

As (un)Seen on TV!

Southern Laos NKM Free Guidebook

by NKM [Mekong Homestay & Family Dinner in Paksé] FREE LAO LIBRARY

Champasak Loop

March 2019 update

Warnings and precautions for use

This free guidebook may contain peanut residue and may even make epileptic. Keep away from any source of intense heat & put your pants-straps on! **PRINT IT** (if possible) or keep it on your iphone, tablet etc. – Share it as much as you want... but keep rude stepmothers away.

It is subjective & talkative and maybe too long for some tired eyes: i wrote it to be as exhaustive as possible & for the travelers to be able to compose their own journey.

Main purpose: I try to explain precisely how to enjoy Southern Laos & to show that there is a lot to do (much more than the official guidebooks say); & therefore to increase the duration of travelers' stay.

I recommend staying 10 days minimum in SL.

Ingredients List: 15 years of Lao experiences, thousands of km & miles on a motorbike or by foot, months of benevolent work, 2 hectoliters (53 gallons) of coffee and... too many cigarettes.

Some beers also (but do not tell my mother, please).

I have written this **free guidebook** because I have not found any tools (guidebooks, blogs, maps) good enough to talk about **my Southern Lao Confidences & Secret Nice Places** ... and "Because sharing matters".

Other tools: My **M-maps** exist since February 2017: 4 beautiful pocket maps (more than 16 maps in total) describing precisely Southern Laos area. They are more than maps, they are guides-maps. *For sale* in Paksé from 2€/map*. *No advertisement & No help from any authorities... blablabla.*

In this guidebook, I have added some screen shots of the **m-maps** and many simple diagrams to be clearer in my explanations, but having **the m-maps** in real will surely help you.

There are **4 main highlights in SL:** **Paksé, Bolaven Plateau, Champasak Area, 4000 islands riverine archipelago.** *Therefore the book is divided in 7 parts* (isn't it logical?):

Laos in General	-- pages (translation in process...)
Paksé Attractions	-- pages (translation in process...)
Lao Food Suggestions	-- pages (translation in process...)
How to survive in a Mekong bar	10 pages
Bolaven Plateau Loops	37 pages
You are here → Champasak Loop	33 pages
4000 Islands	-- pages (translation in process...)



* N.B. All prices in this book are approximate. It is more practical to write them in euro: 1€ = 10.000 Lao kip

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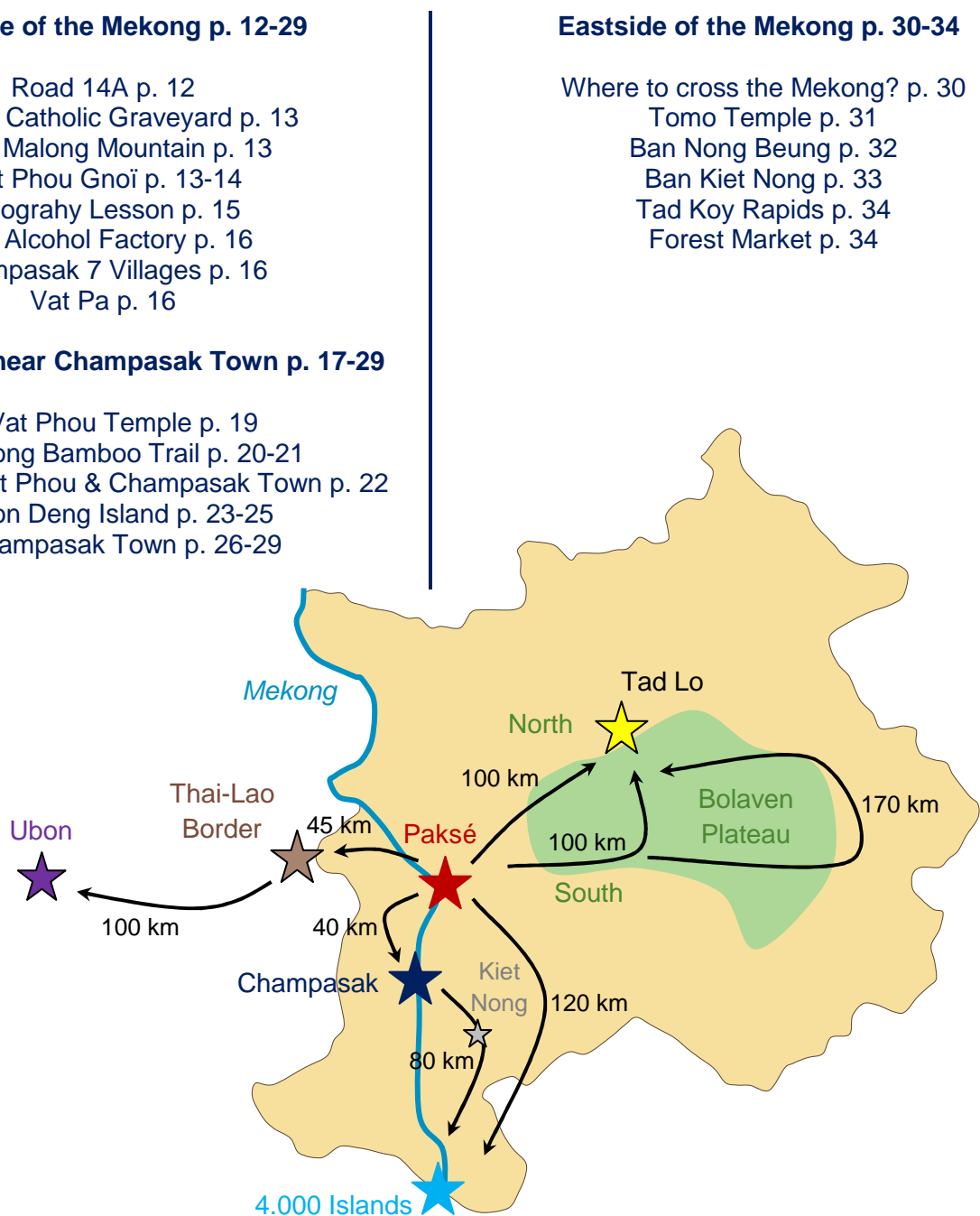
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NKM Mekong Homestay and M-Maps' Southern Laos Highlights

(Northern Part Only)

©creator NKM October 2018

N.B. This map is not to scale

- Mekong, Sedon & Sekong rivers
 - Paved road
 - Unpaved road
 - Unpaved **difficult** road
 - Bolaven Small Loop – 200km
 - Bolaven Big Loop Add-on – 120km
- Attractions:**
- Classic, nice & visited
 - Nice but less visited
 - Nice but not really visited
 - Main town or intersection
 - Paksé Secret Walking Itineraries

Approx. Nber of km between 2 black dots



NKM & M-maps Mekong Homestay

→ Cf. specific free guide book

Champsak Loop Area

→ Cf. specific free guide book

Bolaven Loops Area

→ Cf. specific free guide book

Deep Bolaven Area East

→ Cf. specific free guide book

Deep Bolaven Area West

→ Cf. specific free guide book

Champsak East Loop Area

→ Cf. specific free guide book

Champsak West Loop Area

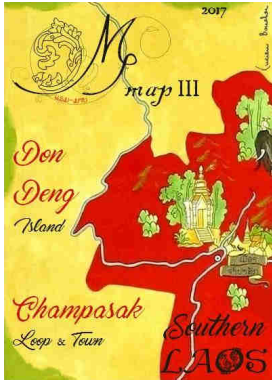
→ Cf. specific free guide book

More details on pocket M-maps & More info in nkm free guidebooks: Search for NKM Free Lao Library [online] ©creator NKM October 2018

Paksé itineraries & Lao Food Suggestions Champsak & Bolaven Loops 4000 Islands

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Champasak ຈຳປາສັກ Loop



← useful m-maps for the Champasak Loop

Real guidebook & good map needed!

Champasak is *misknown*, and its surroundings are *ignored*.

(Champasak is written in English with a single S, but it is pronounced with 2S Champa-SSak)

Most visitors think "Champasak = Vat Phou Temple... and that's it!"

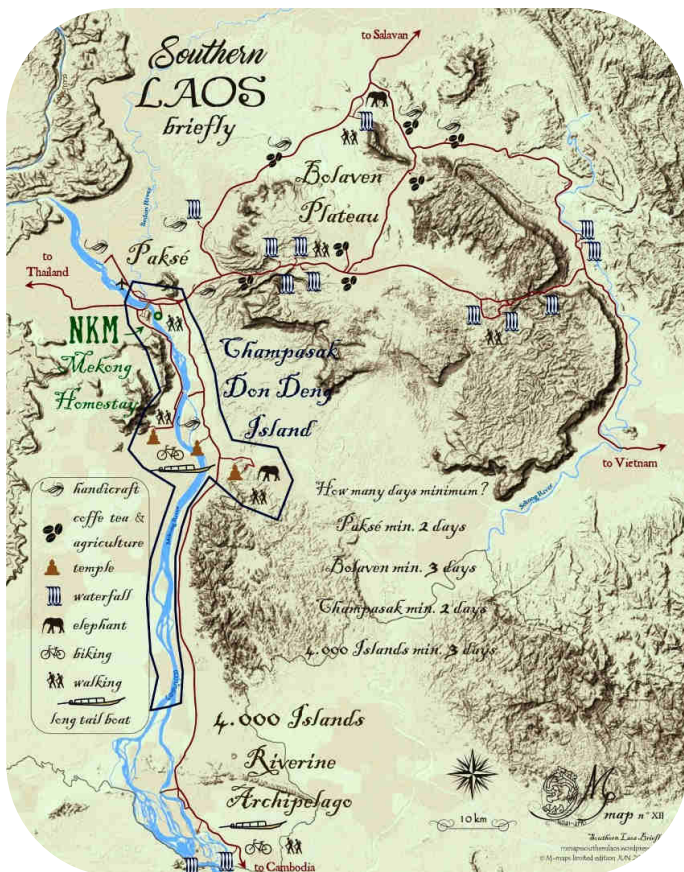
The next 30 pages may help you to change your mind.

Since 2016, many of our nkm visitors have come back from Champasak with big smiles saying that if they had known *it was so charming* they would have differently

organized their journey: "OMG! That's so cuuuUte !" (*sic!*)

Many travelers, poorly informed upstream, have finally limited time to fully discover the treasures of South Laos, including Champasak. One day is not enough, and considering Champasak as a loop with many other attractions nearby, I would say you'll need 3 days & 2 nights minimum...

Champasak Area LOOP ↓



Champasak & Vat Phou are on the Westside of the Mekong. *The Mekong Bamboo Trail* (going down to 4000) is also on the Westside of the Mekong.

Fabulous *Don Deng Island* is on the middle of the Mekong (of course it is!).

Tomo Mystic Temple, *Ban Kiet Nong* (elephants), *Ban Nong Beung* (woodcarving), *Tad Koy waterfall* and *the Forest Market* are on the Eastside.

Eastside attractions can be considered as minor attractions; therefore it is possible to only Go & Back on the Westside from the beautiful Road 14A.

But in **this book**, Champasak is a loop.

*John Doe**: "... Yes, but if it were *truUUe*, ev'rybody would know it! and it would be in guidebooks, and it would be on the internet, and... blablabla"
From this point of view... I can NOT do anything for you ANYMORE.
Why don't you go back to Pétaouchnoque les Indes instead?

What to do in Champasak & around?

Briefly, Southern Laos is...

Paksé = Immersion in the Laotian peri-urban (by foot: miles of authenticity! Cf. the free guidebook for Paksé)

Bolaven plateau = Lush nature, waterfalls, coffee plantations

You go here → Champasak = Rice fields, huge Mekong, temples, old colonial buildings, untouched island.

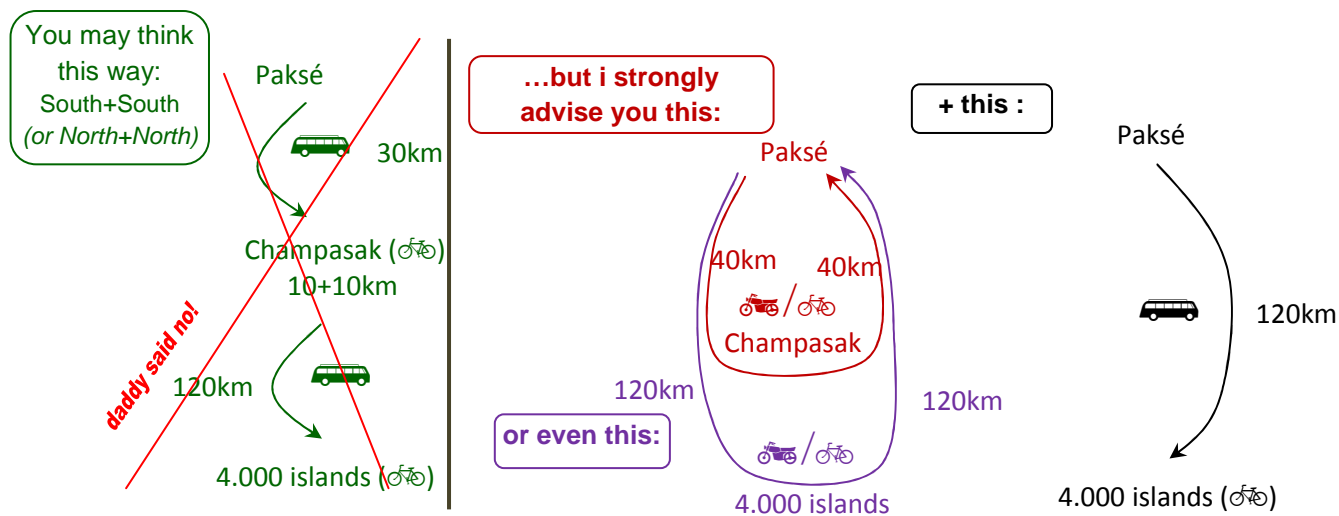
4000 Islands = Slow Lao Life Fluvial Style & Huge Cataracts

*"John Doe" and "Jane Doe" (for females) are multiple-use names that are used when the true name of a person is unknown

How to go to Champasak?

... by scooter ♥♥, by good mountain bicycle ♥, by private car ♥, by boat ♥♥
by local transport (songtéos) ☠, by tourist buses & minivans ☠☠.

Paksé-Champasak-4000 (or 4000-Champ-PKZ)... – No, it is not the best way.



E-xac-tly like the Bolaven Loops, the Champasak adventure is a loop where you'll enjoy stopping here and there.

Therefore you'll ideally need **a scooter** or **a mountain bike** (or **a private car**).

I know, I know, I know... many of you are afraid of the motorbike/scooter, and some of you are on budget... but wait a little bit for the explanations & the other possibilities to enjoy this area.

Why doing this?! North-South & North again aaand South?!! U crazy blady franch!

