



Trekking Gently in Luang Namtha

National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR/ UNESCO Nam Ha Ecotourism Project

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INTRODUCTION

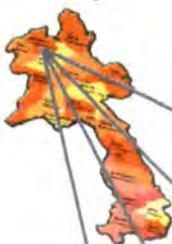
“**T**ourism pollutes the environment and destroys cultures and heritage.” But does it have to? The Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was conceived as a means to disprove this claim. Funded by the Government of New Zealand and the International Finance Corporation, sponsored by UNESCO and implemented by the National Tourism Authority of Lao PDR, the project’s primary objective is to create an economically viable ecotourism development model that contributes to the conservation and protection of Laos’ unique cultural and natural heritage. The project actively encourages the involvement of local communities in the development and management of tourism policies and activities in and around the Nam Ha National Protected Area (NPA). It also provides training and human capacity-building skills to tourism providers and local communities.

Extensive consultation has taken place among villagers, the Provincial Tourism Office, local guides, and project staff to address the growing tourism industry in the province. One of the results is this guidebook, which we hope will enhance your trekking experience, and provide a foundation for better understanding between you and your local hosts, together with an increased awareness of and respect for Luang Namtha’s fragile culture and natural environment.

LUANG NAMTHA

Luang Namtha is a land of rugged mountains, pristine forests, and rich river plains. Sharing its border with China and Myanmar, the province has long been a crossroads and meeting point for cultures in Southeast Asia. During past centuries the people of Luang Namtha have witnessed the rise and fall of different Tai Kingdoms which have left an archaeological legacy of abandoned temples, stupas and moated cities.

Today the province is populated by over 20 ethnic groups, making it one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in Laos. There are villages scattered everywhere in Luang Namtha – nestled in the lush green valleys and tucked away in the rugged upland forests. The richness of the cultural diversity of these groups is seen in their different languages, religious beliefs, and material culture and the way they use their natural environment. The wonderful natural and cultural resources of Luang Namtha attract many visitors, but as with many resources, they may be irreversibly damaged if not properly managed.



Looking towards the Nam Ha NPA core zone.



NAM HA NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA

In 1993, the government of Lao PDR established a series of protected areas called National Protected Areas (NPA). They comprise approximately 12.5 percent of the nation's land, a remarkably high percentage that represents a positive step towards the preservation of the nation's unique and valuable natural heritage.

The 222,400 square hectare Nam Ha NPA is home to a variety of animals, plants and birds, a number of which are globally threatened by hunting and increasing loss of habitat. Some of the more spectacular mammals that are found in the protected area are tigers and the beautiful clouded leopard, macaques, pangolins, wild Asian elephants, Asiatic black bears, Malayan sun bears, gaur, and wild boar. Having been hunted and trapped for centuries, larger mammals are very shy of human beings, thus sightings are rare. However, scat and

footprints can be found along the trail and near riverbanks. For those interested in bird watching, a recent survey reported nearly 300 bird species.

The Nam Ha NPA is also home to people. Twenty-five villages lie within its boundaries. The lives of people in these villages have been integrated with the forests for centuries. People use the forest for their daily subsistence needs, but also protect it, recognizing the need to sustain it for future use. As such the villagers are both exploiters and managers of the forest. In the process of creating the regulations for the NPA, the villagers will play an important long-term supervisory role.

In an early collaboration that may serve as a model, Ban Nalan villagers, together with the Nam Ha NPA Management Unit and Wildlife Conservation Society, developed rules for the use of land around the village, including land in the NPA. Because the villagers risk losing their means of survival if the forests

Swidden Agriculture

Also known as slash and burn, shifting cultivation, or rotational agriculture, this method consists of cutting, drying and burning the natural vegetation in order to create a field in a forested area. Traditionally fields were left fallow for 10 to 25 years allowing the soil and environment to rejuvenate. Traditional swidden farmers are aware of unwritten rules concerning the balance between mountain hillside ecosystems and food production. Unfortunately, growing population densities which create a shorter fallow cycle, and an increasing dependence on new technology and techniques, are jeopardizing the sustainability of this system. (Chasez 1999, pp 23-24)

Wild Cardamom

Wild cardamom (*Ammomun spp*) grows throughout northern Vietnam and Lao PDR. It is eagerly sought as a stomach medicine in Asia. By training villagers to improve their methods of cultivation and harvesting, and educating them about marketing at fair prices to traders, their income from cardamom has risen. Villagers are taking on responsibility for the forest, and in some areas harvest regulations have been created. For example, dates have been set to avoid premature gathering, and special conservation areas have been created to reduce over-harvesting. (De Koning, 2000).



