

THE SAVANNAKHET HISTORIC TRAIL

9

General Information

Circuits

Maps

Attractions





Table of Contents

<i>A Message from the Provincial Tourism Office.....</i>	<i>p3</i>
<i>General Information.....</i>	<i>p5</i>
Laos.....	p5
Do's & Don't.....	p11
Savannakhet.....	p13
<i>Map of Savannakhet Town.....</i>	<i>p15/16</i>
Festivals & Events.....	p18
Local products.....	p20
<i>Savannakhet Circuits.....</i>	<i>p23</i>
<i>Map of Savannakhet Outskirts.....</i>	<i>p25/26</i>
<i>Main attractions.....</i>	<i>p27</i>
History.....	p27
Culture.....	p37
Nature.....	p39
<i>Community-Based Tourism in Savannakhet.....</i>	<i>p47</i>
<i>Important Numbers.....</i>	<i>p51</i>
<i>Map of Savannakhet Province.....</i>	<i>p53/54</i>



A Guide to Savannakhet

Author – Bernie Rosenbloom

Photography – Lao National Tourism Administration, Savannakhet Provincial Tourism Department, JICA, SNV Netherlands Development Organization, Linda McIntosh, Steven Schipani.

Printed with the support of the LNTA-ADB Sustainable Tourism Development Project

Layout and Print Management: Eric Cholet/BSC Laos



Reproduction of this material for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorized by the Lao National Tourism Administration, provided the source is acknowledged.



LNTA - ADB

LAO NATIONAL TOURISM ADMINISTRATION AND JICA
GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project

www.ecotourismlaos.com www.tourismlaos.la.gov

First Edition March 2010: 5000 copies



A Message from the Provincial Tourism Office

On behalf of the Savannakhet Provincial Tourism Department, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our province. Savannakhet features a vast array of historic, cultural and natural attractions, which can be easily accessed. To help travelers discover the Savannakhet Historic Trail we have created five distinct circuits between Savannakhet Town and the border with Viet Nam at Lao Bao. Further, as we are also committed to developing community-based tourism (CBT) to spread the benefits of tourism to rural communities, the Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit offers many CBT tours led by trained local guides to better allow you to experience all Savannakhet offers.

Savannakhet Town, the picturesque provincial capital and birthplace of Lao PDR's first Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane, sits on the banks of the Mekong River and features a wealth of colonial-era architecture and Buddhist temples. Just outside of town the province's most sacred site, That Ing Hang, attracts Buddhist pilgrims all year round especially during the That Ing Hang Festival in late December. Nearby the sacred stupa, nature lovers can visit the Dong Natad Protected Area with peaceful Nong Lom Lake at its center. Also not to be missed is the Monkey Forest on the Champone Circuit.

Further east, Savannakhet has two National Protected Areas (NPA) – Phou Xang Hae and Dong Phou Vieng – through which the legendary Ho Chi Minh Trail once passed. Remnants of the Indochina Wars can still be seen in the rugged terrain.



The provincial tourism office requests that you participate in an organized tour if you plan to trek in the NPAs or remote locations. Among the most popular are the one and two-day treks in Dong Natad and the three-day Katang Trail in Dong Phou Vieng NPA.

Savannakhet is also rich in traditional handicrafts, especially silk and cotton textiles, basketry and wood and metal carvings. Visitors can watch locals create these products in several villages and purchase directly from artisans or in local markets. For a taste of Savannakhet's distinct cuisine, order Sin Savanh, laap, and bamboo shoot soup at a local eatery. For quick and tasty Lao-style snacks of all kinds visit the night market, situated along the Mekong promenade in the center of town.

To ensure your visit to Savannakhet is pleasant for you and your gracious hosts, we respectfully request you observe Lao customs when visiting Buddhist temples or participate in local religious ceremonies or rituals. Also, while the locals warmly welcome visitors, they 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.

We wish you a safe and enjoyable journey of discovery in Savannakhet.

Mrs. Bounmee Khantisouk

Director, Savannakhet Provincial Tourism Department





Location and Geography

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, commonly referred to as "Laos", is located at the center of the Indochinese Peninsula, and stretches 1,700 km from north to south. The country 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.

Laos has a total land area of 236,800 km² characterized by three distinct regions – north, central and south. At its broadest in the north, the country spans some 500 km from east to west. At the narrowest point in the central region only 140 km separate Laos from Thailand and Viet Nam.

The country's dominant geological features – low calciferous mountains, limestone karst formations, and the Xieng Khouang and Bolaven Plateaus – make up three-quarters of the total land area. The rest is mainly fertile river valleys carved by the Mekong and its tributaries. Twenty National Protected Areas (NPAs) cover nearly 14% of the country.

History

The first Lao kingdom, Lane Xang, was founded in the 14th century by King Fa Ngum after he conquered and unified Luang Prabang, the lands north of it, Xieng Khouang and the Khorat Plateau. Luang Prabang remained the administrative seat of Lane Xang until King Saysethatirath moved the kingdom's capital to Vientiane in the mid-1500's.



First contact with western emissaries occurred in the mid-17th century during the reign of King Surigna Vongsa. After his death in 1694, Lane Xang broke up into three separate kingdoms: Vientiane, Champassak and Luang Prabang. Though part of French Indochina during the 19th and early 20th century colonial period, Laos achieved complete independence in 1975 with the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Population

Today, Laos is comprised of 16 provinces and Vientiane Capital. It is the least densely populated Southeast Asian country, with some 6 million inhabitants in 2010, or about 20 people per km². In comparison, Viet Nam has 230 people per km², and Thailand's population density is 120 per km². Roughly 85% of the population lives in rural areas. There are 47 officially recognized ethnic groups, with ethnic Lao making up about half of the population.

Economy

Agriculture is the largest contributor to the nation's economy, providing a living for 80% of the population. The principal crop is sticky rice followed by corn, tobacco, cotton and coffee. Livestock is also raised for domestic and regional consumption. Non-timber forest products such as resins, herbal medicines and food for commercial and home use are also important contributors to the Lao economy and rural peoples livelihoods. The nation's primary export-orientated industries include mining, hydropower, garment and textile manufacturing and agro-forestry. Tourism ranks among the country's most important economic sectors.



Climate

Laos has three distinct seasons. During the May-October rainy period and rice-growing season the country is very green and cool. Temperatures drop from November to February, especially in the mountains. March and April bring intense heat that parches the landscape.

Languages

The country's official language is Lao as spoken in Vientiane, which is derived mainly from Sanskrit and Pali. English, Thai, French and a few other European and Asian languages are spoken in the main tourist centers.

Basic Vocabulary

Hello / Sabaidee

Thank you / Kopchai

Yes / Chao

No / Bor

Good bye / La kone

Hotel / Hong ham

Toilet / Hong nam

Hospital / Hong mor

Bank / Tanakhan

How much? / Tao dai?

Village / Ban

Dollar / Dolla

Zero / Soun

One / Neung

Two / Song

Three / Sam

Four / Si

Five / Ha

Six / Hok

Seven / Jet

Eight / Baet

Nine / Kao

Ten / Sip

20 - Sow

1,000 - Pan

2,000 - Song Pan

10,000 - Sip Pan

50,000 - Ha Sip Pan

100,000 - Neung Sane

500,000 - Ha Sane

1,000,000 - Neung Lan

5,000,000 - Ha Lan



Currency

The official currency in Laos is the kip. Currency comes in 500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 and 50,000 kip notes. Thai baht and US dollars are generally accepted in large towns, but it is best to carry kip in small denominations in rural areas. Credit cards are accepted in major hotels and a few shops and restaurants in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. ATM machines are available in Vientiane and urban centers.

Local Time

Laos is 7 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Thus 12:00 noon in Vientiane is 01:00 in New York (depending on daylight savings time) and 06:00 in Paris.

Working Hours

Government offices are generally open Monday to Friday from 09:00-12:00 and 13:00-17:00. Most banks are open from 08:30-15:30. Shops and private businesses stay open longer.

Keeping Healthy

No vaccinations are required to enter Laos. Visitors should avoid mosquito bites and seek medical advice on whether or not to take malaria prevention medications and other vaccinations. Drink bottled beverages or boiled water and eat only well-cooked food to help avoid stomach ailments.

Immigration Checkpoints

To enter Laos, visitors need a passport with at least six months validity. Thirty-day visas are available from Lao embassies and consulates abroad. The fee varies by nationality. For most nationalities, a 30-day visa on arrival may be obtained at the following international border checkpoints:



By air



- Wattay International Airport in Vientiane Capital
- Luang Prabang International Airport in Luang Prabang Province
- Pakse International Airport in Champassak Province

By land

Thailand-Laos

- Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge (Vientiane - Nongkhai)
- Houei Xay (Bokeo Province)
- Thakaek (Khammouane Province)
- Dan Savanh (Savannakhet Province)
- Vang Tao (Champassak Province)

Viet Nam-Laos

- Dan Savanh (Savannakhet Province)
- Nam Phao (Bolikhamxay Province)
- Nam Kan (Xieng Khouang Province)
- Na Phao (Khammouane Province)
- Nam Soi (Houaphan Province)
- Phou Keua (Attapeu Province)

China-Laos

- Boten (Luang Namtha Province)

Cambodia-Laos

- Veun Kham (Champassak Province)



The Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge (Vientiane – Nong Kai) is open daily from 06:00–22:00 and the bridge between Savannakhet and Mukdahanh, Thailand is open until 20:00. All other overland immigration offices are open from 8:30 – 16:00. After 16:00 a US\$ 1 fee is added for processing visas.

