Foreword

The Government of Sweden has provided technical assistance to the Government of Lao PDR in the Natural Resources Sector since 1977. Until the mid 1980s the assistance focused on support to the Department of Forestry and two State Forest Enterprises. From 1985 assistance was expanded to include support for the establishment of a Forestry Training Organization including the Forestry Technician School at Mouang Mai.

In the late 1980’s the Lao Swedish Co-operation was further expanded to cover shifting cultivation stabilisation and nature conservation. During the first half of the 1990’s the co-operation gradually changed to institution building/strengthening of the Department of Forestry at the centre and in selected provinces.

The co-operation is based on the premise that national ownership of bilateral programmes will contribute significantly to sustainability after the programmes have been completed.

In more recent years the programme has addressed sustainable land use aspects in the village development context with the view that community participation in partnership with government services will enhance the potential for sustainable management of forest and agricultural resources.

The Phase IV of the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme (1996-2001) has concentrated on three aspects of institutional building; competence development, model development and research management. The development efforts have covered a process of formulating, improving and disseminating models (methods and procedures) in four main areas including Participatory Village Development and Sustainable Land Use, Participatory National Bio-diversity Conservation Area Management, Natural Resources Management, and Institution Building. Monitoring and gender mainstreaming have been incorporated as cross-cutting efforts in the model development work. The development activities have been performed in partnership with national, provincial and district administrations and with village communities in response to Lao policies.

The LSFP has supported the strategy and policy development of the Government of Lao PDR and contributed to the emerging consensus on rural development that is taking place within the accepted Socio-economic Priorities of the Government of Lao PDR under which broad development policies have long been operative.

This document is one in a series of resulting documents, which have been produced in both Lao and English languages to assist and provide knowledge and ideas to personnel responsible for policy, planning, and implementation of agriculture and forestry development programmes. It contains lessons and experiences learnt during the programme.

I encourage the personnel of departments and agencies to study and assess the content of the documents and apply the relevant parts depending on local conditions.
I wish to commend the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for its continued support during four phases of technical assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the LSFP personnel and advisors, who have made a major contribution to this development and documentation.

20 March, 2001

Minister for Agriculture and Forestry

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

1. Intended Audience of this Document

- Policy-makers, planners and managers concerned with sustainable eco-tourism in Lao PDR.
- National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NBCA) Heads and staff.
- Provincial Tourism Office Heads and staff.
- Heads of Provincial Agriculture and Forestry and Provincial Forestry Offices.

2. Purpose of the Document

- To describe the key concepts and principles of community-based eco-tourism.
- To describe the steps and procedures involved in conducting community based ecotourism in protected areas.
- To introduce readers to a variety of methods and tools available for use by NBCA managers and staff for developing community-based eco-tourism programmes.

3. Explanation of Documentation

In partnership with the Department of Forestry, the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme (LSFP) has been working in 4 protected areas on the development of a Participatory Protected Area Management System appropriate to the current and future needs of the Lao PDR. The system embodies 3 major components and a variety of methods, tools, case studies and manuals which are described in an inter-related series of documents as follows:
Information Provided in this Document

- The goals and objectives of community-based eco-tourism.
- How to go about planning and developing a community-based eco-tourism programme in a protected area.
- The steps and procedures involved in community-based eco-tourism development.

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Introduction

It is now widely accepted that local stewardship of resources plays an important role in the sustainable use of natural resources. The participation of local communities in the management of biodiversity not only promotes conservation but can also help to achieve economic development goals. Community-based eco-tourism is one such participatory activity which is gaining in popularity throughout the world and is being increasingly used as a central component in many Integrated Conservation and Development (ICAD) projects.

Definitions

Eco-tourism (defined as responsible travel to natural areas which helps to conserve the environment) is now a major growth industry throughout the world. It comes in many forms including:

- Up-market eco-tours where people stay in luxurious, purpose-built hotels or chalets.
- Safaris, usually by vehicle through savanna grasslands, to observe birds and large mammals.
- Unaccompanied, day-trips, usually from a central (often urban) base, to observe exhibits at visitor centres or to walk along marked wildlife and habitat trails.
- Adventure tourism such as mountain-biking, white-water rafting, mountaineering, etc.
- Specialist wildlife tours, usually by enthusiasts, to view and study one particular species or group of animals.

The type of eco-tourism described in this manual is ‘Community-Based Nature Tourism’. This form of eco-tourism is conducted in partnership with local communities. Very simply, it can be defined as ‘responsible travel to natural areas which helps to conserve the environment and also improves the well-being of local people’. It has a number of important attributes.

Key Characteristics of Community-Based Nature Tourism

- Involves travel to natural destinations which are usually under some form of protection.
- Minimises negative impacts on the environment and local people.
- Respects local culture.
- Builds environmental awareness in tourists and local communities.
- Provides financial benefits to local people as well as income for conservation.
- Caters mainly for the lower-budget end of the tourism market.
- Does not require large investment in infrastructure or tourist facilities.

Although currently this type of eco-tourism targets mainly foreign tourists, a major future aim is to attract more Lao visitors to the protected areas. Part of the income generated from foreign tourists can be used to develop attractions and facilities for use by local tourists as they become more interested in the future.

Objectives
Community-based eco-tourism in protected areas embraces the following major objectives:

- To provide alternative sources of income to local communities in order to reduce their reliance on natural resources in the NBCA.
- To provide local communities with an economic stake in the NBCA and to demonstrate to them the value of conserving these resources.
- To generate a modest income which will be used for NBCA management and conservation activities.
- To give foreign visitors the opportunity to visit the country’s National Biodiversity Conservation Areas.