*Above: Evidence of swidden agriculture in the NPA.
Right: Wild cardamom.
Far right: Abka man peeling cardamom ready for sale.*



are destroyed or placed completely out of use, they will play a vital role in policing and managing the natural resources. Already, some areas in the NPA are designated fully protected “core zones”, while others are multi-use “buffer zones” where villages may utilize the land and forest within limits. The futures of the villages and the NPA are, thus, entwined. The goal of the NPA Management Unit is to involve these villagers in the protection of the forest and animals, while allowing them to continue to realize a sustainable livelihood from it.

Nonetheless, growing environmental awareness on the part of the villagers, and their willingness to limit their use of the forest will most certainly effect their lives. In addition to ecotourism, sustainably har-

vesting and selling non-timber forest products (known as NTFPs) is one potential source of additional income for villagers. Villagers have always harvested produce from the Nam Ha forest for local use and for limited sale to outsiders. Rattan vines, bamboo, orchids, eaglewood and animal products, for example, supplement family diet and generate income.

The key to sustainable harvests of NTFPs in protected areas is community awareness and involvement in conservation in their area. In the Nam Ha NPA, the Wildlife Conservation Society and Lao Department of Forestry have focused on one popular NTFP – wild cardamom – hoping to develop an industry that is both profitable and sustainable.

MAIN INHABITANTS OF THE NAM HA FOREST

The Khmu and the Akha are the principal inhabitants of the Nam Ha forest who traditionally use the forest intensively. The Lanten, the third group introduced in this section, use the forests less extensively, but nonetheless, traditionally have lived along its parameters, sometimes entering to open swidden fields.

The Khmu

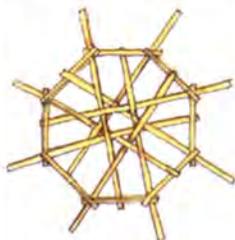
The Khmu are an upland forest people who have hunted and gathered forest products for centuries. Their knowledge of the forest is formidable. Part of the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family, Laos' 500,000 Khmu represent one of the largest ethnic groups in Laos. The Khmu settled the area of present-day Laos several thousand years in advance of the more populous Tai peoples. Recently, many Khmu villages have moved to lower-altitude locations where wet rice cultivation is possible. By doing so, they also gain access to the expanding network of roads. Relocation down the mountain is supported by the Lao government, who is eager to shift village livelihood from swidden cultivation

COMMUNITY FORESTS

The mountainous forests surrounding the Luang Namtha Valley are divided into areas known as Village Use Forests. Management of these areas is the responsibility of those living in adjacent communities. These forests provide the communities with essential products such as timber and rattan for housing. Villagers also supplement their diet and income by hunting, as well as gathering non-timber forest products. The pressure of a growing population, however, threatens the well-being and integrity of these areas. Passing direct responsibility for the management and protection of these vital tracts of land to local inhabitants will help to ensure they continue to exist and produce for future generations.

to wet rice cultivation, as well as improve access to better education and healthcare. After years of close contact with lowland Lao, many Khmu have abandoned traditional costume, and often are indistinguishable from Lao.

Like many of the ethnic groups in northern Laos, the Khmu are not Buddhist, but practice their own form of animism. Most spirits are very accessible, even



The taleo

The *taleo* is a woven bamboo symbol used by many of the ethnic groups in the Luang Namtha area, such as the Khmu, Tai Lue, Lanten and Ahka. The word *taleo* means "eye of the eagle" in the Tai language. Although its precise meaning depends upon the extent to which it is used, when attached to the gate of a village it usually means that outsiders should not enter. If you see a *taleo* during the trek have your guide ask villagers what you may or may not do.