Visa extensions are available for US\$ 2 per day from the Lao Immigration Office in Vientiane (021) 212 520 and in some provincial capitals. Most major tour companies provide visa extension services. In Savannakhet, visas can be extended at the police station on Makhasavanh Road. Those overstaying their visas are fined US\$ 10 per day. Visa information is also available on the Lao National Tourism Administration's website at www.tourismlaos.gov.la or www.ecotourismlaos.com.

Embassies in Lao PDR

Australia: (021) 413-602	Malaysia: (021) 414-205
Cambodia: (021) 314-952	Mongolia: (021) 315 220
China: (021) 315-100	Myanmar: (021) 314-910
Cuba: (021) 314-904	Philippines: (021) 452 490
Brunei: (021) 352 294	Poland: (021) 312-940
Belgium: (021) 222-712	Russia: (021) 312 218
France: (021) 212-253	Thailand: (021) 214-582
Germany: (021) 215-253	Singapore: (021) 416-853
India: (021) 352 302	Sweden: (021) 313 772
Indonesia: (021) 413-910	USA: (021) 212-582
Japan: (021) 414-400	UK Trade Office: (021) 413-606
Korea PDR: (021) 315-261	Viet Nam: (021) 413-400
Korea Republic: (021) 352-031	



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 and do as the Lao do and you will be rewarded with hospitality and friendliness. Specific trekking guidelines are also provided in this guide's community-based tourism section.

Please show respect, dress neatly while in temples and when taking photos. Ask before taking close-up portraits.



The Lao word for hello is Sabai Dee, usually said with a smile. Touching or showing affection in public will embarrass your hosts.



There are many other sacred items and sites in Laos. Please don't touch or enter these places without permission.



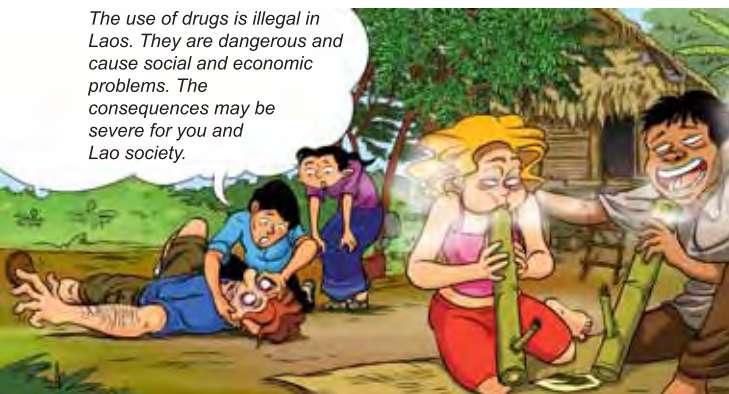
Laos loses a little of its heritage every time an antique is taken out. Please do not buy antique Buddhas or other sacred items. Instead support local craftsmen by purchasing newly-made quality handicrafts.



Support the Lao Economy by buying local food and handicrafts. Do not buy wildlife or wildlife products.



The use of drugs is illegal in Laos. They are dangerous and cause social and economic problems. The consequences may be severe for you and Lao society.





General Information

Savannakhet is in south-central Laos, a little more than halfway between Vientiane Capital and the Cambodian border. The 21,774 km² province is bordered by Khammouane to the north and Salavan in the south. Thailand's Mukdahan province is west across the Mekong River, while Viet Nam's Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces form the mountainous eastern frontier.

With some 824,000 inhabitants, Savannakhet holds the title as the country's most populous province. Though Lao and Phouthai make up 75% of the population, the province is quite ethnically diverse, with the remaining people belonging to the Mon-Khmer-speaking Bru, Katang, Souay, Mankhong, So and Trii groups.

Forests cover around 70% of Savannakhet, which is also crisscrossed by several rivers including the Xe Bang Fai, Xe Nou and Xe Bang Hieng. The 1,060 km² Phou Xang Hae NPA in the province's north is home to langurs, elephants, tigers and bears. Farther south, rare hornbills have been spotted in the 1,970 km² Don Phou Vieng NPA. Closer to Savannakhet Town is the Dong Natad Provincial Protected Area.

Overlooking the Phou Xang Hae NPA





Getting To and Around Savannakhet

Savannakhet can be reached by bus from Vientiane's Southern Bus Terminal (80,000 kip) in approximately 9 hours. Day-buses depart from 06:00 – 08:00. An overnight air-con VIP bus with a toilet leaves at 21:30 and must be booked in advance at the bus station or through a travel agency. Flights on Lao Airlines depart twice per week. Please check departure times, frequencies and prices as they are subject to change. Tuk-tuks are available in Savannakhet Town and at bus stations throughout the province to explore the various attractions. Song taews (pickup trucks with benches) to outlying areas depart from the bus station at Savanxay Market and bus stations in district centers and larger towns. Bicycles and motorcycles can also be hired in Savannakhet Town

Post and Communications

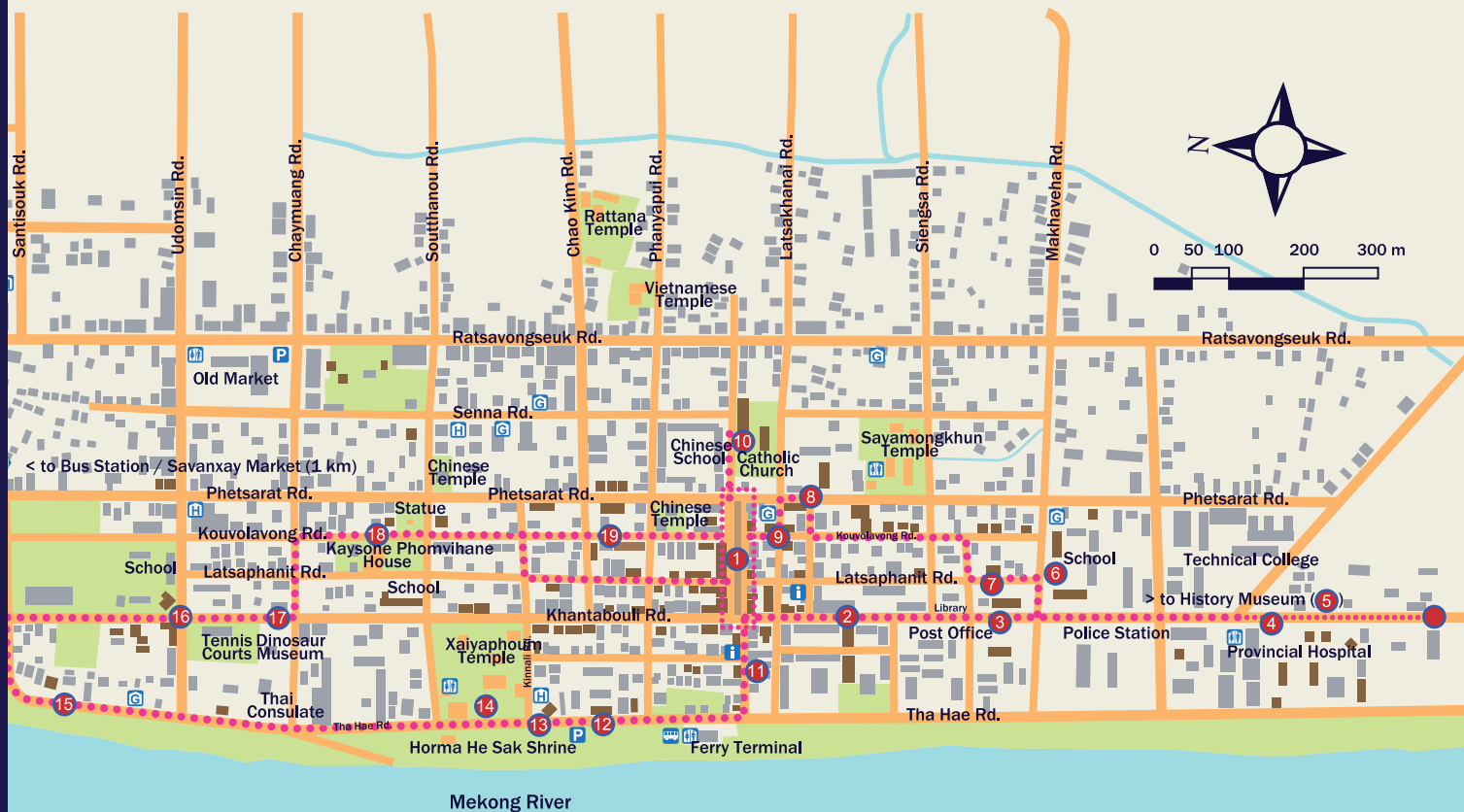
The General Post Office on Kanthabuli Road offers postal services, faxing and public telephones for local, national and international calls. Phone cards and Lao SIM cards are widely available. There are several internet shops in Savannakhet, but the service can be very slow. Sending packages to international destinations through the normal mail service is generally reliable but slow. For urgent or important mail (either to or from Laos) use EMS or a reliable private courier service such as DHL and FedEx.