For many reasons, madam... But let's be brief once again:

- **14A Road** between Paksé and Champasak is **ma-gni-fi-cient**, and the best way to go and stop *here & there* is by motorbike or a very good mountain bicycle (you'll need to be brave & sporty).
- To discover what I have named **the Mekong Bamboo Trail** and to be able to move *here & there in Champasak*, it is strongly advice to have a vehicle (Champasak is 12 km long - 1x2 = ...)
- Opposite to Champasak, the fabulous **Don Deng Island** is an island without car and it is 8km long (North to South)! Unless you have a motorbike or a bicycle, you'll have to walk a lot.
- With a motorbike you'll be able to cross the Mekong river by small boats, to join Road 13 and to go more South to the mystic **Tomó Um Moug forest temple**, to the cute **Kiet Nong Village** (treks, bird watching and elephants), and to come back North to visit **Tad Koy Waterfall & Rapids** and the surprising **Forest Market**.
- It is therefore better to have a scooter (cheap and easy to move) or a good bike (if you are sporty) or a private car with a driver as "a guide" (more expensive).

Important to know: Bicycles in Champasak

It is terribly hot & the Sun light is strong in Laos + the only available bikes in Champasak are simple bikes – I call them hurt-butt-bikes.

Most of the trails are **unpaved and bumpy**... Do you think your butt-bum is gonna like it?

+Champasak area is quite big:

Paksé-Champasak = 30km, and once you are there...

Champasak→Vat Phu (good paved road) = 12km (Go/Bk = 24 km) + The Mekong Bamboo Trail tour (unpaved trail), Go/Bk = 5km *minimum* + Don Deng Island Tours (unpaved trails) = from 5km minimum to 20km

Personally, no way... but I guess it depends on your buttocks skills. God's mysterious ways...

As far as I know, there is no official scooter rental in Champasak, but ask your guesthouse.

♥ 🚲 **Going to Champ' ... By nice dream bicycle (for sporty people)**

Ok, you are sporty, young, maybe handsome, brave and moreover you've just shaved your legs... let's go for the bike then! Go to B'trail or X-plore Asia agencies (Paksé downtown) and try their mountain bikes.

From Paksé, (R.14) go to Champasak & around and come back from the same nice & quiet road 14 (small traffic)... or make the loop (by coming back from the busy Road 13: I do not recommend it).

It's probably a great trip, but I have never heard about such a hero... Oh, let me see... ah, maybe once... I think he was German and brave like a Viking. *Are you a Viking?*

♥ 🛵 **By Scooter**

If you are neither German nor sporty (like me), nor Viking, the moto/scooter is the best: you'll get the same advantages but in a laazy mode.

110cc + very easy to drive + cheap (from 6€ to 10€+ 3€/100km for gas).

If you can drive a scooter, go directly to page 11.

♥ 🚗 **By private car**

You can get a private car and a driver who will stop you everywhere you like. It costs about 50€ (Go or Go+Back, same price). It depends on your budget and if you are in a group (family). This can be combined with the marvelous cruise by long tail boat (about 45€ for the whole boat - see my long explanations about the cruise next pages). All fares and schedule are in **the 7 Tools Pages** at the end of this guidebook.

John Doe: "I am not sporty, I am not a Viking, I am on budget and I can't drive a scooter. What do you suggest me?"

☠️ 🚗 **By Bus (local transport: songteo)**

If you go by bus, you won't be able to stop here & there and, moreover, once you'll be in Champasak you will have to rent a hurt-butt bicycle (under the Lao Sun+ 25km rides minimum) or to negotiate a tuk-tuk several times or you'll just skip several attractive highlights.

Champasak-Vat Phou by tuk-tuk may cost you 10-12€/vehicle. A bicycle is 1-2€/day.

Bus? To me, it is not the best way to go to Champasak... and it may be one of the worst way to *come back from Champasak to Paksé*: there is no bus station in Champasak and you may catch a songtéo *by chance only in early morning*. Arrange it with your guesthouse.

Vat Phou – sometimes spelled Vat/Wat Phu – is a pre-ankorian mystic temple built on a mountainside.
Do not pronounce "Va Fu or Fou"...
In Lao words transcriptions P+H = P + a light aspiration from the throat.
P+H ≠ Ffff ! *Never ever!*
"Phou" ພູ means "mountain"

Where are the bus stations?

There is no bus going to Champasak, but only "local transports", called "Songtéo". They are trucks with benches. They leave from the huge Dao Market (km 2) in the morning from 8 to 1pm (no precise time). Approx. 2-3€/pers. There are many "songtéos" going down South from Road 14A (West part of the Mekong). They serve all the villages from Paksé ປາກເຊ to Champasak ຈຳປາສັກ, and towns in the South of Champasak too, such as: Dontalat ດອນຕະລາດ, Soukouma ສຸຂຸມາ, Mounlapamok ມູນລະປາໂມກ (usually called Muang Moun ມືອງມູນ by locals).

Destinations are written on the songtéos... but only in Lao. *This is a songtéo:*



This man is not German, nor Viking, nor sporty
This is the reason why he doesn't go to Champasak by bicycle



This is a sign in Lao:



Saying Cham-pa-sak !

You'll always need the Lao words, wherever you go (unless you do not want to be understood).

Do not show a map to the drivers: *useless* - they can't read them. Try to correctly pronounce the Lao names... but you'll probably fail and the Lao won't try to understand you.

Shows them the Lao words: Easier & Efficient

In this book, I have tried to write all the Lao words you need, from the town names to the Lao dishes & food allergies (see the Lao Food guidebook).

🐼🐼 🚗 By Bus (tourist minivan & bus)

Paksé-4000-Paksé Buses & Minivans for tourists, leaving from downtown, can stop by Champasak. They drive the Road 13 (Eastside). **Why "🐼🐼"?**

♥Tourist minivans are very convenient to go to 4000 from Paksé and to come back to Paksé from the 4000, because the Road 13 is not very fun for a scooter drive; + it is a long way (130km) on a busy road with very few attractive stops (especially between Ban Thang Beng & Ban Nakasang – 90km).

♥♥♥*nkm tip*: The best (and wonderful adventurous) way to go 4000 by scooter is to take the Westside **Mekong Bamboo Trail MBT** (from November to May only, and if the weather is not stormy-rainy). This MBT starts near Champasak. I will talk about it later on.

... **BUT...**

1) 🐼🐼 The tourist minivans won't drop you in Champasak (Westside), but in Ban Mouang village (Eastside). You'll have to cross the Mekong by small long-tail boat. Make sure the boat transfer is included in your minivan-ticket fare (many people complain). Then you'll be by foot, with your heavy luggage. **Do you remember I told you Champasak is very elongated?**

2a) 🐼🐼 From 4000, minivans leave at 12... so you may be in Champasak around 3.30pm or more. In Laos the sun goes down early, around 6pm: these transports *kill* your day.

2b) 🐼🐼🐼 If you want to arrive earlier, you'll have to take the local transports in Ban Nakasang (4000 pier) that will stop you at Ban km 30 village... 3km away from Ban Mouang (*Road 140*)... on the Eastside. You might find tuk-tuk (and you'll have to bargain, but you'll be in the middle of nowhere). You'll have to arrange a crossing by small long-tail boat (2-3€/pers.)... and you'll have to walk with your heavy luggage or use another tuk-tuk service (if there are any!).

3) 🐼 From Paksé, leaving at 8am, tourist minivans will also drop you in Ban Mouang village (Eastside) around 9am. Same problems & consequences "1) 🐼🐼".

If you're really keen on "bus", from Paksé, choose the songtéos in the Dao Market.

To me, Tourist Minivans = the worst of the worst way to go to Champasak. 🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼

♥♥ By Boat...



2h-2h30 wonderful cruise on the Mekong. I have sailed 3 times in 2018... **WONDERFUL ! EXTRA-ORDINARY ! MA-GNI-FI-CIENT ! GooORGEOUS !** etc.

I would advise you to go by private car or bus and then to come back by boat.

BUT... If you go to Champasak by boat (from Paksé), once you're there, you'll also have to negotiate with tuk-tuks or to ride a hurt-but bicycle. It is unfortunately impossible to enjoy the scooter ride **and** the cruise... but it is possible to mix good mountain bicycles (rent in Paksé) **and** cruise (bicycles can be put in the boat).

"How much is this orgy?"

In agency

Travel agencies sells tickets 7€/pers. if there are enough people. If not, the boat won't leave. As very few people knows this tips, boats usually do not leave.

"Oooh, my god, what a pity ! How can I manage this wonderfulo-romantic cruise?!"

nkm tip: rent the whole boat

I know 2 companies, with different boat sizes.

up to 8 people boat: 45€/boat/way... which means 22€/pers. for a **WONDERFUL ! EXTRA-ORDINARY ! MA-GNI-FI-CIENT ! GooORGEOUS !** etc. 2h30 cruise on the legendary Mekong. Don't you think it's worthy?

The boat will sure leave for this price (45€) +you may meet other travelers to share the cost.

up to 20 people boat: 50€-70€ depending on the company

2-3 companies

Mr Bounmi (020 556 31 008) ; Mr Khamlao (020 978 5555 7). They can't speak good English: welcome in real Laos. Paksé-Hotel agency (=Vat Phou Travel) also has good & cheap boat driver connections.

What kind of boat is it?

They look like a big "fisherman long-tail boat" + a roof + toilets + live vests + very comfortable chairs

Warning !

There is **no regular route** Paksé-Champasak. You will need to phone and to organize a transfer (PKZ-CHAMP - departure from 7am to 9am) or a pick-up (CHAMP-PKZ - departure from 9am to 2pm **max.**). Travel agencies may be able to book the boat for you too, but I do not know how much they charge for this service. *nkm* does it for free for you if you are our guests.

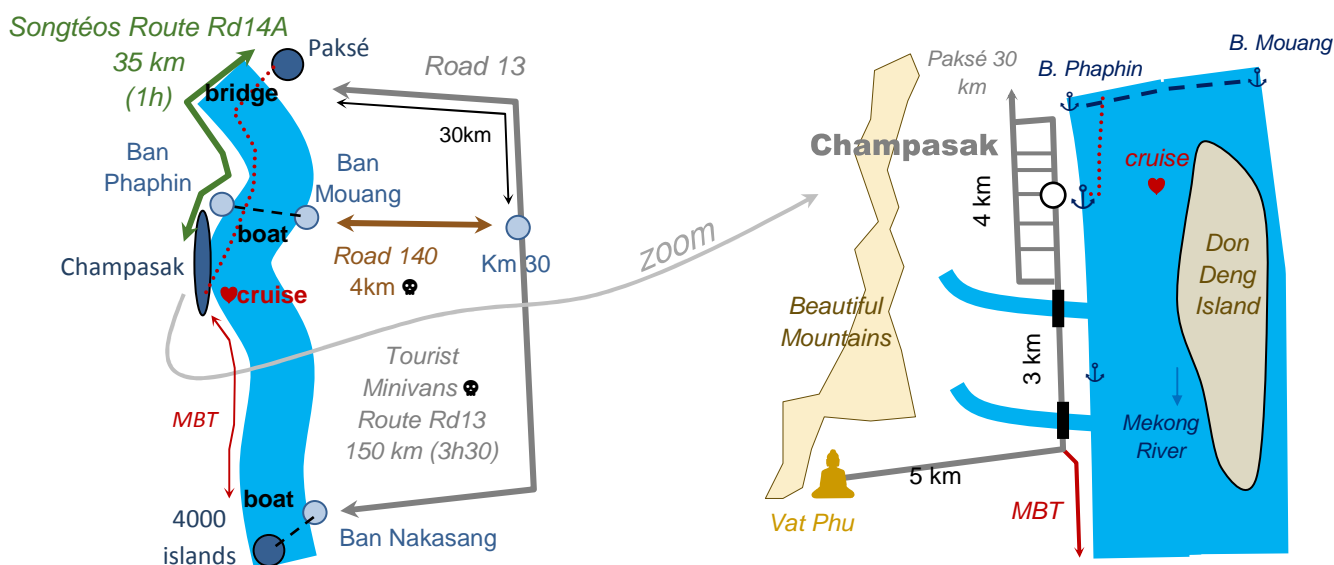
Paksé-Chapasak-4000 by boat (?)

It is also possible to arrange a long 120km transfer to the 4000 islands, to Don Khong Island (the biggest northern island of the area). 220€/boat.

It's a full day trip, and I think it's a too long way... but it is possible: I told you this guidebook tries to be exhaustive.

Where to take the boat? Where do they land?

From *nkm* we use the Mekong Paradise Hotel "pier" or our neighbors'. From Paksé, go to the Salakaham pier, close to the Chitpasong Bus Station (night buses to or from Vientiane) downtown. In Champasak, the pier is next to the Tourism Office.



MBT = Mekong Bamboo Trail

Westside of the Mekong

Road 16W (Lao/Thai Border) & Road 14A (Champasak & South)

Road 14A

Ban Phaphin ບາດ ພະພິນ

Muang Champasak ເມືອງ ຈຳປາສັກ
boats →

Ban Louangkao

Vat Phou Temple ວັດພູ ບາດ ຫລວງເກົ້າ
boats →

Ban Dontalat ບາດ ດອນຕະລາດ

↑ Mekong Bamboo Trail ↓

Muang Soukouma ເມືອງ ສຸຊຸມາ
Muang Mounlapamok ເມືອງ ມູນລະປາໂມກ
boats →

From Don Khong South: boats →

Eastside of the Mekong

MEKONG RIVER

– Bridge –

Muang Paksé ເມືອງ ປາກເຊ
Road 13

Ban Lak Samsip (= km 30)

ບາດ ຫລັກ ສາມສິບ

← Ferry & Small boats →

Ban Mouang ບາດ ມ່ວງ Road 140 to Road 13

Don Deng
← Island →
ດອນແດງ

Dusty Trail to Road 13

MEKONG RIVER

← boats →

Tomo Temple ວັດ ໂຕະໂມະ
Dusty Trail to Road 13

Ban Kiet Nong ບາດ ກຽດໂງ້ງ

Dusty Trail to Road 13

Don San & Don Khong Island
ດອນໂຂງ ↓

– Bridge + Paved Road to Road 13

Don Som Island
ດອນສົມ

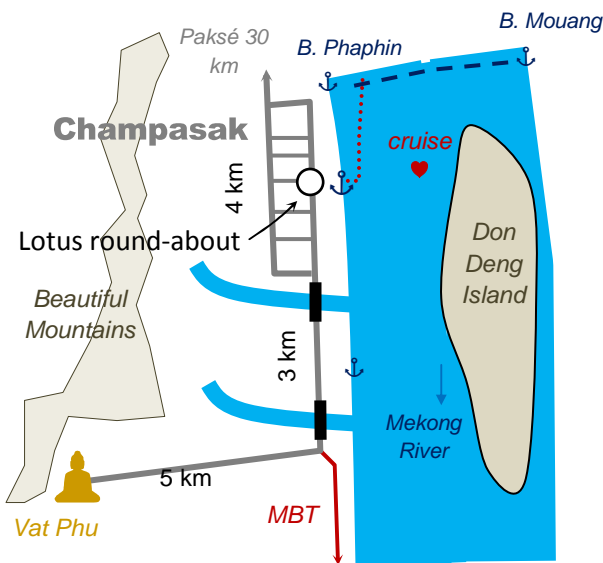
← boats

Ban Khinak ບາດ ຂີ້ນາກ
Paved Road to Road 13

Don Det Island
ດອນເດດ
Don Khone Island
ດອນຄອນ

← boats

Ban Nakasang ບາດ ນາກະສັງ
Paved Road to Road 13



Important Landmarks:

View from the sky, **Champasak** town looks like a 4km long & 500m large ladder. In the middle, there is a **roundabout** with a white concrete lotus on it. There are the Tourism Office, the Police Station & District Offices.