Women pounding rice by hand in the traditional Khmu style, Ban Nalan.

to common villagers, and do not generate much fear. Nonetheless, to keep them satisfied, ritual meal offerings are often provided to placate the spirits upon whom the rice harvest depends. When a traditional ceremony is underway villagers usually place a woven bamboo *taleo* at the entrance to the village. If you are permitted to enter do not disturb people involved in the ceremonies or touch any altars or ritual items.

The Khmu in Luang Namtha generally practice mixed economies. Wet rice cultivation near the river and hill rice cultivation on mountain sides provide the rice essential for survival. Although they raise animals, they still practice hunting and gather forest products which not only provides additional nutrition but some cash income. The material culture of Khmu, their tools, utensils, baskets and net bags, for example, all reflect their continued reliance on the forest. The basic socio-economic unit is the family, and often village families will work together on major undertakings such as clearing new fields or building houses. In any year some families produce surplus rice for sale, and so can purchase clothing, batteries, and even roofing material from the Luang Namtha market.

Buuc gadong

In Ban Nalan or elsewhere in Laos, you may be invited to try a local drink, known as *lao hai* in Lao, and *buuc gadong* in Khmu. Sweet yet surprisingly strong, *buuc gadong* is made by fermenting rice, spices and rice husks in a large earthen jar. These jars of alcohol are an important part of any Khmu celebration, from weddings and rituals for ancestors, to a simple gathering of friends. Traditionally one must drink "two horns full" through long curved bamboo straws, before passing the straw on to the next person. In this picture, taken in Ban Nalan, two jars are visible in the centre of the group.



The Akha

Akha villages traditionally were built high on the slopes of the mountains at altitudes over 600m and as high as 1000 to 1500m. At these altitudes, the Akha cultivate upland swidden fields, growing rice, corn, and cotton as well as vegetables, peanuts, sesame and soybean. Using their vast knowledge of the natural environment, the Akha supplement their diet with animals and plants collected from the forest. Certain items, for example, rattan and cardamon, are either sold at the market or made into useful items for themselves, such as baskets and bags. As is the case with many groups who live in and around forested areas, customary law often prohibits over-exploitation of the forest resources. With the Akha, sexual penalties imposed on men for killing large animals serves to restrict the number of large animals killed.

The Akha differ from the Khmu. They are a Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic group found in today's China, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Their original homeland is China, and their first appearance in Laos dates to the mid-19th century.

In Laos they are frequently referred to as I Kho, Kho or Kha Kho. They are distributed all over Luang Namtha Province, but are particularly concentrated in upland areas of Sing and Long Districts, and inside the NPA in Namtha District. The Akha constitute

22 percent of the population in Luang Namtha Province.

Akha settlements are marked by their towering swings (for the Swing Festival) and gates – both at the front and back of the village. These gates mark the boundary between the human world and the outside, natural world. The gate is usually flanked by a pair of male and female wooden figures. Visitors to the village can pass through the village gates, but should not touch the gate, the wooden figures or anything else associated with the gate.

Akha life is characterized by a ritual and ethical code which provides them with strict guidelines on how to live their lives – this is sometimes called the “Akha way” (*-Akha zang*). The “Akha Way” not only includes all their traditions, ceremonies and customary law, but it also determines how

they cultivate their fields, hunt animals, how they view and treat sickness, and the manner in which they relate to one another and to outsiders.

It is the *dzo me* or village “founder” who ensures that the “Akha Way” is followed correctly. The *dzo me* is a man chosen for his “purity”, but is also usually a man whose grandfather and father were village priests and who passed down detailed knowledge of the “Akha Way”.

The Akha practice their own religion, which is based upon an elaborate system of spirit propitiation with a strong emphasis on the cult of the ancestors. Akha religious beliefs include a

Akha massage

A long-standing tradition within Akha communities is for visitors to be offered a massage after their long hike up the mountain to the village. Different from either a Swedish or Thai massage, Akha women apply firm, steady pressure to the recipient's back and limbs; ankle, toe and finger joints are loosened by pulling and snapping. Trekkers may be offered this massage, if you do receive one, please consult with your guide about payment.

*A boy enjoying the Swing
Festival in Ban Nammatt Kao*

strong respect for the natural environment which is under the dominance of protective spirits.

