



Lao National Tourism Administration

National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan

2005 - 2010

Summary







Foreword

Sabaidee - Greetings to all readers. Laos can be characterised as having a low population density, unspoiled diverse ethnic lifestyles and traditions and the richest, most extensive ecosystems on the Indochina Peninsula. Helping to protect and conserve these irreplaceable resources is a network of twenty National Protected Areas and the World Heritage sites of Luang Prabang and Wat Phou.

Laos, the Jewel of the Mekong, is fast becoming a new and exciting tourism destination for the region and the world. In an age when responsible tourism experiences are in increasing demand, Laos offers extraordinary new opportunities for discerning travellers and investors in the tourism sector. With a reputation for warm hospitality and a number of internationally supported ecotourism projects already underway, Laos is preparing to position itself as a world-class ecotourism destination.

This summary of the strategy presents an overview of how the National Tourism Administration aims to develop and manage Lao ecotourism. The strategy provides guidance and acknowledges the complexities of successful ecotourism development. While recognising the path to sustainability is not always obvious, the paper proposes a series of steps and measures to promote and develop Lao ecotourism in such a way that it contributes to environmental protection, the sustainable use of the natural and cultural resources and, critically, the delivery of measureable socio-economic benefits to local communities.

On behalf of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and as the Chairman of the National Tourism Administration, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the many individuals and agencies from the public and private sectors who, via many preparatory workshops and meetings, contributed their thoughts and ideas to the strategy. I am delighted to recommend this final strategy to you and all stakeholders in the Lao tourism sector. My staff and I at the National Tourism Administration very much look forward to further cooperation and collaboration in the months and years ahead to help implement the strategy - only by working together can we build a bright future for Lao ecotourism.

Somphong Mongkhonvilay
Minister to the Prime Minister's Office
Chairman of the Lao National Tourism Administration



Lao P D R

VIENTIANE	Major Urban Centres
Saravane	Provincial Towns
	Mekong River
	Major Roads
	Major Airports
	UNESCO World Heritage Site
	Provincial Boundary
	National Protected Area (NPAs)
	Mountains



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Summary

Since 1990, when the Lao PDR first opened its borders for tourism, the industry has grown to become the nation's number one source of foreign exchange earnings. With travel and tourism across South-East Asia growing at an extraordinary level, Lao ecotourism offers huge potential to create employment and help achieve the national development objectives for poverty alleviation, economic growth and conservation of the nation's unique wealth of natural and cultural resources.

By publishing this short summary of the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan, the Lao National Tourism Administration aims to:

- raise the profile of Lao ecotourism;
- communicate the vision, goals and objectives of the strategy to a wide audience;
- encourage dialogue and cooperation among the public and private sector;
- facilitate the involvement of donor and development agencies;
- promote business confidence and investment in Lao ecotourism and the wider tourism sector.

Clear direction and strong public support will encourage the investment that is needed to achieve the vision for Lao ecotourism.

Vision

- Laos will become a world renowned destination specialising in forms of sustainable tourism that, through partnership and cooperation, benefit natural and cultural heritage conservation, local socio-economic development and spread knowledge of Lao's unique cultural heritage around the world.



Building on this vision, this document sets out the guiding principles upon which Lao ecotourism is based. Emphasis is also given to the key role of private enterprise and, through a description of the growing number of projects and programmes currently being implemented, the steps being taken to encourage investment and the expansion of this exciting new sector.

The strategy makes it clear, however, that the challenges ahead should not be underestimated. The development of new ecotourism products, services and destinations is a complex process. Success will demand commitment, coordination and cooperation among a host of public and private sector actors. Only by working closely together will lessons be learned and the many potential benefits shared. Key to success will be a strong sense of partnership in taking forward the proposed action plans set out under the five key objectives which aim to:

- 1 strengthen institutional arrangements for planning and managing ecotourism growth;
- 2 support training, capacity building and the promotion of good practice;
- 3 support environmental protection and nature conservation;
- 4 provide socio-economic development and cultural heritage protection for host communities; and,
- 5 develop ecotourism research and information.