Where to Stay

Savannakhet Town has 10 hotels with rooms ranging from US\$ 15 to over US\$ 100. There are more than 20 guesthouses with prices from 35,000-100,000 kip per night. Guesthouses are also available in Sepon, Phine and Seno for 40,000 -100,000 kip per night.



Savannakhet Town Map



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Talat Yen Plaza | 11. Si Muang House |
| 2. Theater “Lao Chaleun” | 12. Public Works Office |
| 3. New History Museum | 13. Mekong Hotel |
| 4. Provincial Hospital | 14. Xaiyaphoum Temple |
| 5. Old History Museum | 15. Deer House |
| 6. Tha Hea School | 16. Secondary School |
| 7. Soumpholphakdy House | 17. Dinosaur Museum |
| 8. Lao Vietnam Association | 18. Kaysone Phomvihane House |
| 9. Sala Savanh Guest House | |
| 10. Saint Theresa Catholic Church | 19. Shop-Houses |

-  Tourist Information
 -  Public Toilet
 -  Parking
 -  Bus/Tuk-tuk Station
 -  Market
 -  Hotel
 -  Guesthouse
 -  Place of Interest
 -  Model Walking Route



Where to Eat

Savannakhet Town has over two dozen restaurants serving Asian and Western dishes, and scores of noodle shops cooking up cheap delicious food. Among the more popular restaurants are Lao Lao Der, Dao Savanh, and the floating Lao Derm.

Savanh Food

Savannakhet food is well-known and savored by Lao people for its use of local herbs and organic ingredients as well as its distinct spiciness. While traveling in the province, give some of the more popular dishes a try. Also, stop at the Savannakhet Tourist Information Center for a detailed brochure entitled "Savanh Food".

Khao Piek: Rice noodles topped with a choice of fish or pork

Mi: Yellow noodle soup with seasonal vegetables

Keng Pa Khor Sai Mot Daeng: A piquant fish soup with big ant eggs available only during dry season

Keng Mark Phak: A popular pork and gourd soup

Larp: A Lao staple of spicy minced beef, chicken or pork eaten with sticky rice

Phorn Pa: Boiled fish mixed with fermented fish, chili and onions

Sin Savanh: Savannakhet's special grilled dried beef with galangal and lemon juice

Mom Savanh: Chopped beef and liver sausage with herbs, fried or grilled

Sin Dad: Savanh-style sukiyaki with a choice of meats and vegetables

Ka Lame Cheun: Fried ice cream unique to Savannakhet



Festivals & Events

◉ *That Phonh Festival*

Held over three days in early February, this celebration attracts locals, who place hundreds of baked rice balls at the That Phonh Stupa and offer alms to the spirits of those who built it. They also give uncooked rice to the monks. (Mekong River South Circuit)

◉ *Boun Heuan Hin (Stone House Festival)*

This Khmer site on the Mekong River south of Savannakhet Town hosts a mid-March festival to pay respect to the dead. People gather for a Buddhist ceremony in the morning, and at night everyone joins in a large circle for the traditional Lamvong dance. (Mekong River South Circuit)

◉ *Pii Mai Lao (Lao New Year)*

Celebrated over three days in mid-April, and with plenty of festive water splashing, the province's biggest New Year celebrations take place in Savannakhet Town. A beauty contest selects Miss New Year, who is paraded through the city atop a float shaped like a bird or animal. The float's design changes from year to year.

◉ *Boun Bang Fai (Rocket Festival)*

A festival linked to fertility and intended to bring rain, the largest celebration is held in Ban Kengkok in Champone District. This late-April/early-May festival starts with a traditional Sualakhang dance, in which men dress like women, and tie themselves together in a circle. A parade of artificial elephants and horses precedes the rocket competition, in which large bamboo rockets are launched skyward. (Champone Circuit)



Traditional Sualakhang Dance



Making Merit at Boun Auk Phansaa

☸ *Boun Auk Phansaa (Mekong Boat Racing Festival)*

Celebrated over two days in the first week of October, Savannakhet's ceremonies are centered around Xaiyaphoum Temple and the Mekong River. Buddhists make merit at temples on the first morning to commemorate the end of Buddhist Lent before joining in various festivities. At around 11:00 am, Lao and Thai longboats meet and the racing begins. In the evening everyone launches their own small heua fai or small boats made of banana leaves and flowers on the Mekong to cast off the past year's bad luck and wish for a brighter future.

☸ *That Ing Hang Festival*

Held over three days leading to late December's full moon, this celebration pays respect to Buddha and those who built the ancient sacred stupa. People place *mark beng*, small banana-leaf towers with flowers, around it and nuns bless them. Forest products, traditional foods and local handicrafts are sold at the huge trade fair that is held at the same time as the festival.

☸ *The Baci Ceremony*

Lao villagers perform this ritual to welcome visitors or send them off, and during weddings. This sacred ceremony, in which blessings are symbolically tied to one's wrist with strings, is also a reconciliation gesture and the faithful believe it can help cure many illnesses.



Traditional Baci Ceremony



Local Products and Handicrafts

Souvenir hunters will find a variety of handicrafts in Savannakhet, which are available at the province's "ODOP" (One District, One Product) shop located on Route 9 a few miles northeast of Savannakhet City. Visitors can also uncover interesting products in markets and rural villages.

The Provincial Tourism Department's Eco-Guide Unit offers several tours to villages in areas, where visitors can view locals making the various products and handicrafts listed here

Bamboo, Straw and Wood Work

After working in the rice fields and during the agricultural off-season, locals make bamboo, straw and wood products for daily use and for sale. Items include spoons, bowls, tables, coasters and bamboo baskets for steaming sticky rice. They also create wickerwork fishing gear, wicker mats, straw hats and caps, brooms and traditional musical instruments. Many visitors buy them to use as decorative items, finding many innovative uses for the distinctive designs. Have a look in Savanxay Market, shops in Savannakhet Town or rural villages to make a purchase.



Weaving Bamboo



Traditional Weaving

Cotton and Silk Weaving

In Phouthai villages south of Savannakhet Town such as Ban Lahanam Thong, locals practice traditional cotton weaving using only natural dyes. Their products are sent to markets and shops in Savannakhet Town and Vientiane, or they can be purchased in the villages of origin. (Mekong River South Circuit).

In Easter Savannakhet's Vilabouly District, the Lane Xang Minerals Group mining operation has helped establish the Lao Silk-Cotton Weaving Center to encourage villagers to improve their traditional skills and generate income for women living near the mine. In the mountainous areas around Nong and Dong Phou Vieng NPA, the Mankhong and other ethnic groups produce distinct cotton textiles and basketry. (Ho Chi Minh Trail Circuit)

Wood Carving and Metal-work

Lao people have been carving wood and working metals for centuries, and the skills have been passed down from generation to generation.



Wood Carving





Iced Coffee

Artisans beautify the doors and windows of Buddhist temples with wood carvings and cast Buddha statues from copper, bronze, gold and silver. Savanxay Market and souvenir shops in Savannakhet Town sell miniature wood carvings, and Turtle Lake villagers carve and sell turtle-shaped figures. Savannakhet Art School north of the city teaches wood carving and other skills. It's worth a visit to the school if you are interested in seeing how the next generation of Lao artisans is being trained.

"Savanh" Foods

Salty processed meats such as sin Savanh (grilled dry beef), mom Savanh (beef liver sausage) and som moo (raw pork sausage) can be found at Savanxay Market and shops around Savannakhet Town, especially near the Vietnamese temple on Phangnyapui Road. Just outside the city in Ban Nateuy, natural salt is obtained by boiling saline groundwater pumped up from deep wells.

The French introduced coffee to Laos and it is grown in Savannakhet's mountains near the border with Viet Nam. The province produces Café Savanh for commercial sale, as locals mostly drink it hot or cold at restaurants and coffee shops. Great with a fresh baguette.

Locals process fruits by drying or frying them, and among the most popular are dried banana chips sold at shops and stalls around Savannakhet Town. Another tasty snack is khao laam, which is sweetened rice packed into bamboo cases.