Going South, there are **2 bridges**, 3km away from each other.

Then the road makes a sort of 90° curve going to the West (to **Vat Phou** Temple, 5km (further)).

After the 2nd bridge, 90° curved road is Ban Louang Kao village. there is the beginning of **the Mekong Bamboo Trail**.

Jane Doe "If i go there by scooter, i won't take any boat, shall I? Boooo...!"

– That's a good question! But don't worry Mme Jane!

In Southern Laos the **Mekong River** is everywhere, so you'll have the possibility to sail many times. *Where?*

In Champasak... while going to Don Deng Island

In the 4000 islands... while going to Don Som, to Don Det or to Don Khone.

... and even in Paksé, if you are a nkm guest.

Champasak : town or province?!

That's confusing! The word "Champasak" can refer to 2 different areas: Champasak Town or Champasak Province.

Referring to Champasak Town, you'd better say Muang Champasak ມຸ້ອງ = Muang = Town or Head of District or District

Referring to Champasak Province, you'd better say Kouêng Champasak ຄູ່ອງ = Kouêng = Province.

Champasak Province = Paksé, (a part of the) Bolaven Plateau, Champasak Town, the 4000 islands.

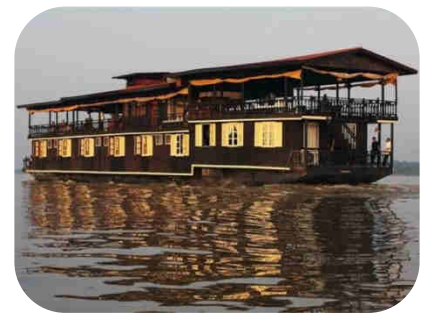
Paksé is the most important "city" of the Champasak Province.

Luxurious Cruise: Vat Phou Cruise

"The Vat Phou" is also the name of the magnificent wooden big boat +restaurant +hotel.

It goes from Paksé to Don Khong (4000) within 2 nights 3 days, stopping on the way to Champasak.

Very classy and high standard... and quite costly (500€/pers. for the all inclusive cruise).



– Summary –

Going to Champasak depends on **your traveler profile**:

"We are keen on scooter" → That's the most convenient and cheap way to fully discover the area. Take your time: 1 night minimum for the Westside (better 2). Champasak Loop (Westside & Eastside): 3 nights min.

"Scooters?! No, thank you!" → Day 1, Go by private car to be able to stop here & there (Vat Phou Gnoï, Vat Phou, Mekong Bamboo Trail, Champasak Town). Day 2 Walk or Bike slowly in the area (Champasak Town, Don Deng). Day 3 Go back to Paksé by cruise.

"We are a family (or a group)" → *Same trip*: Day 1, Go by private car to be able to stop here & there (Vat Phou Gnoï, Vat Phou, Mekong Bamboo Trail, Champasak Town). Day 2 Walk or Bike slowly in the area (Champasak Town, Don Deng). Day 3 Go back to Paksé by cruise.

"Scooter : impossible! & we are on budget" → Go there by local transport "songtéo". Walk, Bike or Tuk-tuk in the area (Vat Phou, Champasak Town, Don Deng, Mekong Bamboo Trail). *Or beg money to your mother.*

Now, let's go deeper and let's detail the **CHAMPASAK LOOP ATTRACTIONS... !**

Champasak Loop(s)

John Doe "A loop?! i've never heard about a loop? ...This blady Franch guy must be crazy..."

By Scooter 🏍️, Good Bike 🚲 or Private Car 🚗

The full loop doesn't look like a round loop: I have named it *"The Constellation"*

By private car/minivan 🚗 the Mekong crossing (Ferry) will cost you 15€/car.

It is also very nice to Go & Back from the beautiful Road 14A: no traffic, no potholes, stunning views (Mekong, Mountain, Green Ricefields)

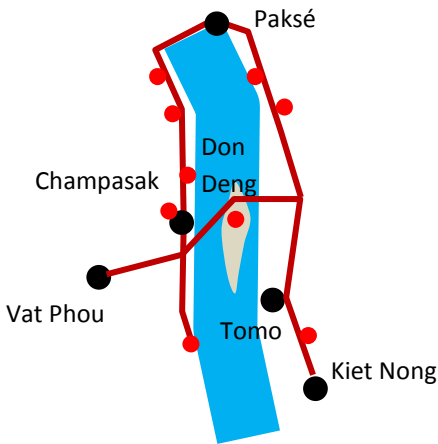
It is also nice to add Tomo (eastside of the river) in the Go & Back 14A

To visit Don Deng Island, you will have to cross the 1,5km Mekong by small boat 🚤 (2-3€/crossing for 2 pers., they usually count by scooter/bike).

● red dots & ● black dots noirs are some of the attractions (explained in the next pages)..

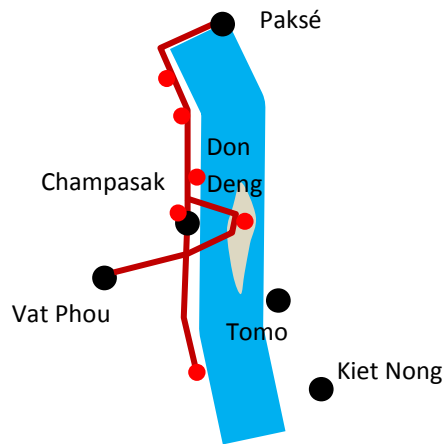
The Constellation

🚲/🏍️ + 🚤 ou 🚗 + 🚤



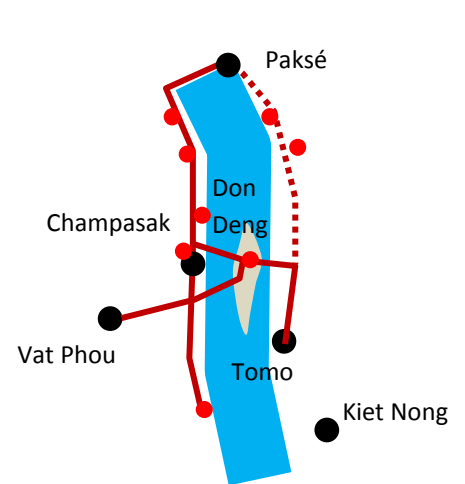
Go & Back 14A

🚲/🏍️ + 🚤 ou 🚗 + 🚤



Go & Back 14A + Tomo

🚲/🏍️ + 🚤 ou 🚗 + 🚤



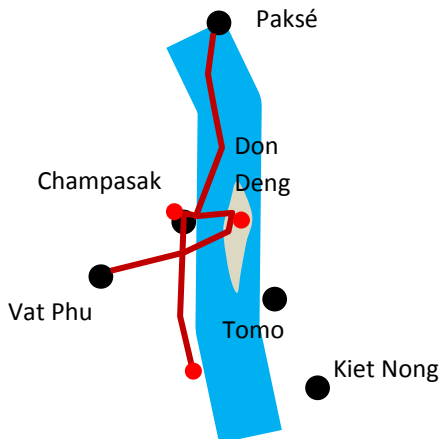
By Boat 🚤 ... By Local Transport (songtéo) 🚚

🚤 big boat with a roof (long cruise) ≠ 🚤 small long-tail boat (Don deng Island)

🚲 Good Mountain Bike (only in Paksé for now) ≠ 🚲 Hurt-butt Cheap Bike (for rent in Champasak)

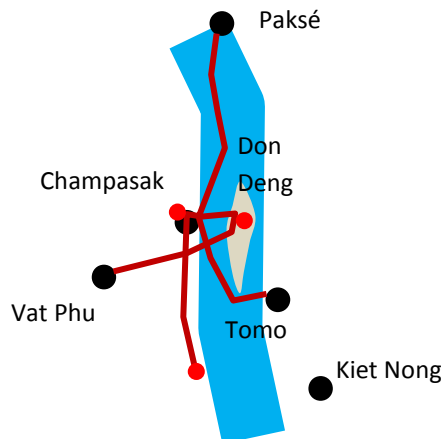
By Boat
+bike or tuk-tuk

🚤 + 🚤 + 🚲



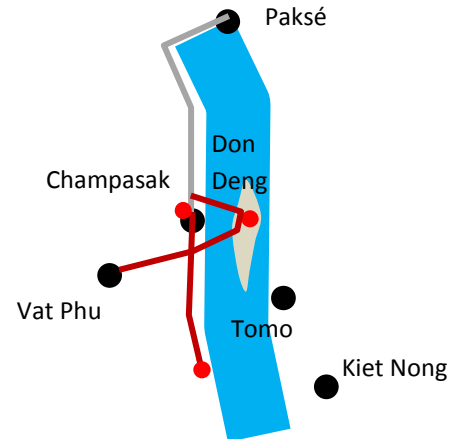
By Boat (+ Tomo) +bike
or tuk-tuk

🚤 + 🚤 + 🚲



By songtéo
+bike or tuk-tuk

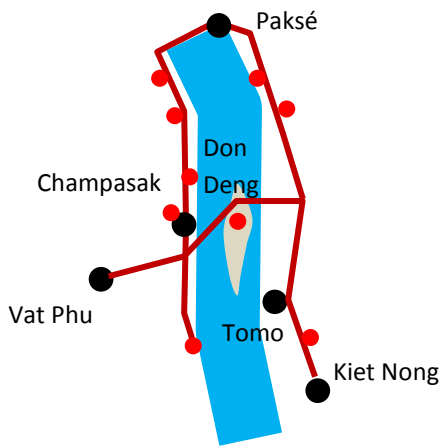
🚚 + 🚤 + 🚲



Westside of the Mekong

Attractions at the beginning of *the constellation Loop*

The Constellation : 200km



Scooter Fear?!

If you are afraid of the scooter and if you want to train first, **The Champasak Loop is easier than The Bolaven Plateau Loop**: Less traffic, Good road and many stops.

Map?

*I strongly advise you to get you the **M-map III** about Champasak Area & Loop.*

Every attractions described in this book are in the pocket map III Useful & Handy = 4 maps in total & fold → unfold = A5 → A3 format Maps.me does not show all the tips bellow.

N.B. In the text bellow, (2km) = means distance already travelled from nkm or from downtown (= km zero).

♥ Road 14A

In Southern Laos the way-to-go is worth as much as the destination. Road 14A is so fantastically beautiful and smooth that I sometimes drive its 30km just for its beauty without stopping anywhere.

The mountains look like green tsunamis to me. Rice fields are usually green, thanks to the irrigation there (June-October + January-March).

How to go there?

(2,5 km) From Paksé, go to the huge Dao market km2 and cross the

Mekong River on the Japanese Bridge (also going to Phou Salao Mountain aka Golden Buddha Mount.).

(4,5 km) You are on the Road 16W.

*If you haven't been up there yet, you can either stop and walk the long & high stairs or drive the 5km road that goes up to the Buddha. But **I would recommend you to go there about 5pm, for the sunset.***

So I do not stop here yet.

N.B. Road 16W go to the Lao-Thai Border (37km).

(6,5 km) 3km further the Buddha mount. foot there is a tollbooth (\$\$) only for cars. Go through it and turn on the left. You are now on the Road 14A, there may be a sign "Vat Phou Heritage".

N.B. If you turn on the right you will be on the Mekong River.

(6,8 km) Drive slowly: there is the first attraction, on your right - only 300m after the crossroad: **the graveyard.**



♥ **Colorful Catholic Graveyard** (15 min visit)

I like this graveyard & I am not a vampire. On your right, the catholic one (open) and...

N.B. ... On your left (of the road), the Chinese one (closed).

Visit respectfully (of course) the colorful & happy field. It is not weird at all. Red, blue, yellow, pink etc. Surprising! See pictures :



Phou Malong Mount. & Vat Saichareun Bounphop Temple (try to say it several times faster & faster) (10 min. visit)

(12,5 km) Phou Malong mountain is on your right. The mountain is one of the symbol of Paksé. It looks like a huge pyramid at the top of the plateau. Phou Malong is the first of the mountain range that ends up to Vat Phou Temple (= Phou Kao mount. looks like a "women breast", but in Lao its name means "hair bun mountain" - French use to name it "Le pic du commandant Lagrée").



Phou Malong seen from Phou Maktchong in the nkm trekking

From North to South = Phou Salao (Golden Buddha) ; Phou Malong (the Pyramid) ; Phou Phaphin (Champasak) ; Phou Douang ; Phou Bassak (Champasak) ; Phou Kao (Vat Phou). I guess you now understand what "Phou" means in Lao...

N.B. The mountain view from the road is not as nice as it used to be "thanks" to high electric pylons newly built. These ugly things will bother your view for 5,5km.

Just at the beginning of the mountain range, there are 2 temples: one on the top of a hill (minor interest), one at the foot of the hill:

Vat Saichareun Bounphop Temple. If you have not been to

Luang Prabang yet, this golden temple looks like the LPBG style. This is only a 5-10 minutes nice stop.

The temple not to miss is 6km further on : **Vat Phou Gnoi**

♥ **Vat Phou Gnoi ວັດພູງອຍ – Hill Temple – Panorama & Forest Walk** (15 min to 2h30 visit)

To the panorama ♥: 2 ways - by vehicle or by foot

(19 km & +600m) Do you remember the ugly electric pylons? They can be use as landmarks: where the wire ends bothering the view (the wire goes east and crosses the Mekong), there is a concrete road on your right, going up to Vat Phou Gnoi (way 1). There is a big stone with Lao writings on it... **BUT I would not advise you** go up by this concrete road: there is a better way: Drive 600m more, you may notice the sign with the name of the temple, and the long & high stairs going up to the panorama.

Leave your vehicle at the small grocery shop below. Cross the road and quickly visit the very old wooden temple on the Mekong river bank (picture) →

Then cross the road again and start climbing the stairs. From time to time, have a look back: the more you climb up the more the view is large & deep.





Looking down the stairs

Altitude = 120m.

There must be 273 irregular steps.

The Mekong view from the top is unique, because the Mekong is unique. It is very large (2,5km) and there are hundreds of islands and bushes. It looks like the 4000 islands view (from a drone, because there is no 4000 view from any mountain in Laos, the area is all flat).



The panorama from Vat Phou Gnoï

♥♥ **Confidence** : Vat Phou Gnoï *unknown forest walk* (2h visit)

Once you're up to the hill visit the cute temple, but especially do not miss the forest walk that starts at the back of the temple. Cf. the small map below

It is not a loop walk but a go&back 4km trail.