Introduction

Facts, Figures

The future outlook for the Lao tourism industry is extremely positive. The Greater Mekong Sub-region is recognised to be the fastest growing tourism destination in the world, and the Lao PDR offers an array of unspoiled natural and cultural resources. In only ten years, international tourism to the Lao People's Democratic Republic has become the country's leading source of foreign exchange earnings. The challenges ahead for Lao tourism should not, however, be understated. Today around 80% – 90% of tourism activity is centred upon short visits to the cultural centres of Vientiane and Luang Prabang. The aim for the future is to diversify the tourism sector by developing new products and attractions across the country. Central to this aim is the development and promotion of Lao ecotourism.

In 1999 the National Tourism Administration (LNTA), with assistance from UNESCO and the New Zealand government, launched a tourism project in the Nam Ha NPA in Luang Namtha Province. This highly successful initiative introduced the concept of *ecotourism* to the Lao PDR – and in so doing received significant international acclaim and a UNDP award in recognition of its contribution towards poverty alleviation.

Building on the success of the Nam Ha initiative, and the wider foundations of an expanding tourism industry, the Lao National Tourism Administration has produced this Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan to further develop and promote this important sector – a sector which tour operators believe will become the mainstay of the Lao tourism economy. In this spirit of growth and expansion, this strategy sets out a framework to deliver:

- socio-economic and environmental benefits to rural communities;
- conservation benefits to the NPAs; and,
- an expanding number of ecotourism products and services for the pleasure and enjoyment of national and international tourists.

NPAs

The Lao PDR is characterised by unique and diverse natural and cultural habitats. High levels of cultural diversity are matched by a wealth of biodiversity. With tropical monsoon forests, marshlands, endangered predators, rare species of fish and a huge number of rice varieties, Lao PDR occupies a unique place in South-East Asia and the world.

Ten years ago, as part of a concerted effort to conserve its wealth of biodiversity, the Lao government created what is recognised as one of the best designed protected area networks in the world. 20 National Protected Areas (NPAs) currently occupy 14% of the total land area. At the same time, however, while these special areas and the land around them are home to ethnic groups with rich traditions, they also house many of the nation's poorest communities.

of Origin

30% of arrivals international tourists being primarily 'or "regional neighbouring India, China, Thailand and Vietnam



ivals

rose from 14,400 in 1995 to 46,000 in 2000. 2004 saw arrivals reach almost 900,000.



Figures and Future Directions

Tourist Arrivals and Income

With less than fifteen years experience in the industry, tourist arrivals to Lao PDR increased from 14,400 in 1990 to almost 900,000 in 2004 - the average annual growth over this period exceeds 27%.

Tourism and hydropower serve as the two key sources of foreign exchange earnings for the Lao PDR. Nature and culture-based tourism, the starting point for the development and promotion of the ecotourism sub-sector, is estimated to account for around 46% of the total income for all foreign tourists.

Looking to the Future

By 2013 Lao PDR hopes to attract over 1 million overnight tourists and around 2 million day visitors per annum. If these targets can be realised, tourism earnings can be expected to increase to around \$500 million per annum.

Meeting these Goals for the Next Decade

Priority and special consideration will be given to improving the quality and provision of service facilities and accommodation in the provinces — the heartlands for the development and promotion of Lao ecotourism.

Interests

Research suggests that just over half of all arrivals are interested in the natural environment, while 67% are interested in cultural attractions.

Income

Nature and culture-based tourism earnings were estimated to reach around US\$54 million out of the total income from all tourists - US\$118 million in 2004.

Defining the Ecotourism Sector

Ecotourism is often referred to as the fastest growing sector of the international tourism industry. This assertion is somewhat controversial as there is no internationally accepted definition of the term.

In the Lao PDR, ecotourism is viewed and defined as:

‘Tourism activity in rural and protected areas that minimises negative impacts and is directed towards the conservation of natural and cultural resources, rural socio-economic development and visitor understanding of, and appreciation for, the places they are visiting.’

Vision and Guiding Principles

In the Lao PDR the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA), in consultation with a number of stakeholders, has developed the following vision and guiding principles - to guide, direct and promote Lao ecotourism.

Vision

- Laos will become a world renowned destination specialising in forms of sustainable tourism that, through partnership and cooperation, benefit natural and cultural heritage conservation, local socio-economic development and spread knowledge of Lao’s unique cultural heritage around the world.