Savannakhet Circuits

To promote visitation to the province's rich historic, cultural and natural attractions, the Provincial Tourism Department has created five tour circuits. Guided tours can be booked at the Tourist Information Center in Savannakhet Town, which also offers detailed brochures about the circuits along with maps for those who wish to travel independently.

Savannakhet Downtown

A half-day walking tour of Savannakhet Town, officially called Kaysone Phomvihane District, winds past 19 points of interest including the home of Lao PDR's first prime minister Kaysone Phomvihane, the 16th century Buddhist Temple Vat Xaiyaphoum, Saint Theresa Catholic Church, and plenty of colonial-era structures.

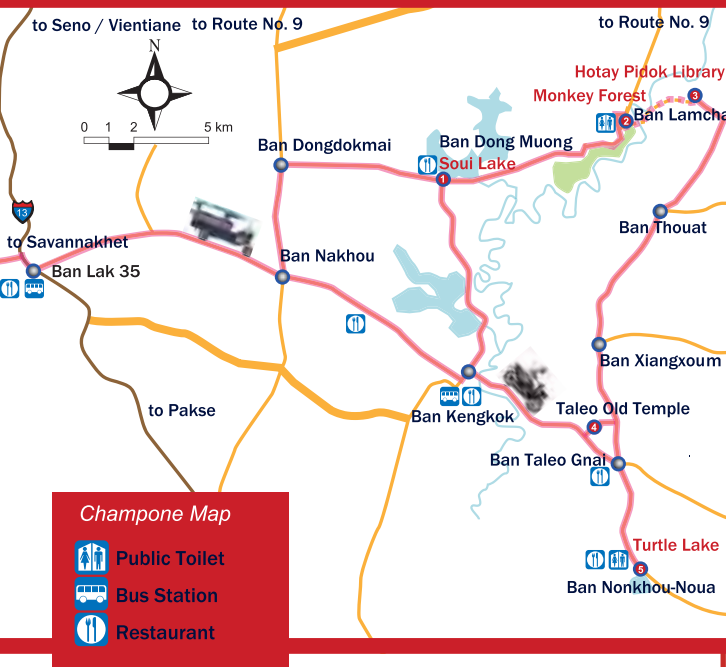
Savannakhet Outskirts

This one-day circuit can be completed by car, tuk-tuk, motorbike or bicycle. Visit That Ing Hang Stupa, Dong Natad Protected Area, Nong Lom and Bungva Lakes, old Phonsim ruins, and the Phonsim Turtle Lake.

> *See the Savannakhet Outskirts map on page 25/26*

Kaysone Phomvihane's House





Champone

Champone is a large agricultural area which can be covered in one day. Circuit highlights include the Hotay Pidok Library with thousands of ancient palm-leaf manuscripts, the Sacred Monkey Forest with hundreds of monkeys, Turtle Lake with enchanted turtles, Soui Lake's distinct irrigation system, and more.

Mekong River South

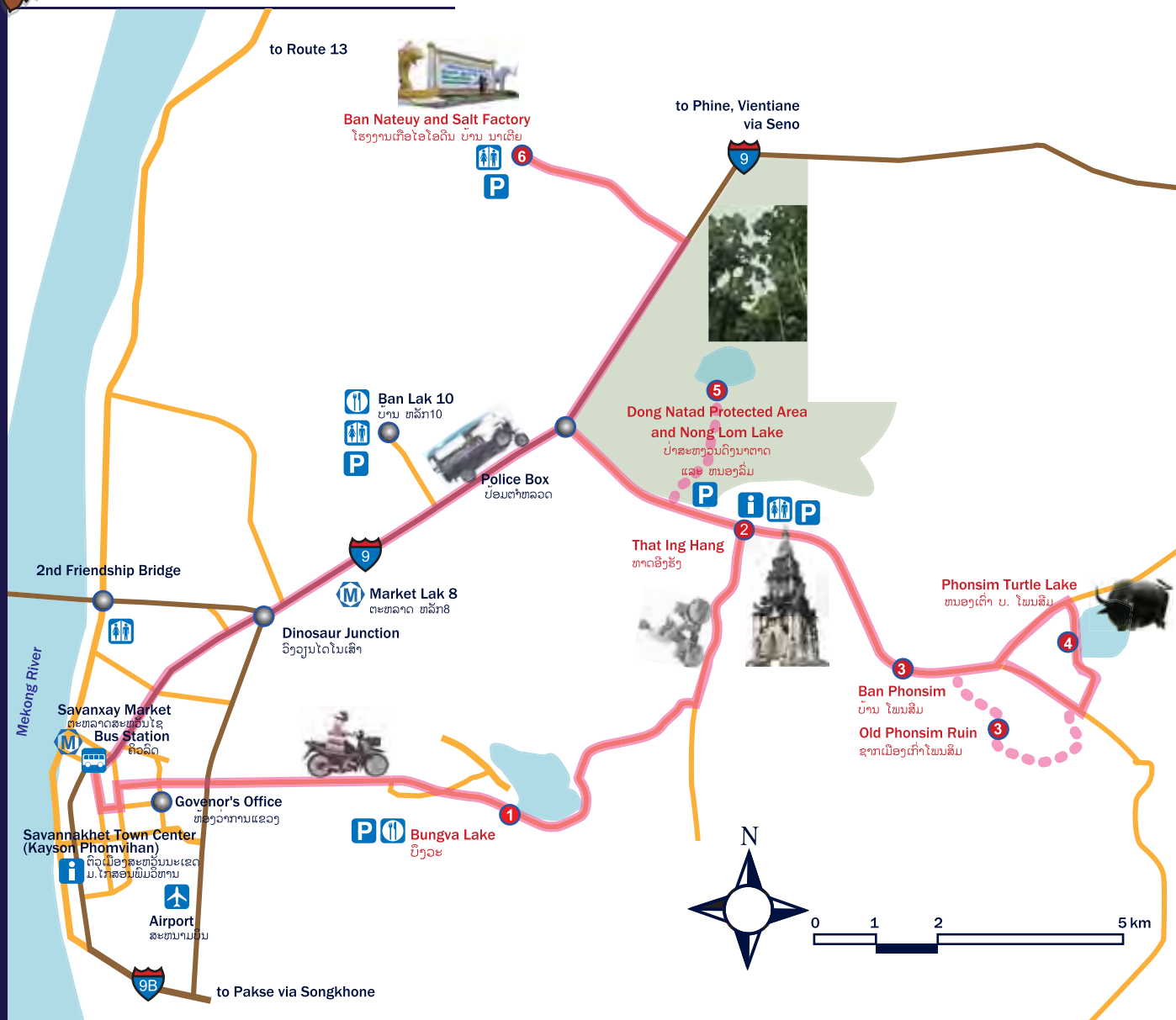
This one-day circuit visits an area with a long history of diverse civilizations. Among the stops are That Phonh Stupa, Savannakhet's oldest. The stupa was built in an area believed to have been visited by Buddha. Huean Hin ancient Khmer rest house built of stone, traditional Phouthai cotton-weaving villages, Kong Phanang's unusual rock formations all highlight the Mekong River South Circuit.

Ho Chi Minh Trail

This well-known wartime transport route can be explored on a multi-day tour. Walk branches of the legendary trail on trekking trips through the province's protected forests and see ruins of the Prince Souphanouvong Bridge destroyed by war-time bombing. Vilabouly's Stone Pillars may be seen as well as the new Lao-Viet Commemorative War Museum at Ban Dong in Sepone.



Savannakhet Outskirts



- Tourist Information
- Public Toilet
- Parking
- Bus/Tuk-tuk Station

- Market
- Hotel
- Guesthouse
- Place of Interest

- Model Walking Route
- Old Buildings
- Temples/Monuments
- Other Buildings

History



That Ing Hang

Savannakhet History

Fossilized remains prove dinosaurs once roamed what is now Savannakhet, and archaeological findings suggest humans lived in the area at least 4,000 years ago. Excavations have turned up Bronze Age artifacts and ancient copper mines, remnants of terraced agricultural systems with diversion dams and channels, stone tools and pottery shards.

According to legend, the Phouthai and Lao people migrated from northwest Viet Nam down the Nam Ou River to the Mekong, and continued downriver, settling along its banks. The Phouthai separated from the Lao and headed on to the central and southern region of Laos, reaching what is now Savannakhet. They began moving far inland, establishing villages organized under the principality of Muang Vang Ang Kham in the early 16th century.

The first Lao community in western Savannakhet Province, Ban Luang Phonsim, was founded near That Ing Hang monument in the 1530s by a group led by the married couple, Luang and Sim. Their son established a village on the Mekong River that later became known as Tha Hae (“mineral port”) during the reign of King Saysethathirath.

