



Lao People's
Democratic Republic

**Hin Nam No
National Park**
Lao PDR

www.hinnamno.org
invest@parkslaos.org



Xe Bang Fai Cave entrance at Nong Ping | credit: giz

Tourism Investment Opportunities

Highlights

Xe Bang Fai Cave & Nong Ping

- Zone 1: Lodging & Restaurants
- Zone 2: Rock Climbing
- Zone 4b: Kayaking Expeditions

2025

ISSUED:
June 2025

SITE VISIT:
Contact for a site visit

NOTIFICATION OF INTENT DUE:
First come, first serve

PROPOSALS DUE:
60 days after receiving initial approval to move forward (see p14)



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Foreword



The Lao People's Democratic Republic is developing nature-based tourism (NBT) as one of the cornerstone's of its 5-Year National Socio-Economic Plan and 2030 National Green Growth Strategy (NGGS). With an amazing wealth of natural capital, Laos' comparative advantage in NBT is a reflection of its expansive protected area network, which covers roughly 20% of the country's total land mass. The Lao protected area system is extremely important for protecting endangered wildlife species, including endemic species of the Annamite Mountain range--a global biodiversity hotspot. It is also home to a diverse group of ethnic people, whose history, culture and religious traditions are intertwined with nature.

Laos has been gaining significant popularity as an international and regional destination for NBT, adventure tourism, ecotourism, and community-based tourism. Tourism has the potential to become Laos' top export and revenue earner, but this will require strong and responsible private sector investment and cooperation. With the right investment, tourism in protected areas has the potential to be positive force for lasting economic growth, local employment, and sustainable conservation financing. The Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods Project is working towards promoting inclusive private sector investment to leverage Laos' natural assets for sustainable tourism growth that benefits investors, local people, and conservation.

Hin Nam No National Park is set to become Laos' first natural UNESCO World Heritage site, forming the world's largest contiguous limestone karst landscapes with Phong Nha Ke Bang in Vietnam. The park is seeking investors interested in working together with ethnic communities to develop, market and manage the park's many nature-based tourism attractions, including the Xe Bang Fai Cave--a truly spectacular 6.5km river cave. Entrepreneurs with a love for nature and long-term vision for ecotourism should apply.



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Associate Professor Dr. Somvang Phimmavong
Director General, Department of Forestry, Lao PDR



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Tourism Potential

“The Loop” to Hin Nam No

- Hin Nam No is part of the “The Loop”, a motorbike route in Khammouane Province that starts in Thakek and links caves, zip lines, waterfalls cultural villages and other attractions.
- Visitors to the park stay overnight in Nong Ping Village at the main entry point to the Xe Bang Fai Cave at a campsite managed by the women’s group, or in guesthouses in Boualapha Town..
- Community-managed boat tours into the Xe Bang Fai Cave are organised in Nong Ping Village, Kayaking tours through the entire cave are organized by Green Discovery.
- Hin Nam No is located along the the historic Ho Chi Minh Trail, which begins near the Vietnam-Lao border on Route 12 at the Mu Gia Pass and continues south to Savannakhet Province.
- Hin Nam No is also the gateway to Khoun Xe Nong Ma National Protected Area, one of the most important areas for Annamite species.
- Although annual visitors to Hin Nam No have been increasing, numbers remain relatively low, .
- Many of the park’s attractions remain undeveloped, with no tour services available for most attractions and only very basic services.



Hin Nam No landscape | credit: P. Eshoo



Boualapha Town crossing | credit: P. Eshoo



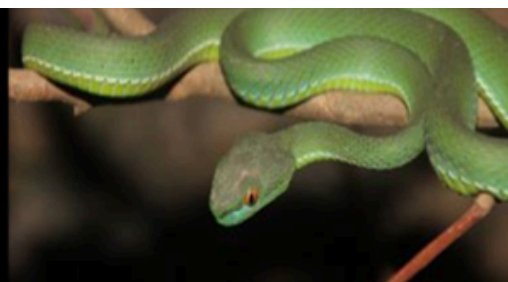
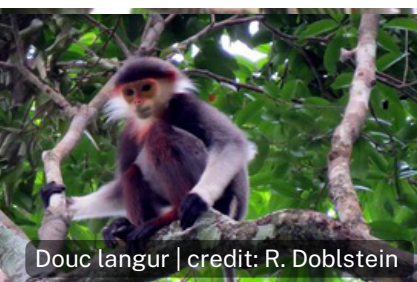
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Key Attractions