Guiding Principles

- Minimise negative impacts on Lao nature and culture
- Increase awareness among all stakeholders as to the importance of ethnic diversity and biodiversity conservation in the Lao PDR
- Promote responsible business practices, which work cooperatively with local authorities and people to support poverty alleviation and deliver conservation benefits
- Provide a source of income to sustain, conserve and manage the Lao protected area network and cultural heritage sites
- Emphasise the need for tourism zoning and visitor management plans for sites that will be developed as eco-destinations
- Use environmental and social base-line data, as well as long-term monitoring programmes, to assess and minimise negative impacts
- Maximise the economic benefit for the Lao national economy especially local businesses and people living in and around the protected area network
- Ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits of acceptable change as determined by researchers in cooperation with local residents
- Promote local styles of architecture and infrastructure that are developed in harmony with the Lao culture and environment, that use local materials, minimise energy consumption and conserve local plants and wildlife



Projects and Programmes

A number of tourism projects and programmes are underway to develop and promote Lao ecotourism. First and foremost the LNTA has established a multi-sector Ecotourism Taskforce to oversee and advise on the implementation of the strategy's objectives and action plans.

The Ecotourism Taskforce will, for example, assume responsibility for:

- developing policy and planning recommendations to submit to government line agencies;
- designing ecotourism management systems for national and provincial protected areas;
- developing participatory ecotourism strategies and management plans for target NPAs to be used as 'test-beds' or models of best-practice;
- liaising and working with donor and development agencies;
- advising NPA and Provincial Tourism Offices on the creation of multi-stakeholder committees to plan and develop ecotourism activity at the site level; and,
- disseminating work findings and operational practices to other NPAs.

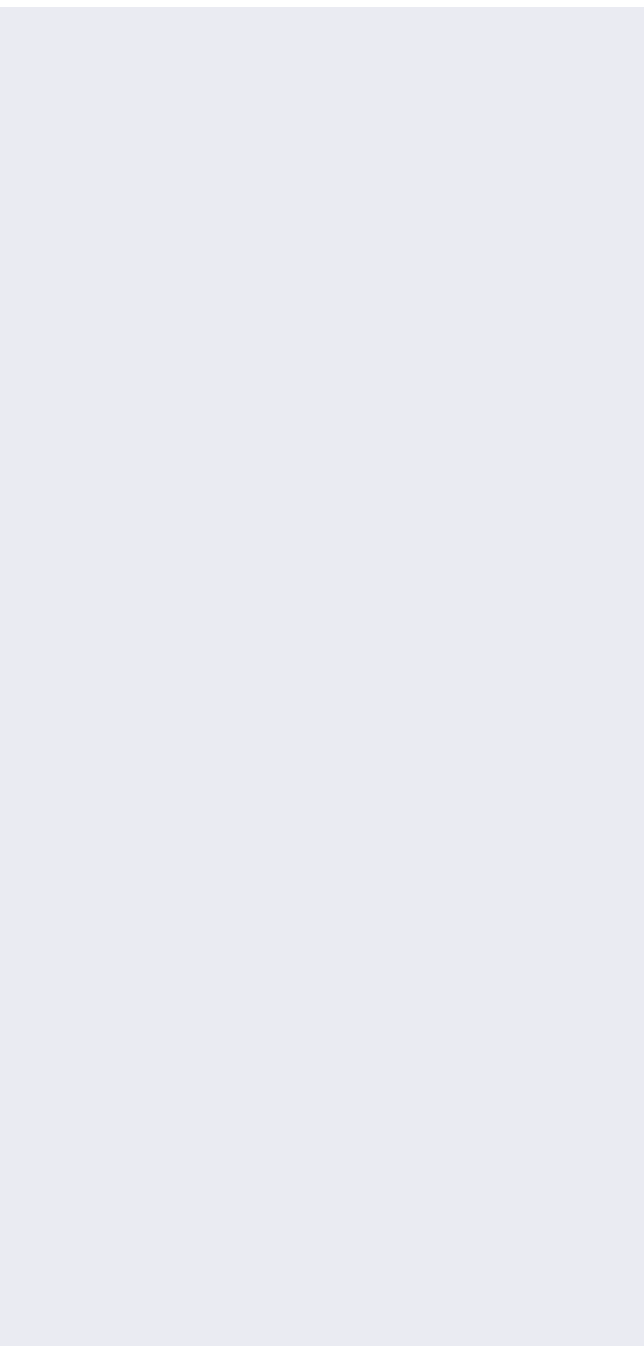
Other programmes include the Mekong Tourism Development Project and several advisory programmes.