In the mid-18th century, Tha Hae expanded across the Mekong to Mukdahan, but Siam soon invaded and drove back the Lao advance. The French took control of the Tha Hae area in 1893 and raised its status to that of a province with the new name Savannakhet beginning in 1907. In 1920 Kaysone Phomvihane, Lao PDR's first prime minister, was born in Savannakhet. Kaysone went to school in Hanoi, met Ho Chi Minh, and was one of the co-founders of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and a leader of the Pathet Lao armed forces. During the Second Indochina War, Kaysone led the Lao People's revolutionary struggle from a cave complex in Houaphanh Province's Viengxay District in the far northeast. Upon independence in 1975, he became the country's first premier and later president after Prince Souphanouvong's term.

That Ing Hang

According to legend, Savannakhet's most sacred site, That Ing Hang, houses Buddha relics. Indian King Asoka allegedly created a monument in 225 BC to sanctify the place where Buddha is believed to have delivered a sermon before resting under a Hang tree, thus the name. It is also thought that the *Phathat* (funeral reliquary) houses parts of Buddha's spine.

Research shows that a Mon Empire king erected a stupa here as early as 1,500 years ago. This smaller monument and area surrounding it was augmented by King Saysethatirath in the 16th century. In 1930, a nine-meter-tall, three-tiered carved stucco stupa was constructed in Lane Xang style with the upper level symbolizing a lotus. (Savannakhet Outskirts Circuit)

That Ing Hang is open daily. Admission fee: 2,000 kip for Lao, 5,000 kip for foreign visitors. Ladies are required to wear traditional Lao skirts that are available on site. Alcohol is prohibited on the temple grounds.

Other Nearby Attractions: Just east of That Ing Hang is Ban Phonsim with a short trail to the ruins of the original Phonsim settlement. The foundations of a pagoda and the town wall sit atop a hill surrounded by bamboo forest. A 3-km trail continues to Phonsim Turtle Lake, originally constructed to irrigate rice paddies. Visitors can see beautiful lotus blooms, buffaloes bathing, and migratory birds, but unfortunately the turtles have vanished. About 6 km south, visitors can stop at Bungva Lake to relax in one of the shoreline gazebos and enjoy a beautiful view of the surrounding rice fields.

Directions: Travel east on Route 9 and turn right at the police box about 8 km past the “Dinosaur” junction. The sign marking the entrance to That Ing Hang is some 5 km on the right, just past the entrance to Nong Lom Lake. Alternatively, the road heading east from the Savannakhet Town bus station runs about 7 km to Bungva Lake and continues 6 km to the sacred site.

Historic Downtown Savannakhet

Savannakhet Town presents several examples of vernacular Lao architecture and French colonial-era Art Deco buildings. Most structures date from the early 20th century. (Savannakhet Downtown Circuit)

Kaysone Phomvihane’s House

The residence of Kaysone Phomvihane, Lao PDR’s first prime minister and then president until his death in 1992, is located on Kouvolavong Road. Born and raised in Savannakhet, Kaysone met Ho Chi Minh while studying in Hanoi. He went on to become one of the co-founders of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party and a leader of the Pathet Lao armed forces.

Vat Xaiyaphoum



Vat Xaiyaphoum

Founded in 1542 near the Mekong River during the reign of King Saysethatirath, Vat Xaiyaphoum is Savannakhet's oldest Buddhist temple. Though today's buildings were rebuilt in 1906, they maintain their original architectural style. The temple is the main venue for celebrating the Lao New Year, Mekong Boat Racing Festival and Buddhist celebrations.

Savannakhet Provincial Museum

Originally established in 1979 within the former French Provincial Governor's house, the museum was moved in 2010 to a renovated colonial administrative building on the south side of town between Khantabouli and Tha Hae Roads. The Museum houses a collection of the province's natural, ethnological, historical, and revolutionary artifacts. It is open Monday-Friday from 08:00-11:30 and 13.30-16:00.



Dinosaur Museum

Opened in 2000, this popular small museum houses pieces of Savannakhet's pre-history including dinosaur bones, fossils and meteorite fragments. The collection was started in 1936 when French geologist Josué Heilman Hoffet discovered fossilized dinosaur bones near Tangvai Village about 120 kilometers east of Savannakhet Town. Before his untimely death during World War II, Hoffet collected more herbivore dinosaur bones along with evidence of freshwater mollusks, crocodiles and tortoises. No further research was conducted until 1990, when a joint Lao-French team rediscovered Hoffet's site and also uncovered substantial new dinosaur remains in the Tangvai area.

The Dinosaur Museum is located on north Khantabouli Road, and is open daily from 09:00-16:00. Admission fee: 3,000 kip for Lao, 5,000 kip for foreign visitors.

Other attractions on the Savannakhet Downtown Circuit:

- Talat Yen Plaza and its surrounding French colonial structures
- Lao Chaleun Theater's Art Deco façade
- The Provincial Hospital and several buildings built in 1925
- Soumphonphakdy House, the Art Deco residence of a French officer
- Lao Vietnam Association's unique globe design
- Sala Savanh Guest House, the former Thai Consulate built in 1926
- Saint Theresa Catholic Church at Talat Yen, built in the 1920s
- The Deer House, an excellent example of a French colonial house
- Sounantha School, once used as a military post



Other Nearby Attractions: About 35 km north of Savannakhet on the Mekong River road, stop at the Kaeng Kabao Rapids, and watch the river crash over rocks. This short journey also provides an excellent opportunity to observe local life.

That Phonh

This stupa commemorates the site where Buddha passed after leaving That Ing Hang. According to legend he took only one step to reach the sacred spot, which is more than 40 km away. It is believed That Phonh was erected between 557 and 700, and then reconstructed in the 16th century during the reign of King Saysethatirath. An annual festival is held on the full moon, usually in late February. (Mekong River South Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: Just before the turnoff to That Phonh, Vat Sisaket and Palm Garden present the typical palm-tree and rice-paddy landscape of the area.



To visit a local market selling fresh vegetables and forest products, continue northeast of the stupa to Route 13, turn left and travel about 1 km.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, take Route 9B to Route 13, and then head south past Ban Lak 35 bus station for about 5 km before turning right on the road to Vat Sisaket. Turn left at the intersection, and travel about 4 km to That Phonh.

Heuan Hin (Stone House)

Heuan Hin is believed to be one of 121 stone rest houses (sala) constructed by Jayavarman VII (1181-1218) along the roads that connected all corners of the Khmer Empire. The Mekong riverside structure is in ruins but well worth a visit. (Mekong River South Circuit)

Directions: Take Route 9B to Route 13 south past the Ban Lak 35 bus station for about 5 km before turning right on the road to Vat Sisaket and Palm Garden. Turn right at the intersection and travel some 7 km to Xaiphoutong restaurant, and then turn left and follow the river road for about 15 km.



Hotay Pidok Library

Hotay Pidok Library

The country's most important repository of palm leaf books written in ancient Lao, Burmese Pali, and Khmer was originally constructed in the late 18th century as part of the Nonglamchanh Temple. The library houses some 4,000 books containing 361 different stories, which are kept in good condition by monks and locals. A Thai-funded project recently restored the structure as a classic example of Lao religious architecture. (Champone Circuit)

Directions: Take Route 9B to Route 13, and head south to the Ban Lak 35 bus station. Turn left, and travel about 25 km to Ban Taleo Gnai, where the main road ends. Turn left and go about 18km to reach Ban Lamchan and the library. Those visiting the Monkey Forest can walk a 3-km trail to the library.

Seno Town

Located at the intersection of Route 9 and Route 13, Seno was selected by the area's French occupiers as a garrison town due to its strategic location. The remains of the former airstrip and barracks are still visible. The name "Seno" is the French abbreviation for the four compass points: sud (south), est (east), nord (north) and ouest (west).

Prince Souphanouvong Bridge (Tad Hay Village)

Prince Souphanouvong, one of the founders of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the first president of the Lao PDR (1975-1986), designed and supervised the construction of this bridge crossing the Xe Bang Hieng River in 1942. The bridge was destroyed by U.S. air raids in 1968, but remnants of the structure are still scattered along the riverbank. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: The rocky Sammateak Rapids are located 3 km upstream on the same river. The area is ideal for swimming, rafting and kayaking. Along the riverside, craters left by aerial bombing can be seen. On the way to Tad Hay Village, about 5 km south of Phine, there is an excellent panoramic view of the area.

Directions: From Savannakhet, take Route 9 to Mueang Phine (about 160 km). Head south for approximately 35 km beginning at the junction of Route 9 and Route 23.

Prince Souphanouvong Bridge



Prince Souphanouvong

Born in 1909, Prince Souphanouvong was the youngest child of the Uparat, or Viceroy, Boun Khoung. He attended school in Hanoi and then studied civil engineering in France in the early 1930s before returning to Indochina in 1937. The colonial government employed the prince as an engineer stationed in Saigon, and he was later promoted to oversee the public works around Nha Trang. In this position, the prince oversaw the construction of Viet Nam's Route 14, the hydroelectric power dam in Da Nhin, the bridge crossing the Brepok River on Route 19 to Cambodia, and the renovation of Route 13 in Strung Treng, Cambodia. After three years in Nha Trang, he was assigned to the Phine office in Savannakhet where he oversaw the construction of Route 23 and the bridge crossing the Xe Bang Hieng River to continue the road south to Salavan Province.