Hin Nam No National Park - Laos' first nominated natural World Heritage Site

- The Xe Bang Fai Cave is highly regarded for having one of the largest active river cave passages in the world (6.5-kilometer) and one of the largest single gour pools (approximately 200 feet long).
- There are many other caves in the park that can be visited, many of which were used as shelters from bombing during the Secret War, including Tham Nam Awk Cave, Tham Nok Aen Cave, and Tham Pak Tham Cave.
- The park is situated where the Central Indochina Limestone meets the Annamite Mountains within the Northern Annamites Rain Forest Ecoregion, one of the Global 200 Ecoregions — crucial to the conservation of endemic species.
- With the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in Vietnam, the area forms one of the world's largest karst regions, and has been nominated by the Lao government to become Laos' first natural UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Hin Nam No has a rich ethnic diversity, including Makong, Tri, Yoy, Phoutai, Kaleung, Vietic, and Salang (also known as Kris) peoples. The Salang is considered the first of these ethnic groups to have inhabited the Hin Nam No area and are characterized as traditionally having no permanent houses and subsisting on a diet on wild food..



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Markets & Accessibility

Key Markets

- FITs/small group touring The Loop by motorbike, bicycle or car. including tours to the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- Thai visitors & motorbikers from Nakhon Phanom.
- Vietnamese FITs/groups adventurers & history buffs.
- Add-on to Rock Viewpoint, Green Climbers, Kong Lor.
- Travelers heading to Southern Laos:

Visitor Statistics

Year	Domestic	International
2018	605	633
2019	337	328
2020	n/a	n/a
2021	2,338	85
2022	4,670	52
2023	1,182	413

Accessibility

Getting to Nong Ping Village, Hin Nam No:

- **Thakek, Laos:** 3.5-hour drive (145km). **Option:** Boating on the Xe Bang Fai River (1-2 hours) from Pak Phanang Village to Nong Ping
- **Vientiane, Laos:** Fly to Savannakhet (1 hour) + 5-hour drive (192km) OR 8-hour drive (445km)
- **Nakhon Phanom Airport, Thailand:** Fly from Bangkok - 1 hour + 5 hours (185km) overland.
- **Dong Hoi Airport, Quang Binh, Viet Nam:** Flights from Saigon and Hanoi + 4 hours (150km) to Na Phao border + 2 hours (68km) overland from border on all-weather road.

Camping at the Xe Bang Fai | credit: giz



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Investment Opportunities



Featured Opportunities

There are three featured tourism investment opportunities based on park and stakeholder input:

Xe Bang Fai Cave & Nong Ping

- Zone 1: Lodging & Restaurants
- Zone 2: Rock Climbing
- Zone 4b: Kayaking Expeditions

Other Opportunities: Investors are free to propose other activities or areas inside or around the park that have high potential and follow park regulations and guidelines.

Xe Bang Fai Cave entrance | credit: giz



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Lodge & Restaurant

Xe Bang Fai Cave - Zone 1

Nong Ping Village, Boualapha District, Khammouane Province
Buffer Zone of Hin Nam No



Rice field view in Zone 1 | credit: P. Eshoo



Pak Phanang to Nong Ping on the Xe Bang Fai | credit: P. Eshoo

The Opportunity

According to the Nong Ping-Xe Bang Fai Cave Tourism Master Plan, Zone 1 is allocated for tourism businesses, including private lodging, restaurants, handicraft shops and other tourism services. Currently, there is only one guesthouse in this zone, which is currently closed and was managed by the community. Private sector investors are invited to develop environmentally friendly lodging, restaurants and other services in Zone 1 that employ local people.