Akha women are easily recognizable by their distinctive costumes which consist of black cotton miniskirts, black, tight-fitting bodices covered by jackets decorated with embroidered and appliqué designs. They wear decorated leggings to protect their legs from being scratched in the field. Most characteristic, however, is the hat. All Akha women wear an elaborate hat. A special ceremony marks a young woman's transition from wearing the close-fitting black cotton cap worn by girls to the high hat worn by women. The new hat indicates that she is now eligible for marriage. The hats represent each woman's individuality, and she will spend much time sewing rows of beads, small pom poms, yarn, bits of monkey fur and coins onto her hat as decoration. Women also possess and wear elaborate silver jewelry – necklaces and medallions as well as the coins and silver bosses stitched onto their hats.

The Lanten

Sometimes called Lao Huay ("stream Lao") because they live near permanent streams, the Lanten are immediately recognizable by the dark indigo clothing worn by men and



women. The women also pluck or shave their eyebrows to mark the end of childhood, and wear their hair swept up in a traditional style held in place with beautiful silver jewelry.

Luang Namtha is home to the largest concentration of Lanten villages in Laos, and counts about 4,000 Lanten in its population. Like the closely related Mien, the Lanten emigrated from China in search of stability and new mountain rice fields. Legend holds that the Lanten were separated from their older brother, the Mien, during the flight, and made their way alone from China's Hainan Island through northern Vietnam, settling here in the 19th century.

Like other members of the Hmong-Mien group, the Lanten are renowned for



the strength of their cultural traditions and a commitment to preserving their way of life. The Lanten still speak their own language, and male elders continue to read and write a Lanten script based on Chinese characters. Their religion is a synthesis of Chinese Taoism and animism, and also includes worshiping ancestors and village spirits.

The Lanten have a tradition of producing bamboo fiber paper. Objects made from this are often used in ritual ceremonies and it is also traded with other groups. You might see paper-drying screens along the stream banks near their villages, coated with the thick white paste made of limestone and pounded bamboo fiber. Lanten craftsmen are also known for silverwork, though unfortunately, many artisans have died without passing on their knowledge. The high cost of quality silver also threatens the survival of this skill.

Above: A Lanten woman working in the rice fields near Ban Namkoy.

Left: Lanten script on bamboo fiber paper from Ban Namlue.

Tchatieneu – The Family Spirit

Known in Lao as *Phi Bou*, this spirit links the family with their ancestors. In order to ensure the family's protection the spirits are fed with ritual offerings. Compulsory ceremonies are performed three times a year, and others may be organized at the family's or the shaman's request. In most houses a representation of this spirit can be found on a small altar where offerings are left (please do not touch!). Of all the Lanten spirits, *Tchatieteu* is the most powerful. (Chasez, 1999, p. 119)



TREKKING GUIDELINES – REFLECTING THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE

The following are suggestions for behavior that is appropriate both on the trail and in the village. As with the overall development of the trekking programs, these suggestions are a result of direct consultation with the villagers and guides. Always ask your guide if you are unsure of what is appropriate.

Photographs

Always ask before taking close-ups or portraits. You can have your guide translate for you, or simply use sign language. Respect those who choose not to be photographed. A camera may be a mysterious intimidating machine to some; the best avenue to follow is to develop rapport with the people in a village or home before taking photos. If you promise to send photographs back, keep your promise.

Going with a guide

Being led by an approved certified guide has many benefits for both you and the communities you are visiting, for example:

- * The certified guides have participated in community meetings with host villages. As a result of these meetings villager's specific needs and concerns have been

addressed, thus ensuring that local people are in control of tourism in their communities.

- * By using a local guide you are helping to employ people in Luang Namtha.
- * These guides have experience with the Nam Ha area. They are knowledgeable about both points of interest and potential hazards along the trail and will be able to answer many of your questions.
- * The guides will organize food and water.
- * The guides work according to a predetermined schedule and group-size which is determined by the trail's carrying capacity.

Make sure you communicate with your guide. They are responsible for your wellbeing and you should tell them if you need to stop if you are not feeling well or have a question. Please do remember that English is not their first language, so be patient and speak slowly.

Basic trail etiquette: Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints

There are several simple steps you can take to help preserve the integrity of the trail and the ecosystem that you are passing through:

- * Please do not collect seeds, flowers, plants, shells, or insects along the trail. Instead, take a picture or make a sketch.