In 1945 the prince met Ho Chi Minh and later joined the Lao Issara movement to fight for independence from the French. He arrived with troops in Savannakhet in October 1945 and later moved to Thakaek, fighting in several battles against the French. The prince passed away in 1995. His remains are kept at That Luang in Vientiane.

Ho Chi Minh Trail

The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a network of trails the North Vietnamese used during the war for independence as a transport and logistics system running through Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia to the south. The trail was not a single road, but rather a complex maze of paths and waterways used by trucks, boats, bicycles, foot-soldiers and porters. It was a lifeline for Vietnamese and Lao revolutionary forces.

-----➔ *The Ho Chi Minh Trail*



Many of the present roads along Route 9 served as part of the trail, and an important section passed through present-day Nong in the province's southeast. Today, much of the trail is covered by deep forests, but bomb craters can still be seen in the area. Please don't enter the forest without local guides since unexploded bombs still remain. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit)

Lao-Viet Commemorative War Museum

This soon-to-be-completed museum (still under construction in early 2010) is currently collecting battle memorabilia such as tanks, guns, bombs and other weapons, as well as photos of soldiers and local people, for display at the museum.

UXOs and Safety

The legacy of bombing from the Indochina War remains today. Unexploded bombs, also known as unexploded ordnance (UXOs) threaten to kill or maim those who unknowingly disturb munitions yet to be cleared. It is estimated that 30% of the bombs dropped never exploded, and many lay intact just below the ground's surface. If you come across a UXO do not touch it. While trekking, please stay on the designated trails.

Old Tank on the Ho Chi Minh Trail





Local history experts, who have a first-hand knowledge of the fighting that occurred during the Indochina War, are being consulted on the design and content of the exhibitions. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit).

Nearby Attractions: The site of the Lam Son 719 battle, a decisive confrontation during the Indochina War, was the only land-battle in Laos that the U.S. Army supported by supplying tanks and other ground support to the South Vietnamese troops.

Despite U.S. material and logistic support, the South Vietnamese lost the battle and recorded heavy casualties. The clash took place in 1971 on Route 9, thus the name “719”. A few kilometers past the War Museum, see the suspended cable bridge – this area was one part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel approximately 180 km on Route 9 to Sepon. Continue east for another 25 km to Ban Dong village. The museum and battlefield are located at the turnoff to Nong District.

Dinosaur Footprints

During the dry season (November-April), visitors can observe dinosaur footprints on the Xe Xang Soi riverbed at Phalanxay, about 100 km east of Savannakhet Town on Route 9. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit)



Culture

Phouthai Weaving – Western Savannakhet

The “Laha” group of Phouthai villages hand-spin and naturally dye cotton textiles in traditional and modern styles. This cluster of communities is set in a scenic area with some old buildings near the Xe Bang Hieng River south of Savannakhet Town. High-quality crafts produced here are sent to markets in nearby Pakxong on Route 13, Savannakhet Town and Vientiane. Some can be found in museum collections worldwide. (Mekong River South Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: The square-shaped That Oumoung stupa was built between 1940 and 1950, and somewhat resembles That Ing Hang. The monument is topped with very unique ornamentation inspired by the banana flower. Located in Ban Lahakok village, about 7 km west of the weaving villages, the stupa is worth a stop for some great photographs. Locals hold an annual festival in late February. About 15 km south of Ban Pakxong on Route 13 sits the legendary Tham Phaseng caves.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel east on Route 9B to Route 13, and then head south for some 40 km to Ban Pakxong. Turn left at the bus station and go about 7 km to a junction, and then turn right. The Laha weaving villages are about 7 km from the junction.

Phouthai village





Rolling Cotton

The Legend of Tham Phaseng

The legend of Tham Phaseng recounts tales of tigers and giant snakes which have battled at the site over the centuries. In fact local people have found tiger footprints in the area, but no evidence of giant snakes. Many of the caves are home to scores of bats. A stone statue of Buddha, chiseled from a natural fossil, was found in one of the caves, making Tham Phaseng one of the most sacred sites in the region. A rocket festival accompanied by local dancing is held annually during the full moon in late May.

Phouthai Weaving – Eastern Savannakhet

In the mountainous eastern part of the province, descendents of the original Phouthai settlers continue to produce traditional cotton and silk hand-woven products. One weaving community, Ban Nong Kadaeng, is situated near Vilabouly Town on Route 28A. Nong Kadeng is also where the Lao Silk-Cotton Weaving Center can be found. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: That Nang Lao stupa houses the remains of a Phouthai princess, who was sent by her husband Prince Anouvong (1805-1828) to govern the local Phouthai people. To reach the stupa, take the road west out of Vilabouly Town for about 18 km. When you reach the 18 km junction, turn right and go about 10 km to a three-way intersection. Make another right to reach the entrance to the stupa. Visitors to Vilabouly Town can also view the gold mine a few kilometers east of town.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel on Route 9 to Sepone. Just past Sepone town is a sign marking the turn-off for Route 28A. At this junction head north for about 25 km and you will reach Vilabouly. The weaving center is about 5 km before the town.

Phouthai Traditional Spirits (lao lao)

Phouthai women in Ban Non Yang near Phine in eastern Savannakhet brew a traditional rice alcohol, which is available for sale. Some make a special brew infused with herbs that is said to have the same effect as Viagra®.

Mankhong and Ethnic Textiles

Ethnic Mankhong, Bru, Trii, and Katang women in remote Nong District weave distinctive textiles with highly complex patterns. If you don't have time to visit one of the weaving villages, purchase a textile at the Craft Center in Muang Phine or the ODOP Center in Savannakhet (Ho Chi Minh Circuit).

Directions: From Sepon, head east for another 25 km on Route 9. Just before Ban Dong village turn right towards the cable bridge and continue about 25 km to Nong.



Weaving Silk

Nature

Dong Natad Protected Area

Located in the outskirts of Savannakhet Town, this 8,300-hectare provincial protected area consists of an ancient forest of towering trees where traditional forest products such as honey and plants are collected for food and medicine. You can also see locals as extracting nyang oil from dipthirocarp trees to make torches that light their homes. Located in the center of Dong Natad is the legendary Nong Lom Lake which can easily be reached as part of a 3-km nature walk.



Nong Lom Lake

On the way, visitors can observe birds, butterflies, rare plants and traditional village life. Driving to the lake is prohibited. (Savannaket Outskirts Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: West of Dong Natad in Ban Nateuy village, natural salt is produced from the ground water which is saltier than seawater! That Ing Hang is about 2 km from the entrance to Nong Lom Lake.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel east on Route 9 past the “Dinosaur Junction” to the police box and turn right. The parking area for Dong Natad and trail to Nong Lom Lake is about 3 km on the left. An alternative route is to take the road heading east from the Savannakhet Town bus station, travel 7 km to Bungva Lake, and continue another 6 km to That Ing Hang. Turn left and go about 2 km to Dong Natad’s parking area, which is on the right.

Tad Salene Waterfall

Salene Waterfall drops 80 meters in a densely forested setting. The falls are easily accessed from Route 9 in an area that was once part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Craters caused by bombing during the war can be seen along the way, as can locals cultivating fruits and coffee. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: Ban Sepon Kao (Old Sepon) sits on the banks of the Xe Bang Hieng River on Route 9 just east of present-day Sepon Town. The old village retains an atmosphere of days gone by. From Old Sepon, trekkers can hike the 10-km trail to the Sakhoe Waterfall and from there to Salene Waterfall. Another 8-km branch of the trail leads to the Sadee Waterfall.

Directions: From Savannakhet, travel east approximately 175 km on Route 9 to Sepon. Continue for about 25 km to the turnoff just before Ban Dong village. Turn left and the road winds north about 15 km to the Salene Waterfall.

Stone Pillars

These towering natural geological wonders rise in deep jungle, yet are easily accessed via a dirt road that was once a section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail linking Vilabouly Town to Khammouane Province to the north. Here is where you can really familiarize yourself with the Trail's rugged terrain. (Ho Chi Minh Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: Phalong Waterfall is located 20 km south of Vilabouly in Phou Xang Hae NPA and is easily accessible from Route 28A. Trekking and home stays in the NPA are available during the dry season.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel east approximately 170 km on Route 9 to Route 28A, and turn left to Vilabouly Town, 40 km to the north. From Vilabouly Town, take the twisting road that leads to Khammouane Province for about 10 km until you reach the Stone Pillars.

