands. This area is extremely exciting for those interested in natural landscapes, waterfalls and unadulterated nature. In fact, the villages say that just about every time they go out, they find a new waterfall or undiscovered natural feature such as a cliff or small cave. You can stay overnight in the village in a homestay setting with families, or you can arrange for camping in the forest through the Traveller's Meeting Point Café.

To arrange for visits to Nong Luang, it is best to first contact the Traveller's Meeting Point Café, located on the left-hand side of the main highway as you pass through Paksong. Staff there can arrange for a guided trip for a modest fee, or if you would like, they will simply help contact the village for you free of charge.



Ban Saphai, Don Kho & Surroundings

Ban Saphai and Don Kho are located just 15 kilometres north of Pakse and are known for their traditional weaving industry, historic town centre and important Buddhist temples. To get to Ban Saphai, you can hire a tuk tuk, rent a motorbike and go on your own, or take public transportation leaving from the new market in the centre of Pakse town.

The age of Ban Saphai is unknown but the village's remnants of Vat Phou-era stones indicate that people inhabited the area more than a thousand years ago. Ban Saphai, historically the weaving capitol of Champasak and largest producer of traditional Lao skirts (sin) in the area in past years, is today the centre of trade in Lao skirts and textiles in the region. Many nearby villages send their weavings to Ban Saphai traders who move the product north to the Talat Sao (morning market) in Vientiane and to foreign markets abroad. To see traditional weaving visit the market in the centre of town, or visit the house of Mae Souvali, which has a group of women weaving various patterns of silk and cotton fabrics. A good variety of reasonably priced woven products are available at the market in the centre of town, as well as at Han Phonesouk, a retail store located on the main road.

Vat Saphai Kang is a temple of an unknown age that was last reconstructed in 1938 and has a venerated, stupa-like stone (Pa That) from the Vat Phou era that marks the temple as the most sacred in the area and the first temple to open all religious festivals. A milestone from the French era used by boats for noting distance of travel can be seen here as well (near the Pa That). Across the street from Vat Saphai Kang is a traditional, southern Lao house in twin-roof style (luuk fete), which was originally built approximately 150 years ago by Pau Tao Jume, a coffee plantation owner. Today the house is inhabited by his great granddaughter, Nang Moui and her family, who practice traditional weaving. Please be respectful and do not disturb the family.





Vat Posay is famous for the Pa Si Ho, a sacred rock that was discovered in 1962 on the grounds of the temple, burried underneath a large tree. To those who pay their respects to the Pa Si Ho comes good luck and strong health; to those who curse or disturb the rock comes sickness or even a loss of speech. Please show your respect by wearing proper attire (cover legs and upper body) and remember to remove your shoes before entering. Also of note are the ancient, carved rocks located on the grounds believed to have emerged from the ground on their own.

Dao Poon (Old Kilns): The remains of old brick kilns are located on the bank of the Mekong at Ban Kathim Gnai across the river from Ban Sakmuang. The kilns were used to produce mortar and plaster before cement was available by using a mixture of rock, snail shells, buffalo skin and sugar cane juice. The age of the kilns is unknown. Please do not touch or remove any objects from the area. Boats from Ban Saphai can be arranged to visit the kilns.

Don Ko

Don Kho is a small island located across the Mekong River from Ban Saphai. According to the villagers of Don Ko, the island was originally settled by a small group of families from Attapeu hundreds of years ago. During the French colonial period in the late 1800's, Don Ko became the first centre of political administration in Champasak Province, preceding Pakse, due to its safe and convenient location for docking French military boats, which travelled up and down the Mekong river regularly. During this ten year period, the island was referred to as Muang Don Ko Gavin and was ruled by three different governors—all Laotian—the last, Udon Sinbandith, died in 1982.



Although the original buildings of the provincial centre are no longer present, some remains can be found, such as the posts of the old buildings which are now used to support present-day houses. Two traditional style houses are still standing: There is the former house of a wealthy trader named Pau Tao Kud Khun Mi which was built over one hundred years ago and features a giant, woven fish trap underneath, and the seventy-year-old twin roof house (luuk fete), which has been maintained in excellent condition. Of more recent history is the site of the house of Mr. Phillipe, a foreigner who lived on the island during the late 1960's/early 1970's and worked with the island's silk weavers. Legend has it that the good-natured foreigner, who spoke Lao fluently, kept fit by swimming laps around the island regularly.

Don Ko is traditionally known for its weavings and today still produces fine silk weavings destined for domestic and international markets. You can observe weaving and purchase the products directly from the producers themselves. Also of note are Don Ko's juicy watermelons, which grow without irrigation or watering and are harvested from January to March. Homestays are available on the island and include homemade food and a tour of the island's attractions. To get to Don Kho, go to the old market in the centre of town where you can hire a boat to take you across the river to the island (a short ride). For those who like to travel in style, ask the boatmen to take you across in a traditional paddle boat, instead of a motorboat.