- * Respect the environment. Please do not carve into trees, or harm insects or small animals. Not only is this disrespectful, but it sets a poor example for other visitors as well as local people.
- * Stay on the trail. During the rainy season the trails can be very wet. Often, people will walk on vegetated edges to avoid muddy sections. Unfortunately this can damage various fragile species of flora and fauna. Staying on the trail reduces erosion, maintaining trail integrity. Staying on the trail will also ensure that you do not damage any crops, or ceremonial flowers that are often grown in upland rice fields.

Pack in-pack out and please do not litter!

Garbage is quite a recent phenomenon in Laos. Traditionally foods were wrapped in banana leaves and waste was biodegradable and easily disposed of. Over the past 10 years the amount of imported and packaged food, household, and motor-vehicle products has increased tremendously. Unfortunately this has not been accompanied with a shift from traditional garbage disposal systems. Therefore, it is very important to “pack out” the non-biodegradable items you have “packed in”.

Please do not litter, garbage along the trail is not appreciated by anyone. Better yet bring along a small bag to collect garbage left by others on the trail. In this way you can lead by example and enhance the beauty of the area through which you are travelling. Cigarette butts are a potential fire hazard, so please make sure they are completely extinguished and pack them out in a bag.

Bathing

Bathing at the end of a day of trekking usually takes place in the river or at the village well. Please always wash in flowing water

downstream from the water collection points. Men may wear shorts or underwear, but women must wear a sin (sarong) that will cover from under your arms to your knees. If you have a bathing suit you may wear it, but you must also wear a sarong over it.

Toilets

It is important to manage human waste responsibly. If there is no toilet facility along the trail or in a village please find a spot at least 50 m away from any water source, and bury all waste to a depth of at least 10 cm. Tampons and sanitary napkins must be packed out.

Hands

Make sure you always wash your hands before eating and after going to the toilet. This is one of the easiest ways you can reduce your chances of becoming ill. It is more hygienic to let your hands air-dry because many bacteria can hide out on clothing and towels.

Malaria

The risk of contracting malaria in the forest or villages increases in the wet season. Apply insect repellent regularly, and cover bare skin in the evening and at night. Mosquito nets should be used on all overnight treks.

Dress

By dressing appropriately you will improve your reception by the people you meet.

Men: Except when bathing, you should always wear a shirt. T-shirts and long-sleeved shirts are best, because it is inappropriate to expose your shoulders.

Women: Like the men you should wear shirts that cover your shoulders. Shirts with low necklines are not appropriate. While in the village you should also wear pants or a skirt that will cover your knees.

Please ensure that your clothing is tidy, and remember nudity is never appropriate, even when bathing in rivers.

Wild animal products

Extensive research on the wildlife of the Nam Ha NPA and other protected areas in Laos shows that hunting and the sale of animal products endangers many species of animals native to Laos. You can help reduce the risk to endangered animals simply by not buying or eating any wild animal products. If you are unsure please ask your guide.

Gifts

Please do not give anything to children. This seemingly innocent practice encourages begging, lowers self esteem, and may shame their families who are not necessarily poor and may resent being regarded as such. Likewise, do not give medicine to anyone but a doctor or a nurse. If you like, donate your gifts to the school, headman or temple so that the whole community may benefit from your generosity. Or make a donation to a local organization. Check with your guide for the best way to donate to a village.

Playing with children

Remember that many of the children in the village are very shy and may be scared of you. Play gently with them, act shy yourself, and a rapport will develop naturally.

Purchasing local crafts

In the villages crafts such as baskets, woven bags and textiles, or bamboo paper may be offered for sale. Buying these crafts at reasonable prices supports the artisans financially and establishes a sense of respect for traditional village knowledge and technologies. Your guide can suggest an appropriate price.

Please do not purchase unique items such as books, antiques, or family heirlooms that may be irreplaceable.



A villager from Ban Nammal Kao accompanies a tourist through the village's spirit gate.