Mekong Tourism Development Project

The Lao National Tourism Administration in partnership with the Asian Development Bank has recently initiated the \$14.2 million Mekong Tourism Development Project.

At the regional level, this five-year project is developing collaborative links with tourism partners in Vietnam and Cambodia to encourage a greater and easier flow of tourists between the three countries.

At the national level the project is strengthening planning and management capacity through, for example, the creation of a National Tourism Marketing and Promotion Board. Four selected provinces - Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang, Khammouane and Champassak - will soon benefit from infrastructure projects that facilitate the movement of tourists both between and within provinces.





Projects and Programmes

From North to South, donor agencies and NGOs are working as active partners to develop the foundations of Lao ecotourism.

Advisory Programmes

Advisory programmes are being developed in a series of strategic locations. These projects deliver awareness raising initiatives and a variety of tourism training programmes to local authorities and communities that possess ecotourism resources of major potential. Training is being delivered to key stakeholders to:

- promote a better local understanding of the potential for ecotourism;
- pave the way for the private sector investment that will underpin and sustain the sector; and,
- raise awareness of different techniques that can be used to manage the negative and less-desirable impacts of tourism development.

Following the considerable success of the first phase of the award-winning UNESCO/LNTA Nam Ha Ecotourism Project, Phase II of the project was launched in January 2005, providing support to the Provincial Tourism Office to identify new products and strengthen project management systems.

In Luang Namtha Province the German government agency GTZ and the European Union are supporting ecotourism planning and management activities in Muang Singh and Vieng Phoukha districts.





Coordinating and Consulting with Stakeholders

The international tourism industry is complex and multi-faceted, embracing a wide variety of stakeholders from the public and private sectors. In Lao these actors include local communities, a number of government agencies and departments (local and national), non-government organisations, aid agencies, accommodation and transport providers, restaurants, retail outlets, guidebook writers, tourists and tour agents (at the local, national and international levels). To clarify the roles of the various actors, Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages provide an overview of stakeholder interests in Lao ecotourism and examples of the benefits they are likely to receive from its expansion.

To gather information, discuss and set out the goals, objectives and action plans of this strategy the Lao National Tourism Administration has consulted with each of these agencies. A series of national and provincial workshops, seminars and meetings were staged to engage with the broad range of stakeholders, including the all important private sector. A draft format of this document was also circulated to the wide range of participants who attended the ASEAN Tourism Forum in Vientiane in 2004. Feedback from these sources has helped shape the final form of the strategy.

Looking to the future, to continue this high level of dialogue and cooperation, there is a need to reinforce a number of coordination mechanisms. Different mechanisms will be developed according to the needs of different stakeholders and the particular activities they are engaged in.

Three types of relationships are described here to summarise how the strategy will address coordination issues. The Ecotourism Taskforce (described on page 10) will play a crucial role in facilitating these relationships, that can be summarised as:

- Hierarchical Relationships
- Product Support Relationships
- Coordination and Communication Relationships

Hierarchical Relationships

The Ecotourism Strategy will address hierarchical relationships between actors such as the Lao National Tourism Administration and the Provincial Tourism Offices and, similarly, between the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and their provincial counterparts with responsibility for managing the NPAs. Actions will be taken to ensure that clear guidance is provided from the centre to the provinces. Conversely, given the need for the supply of data from the provinces to the centre, focus will be given to monitoring and assessment protocols - to inform policy makers of the on-going status of ecotourism activity and allow policies, rules and regulations to be fine-tuned over time.



Product Support Relationships

The strategy will support relationships that are formed to develop and manage ecotourism products and services.

This includes, for example, coordinating and promoting guide services for tourists entering NPAs. Guides provide a service, the Provincial Tourism Office registers the guides, while the Lao National Tourism Administration with assistance from other partners is responsible for the design and approval of guide courses.

The supply of quality services from tour operators, restaurant and accommodation providers depends upon effective coordination and communication, which in some cases will require the formation of associations to effectively represent sector interests. Similarly, at some point in time these sectors may need to be coordinated to develop certification schemes to promote good practice and guard against, for example, pollution or environmental degradation.

Coordination is required to ensure incentives promoting the development of ecolodges, which should deliver tangible benefits to local communities, are effectively structured.