The path first goes to small meditation huts/houses (*aka kuti*) through a ever green **dense forest**, then it crosses a **dry river/stream**: there are nice rocks with strange natural carvings 20m further on ("**Mystic Rocks**"). The path remains shaded for 500m. Notice the giant Ogbono nut tree (**Irvingia Tree**) and next to it, some edible mombin plum trees (both on your left). Further on there is **no shade** anymore for another 500m, but there are nice small thorny **bamboo** bushes. Further on the path is shady while starting going up in the **deep forest**. The path is closed by **cliffs** I have never been able to pass. Have a reste, take your breath and come back. → **Go & Back = 2h**



nkm trick (1)

If your plan is to come back from the same Road 14A, it is possible to go straight from Paksé to Vat Phou Champasak Temple, as the temple is more agreeable to visit in the morning. Then, as you come back, leave Champasak around 2pm, you'll be back at Vat Phou Gnoï around 2:30pm. Go up, visit the temple a bit & walk in the forest for less than 2h (go&back), so you can be down the hill around 5pm. Come back to Paksé and climb to the Golden Buddha Panorama for the sunset (go up with the stairs if you are not tired yet, or from the paved steep 5km road). Enjoy the sunset.

nkm trick (2):

I would personally go up to Vat Phou Gnoï the first day and then enjoy Champasak Town etc. (Day 1) Then, the day after, in the morning (or even very early morning) I would go Vat Phou Temple (Day 2).

Why?

- 1) Vat Phou Champasak Temple should be visited in the morning (so the next morning, Day 2)
- 2) The Vat Phou temple faces the sunrise
- 3) The sun disappears quickly (sunset) behind the high mountains...

[nkm trick (3)=] ... so the best place for sunset is on the West of Don Deng Island (Day 2 evening).

Houa Paa Kor Noy Village

Let's come back down to your scooter parked in front of the small grocery (it is nice and fair to buy some water or a packet of crisps), and continue the trip.

After such a forest walk (+climb the stairs, go down the stairs!) you may be keen on making a pause in a bar, with another beautiful view, aren't you?

(21 km) You won't need to go far... drive 2km south and go to the Wopakok Hotel & Restaurant on the river banks.

Wopakok is located at the end of Ban Houa Paa Kor Noy Village.

You cannot miss it. On your left, there is a big elongated stone (sort of *linga* or *menhir*) as a sign. The owners – Soan (francophone Englishman) & Naly (Lao woman) – have ingeniously put 3 round rocks at the foot... so the sign looks like something erected with two bowls, wherever you come from.

Do you get it? You will.

Wopakok is also a cozy dormitory. It is particularly remarkable because of its large view and its huge **Albizia Saman Tree** (2400m² !) that cover the house's owner. Naly, wife's owner, is a fine & creative cook.

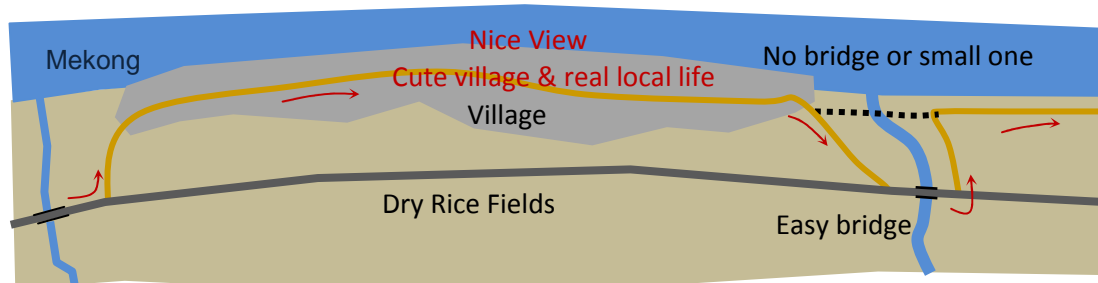
Geography Lesson: 2 trails but 1 bridge – (off the beaten tracks...)

You are now 21km from Paksé and 10,5km from Champasak (Ban Phaphin village).

Most of the bikers just go straight on the nice paved road. The view on the West is incredible (green mountains, green rice fields).

I would also suggest you to go out of the main road and ride a bit in the village near the river: Going to Champasak, turn on the left in the bumpy trails that enter the village (Houa Paa Kor & Ban Vat Xay villages). Coming back to Paksé from the same Road 14A, ride on the main road: the view of the mountain+rice fields is nicer this way.

Long time ago, Lao people settled close to the Mekong and during modern times, the government built nicer paved roads but not too close to the river (too risky). They also built solid bridges. Thus, the road in the village is not paved and there is no bridge (or very small wooden ones) to cross the small rivers. This is the reason why, if you want experience real local village life, you will have to "look for" the trail/path near the Mekong but you won't be able to follow the majestic river all along. A diagram may be clearer:



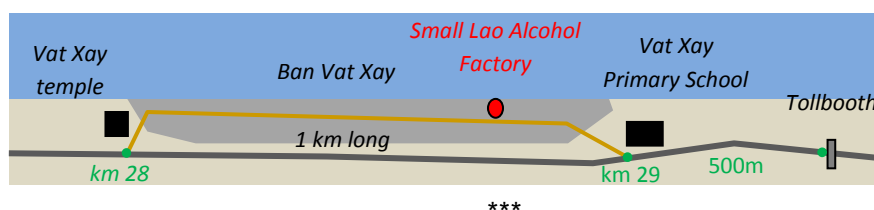
It is a hide & seek game with the Mekong and the villages.

This remark is not really needed for the Paksé-Champasak route... but remember this lesson while going along the **Mekong Bamboo Trail** (= small trail from Champasak to 4000 islands)... you will need to always look for the nicest path (the nearer to Mekong, the better fabulous view).

2 villages can be visit like this between Paksé and Champasak:

One just after Vat Phou Gnoï → Houa Paa Kor Noy village & one close to Champasak → (28 km) Ban Vat Xay village (1km long), 1,5km before the second tollbooth (Vat Xay ends with a primary school).

Would you like another m-map diagram? Would it really please you?



Have you noticed the **Lao Alcohol (family) factory** on the previous diagram? (10 min visit)

No sign... so here are some pictures of the house:



If you cannot find it, ask locals by showing them the Lao words bellow. They sell nice Lao white alcohol (1€/L). The last bottle I got was smoked.

ໂຮງງານ ເຫຼົ້າ ລາວ
Factory Alcohol Lao



(31 km) 1,5km after the tollbooth there starts Ban Phaphin village. There are several shops selling many kinds of wood craft. It is interesting to have a (short) look.

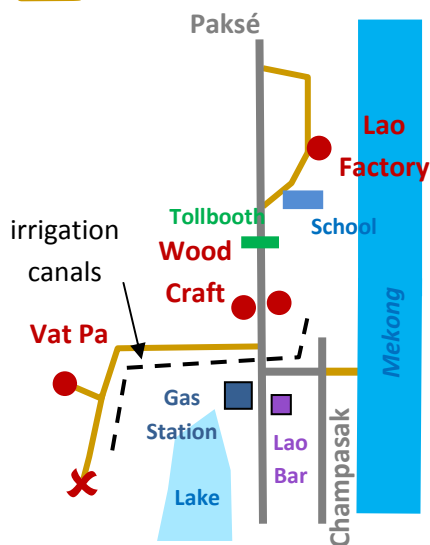


Wood Craft Ban Phaphin

Champasak 7 villages



You are at the beginning of Champasak Town composed of 7 villages all stuck together, from North to South (4 km):



Ban Phaphin ; Ban Phonxay ; Ban Muang Sen ; Ban Vat Thong ; Ban Vat Hamad ; Ban Vat Nakhone ; Ban Phone Pheng. One village = one temple.

500m after the tollbooth, there is a curve. In the curve, a trail (left/East) going to the cosy & expensive The River hotel. Then another curve & a bridge. Then the wood craft shops. A few meters after the wood craft shops, notice the irrigation canals (black dashed on the map), the gas station and a Lao Bar/restaurant.

On your right (going West), following the irrigation canals, there is a trail going to Vat Pa temple.

On your left, a paved road leads to the Mekong & enters Champasak Town.

Remember: there's no sign in Laos... or only in Lao language!

In this area, there are so many rice fields and natural landscapes that one doesn't realized this is a town.

(31,5 km) **Vat Pa Temple** (15 min visit)

Few people know **Vat Pa (Tchantarangi)** temple.

Passing the tollbooth drive slowly to be able to see the trail.

Follow the irrigation canals trail (for 1,3 km) and you will arrive to Vat Pa.

You've missed it? I told you to ride slowly!

Vat Pa (litteraly "temple-forest") has al funny 250m driveway with severals colorful kitsh statues. I have called it the "kids temple" or the "Disneyland temple". It's a 15-30min free visit. The temple itself has no real interest.



Champasak: 2 paved roads

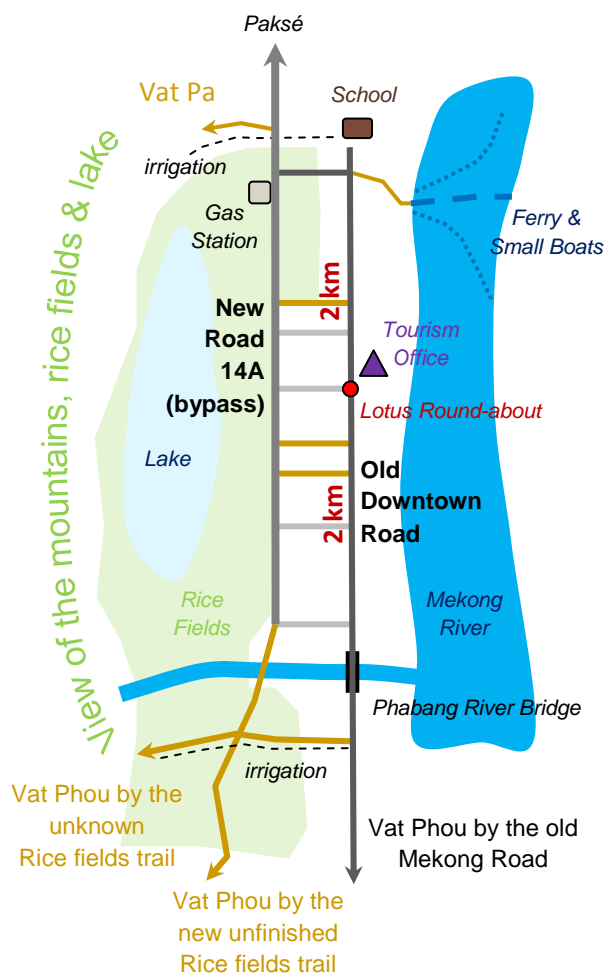
Let's repeat again & again, like an old and tired teacher.

From Paksé, once you arrive at the beginning of Champasak (Ban Phaphin village in fact), there are two parallel roads.

One going straight = **the new Road 14A, a bypass-road** ...

...and, one going left (East), in front the gas station = **the old downtown road**

The old downtown road first leads to the Mekong river (Ferry & small boats to Ban Mouang village or Don Deng Island) and *then* turns right (South) into & to Champasak Downtown and crosses it for **4km**



Going to Vat Phou temple...

Conventional...

If you want to go to Vat Phou directly, you can either go straight (road 14A is "the rice fields, lake mountain view road") or enter Champasak downtown (cute houses, gh, restaurants etc.). The 2 paved roads embrace each other 4km further, just before the 1st bridge (crossing the Phabang river).

Unconventional...

It is possible to go to the Unesco temple by the new unfinished trail or even by the unknown rice fields trail.

Both trails are dusty, muddy and bumpy.

It can be a great walking (cycling) trip: be aware of the Sun & heat and the distances: 8km long (calculated from the Phabang river).

If you are brave enough to consider this walking trip, the unknown rice fields trail is the best one.

5 Attractions near Champasak Town

You are now in Champasak.

Close to Champasak town, there are **5 main attractions** or interesting areas. I am going to describe them first. At the end I'll talk about Champasak Town (the 5th one in fact).

I'm going to describe them in this order (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)... ending in Champasak town itself.

Attractions order does not matter much (depending on the time, the weather, the heat, the season, official religious festivals... and if you are hungry)

You can first visit Vat Phou or Champasak town.

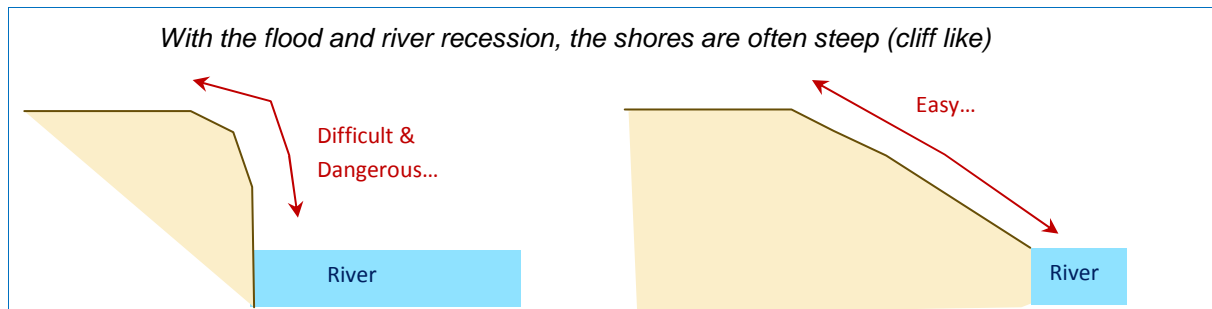
If you want to first go to Don Deng Island, I would recommend crossing the Mekong from the **Ban Louang Kao Pier**: easier & cheaper... and not trying to go to the island from Ban Phaphin Pier (*full explanations in the "Fabulous Don Deng Island" pages*)

A Pier... ?!

There is no proper pier in Southern Laos.

What do I call "pier"?

Some may call it "jetty"... but actually it is an "Easy Mekong Access". It can be a trail slowly going down to the river, it can be a concrete ramp, concrete stairs or a steep curvy & narrow path.



Ban Phaphin Pier = Pedestrians, Scooters, Cars Access / small boats & scooter-barge-boats (going to Ban Mouang ; 2€/pers. or 3€/scooter – or Don Deng Island North ; 3€/pers. or 5€/scooter), car-barge-ferry (going to Ban Mouang **only** ; 2€/pers. or 3€/scooter or 15€/car)

Downtown Pier = Pedestrians Access **only** / small boats (going to Don Deng 2€/pers. or Ban Mouang 3€/pers.)

♥ **Ban Louang Kao Pier** = Pedestrians & Scooters Access (going to Don Deng South-West)

♥ **Ban Si Chantho Pier** is on Don Deng Island East & **only** goes to the main land Eastside of the Mekong ; Pedestrians & Scooters Access (1€/pers.) – *it is a good way to cross the Mekong if you are keen on doing the whole Champasak Constellation Loop.*

Elsewhere = Pedestrians Access (fishermen small boats). Arrange the boat with the guesthouse.

N.B. Approximate prices, one always has to negotiate, bargain etc.