When designing an eco-tourism programme, there is always the temptation to emphasise profit maximisation as the primary objective. Profits can and should be made, but must be kept in perspective and always be secondary to the main objective of improved conservation.

**Expected Benefits**

Community-based nature tourism entails organising villagers to provide tourism related services to visitors in protected areas. By putting management firmly in the hands of the community, it ensures that the majority of the benefits accrue to villagers rather than to large travel companies, tour operators or hotel chains.

It provides the following major benefits to local communities, protected areas, and the Lao PDR as a whole:

- It provides villagers with additional income and other forms of employment as an alternative to forest resource extraction.
- It generates income for local development initiatives and other community based activities.
- It provides villagers with a strong and visible economic stake in conserving natural resources in NBCAs.
- It promotes protected areas and the Lao PDR as a whole as a tourist destination, encouraging tourists to stay longer, spend more, and better appreciate the rich culture and natural attractions of the Country.
- It enhances environmental awareness in local people and the Lao population as a whole.
- It generates sustainable funding for other aspects of NBCA management.

Despite its potential advantages, nature tourism per se does not necessarily contribute to improved conservation. Indeed, poorly planned or inadequately controlled nature tourism activities can actually impact negatively on conservation and biodiversity values. As a consequence, precautions need to be taken when planning an eco-tourism programme. These are explained in a later section of this manual.

**CHAPTER 1:**

**DESIGNING AN ECO-TOURISM PROGRAMME**

A number of logical steps should always be followed when designing an eco-tourism programme. Failure to fully address any of these stages could jeopardise the sustainability of the programme in the future.

**Key Steps in Programme Design**

1. Precautionary procedures
2. Villager orientation and feedback
3. Stakeholder orientation
4. Assessing eco-tourism potential
5. Planning
6. Obtaining approval
Precautionary Procedures

Despite its potential advantages, nature tourism per se does not necessarily contribute to improved conservation. Indeed, poorly planned or inadequately controlled nature tourism activities can actually reduce biodiversity values and interfere with other protected area management activities. As a consequence, precautions need to be taken when planning an eco-tourism programme.

Firstly, consult with DFRC to familiarise yourself with the regulations regarding eco-tourism in protected areas. Secondly, confer with the Provincial Tourism Office to check that programme goals are in line with tourism policy in Lao PDR and to obtain guidelines and help in developing the programme. Thirdly, check the security situation in the area(s) you intend to conduct the programme and check with the relevant authorities that tourist access will be allowed. Always bear in mind that eco-tourism must support both the conservation and socio-economic development goals of each specific NBCA and should be compatible with its unique bio-physical characteristics and recreational opportunities. Finally, the tourist carrying capacity of the protected area should be assessed and adequate safeguards imposed to ensure that this is not exceeded.

Villager Orientation and Feedback

Participating villagers are the most important partners in the design of an ecotourism programme and it is essential that they are closely involved with the programme from the very beginning. To begin with, villagers will have very little idea what eco-tourism is all about. It can, therefore, be valuable to organise a villager study tour to an existing programme so that they can talk to other villagers who have first hand experience.

Carefully describe to target villagers what eco-tourism is, and clarify its goals and objectives. Explain how they will be expected to participate, how they will benefit and elicit their opinions on the proposed programme. Ask villagers to try to identify potential negative impacts on their culture and way of life, and get them to propose safeguards against these. Try to get a commitment from villagers to put part of the proceeds from eco-tourism into a village development fund. Not only does this help to spread the benefits among all villagers, but it helps to instill in them that eco-tourism is a community managed activity which will bring community-wide benefits rather than something which will make merely a few families rich.

Stakeholder Orientation

Many different stakeholders have a role to play in eco-tourism development, and a partnership approach needs to be followed, under which villagers, NBCA staff, district and provincial authorities and the private sector are fully involved in both planning and implementing the programme.

Eco-tourism stakeholder roles and responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governor’s Office/provincial authorities</td>
<td>Direction, guidance and strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBCA</td>
<td>Organisation, planning &amp; implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAFO and PFO</td>
<td>Programme management and accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism authority</td>
<td>Information, training and advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Police</td>
<td>Security and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Commercial programme operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating communities</td>
<td>Management, guides, cooks cleaners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to ensure full stakeholder participation in the programme and to provide guidance and support for future development, it is advisable to establish a Provincial Eco-Tourism Committee to oversee eco-tourism activities in the province. The committee should comprise all key stakeholders and have responsibility for all major decisions in regard to eco-tourism. During programme design, draft plans should be presented to regular meetings of the committee for feedback and comments. The committee should also be responsible for evaluating the programme from time to time and for guiding its future development.

Assessing Eco-Tourism Potential
**Market Potential**

Prior to designing an eco-tourism programme, it is essential to assess the market potential in terms of both the volume and the type of tourists you will be able to attract. This will depend very much on both the location and the scenic, recreational and educational opportunities inherent in your protected area. The key to successful eco-tourism development is to match the specific attributes of your NBCA with market demand.

The best way to assess market potential is by means of a simple questionnaire. Copies of this can be left at bus-stations, hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and other places those tourists frequent and collected later for analysis. The questionnaire shown in Annex 1 is merely an example, and the specific information needed might vary somewhat according to each situation. However, any survey should cover a number of key areas.