Stone Pillars





Sacred Monkey Forest

More than 3,000 monkeys inhabit Savannakhet's sacred three-hectare Monkey Forest. The easiest way to meet the monkeys is by offering them food while walking along the trail. The monkeys can also be spotted feeding at one of the forest's many spirit houses where locals place food to make merit. Many animals make their home at the forest's temple where they can be seen receiving food given to them by monks. (Champhone Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: A 2-3 km trail leads east to the 200-year-old Hotay Pidak Library, and 8 km to the west is Soui Lake and its stepped irrigation dam and small islands, where villagers catch fish and snails during the dry season. Visitors can taste these and other local foods while viewing lotus blooms and migratory birds such as white storks.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel east on Route 9B to Route 13's Ban Lak 35. Continue straight for 10 km to Ban Nakhou, turn left and go 5 km to Ban Dongdokmai. Then turn right and drive about 25 km past Soui Lake and Ban Dong Muong to reach the Monkey Forest.



Turtle Lake

Legend has it that the ghosts inhabiting this natural lake's spirit house protect its many turtles. The turtles are of different sizes and ages and local children are experts at luring them from the depths with food. Turtle-shaped carvings and other souvenirs made by locals may be purchased in front of the lake's entrance. Turtle Lake is open daily with an admission fee of 1,000 kip. (Champhone Circuit)

Other Nearby Attractions: Taleo Old Temple is located about 7 km north of Turtle Lake just outside Ban Taleo Gnai. The early 20th century structure temple somewhat resembles a Catholic church but has a Buddha statue in its alcove and Buddhist iconography. Inside, colorful murals recount the history of the temple and Buddha. American bombing in 1969 took its toll on many of the surrounding buildings but the main temple remains intact.

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, travel east on Route 9B for about 35 km to Route 13's Ban Lak 35. Continue straight for 25 km to Ban Taleo Gnai.

Kong Phanang Panorama

One of the Mekong's many natural wonders, these massive rocks jut from the river to create scores of mini-islands and more than 10 caves at nearby Tham Pulan. Some believe that centuries ago the area's earliest inhabitants used these huge stones as construction materials. During the dry season a walking path leads to an excellent view of this amazing natural site. (Mekong River South Circuit)

Directions: From Savannakhet Town, take Route 9B to Route 13 south for about 5 km before turning right on the road to Vat Sisaket and Palm Garden. Turn right at the intersection and travel some 7 km to Xaiphoutong restaurant and then turn left and follow the river road past the Stone House for about 25 km to the site.





National Protected Areas



Phou Xang Hae NPA

Situated in eastern Savannakhet, this 1,060 sq km NPA is very rich in fauna and flora and offers opportunities to experience traditional life with several ethnic groups. Key species include Douc and Francois' Langurs, elephants, gibbons, tigers and other big cats, bears and the Bar-bellied Pitta. The forest contains a mix of evergreen, deciduous and dipterocarp trees. The Phu Xang Hae range is dominated by a steep sandstone escarpment and a rocky plateau.



Dong Phou Vieng NPA

In the province's southeast, this 1,970 sq km² NPA is home to various ethnic groups, who live a sustainable lifestyle growing subsistence crops and producing handicrafts for home use and sale. Cutting through the center of the NPA is Route 23 linking Muang Phine and Salavan Province. This was once part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and is an ideal road for enthusiastic cyclists. There is a panoramic viewpoint about 8 km south of the Route 9 junction at Muang Phine. The Sammataek Rapids are just north of the ruined Souphannavong Bridge near Ban Tad Hay.

Key Species include Douc and Francois's Langur, elephants, gaur (a type of wild cattle), tigers, pangolins, Oriental Pied Hornbills, Great Hornbills, Wreathed Hornbills and White-Rumped and Red-headed Vultures. Forest types include evergreen, mixed deciduous and dry dipterocarp. Elevation ranges from 200 - 600 meters with peaks up to 1,254 meters.

For more information on these and other Lao NPAs, please visit www.ecotorismlaos.com/protected_areas.htm



Community-Based Tourism in Savannakhet

Introduction to Savannakhet CBT

The Savannakhet Eco-guide Unit operates several community-based tourism (CBT) treks and cycling tours lasting from one to four days. This Savannakhet Provincial Tourism Department initiative aims to help reduce poverty in remote villages as well as conserve nature.

All CBT activities and attractions have been established with the consent and involvement of the villagers, tourism officials and in some cases, in partnership with commercial tour operators.



The tours and home stays have been designed to allow communities to maximize the socio-cultural, environmental and economic benefits of tourism while managing negative impacts. A portion of the income generated by the treks is placed in village development and conservation funds to ensure fair distribution among community members involved. Trained and certified provincial and village guides lead the CBT treks and cycling tours to better explain the lives, beliefs and traditions of the local people. Local guides also enhance visitor's knowledge and understanding of the area. Trekkers/cyclers must stay together and follow the guides' instructions – be sure to consult your guide* about cultural protocols.

**Detailed brochures about CBT excursions offered are available at the Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit*



CBT Guidelines

- Respect ethnic culture and traditions.
- Do not hunt wildlife or damage plants.
- Do not take products out of the forest without asking the guide.
- Please tell the guides if you see animals or birds.
- Do not destroy or remove any ancient relics.
- Never give medicine or food to villagers, particularly children.
- Do not bath or sleep in the nude.
- Remove your shoes and hat before entering a house.
- Do not touch spirit altars, house plants or other belongings.
- When sleeping, do not point your feet at another person's head, but rather towards the outside wall.
- Do not hang clothes on the wall of the house unless told it is OK to do so.
- When in the house, do not enter the owner's bedroom or touch the spirit altar.
- Please ask before taking photographs.

Things to bring on the treks and cycling tours

- Appropriate shoes for trekking or cycling. Running shoes are OK.
- Sunscreen, insect repellent and a hat.
- Camera and binoculars (if you have them).
- Sarong for bathing (women), toiletries and a towel.
- Plastic bags to keep belongings dry on tours with boat rides.
- Prescription medication if you are taking it.



The Honey Trail to Nong Lom Lake:

1-day program

A provincial guide picks you up at your hotel/guesthouse or meet at the Eco-Guide office. Take a tuk-tuk to Ban Simuang and meet your village guide. Begin the trek and along the way, watch locals extract nyang oil and learn how villagers make traditional crafts from bamboo and other natural raw materials. Deeper into the forest you'll see local villagers climb trees to collect honey (February and March). Stop at Nong Lom Lake for a lunch of local food and listen to your guide tell about the lake's legend and local taboos. Continue under towering trees, listen to forest sounds, learn about local plants and wildlife, and try some traditional forest products used for food and medicine. The treks end at That Ing Hang.

**The Honey Trail Trek to Nong Lom Lake operates all year round.*



Dong Natad Cycling Tour to Bungva Lake:

1-day program

Meet your provincial guide at the Savannakhet Eco-guide Unit and cycle on paved roads to visit That Ing Hang stupa. Continue along the "Honey Trail" inside Dong Natad until you reach Ban Thad where locals teach you about traditional village crafts such as weaving, mat making and cooking local food. After leaving the forest, the route heads to Bungva Lake where you can relax in a shoreline gazebo and enjoy a view of the surrounding rice fields.

**The Dong Natad Cycling Tour and Bungva Lake operates all year round.*





Home Stay in the Spiritual Heart of Savannakhet:

2-day program

A provincial guide picks you up with a tuk-tuk and takes you to Ban Simuang to meet your village guide, before heading off on the "Honey Trail" through Dong Natad. Walk to Ban That for your overnight home stay. You'll participate in a traditional Baci ceremony, see how villagers use forest products, stop at a local school and visit That Ing Hang stupa. Rise early the next day and make merit by giving alms to the monks, and then trek to Ban Phonsim. Stop along the way to learn about local farming techniques in this vast rice-growing area. At Ban Phonsim, you'll buy food for lunch and meet a village guide who leads the remainder of the trek. Visit Old Phonsim's ruins before continuing to Phonsim Turtle Lake. Enjoy a boat ride during the cool season (November-February).

**The Home Stay in the Spiritual Heart of Savannakhet operates all year round.*



Ban Phonsim Village Home Stay & Nong Lom Lake:

2-day program

A provincial guide picks you up with a tuk-tuk for a ride to Ban That to meet your village guide before visiting That Ing Hang. Continue to Nong Lom Lake and start the 15-km trek to Ban Phonsim. Stop along the way for a lunch of local food and learn about the lake's legend and local taboos. On the trail your guide will teach you about local plants and wildlife and you'll have the chance to sample forest fruits and learn about other edible forest products. Arrive at Ban Phonsim for your home stay. That evening, take part in a traditional Baci ceremony with your village hosts. Rise early to give alms to the monks and then head off to the Old Phonsim Ruins. Continue to Phonsim Turtle Lake for lunch and enjoy a boat ride during the cool season (November-February).