Vat Po Sayalam Temple

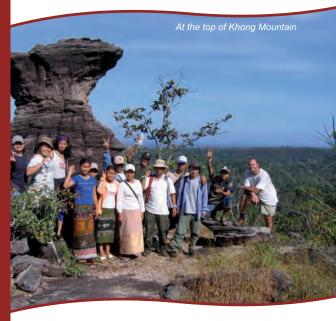
Vat Po Sayalam is a very sacred temple as it was the home of the venerated monk, Ajaan Somdeth Lun. The temple actually is named after the Pipal tree in the centre of the grounds, which is said to have gown on its own after the respected monk was cremated at the site in 1921. The temple was later erected in tribute to the lasting spirit of the great monk. The forested area surrounding the temple was settled after the construction of the temple and is now known as Ban Simoungkoun. Villagers still believe that the spirit of Ajaan Somdeth Lun still protects the area. Please remove your shoes before entering the worship area. You may also make a donation if you wish. From Ban Saphai/Don Kho, you can travel the Mekong north to Vat Po Sayalam located at Ban Vernxay Village. The temple can also be reached by driving to Ban Nakeo from where a short boat ride across the Mekong to Ban Vernxay can be made.





Khong Mountain & Phou Xieng Thong NPA

Khong Mountain, located in the Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area, is known for its wild orchids, rocky outcroppings, cultural and religious sites, as well as stunning views of Laos and Thailand. A day hike to Phou Khong is a moderate 4-6 hours. A two-hour walk to 'Hin Khong' (Fish Basket Rock) and back is also possible. During the trek, you can visit a cave where two nuns live in peaceful harmony with nature, learn about local plants and orchids, and see the ancient remains of a former Khmer kingdom. Locally guided tours are available from Ban Mai Singsamphan.



Ban Mai Singsamphan: This lowland Lao trading and fishing village, located at the base of Khong Mountain, is known for its market with its wide variety of non-timber forest products, local rice whiskeys, and woven bamboo crafts. Nearby the village is an area called Nakhon Sing, where there stands a replica statue of the Nakhon Sing lion—the area's original symbol that was stolen by thiefs years ago-and two statues of Nyak guards protecting the village from evil. The village currently offers overnight homestay which includes family-style Lao food.



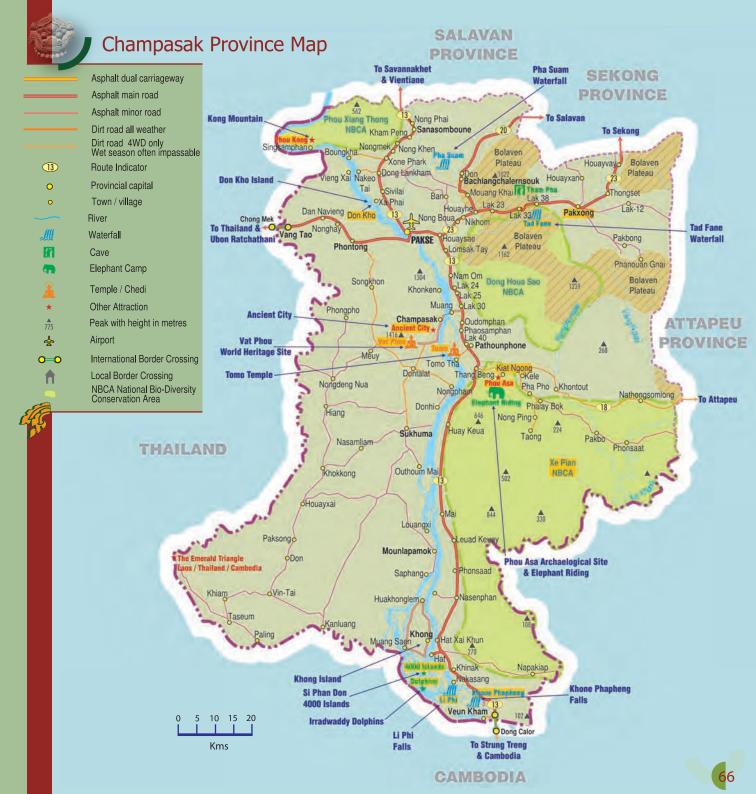


Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area: Ban Mai Singsamphan is located inside the Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area, which covers 1,200 km2 over two provinces, Salavan and Champassak. Key species living in this predominantly semi-evergreen forest are leopard and green peafowl. The protected area is also well known for its diversity of orchids.

✓ Getting to Ban Mai Singsamphan/Khong Mountain

The best way to get to Ban Mai Singsamphan and Khong Mountain is by booking a tour through a local tour company. Contact the Provincial Tourism Office for more information. Alternatively, take a tuk tuk (hired from the Central Market) to Ban Boungkha village (approximately 40 km north of Pakse), from where you can hire a boat upriver about 1.5 hours to Ban Mai Singsamphan. Once at Ban Mai, ask the villagers to arrange a guide to take you to Khong Mountain.









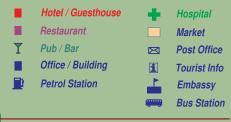
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Town / village

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