**Sample Tourist Survey Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Possible Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationality?</td>
<td>Interest in eco-tourism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age?</td>
<td>Specific interest in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex?</td>
<td>- Scenic beauty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession?</td>
<td>- Camping?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days spent in Lao PDR?</td>
<td>- Trekking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days spent in your area?</td>
<td>- Bird watching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arriving from which province?</td>
<td>- Wildlife observation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling to which province?</td>
<td>- Cultural tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using what form of transport?</td>
<td>- Other interests?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments?</td>
<td>Acceptable daily charges?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optimal duration for a nature tour?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tourist survey should give you a good idea of the type of tourist available in your particular market. Although the programme may initially target foreign visitors, development of the domestic eco-tourism market must also be an eventual goal if conservation objectives are to be fully realised. Consequently, it can also be valuable to survey urban populations in the larger provincial and district towns to obtain their views and to see whether their interests coincide with foreign tourists.

**Features of Interest to Tourists**

Once you have obtained information on the types of eco-tourism activities most attractive to the tourist clientele, you need to assess to what extent your protected area can provide these. All NCOs have some features, which will be of interest to visitors. You don't necessarily need dramatic views, spectacular landscapes or unusual wildlife. In most cases, tourist tastes are quite simple and they will usually be happy to merely camp in the forest and trek between guardian villages. As a starting point, inventory the attributes of your NBCA according to a few basic categories.

**Natural attractions**

Features of scenic interest such as mountains, escarpments, damps and rivers, including such features as waterfalls and rapids.

**Habitats**

The various forest types in your NBCA (including tree or other plant species of special interest), wetlands, farmland and other more localised habitats such as caves, cliff faces, etc.
**Wildlife**

Wildlife species which are readily observable, evidence of less easily seen species (such as footprints, scratches, claw marks, scats or other evidence), birds, reptiles, fish and any interesting insects, particularly butterflies.

**Cultural attributes**

Ethnic groups represented in and around your NBCA, and their socio-cultural features such as their way of life, fishing and hunting gear, their farming practices, livelihood systems and methods of NTFP harvesting and use. Also identify any sites of archaeological interest or historical importance, any ancient ruins or cultural sites such as jungle temples, etc.

**Recreational opportunities**

Appropriate sites for trekking, swimming, boating, white-water rafting, mountain biking, etc.

**Private Sector Interest**

Eventually, it will be important to obtain private sector involvement in your ecotourism programme, so you should try to assess their interest in getting involved at an early stage. This can best be done at the same time as the tourist survey as your most likely partners in nature tourism will be the tourist-related businesses where you leave the questionnaires. When requesting their cooperation with the tourist survey, assess their dependence on tourism and explore their interest in becoming involved in the nature tourism programme in the future.

### Surveys of tourist-related businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of business?</th>
<th>Interest in involvement in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location?</td>
<td>- advertising?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products sold to tourists?</td>
<td>- taking bookings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue from tourists?</td>
<td>- providing transport?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language capacity?</td>
<td>- organising trips?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial capability?</td>
<td>- other?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Planning**

When planning an eco-tourism programme a number of issues need to be considered. These are dealt with here on a case-by-case basis.

**Sites and Itineraries**

As a product, eco-tourism comprises two components: attractions and services. Use the attributes from the inventory of the NBCA to identify appropriate attractions to be included in the eco-tourism itinerary. You cannot make an area more beautiful, but you can make it more interesting. Use the knowledge and culture of local people to embellish potential attractions by showing how these are used by villagers or how they feature in local beliefs and customs.

Try to keep itineraries as varied as possible so that tourists see a wide range of interesting things. Wildlife, plant species, scenic beauty and cultural aspects can all be combined to give a trip variety. Ideally, you should develop a number of different routes and itineraries and rotate these with each succeeding tour group.

Not only does this distribute the benefits among a larger number of villages, it also means that tourist pressure is evenly spread over the entire protected area and that tourists are more likely to return to see different things
on a subsequent visit.

Tour Frequency and Duration

How frequently you offer nature tourism expeditions will depend both on the size of your potential tourist market and on the staff and resources at your disposal. On the one hand, you must be careful to ensure that carrying capacity is not exceeded and that eco-tourism does not interfere with other NBCA management activities, but on the other hand, expeditions should be sufficiently frequent to meet demand, justify investment, and provide villagers with a continuing source of income.

The duration of each tour should be based on the local situation and the preferences of your target tourist market. If the protected area is close to a tourist center, short or even one-day trips might be possible, but if travelling time is more than 3 hours, most of the first and final days will be taken up with travelling, and longer tours will be required. As a general rule of thumb, the actual tourism programme should always be at least twice as long as the journey time back and forth to the site.

Assess the seasonality of your programme. Tourism in Lao PDR has both high and low seasons and the number of tourists visiting your area will vary accordingly. More importantly, access to and the conditions in your protected area, will vary from season to season. Access may be difficult or even impossible in the wet season, and even if this is not a problem, leeches, mosquitoes, poor trail conditions, etc. may detract from tourist enjoyment. Consideration must also be given to the work cycle of participating villagers. If it is to be successful, eco-tourism should complement rather than interfere with villagers' livelihoods and should not be conducted when villagers are busy in their rice fields or have other important activities.