Coordination and Communication Relationships

Mechanisms will be developed to facilitate relationships that revolve around the need for efficient and effective coordination and communication.

Cultural misunderstandings and the misplaced expectations of local communities, as regards the likely benefits from ecotourism activities, for example, can be avoided if consultation and suitable methods for awareness raising are established.

Efficient coordination is required to ensure stakeholders such as NPAs, the Ministry of Finance and donor agencies properly understand each other's needs and priorities - and ensure steps are taken to build capacity and develop and promote good practice.

Importantly, at the centre-level attention will be directed towards strong and broad consultation to set clear development objectives and to ensure, for example, that transport policy and the improvement of road networks are conducive to ecotourism growth.



Photos, top from left

Akha house: Kees Metselaars/UNDP Waterlilies, Fieldwork: Ian Birch
Village view: LNTA Portrait: Kees Sprengers Wetlands: IUCN

Table 1: Ecotourism Stakeholders at the Centre-level

Stakeholders	Ecotourism Interests	Potential Benefits from Ecotourism Activity
Private Sector (guides, tour operators, accommodation and restaurants) and their associations that may be formed	developing and promoting a variety of businesses (facilities, products and services) upon which the industry depends	a variety of economic and social benefits associated with enterprise development, employment and income generation
National Tourism Administration (NTA)	a range of activities associated with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - policy issues - product and service development, promotion and management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new tourism markets developed - high profile of Lao tourism market - increase in visitor numbers to the Lao PDR
Ministry of Agriculture (MAF) / Department of Forests (DoF) / Division of Forest Resources and Conservation (DFRC)	a range of activities to ensure ecotourism policies and activity in and around NPAs are consistent with, and directly supporting, conservation objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ecotourism helps fund biodiversity conservation and protected area management - greater public awareness of conservation issues - improved management of protected areas
Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA)	policies to ensure symbiotic relationship between tourism, conservation and the environment	ecotourism supports national poverty alleviation and conservation objectives
Ministry of Finance (MoF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reviewing policies and allocating funds to government agencies with ecotourism agendas - reviewing the level of income received from ecotourism activities - promoting access to credit and business loans 	growth in foreign exchange helps finance government development objectives
Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC) / Foreign Investment Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - approving ecotourism policy - ensuring a coordinated and integrated development approach - developing rules and regulations for foreign investment in the sector 	cross-sector benefits from ecotourism activity encourages cooperation between government line agencies
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	setting of tourist visa fees, rules and regulations	increased income from visa policy
Ministry of Information and Culture (MIC)	a range of activities associated with the depiction of Lao culture and heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased income for the preservation of Lao heritage - the spread of knowledge of Lao culture around the world
Ministry of Public Security	safety and welfare of tourists	ecotourism growth increases sense of national pride, well-being and security
Ministry of Education (National University of Lao and private schools and colleges)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - producing informed ecotourism professionals - developing teaching and training courses directed towards tourism and ecotourism - undertaking research to guide the future direction of ecotourism activity 	development of new educational opportunities to benefit the nation
Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction (MoCTPC)	policies to develop and manage access routes to, and communications with, ecotourism sites	growth in foreign exchange leads to greater public funding for communications, transport, post and construction
Ministry of Public Health	policies concerned with the provision of health standards and facilities for tourists	ecotourism growth leads to greater public awareness of, and funding for, health and hygiene issues
Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts (MoIH)	policies to support and promote local industry	ecotourism growth leads to expansion of small and medium business opportunities
Lao National Front for Reconstruction (LNFR) and Lao Youth Union	informing members of the ecotourism agenda to expedite implementation of government policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - growth in ecotourism income and business opportunities - increased sense of national pride and well-being
National Poverty Alleviation Committee (NPAC)	ensuring ecotourism activity is targeted towards poverty alleviation objectives	ecotourism activity reduces poverty
Lao Women's Union	mainstreaming gender issues into the ecotourism agenda	ecotourism business opportunities empower women
Non-government Organisations (NGOs) and Donor Agencies	providers of expertise to the ecotourism sector and funding for projects	assist government to achieve national objectives