Drugs

DRUGS ARE ILLEGAL IN LAOS. Using opium, marijuana or other illegal drugs can result in severe penalties for foreigners. Ethnic groups in Laos have traditionally controlled the use of drugs by limiting consumption to the elderly only and as a cure for specific ailments. Use by foreigners sets a poor example for young Laotians. Often villagers turn to begging or selling irreplaceable cultural items in order to support opium addiction. Even more distressing is that villagers who become involved with drugs often fail to produce enough food for themselves and their families, resulting in malnutrition and a general decrease in the standard of living for the whole community. Much time and energy has been spent on providing alternatives to growing opium in Laos. Continued participation in the drug trade will bring local people into conflict with their government and international agencies. Laos does not need an economy based on the underground drug trade. Please do not do drugs in Laos. Drug tourism does damage!

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- * The treks in and around the Nam Ha NPA are moderately strenuous and include some steep ascents on local paths. These paths are sometimes uneven and can be slippery after rain, and feature narrow footbridges. There is no road access on overnight treks, and emergency medical care in the province is basic. The treks should be undertaken by those who are at least moderately fit, and do not have serious pre-existing health problems.
- * Please bring long pants and strong shoes. Local people often walk barefoot or in sandals, but this provides little protection against the mosquitoes or leeches that often appear after rainfall. Modest clothing that covers the shoulders should be worn by women.
- * A sarong (or two!) will be useful for bathing, and a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, and mosquito repellent are essential, as is a flashlight for overnight treks.
- * It is important to use only the approved local, certified guides with experience in the Nam Ha area. They will arrange food and water. Two liters of water per person are provided for the first day of the trek, and will be refilled with boiled water in the villages. The local certified guides have basic first aid training and carry first aid supplies.

COST OF THE TREK AND WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES

The charge for the treks into the Nam Ha forest depends on the size of the group and route, with a minimum of two and maximum of eight participants accepted.

When you use the Nam Ha Guides Association, your money goes to all the people who participate in the ecotourism industry in Luang Namtha. In short, your money supports the people and environment of Luang Namtha by being spent in the community in the following manner:

- * Transportation to and from the trail.
- * Food.
- * Lodging in the village. The cost of lodging goes directly to the villagers concerned.
- * Local guides.
- * Trekking trail permit from the Nam Ha NPA Management Unit. This fee helps support the conservation work of the Management Unit and the villagers who maintain the trail.
- * A contribution to a village development fund to reinvest profits from the operation back into participating communities.

Sok dii!

The local people you will meet are genuinely happy to welcome you to our country, as you can see in the many smiles and "Sabaidii!" that greet you. We will be pleased by any efforts you make to learn about our culture, respect our traditions and rules, and speak our languages.

Please do not forget that when traveling here you are a guest passing through someone's home. Be aware that many Lao are watching you and may imitate your actions, especially the youth. To make the most of the experience for both you and the local people, look, listen and learn without being intrusive.

MINI FIELD GUIDE

Environment

The trekking routes range in elevation from 540–1000 m. Many tributaries feed the economically important Nam Tha watershed, which in turn forms a catchment for the mighty Mekong. The area is forested by mostly 20–30-year-old secondary growth evergreen forest that supports a high diversity of wildlife. The following species are some of the plants and animals that are found in and around the Nam Ha NPA, but please note that sightings of large mammals are very rare.

Mammals

Asian Tiger (Panthera tigris) Sua Khong

The number of Asian Tigers has been massively reduced since historic times. Tiger sightings often correspond with raids on livestock and sometimes tigers are killed to protect domestic cows and buffalo.



Gaur (Bos gaurus) Mueuy or Kathing

Over-hunting has made this species exceptionally rare. Their habitat includes evergreen forest which has some open areas. The Nam Ha NPA is extremely important, as it is one of the few areas where Gaur can still be found.



Malayan Sun-Bear (Ursus malayanus) Muay

Both Sun Bear and Asiatic Black Bear are hunted for their bones, gall bladders, claws, and other parts for medicinal use. Once reportedly common in Laos there is uncertainty as to the size of existing populations. It may be possible to see tracks or scat of bears along the trail.



Macaque Ling Ton

There are several species present. Macaques are becoming quite rare in the wild due to hunting to supply the pet trade. They forage on the ground for small invertebrates and fruit as well as climbing trees. They are occasionally seen in the tree tops of dense old growth forest.