Size of Tour Groups

The number of tourists on each trip should be a balance between enough to make the trip cost effective, but not too many to make it difficult to manage and control. Available transport for people and equipment may limit the size of groups, as may the available accommodation if tourists are staying in villagers' houses. As a general rule, trips probably should not exceed about 15 people, including NBCA and other staff.

Transport

Plans have to be made for transport to and from the protected area. One pick-up truck per four tourists is generally required to transport the tourists, their luggage, staff and equipment. If NBCA vehicles are not available or are insufficient, it may be possible to borrow vehicles from another government agency such as PAFO. Alternatively, private car hire can be used, but this may be quite expensive and will reduce profits.

Safety and Security

Make safety a high priority at all times and ensure that your staff understand the need for this. Staff training should include instructions on security issues, tourist safety and first aid. Tourists should also be warned of potential safety issues and understand that ultimately they are responsible for their own well being. A form with simple precautionary advice should be distributed to tourists prior to the departure of each trip. A sample format for this is presented in Annex 2 of this manual.

Security and safety are mainly common sense, but the provincial police and and/or the military will be able to assist with training in this regard. When trekking, avoid potentially dangerous trails and steep slopes or rock faces. If it is a problem in your area, explain the dangers of unexploded ordnance to the tourists and try to keep out of high risk areas. Always have a vehicle standing-by at the closest possible location to your trekking route for use in case of accidents, and if possible, try and maintain radio contact with it at all times. Compasses and handheld global positioning systems, pre-loaded with the coordinates of each campsite, should be carried on all treks to ensure that the correct route can be followed even in the dark or under severe weather conditions.

A doctor from the Provincial Hospital should be requested to provide training on basic health care, first aid, what to carry in the first aid kit and how to use it. Always carry a fully stocked first aid kit with your tour groups on each trek and make sure that at least one accompanying member of staff knows how to use it. Ensure that all participants on the eco-tour take adequate precautions against malaria and other mosquito borne diseases, and try to get your staff set a good example in this respect.

**Essential First Aid Kit Items**
Guides and Tour Leaders

Every tour should be accompanied by at least one member of staff, who should have sufficient English to be able to explain things to the tourists. If none of your staff have any English try to arrange language training for them and consider hiring an English speaking guide in the meantime. Provincial teacher training colleges generally have students with adequate English and can provide English speaking guides.

Always use villagers as tour guides on the jungle treks. They know the local terrain and where to find interesting wildlife and other attractions. Pay the guides a fair daily wage for this and provide them with training on how to conduct a trek and the type of attractions that will be of interest to tourists.

Planning with villagers

Local villagers are the most valuable resource available for planning an eco-tourism programme. Consult them about appropriate routes, the state of trails, where best to see wildlife, NTFPs, outstanding views and other attractions. Prepare the villagers to act as guides, porters, cooks and cleaners and show them how to prepare accommodation for the tourists. Make plans with the villagers on how to ensure the most equitable distribution of the benefits from eco-tourism amongst the community as a whole and how to best use the income generated for development purposes.

Finance and accounting

Although nature tourism will generate income which can be used for other NBCA management activities, profit maximisation is not the major goal. Charge a fair price which provides a reasonable margin, but do not seek excessive profits. If tourists feel they have been overcharged, word will soon get round and marketing the tours will become a problem. You should also consider paying per diems for NBCA staff accompanying the trips from tourism revenue. This will allow ecotourism to be entirely self funding and thus not become a drain on NBCA management budgets. Always try to maximise the income going to villagers and remember that there will also have to be adequate profits for the private sector if they are to become involved. If the tours are to be run by private companies, they should be charged an NBCA levy or entrance fee ($1 per person per day is an appropriate sum).

It is essential that accounting procedures for the programme are entirely transparent and a full accounting should be made for each eco-tour and accounts held for inspection by PAFO or DFRC auditors. A special eco-tourism account should be established in the PAFO to receive all eco-tourism revenue and clear guidelines for its use should be established. Money in the account can be earmarked solely for the NBCA, but clear rules and regulations on how it is to be used should be drawn up in consultation with PAFO prior to implementing the programme. The regulations used for the eco-tourism programme in Savanakhet are presented as an example in Annex 3 of this manual.

Advertising and Bookings

Most tourists spend only a few days in any one place, so the key to advertising is to catch them while they are there. If, from the survey, you know where most tourists are coming from, you can place adverts there, so that they are aware of the programme in advance. Placing adverts in bus-stations, hotels and restaurants will usually produce a good response. With low-budget tourists, in particular, advertising can be simple, as information tends to spread rapidly through the back-packer grapevine and by word-of-mouth. Later on, it might be useful to get details of your programme into the various tourist guidebooks, such as the Lonely Planet. Nowadays, virtually all travellers use the internet to obtain tourist information and you should seriously consider establishing a website to describe in detail what is being offered in your programme.

Advertising does not need to be expensive or elaborate. Simple handouts explaining the tour packages being

| Bandages plasters and cotton-wool |
| Antiseptic solution and cream |
| Ointment and pills for sprains |
| Tiger balm muscle ointment |
| Aspirin or paracetamol |
| Anti-malarial medicine |
| Diarrhoea medicine |
| Electrolyte powder |
| Calamine lotion and anti-histamine pills |
offered, along with a brochure describing your NBCA and the nature tourism activities which you offer will normally be sufficient. A sample of such advertising material is presented in Annex 4 of this Manual. Poster-type presentations with photographs and more detailed explanations can be put on show in places where tourists tend to gather. DFRC can be consulted for help, guidance and possibly even funding in regard to the production of brochures and posters.