Table 2: Ecotourism Stakeholders at the Local-level

Stakeholders	Ecotourism Interests	Potential Benefits from Ecotourism Activity
Private Sector (guide, tour operators, accommodation and restaurant providers, local entrepreneurs)	developing and promoting a variety of businesses (facilities, products and services) upon which the industry depends	a variety of local economic and social benefits associated with enterprise development, income generation and employment
Local Communities	developing and promoting environmentally and culturally-based products and services	increase in local business opportunities, sense of well-being and local pride
Provincial Cabinet	a range of activities associated with the identification, planning and management of sites and destinations	expansion of local economy and development projects and programmes that support local people
Provincial Tourism Office (PTO)	a range of activities associated with the planning, management and regulation of sites, destinations and service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - growth in tourist arrivals to provinces - raised profile of PTOs
Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) / District Forestry Office (DFO) / NBCA	a range of activities, including planning and management of sites, destinations and service providers to ensure ecotourism supports conservation objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased funding for management of protected areas - greater local awareness of biodiversity conservation issues
Department of Information and Culture (DIC)	a range of activities associated with the depiction of Lao culture and heritage, and the management of heritage sites, at the local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased funding for conservation of heritage sites - spread of knowledge of local culture around the world
Department of Science, Technology and Environment	assessment of ecotourism activities to ensure symbiotic relationship with conservation and environmental objectives	ecotourism activity provides local jobs and income, and supports biodiversity conservation
Department of Public Security (DoPS)	safety and welfare of tourists	ecotourism growth increases sense of local pride, well-being and security
Department of Industry and Handicrafts (DoIH)	creating a favourable environment for the production of tourist souvenirs	ecotourism activity diversifies the local economy and industry
NGOs and Donor Agencies	providers of expertise and support to ecotourism projects at the local level	assist local government to achieve Provincial objectives
Department of Finance (DoF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - income received from tourism activities - funds allocated to agencies concerned - promoting access to credit and business loans 	increased income from direct and indirect taxation on ecotourism-related activity for provincial development programmes
Department of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction	developing and managing access and transit routes to ecotourism sites	greater provincial funding for communications, transport, post and construction
Department of Education	overseeing and promoting knowledge and understanding of ecotourism in schools and colleges	the development of new educational opportunities to benefit the nation
Department of Planning and Cooperation (DPC)	ensuring cooperation and synergy in ecotourism planning	cross-sector approach of ecotourism activity encourages cooperation between government agencies
Department of Public Health (DoPH)	the provision and management of health services for tourists	ecotourism growth leads to greater local awareness of, and funding for, health and hygiene issues
Lao Women's Union / GRID Centres	mainstreaming gender issues into the ecotourism agenda	ecotourism business opportunities empower women
Lao National Front for Reconstruction provincial branches and Lao Youth Union	informing members of the ecotourism agenda to expedite implementation of government policy	increase in local business opportunities, sense of well-being and local pride



Goals, Key Objectives and Action Plans

The National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan provides a framework to develop and promote Lao ecotourism. A thriving ecotourism sector will be promoted through coordinated support for the provision of infrastructure and capacity building initiatives that are conducive to the supply of quality ecotourism products and services that meet market needs and expectations. At the same time, to avoid adverse and negative impacts, all stakeholders should be aware of the parallel need for a cautious and considered approach to promoting the sector. Development must take place within the boundaries of pragmatic management that provides targeted support to commercially viable public and private sector business enterprises that are sensitive to environmental and cultural requirements.

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To achieve meaningful gains the strategy will need to address a range of complex issues. In addition to the priorities to develop policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks, the following action plans focus on requirements to:

- develop infrastructure (quality accommodation, good roads and transportation networks, information and interpretation centres);
- improve access (physical and structural / 'red-tape' barriers) to ecotourism sites; and,
- develop ecotourism facilities, products and services that appeal to high spending tourists.

To develop and promote a thriving ecotourism sector, three broad ten-year goals and five key objectives have been identified to serve as themes of work for the action plans.

Ten Year Goals

- Strengthen national and provincial capacity and expertise in the ecotourism sector.
- Coordinate and, where necessary, guide and regulate the development of ecotourism to ensure it adheres to guiding principles.
- Support local communities, the public and private sectors and ensure they are given sufficient freedom and assistance to develop and promote the sector.

Five Key Objectives

- Strengthen institutional arrangements for planning and managing ecotourism growth.
- Support training, capacity building and the promotion of good practice.
- Support environmental protection and nature conservation.
- Provide socio-economic development and cultural heritage protection for host communities.
- Develop ecotourism research and information.