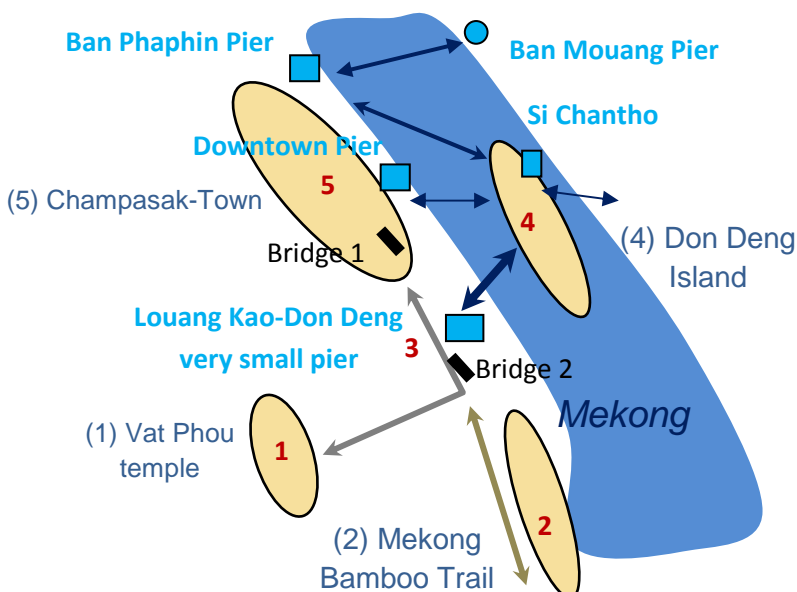
Seasons...

During dry season (February-May), it's better to visit **Vat Phu Champasak Temple** ວັດພູ in the morning.

During Lao warm winter (From the end of December to Mid-February), visiting Vat Phu during the afternoon is also nice (not too hot).

Rainy season usually starts in July and normally ends the day after the last October full moon. Trails become very muddy, slippery and dangerous (go for a walk only).

5 Main Attractions...



N.B. Remember? We are driving a scooter side by side...

So, if you haven't any scooter nor private car, these **5 main areas** can be reached with the help of a butt-hurt bicycle or tuk-tuk services.




Many of the following trips are walking trips (the best way). You may reach the 5 areas one by one by tuk-tuk or bicycle, park here & there, and then visit them by foot. 🚶

Attraction (3) mainly consists in landscape views.



♥ (1) ວັດຟູ **Vat Phou Champasak Temple (XI°-XII° century)** (2h-3h visit)

N.B. Vat Phou is famous in Laos... unesco blablabla... but its real full name is *Vat Phou Champasak*... because "Vat Phou" literally means "Temple-Mountain", and there are many, "Vat Phou Something" in Laos.

English transcription for ວັດຟູ is sometimes "Wat Phu", but I prefer the French transcription, clearer and closer to the Lao phonetic: a real "v" [v] sound  **and** a real "ou" [u] sound 
Lao from the North & Lao from the South have different accents.
Indeed  sounds like [w] in the North.

Official **guidebooks** are very talkative about this famous temple (*Unesco blablabla*), and usually made a map of the site. I therefore do not need to talk about facts that are already well-known.

It is a temple to the glory of Shiva and all his troops: Nandin, Parvati, Brahma, Vishnu, Garuda.

The best **book** about it: *The Temple of The Mountain* (bilingual eng/fr) by Francis Engelmann, *Département du Patrimoine Mondial de Vat Phu Champasak* edition (15€) – nkm has it at home if needed.

I have read it three times... my conclusion: it is a **mystic** place, and no one knows much about it (!): it is **mystical**, that's it.

The location is **mystical** (= its main advantage & big difference with Angkor); the ruins are **mystical**; the avenue with the lingams is **mystical**, statues, crocodile-stone, elephant-stone, stone staircase, mango and especially frangipani trees & fragrance - all of it: **mys-ti-cal!**

Like most of the very ancient construction: more questions than answers.

Visitors love it and slowly climb to the top terrace for **1h30-2h30 walk** in total. The site is not big but the rise of the steps imposes breaks. There is something *initiatory like* & the top view is majestic... and some may say **mystical!**

Close to the entrance, do not miss to visit the small **museum** with beautiful (mystic! Ok, sorry, I stop it) stones and carved lintels + explanations etc.

Site + Museum fee: 5€/pers. Closed at 4pm but it is possible to go out much later, even at night time.

I also know that local villagers go in the site before the sunrise... the site is not hermetically closed...

The other ruins (no entrance fee) - walk (2h visit) **or drive** (20 min. visit)

2,5 km south west from Vat Phou temple (there is a sign for once), you'll easily find **Hor Ning Sida**... Another mystic stone temple... with some remainders of the ancient Angkor road...

Hong Tha Tao is also in this area but much more difficult to find... and to be honest... I have never found it! (no sign, no path...) It is somewhere in the middle of the rice fields. Be more clever than me!

Tuk-tuk Champasak-ville – Vat Phou : 8km + 8km

If you are by foot ("*No scooter? What a pity!*") a tuk-tuk driver may ask you 10€ for 2 people to Go from Champasak town to Vat Phou.. & Come Back. The driver will wait for you (2h max.).

4 people = 12€ etc.

I would also include necessary a stop & walk to the Mekong Bamboo Trail. Negotiate it with your driver.

The driver will wait for you... because there are very few tuk-tuk in Champasak... he knows that if he leaves, you'll be stuck!

♥♥ (2) Mekong Bamboo (Tiny) Trail : MBT (2h-3h visit)

By foot, by scooter, by bicycle, by horse... What's a **MBT** ?

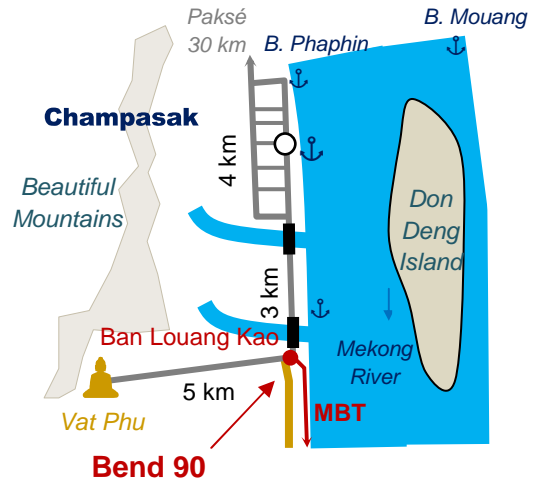
Ingredients list: a majestic Mekong river (2km large without any islands or bushes), evergreen bamboo, small trail very close to the river. Sprinkle *here & there* with remote villages, schools, temples, rice factories, local life.

N.B. Rainy season, MBT = muddy - walking only

Bend 90 : Ban Louang Kao

From North to South then West, Champasak-for-dummies:

- A ladder like **town** 4km long
- A first **bridge** (Phabang river)
- A 3km long **road**
- A second **bridge** (Sahoua river)
- A 90° **bend** (in Ban Louang Kao village)
- A 5km long **road**
- A mystic **temple** (Vat Phou)



The **MBT** starts from this bend.

There are 2 parallel trails: the large unpleasant trail (for cars) and the tiny lovely MB Trail (walking, biking, cycling), very close to the Mekong.

I recommend walking for at least 2,5km to the ancient Vat Muang Kang temple. Come back from the same trail. If you are brave, walk up to Ban Kateub village [ບ້ານ ກະຕິບ] (5km... Go&Back = 10km). If you are heroic, go further on: this magnificent trail is 80km long up to 4000 Islands area.

MBT Options – walking, cycling, riding, driving, tuk-tuking...

The best & easy: Park your vehicle in Louang Kao village (there is a noodle soup shop in the bend = safe). Walk for 2,5km and come back.

The best of the best: Same way, same tricks, double pleasure: walk to Ban Kateub [ບ້ານ ກະຕິບ] (Go&Back = 5km x2)

By scooter/bicycle: Drive at least the 2,5km *or even more* and come back.

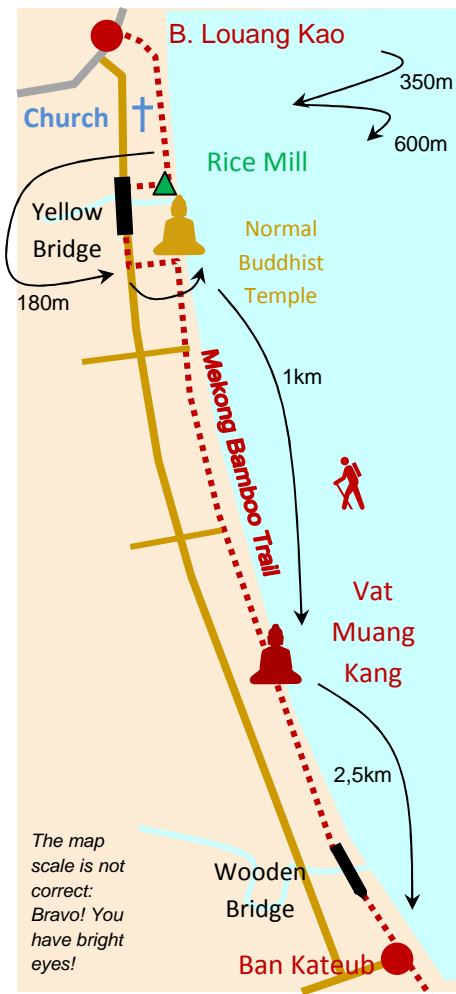
♥♥ *Be aware that this trail is 80km long actually. It is fabulous from the beginning to the end. It is the nicest & adventurous (& quasi secret) way to go to the 4000 islands by scooter!*

By Car (cleaver driver): The driver drops you off in the bend. Walk the 2,5km to Vat Muang Kang temple... or even more... meanwhile, the car drives the large trail and waits for you near the temple or to Ban Kateub [ບ້ານ ກະຕິບ].

By Tuk-tuk From your gh = 3-4€/pers./way. To be well understood show this translations to the driver (remember that usually tuk-tuk drivers can't speak English, can't read a map, don't understand off the beaten tracks demands): Go to Ban Louang Kao bridge [ຂົວ ບ້ານ ຫລວງເກົ້າ] or temple (also in the bend) [ວັດ ບ້ານ ຫລວງເກົ້າ]. Ask the driver to wait "*here*" [ກະລຸນາລໍຖ້າພວກເຮົາຢູ່ທີ່ນີ້]. Walk 2,5km & Come back 2,5km.

You can walk to Ban Kateub [ບ້ານ ກະຕິບ] but the tuk-tuk driver may not wait that long... or ask him if he'd like to wait for you at Ban Kateub [ກະລຸນາລໍຖ້າພວກເຮົາຢູ່ບ້ານ ກະຕິບ].

What's on the MBT?



The Holy Name Of Jesus Christ Church ວັດກາໂຕລິກ (15 min visit)

From bend 90, 350m further on, notice the cute Catholic Church (unfortunately it is usually closed) facing the river. It looks like a Mexican church to me... It is very old compare to other buildings in Laos. It may be the first church ever built (French Colonial Era).

N.B. The banks of the river are eroding. The trail is so close to the Mekong that some parts have disappeared. Therefore, you may have to pass by local lands: no problem... privacy in Laos is very different from Americano-europeo-japano etc. one.

600m after the church there is another 90° bend (there is a rice mill, very interesting to visit, especially if it is working). There is a small river, 2 trails (MBT and the large one) but only 1 yellow bridge... so you will have to meet the large trail, cross the yellow bridge, walk 180m on the large trail and turn back right to the Mekong trail. There is a normal Buddhist temple. Continue walking on the MBT.

Do you remember the Geography Lesson page 15? This is a perfect lively example: 2 trails but 1 bridge.

♥ Rice Mill (10 min visit)

When locals use the rice mill, everybody knows it: noisy. The incredible machine transforms "paddy rice" into "edible rice". During the process, the machine clean the paddy to also get the rice bran (for animals). There is another rice mill close to Champasak town; I'll talk about it later.



♥ After the Rice Mill, about 1km further on, you will find **Vat Muang Kang Temple** (15 min visit). It is also an old temple. Beautiful architecture.

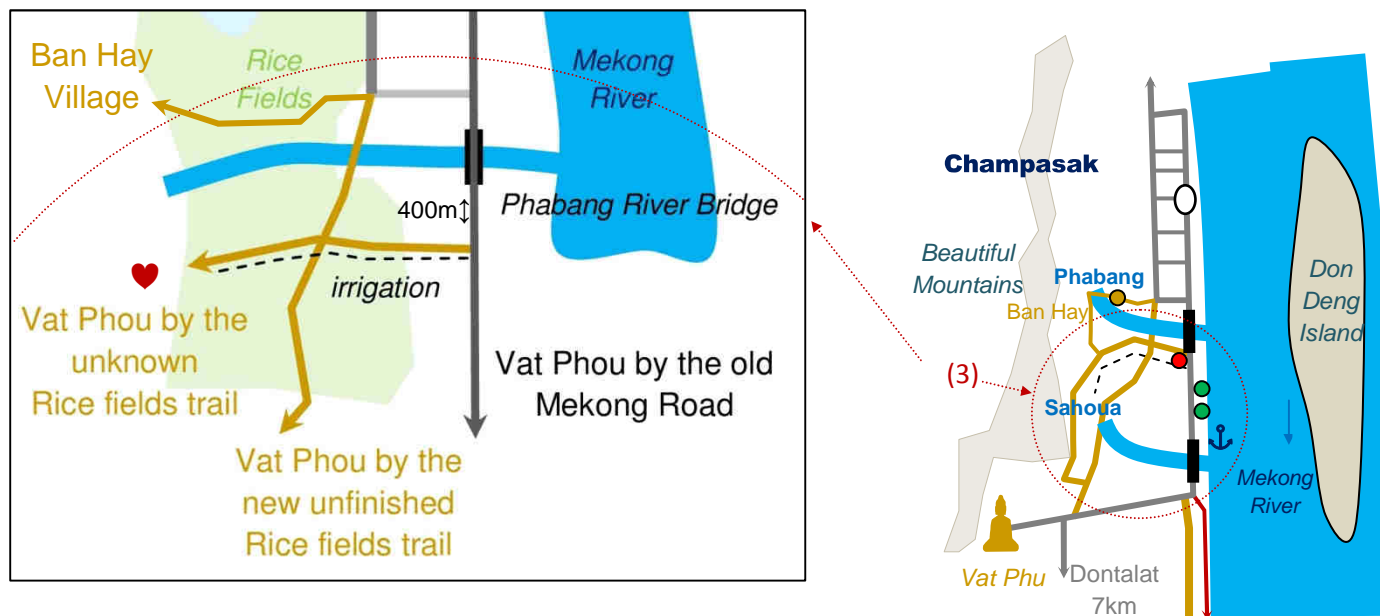
Do not get me wrong! To me, the best of the best is the trail itself. The Church is nice, the old temple is nice, but the MBT is marvelous!



From Vat Muang Kang, the trail is also nice. But **be aware** that the "wooden bridge" (2,5km further on) is not so easy to cross by motorbike. No problem by foot or Bicycle.

(3) Between Vat-Phou/MBT (1 & 2) and Champasak Town (5)

In a previous diagram/map I've shown you there are 3 ways to reach Vat Phou: the main paved road, close to the river; and 2 other trails through the rice fields:



The main paved road

The road connects the end of Champasak Town (Phabang river Bridge) and Bend 90° (Sahoua river Bridge & Ban Louang Kao village)

There are several interesting things along that road, such as...