Only enough tickets for each trip should be put on sale, preferably at a single location so that sales can be easily monitored. Tickets can be put on sale about a week in advance of each trip and ticket sales should close before you purchase supplies and make final plans - usually about 24 hours before departure. If the NBCA has a centrally located provincial office which is easy to find, tickets can be sold there. If this is not possible, a guesthouse or restaurant could be contracted to sell tickets or a small fee for each ticket sold. Such establishments will normally be happy to do this as it will attract customers for their business. Remember that good English must be spoken wherever you decide to sell the tickets so that explanations can be given to tourists.

When tourists purchase their tickets, they should be asked to complete and sign a registration form which will be used to register the tourists with the provincial and district authorities. This form should include a disclaimer to be signed by each tourist absolving the NBCA of any responsibility for accident or injury. An example of the form used in Savannakhet is shown in Annex 5.

The Approval Process

Once you have sufficient information to show the potential for eco-tourism, and have developed a set of well-thought-out plans for the programme you will need to obtain approval from the appropriate authorities. This needs to be done at two levels. Firstly, present your case to DFRC to ensure that your proposals meet DoF policy. Once you have DoF’s support, it will be necessary to obtain provincial approval from the Governor’s Office. This is best done through a series of stakeholder meetings with representatives from all agencies on the Provincial Eco-Tourism Committee. Present the draft plans for your eco-tourism programme to obtain feedback and comments and use these to modify your plans accordingly. Once approved by the committee, the plans should be submitted to the Provincial Governor for final approval.

CHAPTER 2
CONDUCTING AN ECO-TOUR

Preparation

Before conducting an eco-tour have a clear and achievable itinerary and make sure all campsites, villagers, trekking routes, etc. are fully prepared. It is advisable to have one staff member go on ahead to work with the villagers to get everything ready.

Equipment

Make sure that transport is prepared and that the vehicles are in good working order. Check that your nature tourism equipment is complete and that everything is in good repair, clean and ready to use.

Essential Items of Eco-Tourism Equipment

- Tents
- Sleeping bags
- Compasses
- Binoculars
- Mosquito nets
- Sleeping bag liners
- Hand-held GPS
- First aid kit
Supplies and Provisions

Carefully work out exactly what you will need in the way of food and supplies for each trip. To do this, it can be helpful to plan a menu for each meal and make sure that you have adequate supplies for this. Also bear in mind that you will invariably have at least one vegetarian in your group and make sure you have adequate supplies to cope with their needs.

Wherever possible, buy local produce from participating villagers. However, be careful not to create additional problems by depriving them of food items that are hard to come by. Many villages are in rice deficit, so in most cases, you should supply your own. Eggs, chickens, ducks, fruit and some vegetables can normally be purchased from villagers to provide them with a little extra income. You can also encourage villagers to sell basic items to tourists such as soap, toothpaste, cigarettes, etc. However, you will always have to take food and supplies with you and these should be listed and prepared in advance.

Essential Provisions for an Eco-Tour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drinks &amp; batteries</th>
<th>Ice box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water flagons</td>
<td>Drinking water canteens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plates and cutlery</td>
<td>Cooking utensils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckets and water scoops</td>
<td>Playing cards and games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tourist Orientation

Always hold an orientation and briefing for the tourists before leaving for the NBCA, possibly on the evening prior to departure. Tourist passport details along with the trip itinerary and schedules should also be taken and registered with the provincial authorities at this time.

Use maps to explain to the tourists where they will be going, the villages they will be staying in and what they will see. Describe the type of clothing and footwear they will need and what they should take with them. Explain how they should behave with villagers, along with a list of do’s and don’ts when in the protected area. It is advisable to discourage the tourists from giving money or gifts to villagers, but give them the opportunity to contribute to village development, through an NBCA fund for this purpose. Explain the possible dangers and health hazards and emphasise precautions in regard to drinking water, dehydration, mosquito-borne diseases, UXO and other potential hazards. Clearly spell out the Lao Government’s laws on drugs and warn the tourists that NBCA staff are dutybound to report anyone found to be using illicit substances. A single incident related to the illegal use of drugs could put the future of your eco-tourism programme in jeopardy.

Treks

When planning routes for treks, don’t be too ambitious about the distance covered. Aim for leisurely walks and
provide plenty of time for stopping to observe wildlife and other features of interest.

Treks should always be led by village guides, and at least one NBCA staff member should always accompany the trek. He or she should be able to provide explanations in English. For the first few trips it’s a good idea to have 3 or 4 of your staff accompany each group to give them experience and to help sort out the problems you’re bound to encounter in the early stages of the programme.

When out in the forest, explain all items of interest to your tour group. They will be attracted by all sorts of things which might seem mundane and everyday occurrences to you. Explain the different types of forest you walk through and the type of wildlife which each contains. Even if you don’t see much wildlife, explain and describe footprints, scratch-marks and other evidence that you come across in the jungle. Point out the various types of NTFP’s and explain their uses.

Such simple things as herbs, edible leaves, rattan, cardamom, khi sii, naman yang, etc. will be of great interest to most tourists. It can be exciting to collect a variety of edible herbs, leaves and roots while out on a trek and allow the tourists to try them with their evening meal.