Unique Selling Points

- Near main entrance to the Xe Bang Fai Cave..
- A unique opportunity to open the first private lodge.
- Beautiful karst mountains and river views.
- Can market tours to the Xe Bang Fai Cave and Hin Nam No.
- Multi-ethnic cultural attractions of the village.

Investment Needs

- Accommodation (international investors must invest in 4- or 5-star accommodation according to tourism regulations).
- Restaurant or cafe serving international & local food
- Boating and caving activities with village boat association
- Rock climbing and nature walks with village guides.
- Tours to other caves and attractions around Hin Nam No.
- Waste Management facility to support investment.

Accessibility

- The cave is closed in the rainy season.
- Year-round accessibility on paved road from Boualapha.
- Alternative scenic boat ride from Pak Panang (1-2 hours).

Partner Communities

- Nong Ping Village (Makong, Salang, Ngouan and Lao Loum)
- Pak Panang Village (Vietic ethnic group)



Rock Climbing

Xe Bang Fai Cave (Zone 2)

Nong Ping Village, Boualapha District, Khammouane Province
Controlled Use Zone of Hin Nam No

The Opportunity

According to the Nong Ping-Xe Bang Fai Cave Tourism Master Plan, Zone 2 is set aside for low visitor management, including a visitor center, ticket office, parking lot, campsite with bungalows, one restaurant, and nature trails. Currently in Zone 2, the village women's group manages the campsite, bungalows and restaurant, and the village boat group manages the small visitor center, ticket office and parking lot. An experienced private sector partner is desired for developing rock climbing activities outside the cave.

Unique Selling Points

- Excellent karst walls for rock climbing.
- Can market rock climbing to existing visitor flow to cave.
- Suitable climbing routes surveyed and identified already.
- Rare primates can be seen from rock climbing area.
- Combine climbing with cave tours and nature walks.
- Market climbing and campsite tours with women's group.

Investment Needs

- Rock climbing infrastructure, equipment, and training for local guides.
- Joint marketing of climbing, campsite, cave and crafts.
- Construct cultural meeting hall to host groups.
- Electric vehicle transportation for Zone 2.
- Improved recycling and waste management in Zone 2

Accessibility

- The cave is closed in the rainy season.
- Year-round accessibility on paved road from Boualapha.
- Alternative scenic boat ride from Pak Panang (1-2 hours).

Partner Communities

- Nong Ping Village (Makong, Salang, Ngouan and Lao Loum)
- Pak Panang Village (Vietic ethnic group)



Karst area with rock climbing potential | credit: giz



Rock climbing survey at Nong Ping | credit: giz



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Kayaking Expeditions

Xe Bang Fai Cave (Zone 4b)

Nong Ping, Chalu & Laboy Villages, Boualapha District, Khammouane Province
Totally Protected & Controlled Use Zones of Hin Nam No



Kayaking inside the Xe Bang Fai | credit: giz



Giant gour pools of the Xe Bang Fai | credit: giz

The Opportunity

According to the Xe Bang Fai Cave Tourism Management Plan, Zone 4b is accessible only by kayak due to safety and conservation concerns and allows for specialist, limited low impact kayaking tours and expeditions only. Currently, kayaking tours are organized periodically by a licensed tour operator. A private sector investor is sought to develop high-end kayaking tours (similar to Son Doong Cave in Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park, Vietnam) in partnership with the communities on both sides of the cave .

Unique Selling Points

- World class, untouched cave on par with Son Doong Cave, Phong Nha Ke Bang..
- Multi-day tour itineraries can be marketed to mid- and high-end small groups and FITs.
- Cultural attractions of remote host villages of Chalu and Laboy (Tri and Makong ethnicities) and Nong Ping village (Makong, Salang, Ngouan, and Lao Loum ethnicities)..