- The beginning of the irrigation canal (there is a basin where kids usually love bathing ♥)
- ♥ The magnificent Albizia Saman tree (1500 m²) that covers the Sikeut Primary School → ●
- 3 more Albizia trees (1500 m² too but all together) above a big Buddha statue (Phra Sisoumang, minor interest) → ●
- ♥ The Ban Louang Kao small Pier (cheaper & easier way to go to Don Deng Island)



♥ Rice fields trails: Irrigation Canals Walk (1h-3h walk)

If you have time explore the western trail "Unknown Rice Fields Trail" (following the irrigation canals). Go there by scooter, by bicycle...

...or Park you vehicle in front

of a shop and go for a walk. = **13 km tour** (back from the paved road), or walk as much as you like on the trail and come back from the same trail.

... or Follow the irrigation for 1,8km and go north to **Ban Hay Village** (I'll talk about it further on in "Walking in Champasak Town" page)

The "New unfinished rice field trail" is larger and without any shade.

N.B. During rainy season trails are muddy. During dry season there are dusty-sunny.



♥♥ (4) The Fabulous & Sweet Don Deng Island ດອນເດງ

Don Deng Island gently sleeps in front of Champasak (East). It stretches for 9km long and 3km large. Visit it by bicycle, by scooter and better by foot (for the Northern part).

Where should you cross?

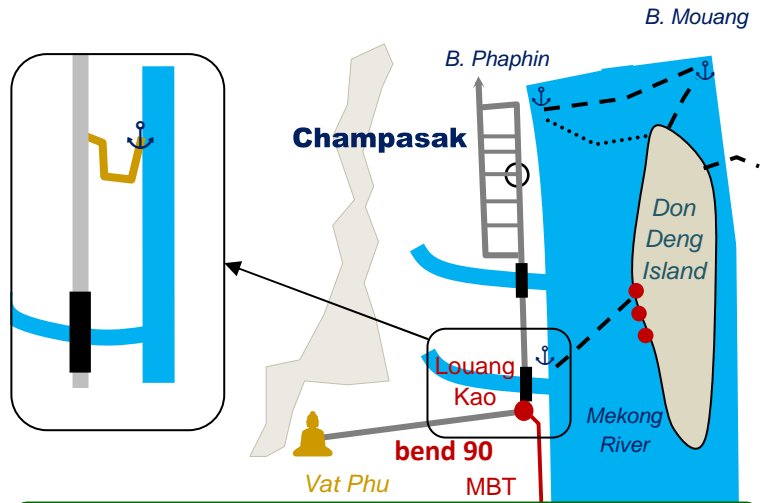
There are 2 main piers 7km away from each other. The best known is at Ban Phaphin village ບ. ພະພິນ (in the North of Champasak) and the best one is 250m from the Sahoua river Bridge of Ban Louang Kao village ບ. ຫລວງເກົ້າ (bend 90).

– I do not recommend you to cross in Ban Phaphin. It is more expensive and many visitors made this mistake: going in the boat, not saying anything, sailing gently and finding them on the other side of the Mekong, in Ban Mouang ບ. ມ່ວງ... but not in Don Deng Island ດອນເດງ...

– I strongly recommend you to go to the Louang Kao ຫລວງເກົ້າ Pier (there is no sign!). The boats only go to Don Deng. They can go to 3 villages, on the eastside of the island (it depends on the water level & the shore elevation) – from North to South:

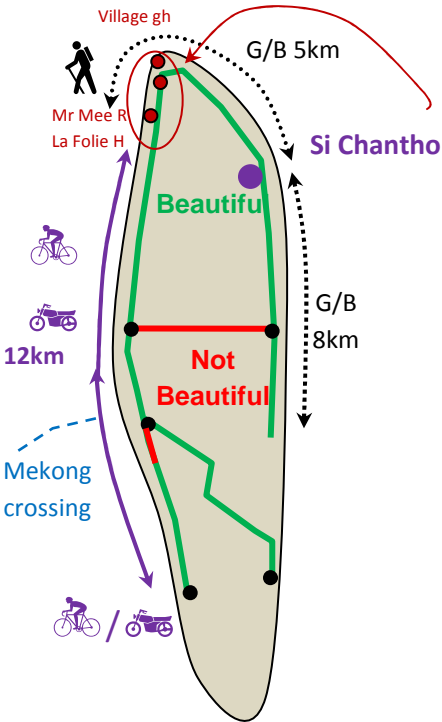
- = (North to South) Ban Simoung Khoun ບ. ສີມຸງຄຸນ ; Ban Sieng Vang ບ. ຊຶ່ງຫວາງ Ban Boung Kham ບ. ບຸ່ງຄໍ້າ

There is a clear map on the next page



N.B. The river crossing is enchantress. The Mekong is so large and the light is so pure... OMG!

Why should you go to Don Deng Island?



Don Deng is a big mis-known island. There is only one place dedicated to tourism (La Folie Lodge Hotel), only one English-menu-restaurant (Mr Mee Restaurant), and one village guesthouse aka "community lodge".

N.B. When the gh is closed the villagers will propose you homestay.

All this IS only in the northern part of the Island (1,3km long, see the red dots).

All the rest of the island is untouched.

There is no car on the island and very few paths (impossible to really get lost).

There is a pristine 7km long x 500m large sand beach on the West where one will only see but kids, buffalos and ducks.

Don Deng is 4 times bigger than the famous Don Det (4000 islands). On Don Det, there are more than 80 tourism gh-restaurants-agencies-hotel! Do you understand what I mean?

The most beautiful shady paths are in the North, North-East and South-West. Be aware that the path in the middle is sunny, bumpy without any really interesting view: "not beautiful"

I recommend going for a walk to & in the labyrinth-like Ban Si Chantho ບ. ສີຈັນໄທ. This village is not elongated like the other ones, it is a circle with many small lovely streets.

How to visit Don Deng?

I recommend mixing Scooter/Bike + Walking. The island is very big, so you'll need a vehicle, but it is always nicer to walk.

Leave your bike at Mr Mee restaurant or at La Folie Lodge (safety first!), head North and walk to

Ban Si Chantho ບ. ສີຈັນໄທ (3km – Go&Back = 6km). If you are brave, walk 4km more to **Ban Puay Lao**

ບ. ເປື້ອນລ້າວ (Go&Back = 14km).

Crossing the Mekong

"by foot"?! 🚶

No scooter? No Bicycle? Don't panic! It is easy to meet a fisherman in Champasak Town (ask your gh) and ask the waterman to send you in the north of Don Deng. From there, follow my recommendations (or not).

Coming Back from Don Deng? 🚲 🚶 🚲

Ban Simoung Khoun, Ban Sieng Vang, Ban Boung Kham (Westside) & Ban Si Chantho, Ban Puay Lao (Eastside) are the official village with a "pier". They are too far to reach by foot. You can stand on the beach or shore and wait for a boat... or ask villagers in the north... or ask La Folie Lodge boat for a transfer.



N.B. I have made this map for La Folie Lodge in 2017. If you sleep at La Folie, they will give you a good copy.

Where to sleep in Don Deng Island?

I recommend you 1,000 times to stay there for the night (or more!). The **village guesthouse "Community Lodge"** is cheap (3€/pers.), the **homestay** too. **La Folie Lodge** is much cozier and costly (nice bungalows, beautiful restaurant & a swimming pool, free bicycle: approx. 60€/night).

Mr Mee restaurant has hurt-butt bicycles for rent.

During the day and especially between 5 & 6 pm + early morning, the sunlight is very special. The beaches are huge and deserted. **It is safe to bath in the Mekong** (I have lost my soap in 2006 so thanks to give it back to me if you find it).

Don Deng Island's beauty is wild, nature, pure, pristine.

It is one of the perfect place for chilling (French youth now uses this verb "Chiller" instead of extending their French vocabulary)

If you love being on your own, tranquility, magnificence, authenticity etc. **Don Deng is a must go & stay.**

If you like busy cities, pollution & concrete: Don Deng is not for you.

If you like burgers: you'd better stay in the USA.

Cultural Tip

Lao manners: offering a little money to express your gratitude or respect is very polite (and expected).



Homestay: How to be understood...

Nobody lives in the Village gh (community lodge). If they haven't any customers, they close the beautiful building and garden. You will have to go in the nearest village and ask. They will probably prefer to invite you in their homestay organization. Locals speak only Lao (like most of Laos genuine places).

Ask for **"homestay ??"** (in Lao pronunciation "home-se-tay" & "sleeping" = "sa-lipping". You do not need to be Paul Mc Cartney's relative).

Ask also for **"Po Ban"** (= "father-village" = the chef of the village).

... or Go to **Mr Mee** restaurant: he can speak a little English.

Don Det (4000 islands) VS Don Deng (Champasak)

Do not confuse **Don Det ດອນເດດ** (3.999th out of the 4000 islands) and **Don Deng ດອນເດງ**.

Det = 2 km² VS Deng = 20 km²

Det = 80 restaurants/gh/agancies VS Deng = 3

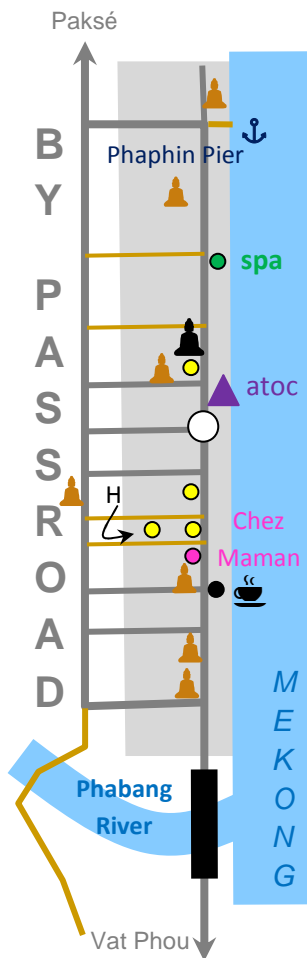
Det or Deng? Both of them worth the visit, they are just as different as your wife & your sister or daughter. They are both beautiful.

If I had only a little time for Southern Laos, I would choose Don Deng.



Mekong Bamboo Trail Pictures = Don Deng Island Paths

♥♥ (5) Champasak-Town: the ladder



View from the sky Champasak looks like a 4km long ladder.

The west sidebar is the "By Pass Road" (rice fields, mountains, lake); the east sidebar crosses the **TOWN**.

There are **7 Buddhist temples**. Villagers are more religious & traditional than in other SL towns. They *daily* take care about the colorful temples.

There are many gh, hotels, cafés, restaurants, souvenirs... Some of my favorites:

♥ Spa Champasak

... is probably the best massage-spa-wellness-center in Southern Laos. The house is beautiful and on the Mekong banks. Mme Nathalie (France) is the creator & manager. I recommend you to make an appointment few hours before.

Open: 10-12am + 1.30-7pm ; Meet Nathalie: 9.30am, 1.30pm, 5pm.
Closed on Mondays ; Site & Mail at champasak-spa.com ; Call: 020 5909 4061

♥ Potery 🏠

Very beautiful "vat Phou style" creations. It is also known as Champasak Flavor. It is in front Champasak with love restaurant & gh.

Royal & French Colony Houses 🏠

4-5 houses from the last century. Most of them are private houses (no visit). Beautiful old style buildings. Notice the HM (yellow dot): "Huan Moladôk" ເຂື່ອນ ມໍລະດົກ – "patrimony house" was built by the royal family. Also private.

♥ ATOC (from November to February only)

ATOC means "Association du Théâtre d'Ombres de Champasak" = "Shadow Puppets association". Mr Yves Bernard (France) is the creator and manager.

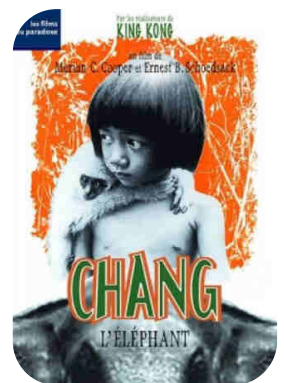
The show = live traditional music (10 musicians) with Shadow Puppets (Tuesday & Friday 8.30pm) or with the fabulous Chang movie (Wednesday & Saturday 8.30pm).

The shows take place outdoor on the Mekong river bank behind the tourism office, close to the Lotus-roundabout.



Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness (1927) is a silent film about a poor farmer in Nan Province (Northern Thailand) and his daily struggle for survival in the jungle. I love it. The live music is also wonderful (traditional instruments such as khene, wood xylophone (Kmhmu), Lao zither...

Show duration: 1h30 – Fee: 5€ (free for kids).



♥ Lao Handicraft & Tea-room

Chez Maman is the best souvenirs shop in Southern Laos. Mme Guislaine the owner is passionate. She is also from France & speaks German very well.

Many colorful handicrafts - small & more costly. Guislaine and her son, Michel, drive around Laos in remote villagers to find special well-done things such as wood statues & bags; and many traditional silk or cotton materials. G&M are very active in the local Lao life and know many things about traditions & beliefs.

Chez Maman is also a tea-room with good (Bolaven fair-trade CPC) coffee and homemade cakes.

Chez Maman is also a M-map lover...

♥ ☕ The photocopy shop = "one of the best coffee?" – nkm trick

I have been told this trick by Mr Yves Bernard (ATOC). The best coffee I have ever had. There is no sign.

In front of Vat Hamad Temple (its southern corner), a small shop with computers and photocopiers also sells very good espresso and nice sweet bread. The coffee is also the cheapest I have ever pay. The woman is Lao but her husband is Japanese.

The coffee is from Paksong and it is roasted in Vientiane by a small Lao-Japanese Cie named "The Little House – House Roasted coffee".

N.B. My guidebook project is to talk about places usually unknown and to give special tricks such as walks or special stops (where? how long? how far?).

I'm never very talkative about gh & hotels.

If I do, I mainly recommend you restaurants that serves real Lao or Asian food.

Most of the official guidebooks, blogs & reservation-booking systems write a lot about where to sleep & eat.

➤ **Where to stay (for the night)?**

There are many gh & h. There are different range prices. Tripadvisor, Booking.com, Agoda & Airbnb comments may help you more than I can.

Less than 10€ – Khampouy gh is appreciated by a large public, but it is not on the Mekong. Champasak with love is a wooden gh (second floor).

Less than 15€ – The View gh is located near the Mekong but outside of Champasak (south, after the first bridge) ; The Cozy House (half broad) is a nice homestay with stunning view & owners (mr Yves, Belgium & mr Banana, Laos)

Less than 30€ – Nakorn gh is cozy and near the Mekong.

More than 50€ (*much more!*) – The River, La Perle du Sud & La Folie Lodge (Don Deng Island) are high standing hotels.

I like Mr Yves (Belgium) & Mr Banana (Lao) project: "The cozy house". It is near the Mekong, outside Champasak. It is more like a homestay (similar to nkm). Check it on Airbnb or Booking.

➤ **Where to eat?**

Selection criteria: Lao or Asian food; creativity; off the beaten tracks; view & atmosphere

Home-Made restaurant is located on the road between "Chez Maman" and "La Perle du Sud". Mr Bounmi and family. Ask for ຫົວສິງໄຄຍັດໄສ້ ("Houa Singkhay Yadsay") Lemongrass Roots stuffed with pork.