Make the most of your time in the villages. Have villagers display their snares, fish traps and other hunting gear and demonstrate how they work. Describe to tourists the types of wildlife which are hunted and those which are not. When staying in a village, demonstrate simple things like rice milling, how sticky rice is cooked, the use of naman yang lanterns, etc. If possible organise demonstrations of local handicrafts such as cloth and mat weaving, cotton dyeing, Lao-lao distillation, etc. Not only will the tourists be extremely interested in this, but it also offers the opportunity for villagers to make some additional income from the sale of handicrafts.

In the evenings, spend time with your tour group to chat and answer any questions they may have. You should describe the Lao Protected Area System to them and explain what an NBCA is, its objectives and how it is managed. Describe your job to them and the various tasks you undertake on a day-to-day basis. Most importantly, explain why you are offering eco-tourism expeditions, what its objectives are, how it helps conservation and how the revenues from it will be used.

CHAPTER 3
EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME

At the end of each nature tour expedition, hold a short evaluation with the tour group. Ask what they enjoyed the most, what they didn’t particularly like, what problems they had and how things might be improved in the future. Ask them for ideas about future trips and how they might be made more enjoyable. These evaluations will not only show the tourists that you take their satisfaction seriously, but the information obtained will be invaluable in improving the programme in the future. A sample evaluation form is presented in Annex 6 of this manual.

From time to time, evaluations of the programme should be undertaken by the Provincial Eco-Tourism Tourism Committee. For this, summaries of the number of tourists, the number trips, destinations, the participating villages, etc. should be prepared and written up. Villagers should be interviewed on what they think of the programme and on how they have benefited from it. A full financial accounting should be made and information from the tourist evaluations should be summarised. This information should then be presented to and discussed by the Committee and used as the basis for making improvements to the programme in the future.

CHAPTER 4
FURTHER INFORMATION

A number of government agencies, donor programmes and NBCAs are now working on the development of eco-tourism in Lao PDR. These various institutions have a lot of valuable experience and would welcome
inquiries from anyone considering starting an eco-tourism programme in their protected area.

Sources of Information on Eco-Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DFRC</td>
<td>Advice on policy and help with brochures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTA</td>
<td>Tourism policy and promotional assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNV</td>
<td>General information and requests for volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>General information and reference materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOFT</td>
<td>Training and technical advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PXH NBCA</td>
<td>General advice and staff study tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO/Nam Ha</td>
<td>General advice and staff study tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSFP</td>
<td>Copies of manuals and reference materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of publications and papers on eco-tourism have also been produced and are available for further reading on this topic. They include the following references:


ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. SAMPLE TOURIST SURVEY FORM

1. Would you be potentially interested in eco-tourism in Lao PDR?

   Yes □ No □

2. If so, would your main interest be in:

   Scenic nature tourism? □
   Eco-tourism expeditions? □
   Walking and camping? □ Please tick one or more boxes
   Jungle trekking? □
   Bird watching? □
Wildlife sighting? □
Other? □ Please specify

3. What would you be prepared to pay per day (including food and lodging)?
   < $5 □ $5-10 □ $10-20 □ >$20 □

4. How many days do you intend to spend in Savannakhet? _______ Lao PDR? ______

5. How many days would you consider spending on eco-tourism in Savannakhet?_____

6. Which countries are you travelling from? __________________ to? _______________

7. What other provinces have you visited or intend to see to during your stay in Lao PDR?

8. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

Thank you for your response to this questionnaire.

ANNEX 2. SAMPLE REGULATIONS FOR THE USE OF ECO-TOURISM REVENUE

Regulations Governing Income Generated by Eco-Tourism Activities in NBCA’s in Savannakhet Province

1. A full and complete financial accounting will be made for each and every ecotourism expedition conducted in the NBCA.

2. All accounts will be kept and maintained at the NBCA headquarters and will be made available for inspection by PAFO on request.

3. All income earned from eco-tourism will be paid into a special NBCA ecotourism account held by the PAFO. This account will be maintained for the sole use of the NBCA.

4. Income from the NBCA eco-tourism accounts will be withdrawn following normal PAFO approval procedures and will be used only for the following purposes:

   Any patrolling, extension or development activities which directly benefit the NBCA, as firstly approved by the Head of the NBCA, PFO and PAFO.

   Purchase and procurement of equipment, materials or services as required for eco-tourism activities.

   Per diems at prevailing PAFO rates for NBCA or other government staff involved in activities directly related to NBCA management or guardian village development.

   The hiring of or per diem payments to village officials, VFV’s or other villagers for services directly related to eco-tourism, NBCA management or guardian village development.

   Eco-tourism revenues cannot be used for per diem or other special payments to NBCA staff in excess of prevailing PAFO rates.

5. The use of all eco-tourism income will follow all normal PAFO regulations, rates, approval processes and accounting procedures.

6. An annual financial report will be submitted to PAFO at the end of each fiscal year showing total income earned from eco-tourism and total expenditures in that year.

7. Any outstanding balance in the eco-tourism account will be carried over for use in the next financial year.
ANNEX 3. ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

Eco-Tours in Savannakhet’s National Parks

The Provincial Forestry Office is offering nature treks in 2 National Parks in Savannakhet. These treks will take you to some of the most beautiful and remote areas in rural Lao PDR and give you the opportunity to see a variety of interesting plants and animals.

Each trek lasts for 5 days (including travel to and from Savannakhet Town) and will take you on hikes through the National Park to a number of different villages in and around it’s borders. You will spend the nights in these villages, sleeping in tents or other simple accommodation. The tours are organised by the Park Authorities and all are accompanied by Park Rangers and local villagers, who act as guides. To ensure that you get the most out of the experience, each trek and is normally limited to 12 people.