Sambar (Cervis unicolour) Khwang

This large deer is reasonably common throughout the NPA, particularly in dense secondary growth forest. Most active at dusk and night, the Sambar eats twigs, leaves, vines, buds and fallen fruit. Their alarm calls can occasionally be heard through the forest.





Pygmy Loris (*Nycticebus pygmaeus*) Ling Lum Noi

These are considered to be of special conservation significance in Laos. Nocturnal animals, lorises are often taken from the wild to be kept as pets or to sell to traders.



Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) Lin

The population of this elusive scaly mammal is declining due to its being hunted for food and for the medicinal properties of its scales. Inhabiting dense forest, it uses its strong claws to rip open nets and mounds, and its long sticky tongue to extract the ants and termites which make up its diet.



Wild pig (*Sus scrofa*) Mu Pa

The ancestor the today's domestic pig, this is a common inhabitant of the NPA. Along the trails footprints and disturbed earth are frequently seen, evidence of pigs furrowing for roots and tubers. It also eats fallen fruit and seeds.

Birds

Drongo Nok Sel



Several species are present, including the dark-grey Ashy (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*), the glossy Bronzed (*D. aeneus*) and Greater and Lesser Racket-tailed (*D. paradiseus* and *D. remifer* respectively). Their call can be a sequence of loud whistles or scolding notes and they also mimic the calls of other birds. Drongos inhabit evergreen forests up to 2000m and can often be seen in the treetops catching insects on the wing. They have a distinctive long forked tail.

Great Barbet (*Megalaima virens*) Nok Tang Lau



The call of these birds is a high pitched ringing *kay-ob*. When in duet one bird will call as described and the other will utter a rapid and continuous *piou-piou-piou*. These beautiful birds live in evergreen forests, from 600m to much higher elevations, and are a common resident.

Green Cochoa (*Cochoa viridis*) Nok Pbi Pay Si Kow



These birds are quite rare. They live in the canopy and middle story of the forest. Their call is a pure monotone whistle that lasts for 2 seconds. They are more often found at an elevation of 1200m but sometimes descend as low as 400m.

Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) Kai Pa

The ancestor of the modern domestic chicken, this older species differs in that it has a slightly higher *cock-a-doodle-do* and is able to fly when disturbed. Fairly common, it inhabits forest and new-growth scrub up to 1800m.



Kingfisher, Nok Dten

Both the Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and the larger Blyth's Kingfisher (*A. beryles*) are fairly common, inhabiting forested streams at lower elevations. When trekking near waterways, watch out for the flash of their iridescent blue back and tail



Short-tailed Parrotbill (*Paradoxornis davidianus*)

Nok Kheo Han San

Like the silver pheasant these little birds are a protected species. They live in grassland and bamboo above 600m and can be found in and on the outskirts of the Nam Ha NPA.



Silver Pheasant (*Lophura nycthemera*) Nok Khua

Lang Kow

These striking birds are a protected species common to the Nam Ha NPA. Their voice is a soft mewing whistle when feeding and a shrill whistle when alarmed. They live in evergreen forests from 700m–2000m.



Reptiles

King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) Ngu Jong Ang

The cobra is occasionally seen on the trail. Essentially terrestrial, it hunts amphibians, birds and small mammals at night and usually hides out during the day in undergrowth or sometimes inside termite mounds. It can spit blinding venom up to 2m.



Reticulated Python (*Python reticulatus*) Ngu Leuam

This large snake is found in humid forests up to 1500m. Like the cobra, it is primarily terrestrial and nocturnal. It is a very powerful constrictor, feeding on any warm-blooded animal it can overpower, including deer and wild pigs.





White-lipped Pit-viper (*Trimeresus albolabris*) Ngu Kieow

This small vivid green snake is often seen dead on roads or trails. It prefers open country below 400m. It hunts small animals at night and spends the day resting in trees.

Plants

Bamboo, (*Dendrocalmus* and *Bambusa* spp)

Nor Mai

This versatile plant, of which there are approximately 400 different types, is abundant in the NPA. Communities living in the forest utilize its strength, flexibility and light weight in almost every aspect of their daily life. Bamboo shoots of many species are consumed locally and sold in local markets.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) King

The root of this plant, is gathered from the forest and sold in local markets. It is a flavor common to Lao food and is also used as a stomach medicine.

Indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) Ton Kham

Ethnic groups such as the Lanten people use this plant as a dye. Often grown in village gardens the young branches and leaves are placed in a jar of water and allowed to soak and decay for 2-6 days. Lime is then added to fix the color, and the sludge is then treated with ash before it is ready to be used for dyeing cotton.

Mak Pao

By slicing off a small part of this plant's root you will see the rich red juice that is used as a natural dye.

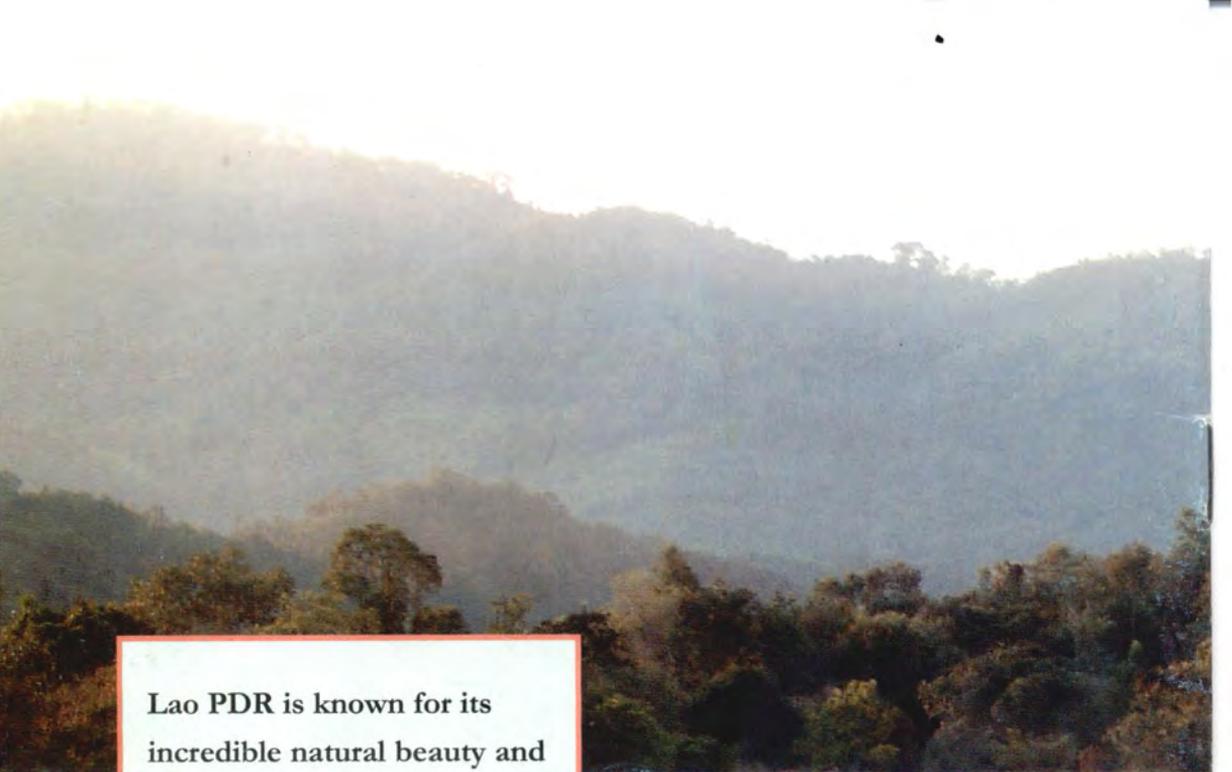
Rattan (*Calamus* & *Daemonorops*) Wai

This NTFP is quite abundant. Rattan fruit is exported to China to be used in medicines. The canes of rattan are used for making a variety of crafts, such as baskets and furniture. Rattan shoots are commonly eaten, either steamed or in soup.



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Lao PDR is known for its incredible natural beauty and gracious people. By choosing to go trekking with the Nam Ha Guides Association you will be able to explore unique examples of Laos' cultural and biological diversity from an adventurous perspective. This booklet includes an introduction to the local people you will encounter, some suggestions for appropriate behavior, and a mini field guide for the Nam Ha National Protected Area.



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