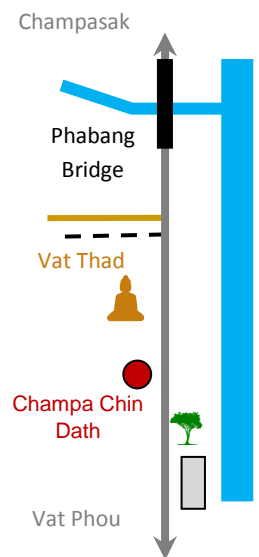
Saythong restaurant & gh is located close to the Lotus Roundabout & near the Mekong, with a nice view from a huge wood terrace. Mme Bobie cooks traditional Lao food, such as "Mok Paa" ຫມົກປາ (steamed fish, coconut & lemongrass in banana, ginger or galangal leaves).

Nakorn restaurant is near the Mekong and a beautiful temple (Nakhone temple). Mme Wan is an excellent & creative cook. Duck laap & Curry (Cari) are popular.

Champasak with Love 's menu is very large. The owners are Thai. No special dish to recommend, but the view of the Mekong is fantastic. It is located in front of the Pottery Shop.

Champa Chin Dath is mis-known. It is located south of the Phabang river bridge, between Vat Thad temple and Sikeut School. It is a very small house →

They only make ຊິນລາດ (Sine Lat) = sort of Lao sukiyaki. I usually do not like sukiyaki but I have loved this one. It is like a hot-pot dish: if you travel in January it will warm you in the evening.



➤ **Having fun late? Local Bars...**

Champasak is very quiet, very early in the evening... however there are 2 local bar/restaurants:

Thippavanh is in Ban Phaphin (in front of the gas station in the north of Champasak)

Saythala ("pétanque game") is close to the 2nd bridge – Sahoua River Bridge, 3 km south from Champasak.

None of them have any view on the Mekong.

Very few travelers go there, so the Lao people will probably warmly welcome you.

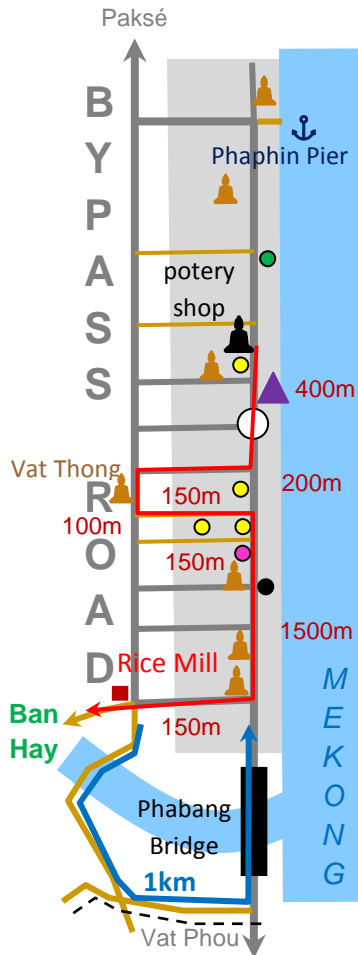
The menu is only in Lao. They serve the same kind of appetizers & main dishes you would find in the **Mekong Bars** in Paksé: see my "*How to survive in a genuine Lao Mekong Bar*" article in the Lao Food Suggestions guidebook.

➤ **🏪 Champasak Market (?)**

There is a market in Champasak... on the "bypass road" near Vat Thong temple. It opens only from 5am to 7am (!) – During the day there are also small stalls near the gas station – During late afternoon, on the downtown road, there are travelling-trolleys selling fresh vegetable, fruits, meat etc. It is something particular to Champasak. I have never seen any elsewhere in Southern Laos.

Walking in Champasak Town

The atmosphere in Champasak is very special: clean, quiet, peaceful & cute (Kawaii!!!! 可愛い). I especially like the way villagers take care of the road in front of their house. There are more flowers and trees in Champasak than in any other village or town I know in Southern Laos.



Champasak Tourism Office with the help of NGOs has developed nice itineraries map. It is not as precise as my suggestions but it is far to be the best thing I have seen in 16 years concerning tourism development. There is no such a thing for Paksé (except my private benevolent initiative).

Let's walk in **Champasak Town** for 2,5km (1h... +way back = less than 2h)...

(option 1) Come back by following irrigation canals (+1km + way back 2km)

(option 2) Continue to Ban Hay village (+4,5km + way back 2,5km or +1km option 1)

Champasak Town Walk Suggestion

Leave from the **Pottery Shop** (small black buddha) and go south for 600m. Turn right (East) after Khampouy gh and just before a colonial house ●. Walk for 150m on the unpaved trail. Have a look at Vat Thong (first royal temple) on the other side of Road 14A. Go south 100m. Turn on the left (East) and come back downtown by another unpaved road and notice the "patrimony house" ● – "Huan Moladôk" ເຮືອນ ມໍລະດົກ. first and another colonial house further on. Turn on the right (South) and pass by "Chez Maman" Souvenirs Shop & Tea-

room.

Walk 1500m and turn on the right (West) before the Phabang river Bridge.

Continue 150m, cross the road and notice the **Rice Mill**

Option (1) Irrigation Canals (+ 1km)

From the **Rice Mill**, go South by the "New unfished road" (in dry season the water level is very low, it is crossable), find the irrigation canal (dashed black line).

Turn on the left (East) and follow the canal up to the main road.

Turn on the left (North) in the direction of Phabang river bridge & cross the bridge.

Option (2) Ban Hay village Loop Map next page →

Option (2) Ban Hay Village Loop (2km + 1,2km x2)

From the **Rice Mill**, go West by **the unpaved 1,2km road** that leads to **Ban Hay village**

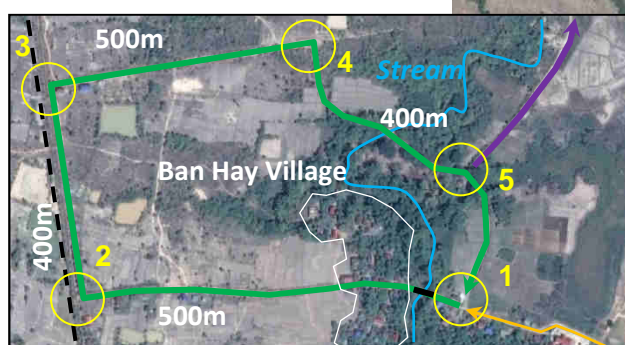
I have just bought a brand new satellite:

"1" Cross a small bridge to enter the village and say "Sabaydii" to Lao you meet.

This village has many very small streets - *labyrinth like*.

Go out of the village from the back through the rice fields for 500m.

"2" There is another irrigation canal. Follow it for 400m (North), then quit the canal **"3"** by turning on the right (East) by the path.



Option (2) Ban Hay

Walk 500m and notice the path going right. **"4"**

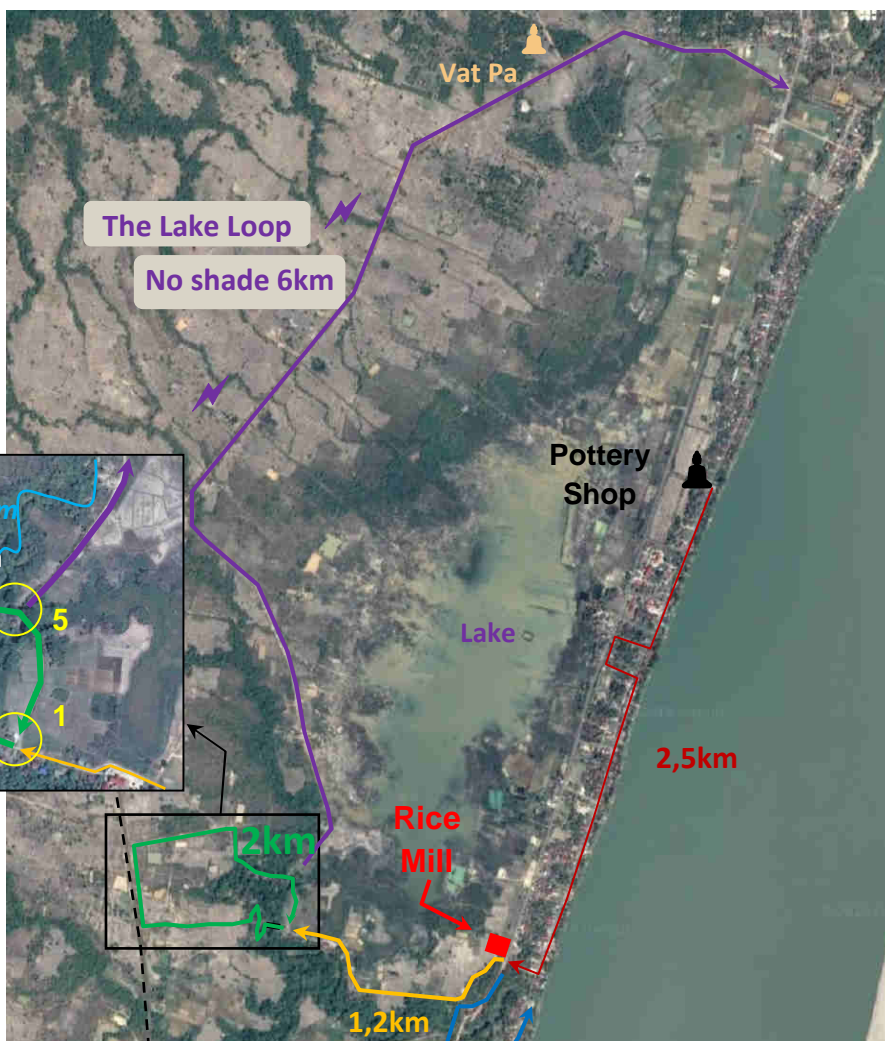
This path goes into a small forest and cross a **small stream**

At **"5"** crossroad turn on the right (South): you are back to **"1"**

Go back to the **Rice Mill**, going East by **the unpaved 1,2km road**

Go back to Champasak (straight on a little and then turn left North: 2,5km to the **Pottery Shop**)

... or turn on the right to walk **Option (1)** (+1km)



The Lake Loop

I do not recommend you to walk, cycle or drive the **Lake Loop** that goes to **Colorful Vat Pa Temple** (*Do you remember the Disneyland temple?*). It is a 6km long trail without any village or shade. It is very bumpy.

N.B. In general, on all my M-maps the "storm" symbol ⚡ means that the road is pretty difficult.

On the other side of the Mekong river: Champasak Constellation Loop

It is time to leave Champasak & Don Deng Island and to explore the Eastside of the river: Tomo temple, Ban Nong Beug (wood carving village), Kiet Nong & Phou Assa (elephant village), Tad Koy Waterfall and finally the Forest Market.

Westside ≠ Eastside

I have recommended you to drive a scooter (a mountain bike from Paksé or even a private car).

But it is true that a large part of the **Westside Attractions** (the southern part from Ban Phaphin) & Don Deng Island can be visited without it.

"No vehicle from Paksé" → (consequences) → no Vat Phou Ngoï panorama, no Vat Phou Ngoï forest walk, no Wopakok hotel panorama, no Wopakok Albizia giant tree, no Ban Vat Xay village, no small Lao Alcohol Factory (although it is possible to cycle North from Champasak to Vat Xay small Lao alcohol factory = 3km Go&Back = 6km)

You'll need to use tuk-tuks and/or hurt-butt bicycles, as previously explained.

On the other hand, it is much more difficult to visit the **Eastside Attractions** without any motorbike or good mountain bike.

For each one of the coming attractions I will add "*I no drive scooter*" inserts in case of you are really interested in them.

Crossing the Mekong... or not

From Champasak you can...

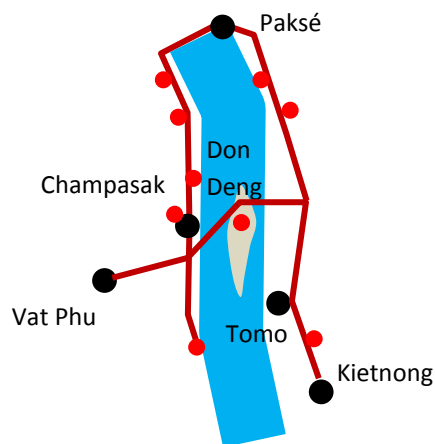
– **Paksé** – **Coming back to Paksé** (local songtéos, boat, scooter) by road 14A. With a scooter, remember that you can also enjoy 14A attractions on the way back (South to North): *Vat Pa, Ban Xay Lao Alcohol Factory, Vat Phou Ngoï panorama & trekking, the colorful catholic graveyard... finishing with Phou Salao sunset panorama in Paksé (or a beer in a Mekong Bar).*

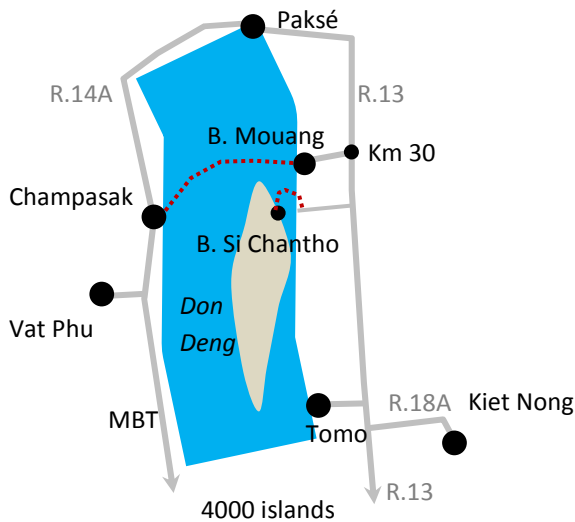
– **4000** – On foot: organize (with your gh) a "pick up" around 8.30-9am in **Ban Mouang** ບ. ມ່ວງ to get the tourist bus or minivan and going up to Paksé, or down to the **4000 Islands**.

No tourist bus/minivan nor songtéos cross the river. You will have to take a boat in Champasak to reach Ban Mouang.

– **4000** – **Continue** the scooter-trip by following the gorgeous **Mekong Bamboo Trail** down to the **4000 Islands** (from Champasak to Don San Island MBT is described in the 4000 Islands guidebook)

– **Constellation Loop** – **Cross** the Mekong to continue the Constellation Loop → Tomo temple, Ban Nong Beug (wood carving village), Kiet Nong & Phou Assa (elephant village), Tad Koy Waterfall and finally the Forest Market.





Mekong crossing? Where are you?

You are either in Champasak either on Don Deng Island.