Photos, top from left
Photo, right

Tigers, Sipandon: IUCN Suspended bridge: LNTA Fisherman: Ian Birch
Hmong girls: Kees Metselaar/UNDP

Key Objective One

Strengthen Institutional Arrangements for Planning and Managing Ecotourism Growth

Given the short history of Lao ecotourism, there is a need to promote a greater awareness of ecotourism concepts and approaches within the government machinery and to set in place institutional mechanisms to encourage growth, development and diversification throughout the sector. Actions to be promoted under this objective are targeted towards: building government knowledge and expertise in the sector; further defining the policies, form and direction of ecotourism growth in Lao PDR; and, strengthening planning and management mechanisms.

Actions to be implemented under this key objective include:

Creating or assigning an existing high-level body with the responsibility to lead the development of the sector.

Assigning a taskforce under the lead body to carry forward recommendations and work-plans.

Organising workshops, seminars and study tours for policy makers and technical staff with responsibility to approve and oversee the implementation of policies and programmes.

Organising workshops, seminars and study tours for project managers and heads of provincial government to impart knowledge of the styles and standards of ecotourism products and an understanding of the management mechanisms required for effective operation.

Include the National Ecotourism Strategy as a key component of the newly revised National Tourism Master Plan.

Developing operational guidelines for the creation of inclusive provincial level bodies to lead and direct the development of ecotourism activities at the local level.



Key Objective Two

Support Training, Capacity Building and the Promotion of Good Practice

A range of capacity building measures are required to inform and empower stakeholders and the wider public and so unleash the development potential of Lao ecotourism. Actions under this objective are targeted towards building professionalism across the sector and promoting a national appreciation of the ecotourism concept and rationale for sector growth. Actions will focus upon stakeholders at different levels and positions within the sector, from government staff to service providers at the site level and students interested to develop ecotourism careers.

Actions to be implemented under this key objective include:

Establishing a mobile training unit under the auspices of the Lao National Tourism Administration to coordinate and develop a range of standardised training programmes and manuals for key groups, including:

- guide training for tour guides;
- ecotourism awareness programmes for national and local government staff and local communities;
- ecotourism business skills training for service providers (i.e. guest house and lodge owners, providers of new ecotourism products); and,
- specific ecotourism planning and management courses for national and local government officers and staff employed on provincial tourism projects.

Encouraging the development of vocational, diploma and bachelors degree courses in the ecotourism, and tourism and hospitality sectors.

Creating an LNTA-based sustainable tourism network to share information among all stakeholders on, for example, good and bad ecotourism practices, encouraging private sector investment and responsible business practices, NPA management issues, certification schemes, etc.

Developing a wide ranging media and marketing campaign to inform all sectors of the Lao population as to the goals, aims and objectives of Lao ecotourism.

Encouraging guidebook writers and international travel journalists to visit Lao PDR.

Developing an annual “National Ecotourism Awards” programme to recognise and encourage good practice in, for example, hotel, lodge and guest house design and management, tour agent operations, NPA management, tour guiding and community enterprise in the sector.



Key Objective Three

Support Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation

Lao PDR's natural heritage underpins the sustainable development of the nation. A thriving ecotourism industry also depends upon high quality natural and cultural attractions. Similarly, a key purpose of Lao ecotourism is to support and conserve these special attractions upon which the industry depends. Actions to be developed under this objective will address and develop: funding mechanisms to strengthen biodiversity conservation programmes; NPA ecotourism management plans; Lao ecotourism policy and regulatory environment; and, NPA visitor interpretation standards and facilities.

Actions to be implemented under this key objective include:

Introducing ecotourism funding mechanisms and fees to finance biodiversity conservation programmes and the implementation of the National Ecotourism Strategy. This might include nominal increases to tourist visas or entry fees to NPAs – or the leasing of land in or around NPAs for managing ecotourism attractions and infrastructure (lodges, vantage points, restaurants etc.).

Promoting the development of participatory ecotourism plans for NPAs that, a) complement and support wider NPA management planning and, b) seek to reduce existing threats to biodiversity in NPAs.

Reviewing the legal and regulatory mechanisms related to tourism, the environment and NPAs.

Assessing the capacity building requirements for the effective implementation of environmental rules and regulations.

Enforcing the use of EIA procedures for tourism projects that involve a significant change in land use.