Objectives

Lao PDR takes the management and conservation of its natural resources very seriously and has devoted over one fifth of its total land area to biodiversity conservation under either national, provincial or district management. Quite unlike conservation initiatives in many other countries, Lao PDR is committed to developing a partnership with the local people who live in and depend on the natural resources in the conservation areas for their daily livelihoods.

Savannakhet’s eco-tourism programme contributes to this goal through three closely related objectives.

1. To give foreign visitors the opportunity to visit the country’s National Parks.
2. To provide an alternative source of income to local communities in order to reduce their reliance on the Park’s natural resources.
3. To generate a modest income which is used for park management and conservation activities.

Bookings and payment

Tickets for upcoming trips can be purchased at the Lao-Paris Restaurant (formerly the Four Seasons) on Charoenmuang Road, close to the ferry terminal. Payment for the total cost of the tour is required in advance, for which an official receipt will be issued. If for any reason the tour has to be cancelled, a full refund will be given.

The cost of the five-day trek is $ US 50 per person. This includes travel to and from the National Park by 4-wheel drive vehicle, all food and board, the loan of tents and sleeping bags and a $5 Park entry fee.

The National Park entry fee and any profits from the nature treks go into a special account held at the Provincial Forestry Office and will be used only for conservation and management activities in the Park.

Food

The food provided will be adequate but rather basic due to local availability and the problems of transport. We will try to arrange as balanced and as varied a diet as possible during your nature tour and give you the opportunity to taste as many local dishes as possible. In particular, the many herbs, spices and vegetables found growing naturally in the jungle will be featured in your meals. Bottled drinking water will be provided throughout the tour.

If you have any special dietary requirements, please make sure you let us know beforehand and we will try and cater to your needs.

A typical itinerary

Day prior to departure

- Welcome dinner and orientation briefing.
Day 1
- Meet at Provincial Forestry Office.
- Travel to the National Park (lunch en-route).
- Visit dinosaur footprints (Xe Xangsoy River).
- Arrive at first campsite, dinner in village.

Day 2
- Breakfast in Ban Na Muang
- Jungle trek to Darn Mon.
- Lunch at Darn Mon.
- Return to Ban Na Muang by alternative route.
- Dinner in Ban Na Muang.

Day 3
- Jungle Trek to Ban Nalai.
- Packed lunch in jungle.
- Continue to Ban Nalai and establish camp.
- Dinner in Ban Nalai.

Day 4
- Breakfast in Ban Nalai.
- Jungle trek to Ban Tinh Ngalong.
- Packed lunch in jungle.
- Continue to Tinh Ngalong and establish camp.
- Dinner in Tinh Ngalong.

Day 5
- Breakfast in Ban Tinh Ngalong.
- Depart for Ban Nathong by 4-x 4 vehicle
- Visit Dong Kapo community forestry programme
- Lunch in Palansai
- Arrive in Savannakhet

Onward travel

If you are intending to travel to Vietnam on National Route 9, you will already be half way there by the time you reach the National Park. If you let us know in advance, we can arrange to drop you at a bus stop from where you can continue your journey.

Those returning to Savannakhet can leave excess luggage with us so as to keep what you take on the nature trek to a minimum. Although we will take every precaution, don’t leave anything of high value as we cannot be responsible for any losses.

Personal responsibility

Although crime is virtually non-existent in rural Lao PDR and mishaps while walking in the jungle are rare, accidents can occur. While we will do our utmost to ensure your nature tour is a safe and pleasurable experience, the National Park cannot accept responsibility for any accidents or losses which might occur.

We sincerely hope your nature tourism experience will be enjoyable. To guarantee that you get the most out of it and to ensure your safety and comfort, we suggest that you read carefully and abide by the instructions you will be given by the Park Rangers.

ANNEX 4. PRECAUTIONARY ADVICE FOR TOURISTS
We sincerely hope that your nature tourism experience will be enjoyable. To guarantee that you get the most out of it and to ensure your safety and comfort, we suggest that you follow a few words of advice.

**Use of National Park equipment**

Unless you already have your own, you can borrow the following items (free of charge) for use during your nature tourism expedition:

1. Sleeping bag
2. Freshly laundered sleeping bag liner
3. Tent (normally shared by 2 people)
4. Mosquito net (for use when staying in villages)
5. Water canteen
6. Torch (flashlight)

You will be responsible for these items during your nature tour expedition. Please return them in the same condition as you received them. Unfortunately, we will have to charge you for any loss or damage to them.

**Things to take with you**

Keep what you take with you to a minimum, as you will have to carry your packs while trekking in the jungle. However, even basic items are unavailable or at least extremely limited in the National Park, so you should make sure that you have the following items with you:

1. Soap, toothpaste, shampoo and other toiletries.
2. Towel and bathing wear (especially women).
3. A good supply of insect repellent lotion, cream or spray.
4. Protective sun cream.
5. Candy, chewing gum or cigarettes if you smoke.
6. A pack of cards, other games or a book to pass the long evenings with no electricity.

**Clothing and shoes**

Nature tourism is conducted only in the dry season so you don’t normally need to worry about waterproofs. Heat is the main worry but from November through January it can get very cold, so make sure you have warm clothing with you during this period. Take old but comfortable clothes with you. Strong walking shoes and good socks are essential and flip-flops are useful for eveningwear and bathing.