**The Ban Phonsim Village Home Stay & Nong Lom Lake operates all year round.*



Dong Natad Cycling Tour & Ban Phonsim Home Stay:

2-day Program

Meet your guide at the Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit and then cycle 28 km by paved road past Kom Lake to Seno and visit the town's secondary school. Begin pedaling on a dirt trail and learn about local plants and wildlife on the way to Phonsim Turtle Lake. Venture another 3 km to Ban Phonsim for your home stay and evening Baci ceremony. Be prepared to listen and sing local Lao folk songs. Rise early the next day to make merit by giving alms to monks before cycling 9 km to Kheng Lake, stopping along the way to learn how locals extract nyang oil from dipterocarpus trees used for making torches. A short ride leads to Nong Lom Lake where you can try a variety of forest products used for food, medicine, fuel and other purposes. The trail continues to Ban That and includes a visit to That Ing Hang stupa. On the final 14 km ride back to Savannakhet Town, stop and relax at Bungva Lake.

**The Dong Natad Cycling Tour & Ban Phonsim Home Stay operates all year round.*



Katang Trail to the Sacred Forest:

3-day Program

Depart Savannakhet with a provincial guide in the morning and travel 160 km by public transportation to the Meuang Phin Lao-Viet Nam Solidarity Monument. Continue to Dong Phu Vieng NPA where you'll have lunch and learn about the plants, trees and herbs used by the locals. Trek to the Katang village of Ban Vongsikeo for your first overnight home stay. Here you will see the ceremonial Lak La Puep posts before visiting the Dong Sakee forest to learn why this area is considered sacred. You'll also participate in a Baci ceremony, try local food and drink, and enjoy Katang entertainment.

On the trail





The following morning, trek to Ban Nhang for a home stay where you'll take a refreshing swim in the river, chat with villagers and experience their lifestyle. Along the way, you may encounter monkeys such as Silvered Langurs as well as rare birds like hornbills. The third day kicks off with a 5-km trek to the Coffin Cave and the Xe Bang Hieng River for a long-tail boat ride down the Kaeng La'berng rapids to the Kaeng Saammatek rapids. Also during the trek, you'll learn about traditional village skills and crafts such as silk production, weaving and blacksmithing.

**The Katang Trail to the Sacred Forest operates between November and May.*



Lowland Lao Culture & Home Stays:

3-day Program

This program starts at Ban Dongbang where you meet a village guide. The first day's hike heads to Phonsim Turtle Lake. On the way learn how locals extract nyang oil from dipterocarp trees and make torches, see how forest products are collected and if your group is lucky, spot wildlife. The trek passes Phonsim Turtle Lake before reaching Ban Song village for an overnight home stay. There, you'll meet the villagers, participate in a Baci ceremony, learn local Lao folk songs and dine on local food and drink. After giving alms to the monks the next morning, trek 10 km for a home stay at Ban Khok, where you'll see how villagers use forest products, and visit a school to learn weaving. On the final day's trek, you'll try forest fruits, discover other edible forest products, have lunch in the forest, listen to jungle fowl, ride a tractor and learn about farming techniques.

**The Lowland Lao Culture & Home Stays in Dong Natad operates all year round.*



Mountains of the Elephant Parade:

4-day Program

After a long drive from Savannakhet Town, this trek in Phou Xang Hae NPA begins with a home stay in Ban Paphaknao. First take a refreshing swim then chat with villagers to learn about their lifestyle. On the second day, the local guide leads you through the forest and into the mountains while telling the epic tale of Nang Loun and Nang Laa. Stop for a rest at a rocky outcrop and see a four-lane highway built by an ancient civilization. After a lunch in the forest, the trek moves to the Elephant Scratching Cave and on to a forest campsite where you'll sit around a fire and listen to local tales. The next morning, rise early and take a guided walk to spot birds, squirrels, lizards, woodpeckers and other animals. After breakfast, the trek continues as the local guide tells stories of the Hin Lam Phan rock formation and the buffalo trader. Stop for lunch at a panoramic view of the forest below. The trek ends at the Phouthai village of Ban Naxalo for a home stay. Here you will participate in a Baci ceremony and enjoy Phouthai music.

**The Mountains of the Elephant Parade trek in Phou Xang Hae NPA operates from November to May, and may be done in reverse to fairly distribute the income among villages visited.*

To Book a Tour, Contact:

Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit

Ratsaphanith Road

Savannakhet, Lao PDR

Phone/Fax: (+856 041) 214 203

Email: savannakhetguides2@yahoo.com

For more CBT programs in Laos, visit
www.ecotourismmlaos.com/activities

Important Numbers

Provincial Tourism Office: (041) 212 755,

Savannakhet Eco-Guide Unit: (041) 214 203

Tourist Police: Mobile (020) 260 1993

Hospital: (041) 212 171

Dr. Outhon Clinic: (041) 213 816, Mobile (020) 554 0517

Provincial Foreigner Office: (041) 215 224

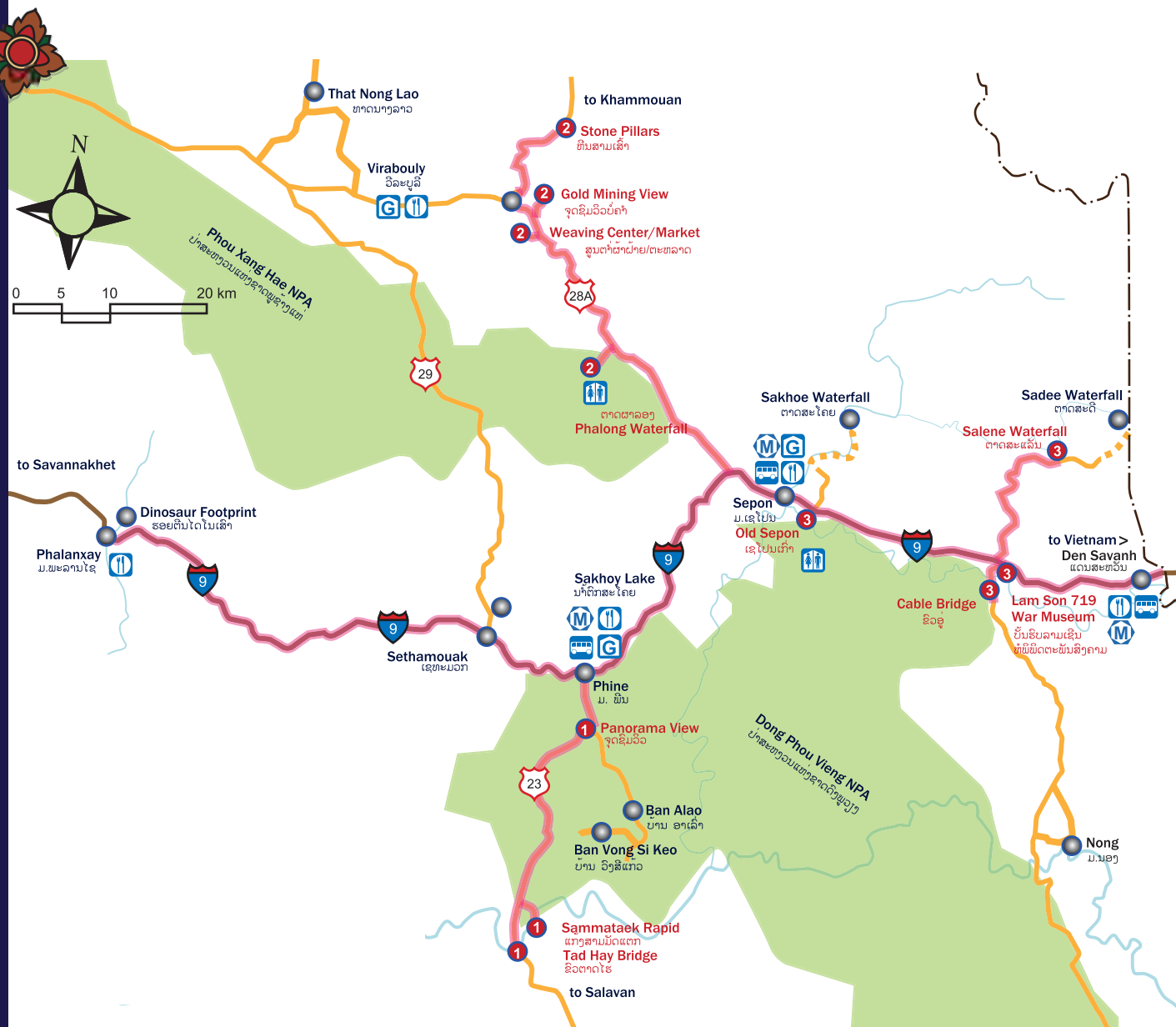
Police Station: (041) 260 173

Bus Station: (041) 213 920

Savannakhet Airport: (041) 212 143







Eastern Savannakhet Province Map

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Public Toilet | Hotel |
| Parking | Guesthouse |
| Bus/Tuk-tuk Station | Place of Interest |
| Market | |



LNTA - ADB

ເຂື່ອນນໍ້າຕົກຕະຫຼົກ ເຂດປະເທດລາວ
GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project



www.ecotourismlaos.com
www.tourismlaos.gov.la