Organising workshops and seminars to promote partnerships between NPA managers, local communities and the private sector.

Building the capacity of ecotourism guides (private sector, government and village) to provide accurate and informative nature interpretation in NPAs.

management courses for local entrepreneurs.

ce for private sector operations looking to use NPAs for ecotourism activities and rules and regulations.

des of conduct for visitors to NPAs.



Key Objective Four

Provide Socio-economic Development and Cultural Heritage Protection for Host Communities

Host communities must be among the primary beneficiaries of ecotourism activity at the local level. With time and effort local people should develop a strong sense of ownership of ecotourism resources in their area. At present, however, these stakeholders lack knowledge of, and access to, tourism markets. Measures will therefore be put in place to encourage equitable partnerships between local communities and ecotourism projects and programmes, to ensure local people continue to be among the primary beneficiaries. Actions included under this objective are targeted towards; the development of new and existing ecotourism destinations; local involvement in the design, management and ownership of ecotourism products; and, ensuring the equitable distribution of ecotourism benefits.

Actions to be implemented under this key objective include:

Supporting NGO and donor agency projects that seek to develop and promote community-based ecotourism activities in rural areas.

Encouraging the development of vocational ecotourism, tourism and hospitality courses at the provincial level.

Encouraging community and NPA partnerships to promote conservation and ecotourism activities.

Encouraging local participation in decision-making frameworks.

Developing regulations and guidelines to create and promote local tourism businesses and services.

Providing access to credit and funding mechanisms for community ecotourism projects.

Encouraging the creation of guidelines to promote community and private sector partnerships in the provision of ecotourism products and services.

Encouraging local and foreign investment in 'ecolodges' that support conservation objectives and local socio-economic needs.

Developing and promoting the sale of local handicrafts as tourist souvenirs.

Encouraging the design of mechanisms to ensure the equitable distribution of ecotourism benefits.

Promoting the development of visitor codes of conduct to promote respect for local culture.

Encouraging tourism entrepreneurs to reflect cultural values and community needs in ecotourism enterprises.

Key Objective Five

Develop Ecotourism Research and Information

There is currently a lack of ecotourism data and information on existing practices and trends and also possible products and markets. To help develop and promote the sector a variety of planning, management and marketing information must be compiled and made accessible to interested parties, not least to policy-makers who depend upon up-to-date and accurate information to make informed policy decisions. This objective therefore seeks to develop a series of initiatives to improve the ecotourism knowledge base, which in turn will help guide and facilitate the expansion of the sector. Actions under this objective will focus on: identifying sites for ecotourism development; developing research agendas, programmes and partnerships; and, improving the supply of data and information to all partners and stakeholders.

Actions to be implemented under this key objective include:

Developing an inventory and data-base of existing and potential ecotourism products and services.

Developing tourism and conservation research partnerships with international bodies.

Supporting research into environmental, social and economic aspects of ecotourism activity at both the national and local levels.

Encouraging segmented market research into the national, regional and international potential of Lao ecotourism.

Developing a centre-level data-base profiling visitor use of NPAs.

Creating a data-base of international tour operators and accommodation providers with an active interest in developing and promoting the ecotourism sector.

Supporting research into certification and accreditation schemes that will help set new standards for Lao ecotourism.

Improving the supply of ecotourism data and information to government policy-makers.

Information on Lao ecotourism to agencies at home and abroad.





Getting Involved and Requesting Further Information

This summary of the Lao PDR National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan has been developed and distributed as part of a strategic effort to communicate with all stakeholders — including international tour operators and tourism service providers — to promote and coordinate interest in the ecotourism sector. If you have any comments or feedback on this strategy, would like to learn more about opportunities and incentives to invest in the sector, or have some other related enquiry, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Lao National Tourism Administration. We look forward to receiving all enquiries and comments and will do our utmost to respond in a timely manner.

Please send your comments to one or more of the contact points below.

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SNV is a Netherlands-based international development organisation that provides advice to local organisations in developing countries; a consultancy for those organisations that lack access to the commercial market.

Our advisers work closely with local organisations in more than 25 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe to harness their own solutions for development.

We aim to strengthen our partners in their bids to improve the income generating capacity of local communities, to create a fair influence over the way they are governed and to benefit from the natural resources surrounding them while sustaining the environment for future generations.