Shorts and tee shirts are fine for both men and women while walking and trekking during the day, but long pants and a long-sleeved shirt are advisable to keep insects at bay in the evening. You’ll also need a hat or cap to keep off the sun during the day. You might like to bring a small sachet of soap powder with you to wash your clothes after a long day’s walk. We assume you already have a backpack to carry your gear, but if not, let us know and we may be able to lend you one.

**Food**

The food provided will be adequate but rather basic due to local availability and the problems of transport. We will try to arrange as balanced and as varied a diet as possible during your nature tour and give you the opportunity to taste as many local dishes as possible, in particular the many herbs, spices and vegetables found growing naturally in the jungle.

If you have any special dietary requirements, please make sure you let us know beforehand and we will try and cater to your needs.

**Personal hygiene**

Only drink the water provided for your use. Drinking water will be available at all times in the campsites and you will be given a canteen to take with you for use during the day. It is also advisable to use drinking water for cleaning your teeth rather than well or river water.

Bathing facilities are rather basic - either in a river or using water from a village well or bore hole. Water scoops for bathing will be provided but you should wear trunks (for men) and a sarong (for women) while bathing.
Toilets will not be available at all and you will need to find a quiet spot in the forest instead. Toilet paper will be provided throughout the nature tourism expedition.

**Health**

A basic first aid kit is taken on all nature tourism expeditions and we try to have a vehicle standing by as close as possible in case of any more serious health problems or accidents. If any one has any first aid or medical training, we would be grateful if you could make this known to us before the trip. In addition, anyone with any special health problems should let us know prior to departure so that we can give appropriate advice.

Malaria and some other insect borne diseases are prevalent throughout the National Park. Even if you are using prophylactic malarial drugs, the best precaution is not to get bitten. Whenever possible, try and take the following steps to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes:

1. Always use the mosquito net provided when sleeping in a village house and make sure there are no gaps between it and the floor.
2. Make sure the screen on your tent is always closed even during daylight hours.
3. Try and bathe at least one hour before sunset.
4. Wear long pants and a long sleeved shirt in the evenings and/or keep all exposed skin treated with insect repellent.

If you should experience fever, headaches and muscular pains any time after your trip you should immediately seek medical advice.

**Use of drugs**

The use of certain drugs is illegal in the Lao PDR and these must not be used in the National Park. As government officials, the rangers who accompany you on the nature tourism expedition are duty bound to report you to the authorities for the use of any banned substances.

**Left luggage**

As you will be doing a lot of walking, you should try and keep what you take on the nature tourism expedition to a minimum. To help you with this, we can arrange for you to leave excess luggage with us in Savannakhet. Make sure everything is secure and well labelled, but don't leave anything of high value, as we cannot be responsible for any losses.

**Personal responsibility**

Although crime is virtually non-existent in rural Lao PDR and mishaps while walking in the jungle are very rare, accidents can occur. While we will do our utmost to make sure your nature tourism expedition is a safe and pleasurable experience, the National Park cannot accept responsibility for any accidents or losses which might occur.

**Use of nature tourism revenue**

The $5 per head National Park entry fee and any profits from the nature tourism programme go into a special account held at the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office and will be used only for conservation and management activities in the National Park.

**ANNEX 5. TOURIST REGISTRATION FORM**

*Savannahet Nature-Tourism Registration Form*

PXH/DPV National Parks

Date: //

Date of tour: //
Name
Age
Male
Female
Nationality Passport No.
Visa No. Place of issue Date //
Place of stay in Savannakhet Tel.
Travelling from: To:
Occupation:

I hereby agree to the terms and conditions of the nature tourism programme as explained in the advertising brochure.

I agree at all times to abide by the instructions of the Department of Forestry Park Rangers who will accompany the nature tourism expedition and agree to respect the traditions and customs of the villages visited.

I understand that all reasonable precautions have been taken for my comfort and safety and I hereby agree not to hold the Park Authorities responsible for any loss, damage or accidental injury which may occur during the nature tour expedition.

Signed:

---

**ANNEX 6. TOURIST EVALUATION FORM**

**Date of tour:** from // to //

**How did you rate each of the following:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>satisfactory</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The overall nature tour experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel and other arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and packed lunches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation &amp; sleeping arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The helpfulness of the rangers &amp; guides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The natural environment on the treks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The birds and wildlife seen while trekking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The non timber forest products &amp; their uses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of living in Lao villages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Was the trip?**
- too short □
- about right □
- too long □

**Was the cost?**
- too cheap □
- about right □
- too expensive □
How could we improve the nature tourism programme in the future?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Do you have any other suggestions or comments on the nature tourism programme?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

(Please continue overleaf if necessary)

Thank you for completing this form.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

DAFO    District Agriculture and Forestry Office
DFRC    Division of Forest Resource Conservation
DOF     Department of Forestry
DPV     Dong Phu Viang [NBCA]
GPS     Global Positioning System
ICAD    Integrated Conservation and Development
IUCN    International Conservation Union
LSFP    Lao Swedish Forestry Programme
MAF     Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
NBCA    National Biodiversity Conservation Area
NTA     National Tourism Authority
NTFP    Non Timber Forest Product
PA      Protected Area
PAFO    Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PFO     Provincial Forestry Office
PXH     Phu Xang He [NBCA]
RECOFT  Regional Centre of Forestry Training
UNESCO  United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNV     United Nations Volunteer [Programme]
UXO     Unexploded Ordinance
VFV     Village Forestry Volunteer