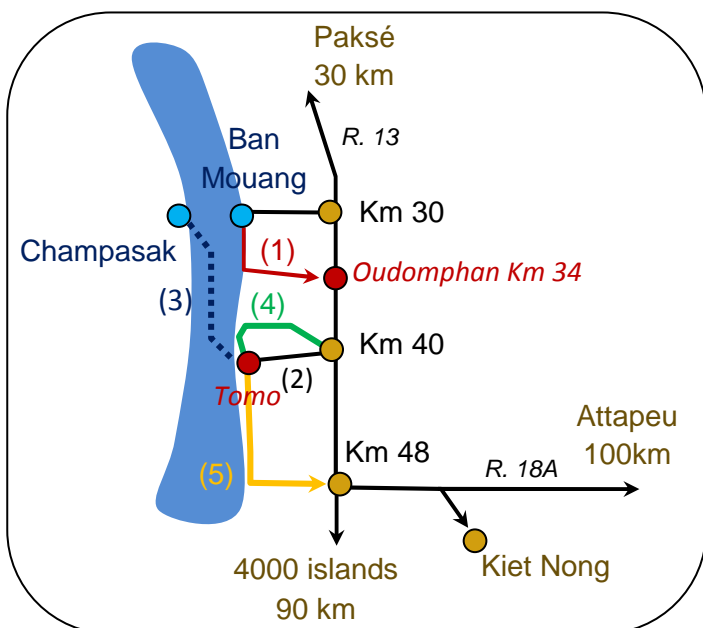
If you are in Champasak go to Ban Phaphin in the north of the town and cross to reach Ban Mouang (2-3€/moto). If you are by car, you will have to cross with the Ferry (15€/car)

Road 140 (4 km long) goes to Km 30 village on the Road 13.

If you are on Don Deng (Normaly = Day 1: Champasak; Day 2: Don Deng) go to Ban Si Chantho North-East of the island and cross the river (1€/moto).

A trail goes to Road 13.

You can also cross the river in the North of the Island & reach Ban Mouang, but it is not a regular boat-route.



Optional itinerary (nkm confidence): the mini Eastern MBT ♥

If you are in Ban Mouang, for whatever reason, you can either go to Km 30 village from Road 140 (4km long), or (better) go South on the mini Eastern Mekong Bamboo Trail

← Itinerary (1)

This MBT is only 2km long along the Mekong and then it goes East for 3km to Oudomphan village km 34 on Road 13... though a rubber tree plantation.

♥ Let's go to Tomo...

What's Tomo?

Fabulous Tomo Temple ໂຕະໂມະ – aka Oum

Moung Temple ວັດອູໂມງ – is a pre-angkorian temple in ruins. Many giant trees have grown in the middle of the mossy stones... another mystic place. Entrance fee 2€/pers.

How to go to Tomo? 3 possibilities minimum

Normal route

From the Road 13 drive South to Km 40 village (ບ. ຫລັກ ສີສິບ Lak Siisip in Lao), cross the bridge in the village and turn on the right (there is a sign indicating a 5km long trail to Tomo village).

↑ **itinerary (2)**

By boat "I no drive scooter"

It is not possible to go there by boat by scooter.

From Champasak you can organize a nice trip by boat to Tomo (ask your gh) and come back. Or... if you go from Paksé to Champasak by (private) boat you can organize a Paksé-Tomo (visit) + Tomo-Champasak. I did that in Feb. 2018 with my relative (8 people): 60€/boat.

It is also probably possible to organize a boat from Don Deng to Tomo (Go&Back) – it is probably cheaper from Ban Tanthip (South-East of the island): go to Ban Tanthip by bicycle, leave them in the village, organize a boat to Tomo and come back.

↑ **itinerary (3)**

Special route: my scooter trip in November 2017

On the previous page map ↑ **Itinerary (4)** – the map below is much more precise ↓

Going to Tomo by the *Normal Route* [**itinerary (1)**] means to first cross the bridge in Km 40 Village and then to turn right, *remember?*

Going to **Tomo** by the Special route [**itinerary (4)**] means to turn right before the Km 40 village bridge.

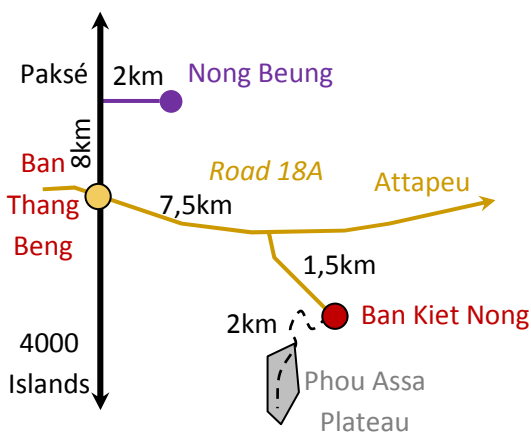
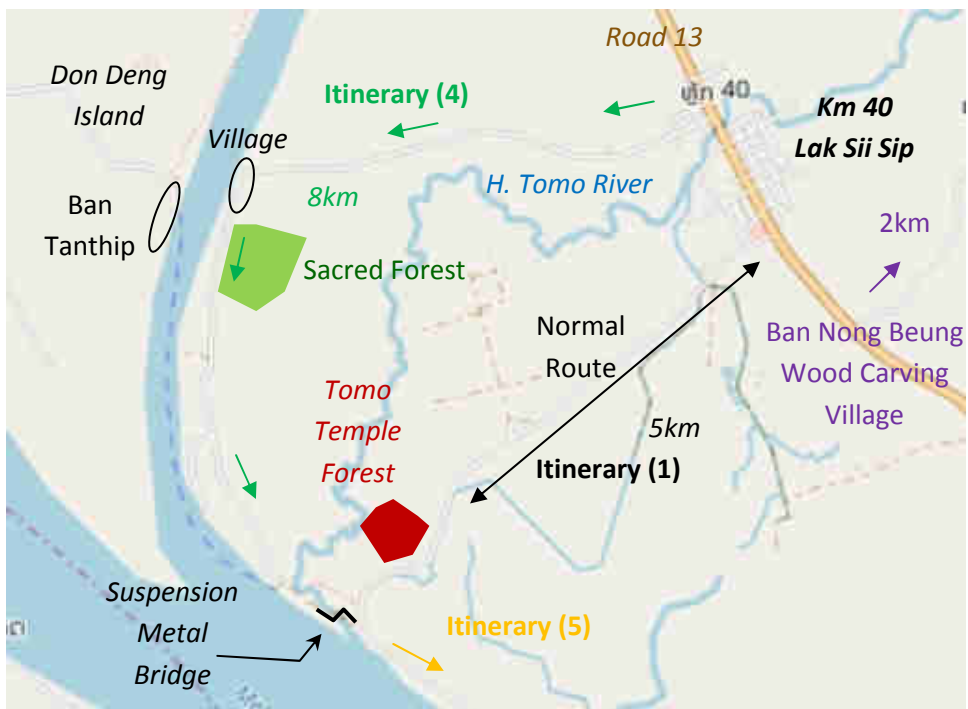
The trail is 8km long. There is a village on the Mekong bank. Going South, you'll pass by a **sacred forest** with beautiful giant trees.

Drive South and cross the stream (Tomo river) thanks to the suspension metal bridge.

Visit Tomo Temple.

From Tomo, come back to Road 13 by following the normal route [**itinerary (1)**] or...

... or Drive South following **itinerary (5)** ↓ for 7km to **Km 48, Ban Thang Beng village** ທາງແບ່ງ



Ban Nong Beung

← On the maps ↑ see the 2km trail to **Ban Nong Beung** ບ. ຫອງບຶງ

It is a dead-end-village where many villagers carve wood making statues in a surprising African style.

Ban Thang Beng (Km 48) : R.13-R.18A crossroads

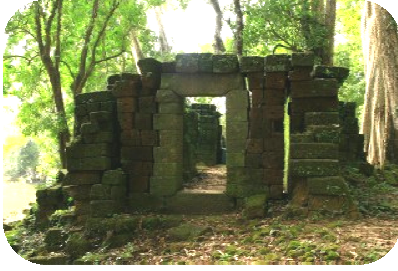
Coming to Raod 13 from B. Nong Beung, drive South 8km to Ban Thang Beng village ບ. ທາງແບ່ງ (km 48).

Turn on the left: you are driving the Road 18A.

It goes to Kiet Nong village ບ. ກຸດໂຈ້ງ (elephant & Phou Assa sanctuary): 7,5km + 1,5km.

It also goes to Attapeu: 100km. The unpaved road is now large... but busy & dusty and there is no real nice landscape view. 80 km further on (20 km before Attapeu), Road 18A has been devastated in July 2018 with the flood (Dam break catastrophe): Sanamxay village.

Tomo Temple



Wood Carving



Big Mouse



Phou Assa Sanctuary



Ban Kiet Nong ບ. ກຽດໄຈ້ງ

The village is well-known for elephant riding, Phou Assa enigmatic sanctuary, jungle trekking, swamps, bird-watching, homestay and eco-lodge **King Fisher Lodge** (hotel-resto).



"I no drive scooter"

There must be travel agency Tours organized from Paksé. Local songtéos go South everyday (in the morning) and drive Road 13. They leave from Km 8 Southern Bus Station. hy can drop you wherever you want on this road, just make sure to be clear with a good pronunciation or Lao writing words. They are direct songtéos to Kiet Nong and they are songtéos only going to Ban Thang Beng. From Ban Thang Beng organize a tuk-tuk to Kiet Nong.

Phou Assa Sanctuary ວັດພູອາສາ

In Kiet Nong, you can either go up to Phou Assa with an elephant or by foot. Entrance is free. The 2km long trail up is shady. The sanctuary is on a lunar plateau with here & there stones towers. Another mystic place.

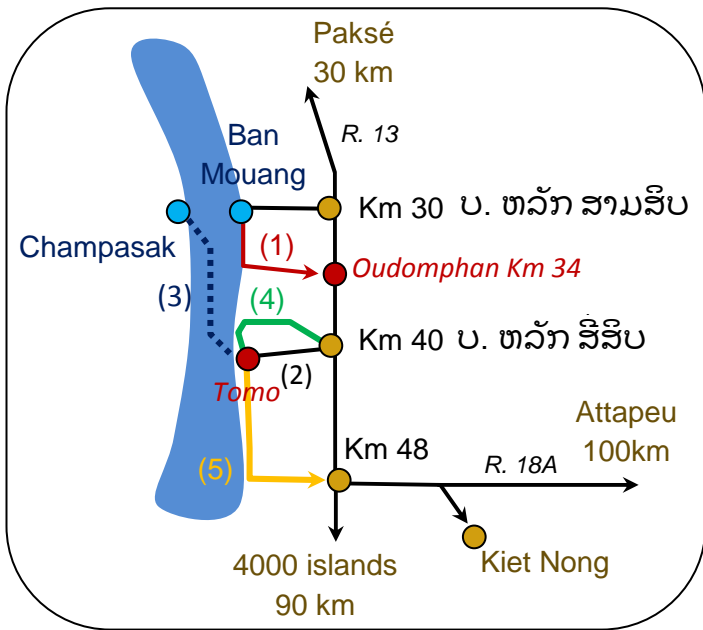
Compare to other Southern Laos villages, Kiet Nong is well organized: Tourism Office, real homestay, 3 gh and 1 to 3 days trekking in **Xé Pian area ເຊປັນ** – real name : ປ່າສະຫງວນແຫ່ງ ເຊປັນ = **Xé Pian National Protected Area**



Ban Phapho

Road 18A also goes to Ban Phapho village ບ. ພະໂພ where the villagers use to have elephants... The last one died in 2017. There was a gh (Mr Bounhom): i do not know if it is still open.

Coming back...



From Ban Kiet Nong to Paksé – or – From Km 30 village to Paksé: going North only

From Ban Kiet Nong, drive back to Ban Thang Beng Road 13 and drive North.

Some travelers do not want to go South to Ban Kiet Nong. From Km 30 village, they head North.

←
N.B. Km 30 village in Lao is "Ban Lak Samsiip" ບ. ຫລັກ ສາມສິບ



2 last attractions... Tad Koy waterfall & the Forest Market

Km 25 Rapids & Tree-climbing in Tad Koy

You may start from Km 30 village or driving through it from Kiet Nong: 5 km after Km 30, notice Ban Laksohaa ບ. ຫຼັກລາວຫ້າ (literally village-Km-25 isn't it a sexy name?). A 5km long trail goes right (East) to Tad Koy waterfall/rapids ຕາດກອຍ There must be a sign... maybe...

= Water, rocks, tree-climbing, picnic, many local families on weekends.

Km 15 Forest Market ຕະຫຼາດ ຫຼັກສິບສີ່ (thalat laksipsii = market-km-14 !)



Back to Road 13, drive North for 5km. Notice the big Beerlao Factory (as a landmark) on your left.

I love the Km 15 Forest Market. It is 15km from Paksé, but Lao people called "km 14 market"... God's mysterious ways... The market is interesting from 4pm: villagers from the nearby countryside come to sell what they have found in the forest, jungle and rivers. Wildlife (snakes, fish, turtle, birds, iguana...), insects and strange fruits, vegetables, plants & mushrooms...



The "normal" market is near the main road and the "forest market" is at the back. It is possible to miss it! **How to find it?** → From Paksé the road crosses the **Nam Sak River bridge** (in Laos there is always a sign with the name of the river in English). The market is 500m South from the bridge. Coming from the South, if you have already crossed... it means that you have missed the market.

Paksé at 5pm

Coming back to Paksé, remember that the Phou Salao (from the Golden Buddha) Panorama is beautiful for sunset, and so Mekong River view from these 3 Mekong-Bars: **One Love** (Ban Bangyor village), **Phoptavanh** & **Tiewvalat** (Sopsé village).

Please see **nkm Lao Food Suggestion guidebook** and especially the "How to survive in a Lao Mekong bar?" pages.

NKM Champasak Loop Guidebook: THE END

NKM Mekong Homestay & Family Dinner – Paksé – Laos

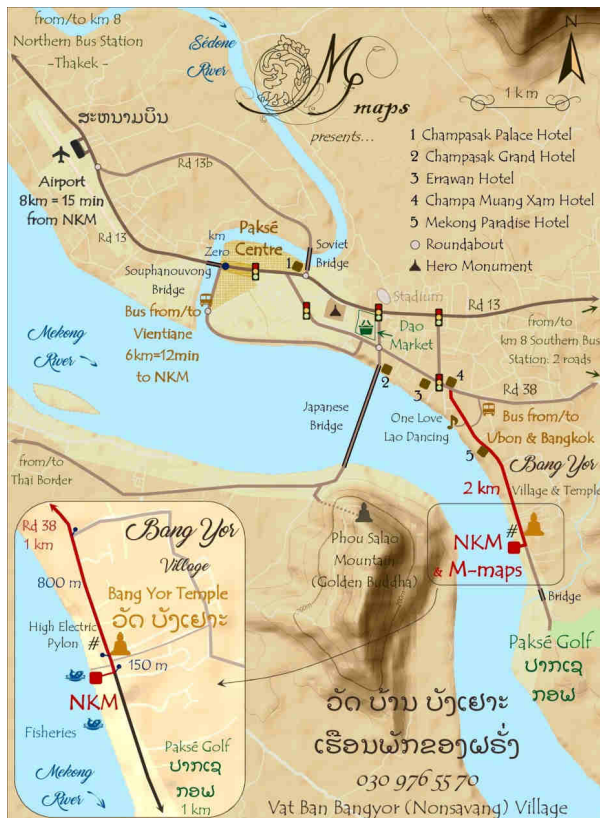


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COOKING...

SAILING... fishermen long tail BOAT