Investment Needs

- Low impact, small-group multi-day kayaking expeditions (similar to Oxalis' Son Doong Cave program) in the Xe Bang Fai Cave starting in Chalu or Laboy village.
- Construct low-impact campsite(s) near Chalu. and Laboy.
- Equipment for kayaking, caving, and camping.
- Train local guides on interpretation, caving and kayaking..
- Waste Management system.

Accessibility

- Road to Nong Ping Village is paved. Dirt road to Chalu and Laboy villages is inaccessible during the rainy season. Project funds may be available for road improvements.
- No motorized boats allowed in Zone 4b. Kayaking only.

Partner Communities

- Nong Ping Village (Makong, Salang, Ngouan and Lao Loum)
- Chalu and Laboy villages (Makong and Tri ethnic groups)



Other Areas

There are many other areas with tourism potential in Hin Nam No, which investors may also consider:

- Thong Xam area caves (Tham Nam Awk Cave, Tham Nok Aen, and Tham Pak Tham) and trekking on the Houay Hok Trail
- Nong Seng area primates and trekking
- Ho Chi Minh Trail historical sites including sites at Vang Khone and Nong Khoum villages
- Phou Khao Nok-Phou Louang National Protection Forest, which forms the buffer zone and has potential for trekking and camping.
- Song Su Waterfall (Nong Bua Village)
- Xieng Lue Waterfall (Gnaved Village)
- Boat tours along the Xe Bang Fai River from Pak Phanang to Nong Ping Village and the Xe Bang Fai Cave entrance
- Other caves around Nong Ping Village including Tham Pong, Tham Phaleusi, and Tham Kouan Kouay
- Mouang Soum Village Waterfall

Investors are also welcome to propose for investment and development other attractions in Hin Nam No not listed in this manual.



Village guide | credit: giz



Tham Nam Awk Cave | credit: J. Johnston



Zoning & Guidelines

for Environmental & Socially Responsible Investment

Zoning

- For investments inside the **Totally Protected Zone (TPZ)**, no permanent infrastructure is allowed. Only campsites, trails, walkways, and viewing platforms are allowed.
- For investments inside the **Controlled Use Zone (CUZ)**, no large infrastructure (e.g., hotels, resorts) is allowed. Only low-impact infrastructure such as ecolodges, community guesthouses, and semi-permanent tented camps are allowed.
- For investments in the **buffer zone**, other tourism infrastructure types are allowed, including hotels and resorts.
- All investments must follow the Nong Ping-Xe Bang Fai Cave zoning plan, with private accommodations and restaurants allowed in Zone 1 only. All materials used for infrastructure inside the park must be reviewed by the park in advance to ensure that no prohibited wood or other materials are used. For more information, please contact park administration.

Sustainable Capacity

- The capacity of any tour area will depend on the sensitivity of the area, zoning and other factors.
- For trekking and camping tours inside the totally protected zone groups should be limited (example: one group per area per day with approximately 10 visitors per group plus guides). Actual limits will be mutually agreed with the investor based to an impact assessment and needs of the investor.
- Investment proposals should provide details on the capacity requirements of the tour, and proposed facilities, balancing impact management, tour experience, and sustainable benefit sharing for all partners.

Environmental Guidelines

- For tours inside the TPZ, strict waste management procedures are required. All waste must be carried out, and no burning or burying waste allowed. For facilities in the CUZ and buffer zone, waste must be managed according to district waste management regulations, with maximum effort to reduce overall waste.
- Investment proposals that do not propose large infrastructure are not required to conduct a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) but must pass an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) according to MONRE regulations. Proposals for lodging and larger infrastructure may be required to conduct an EIA.
- All investments must be designed to limit impacts on the environment, landscape, water resources, and biodiversity. Designs should demonstrate that potential impacts have been addressed.
- Infrastructure and tours should also ensure no loud noises or disturbances in natural areas or villages.

Social Guidelines (Community Participation)

- Communities must be partners in developing and managing the investment.
- Communities must be consulted during the proposal and negotiation process
- Villagers must be trained and hired by the investor as local guides, cooks, camp managers, lodge or resort staff, etc.



Matching Grants

The Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods Project supports the Nature-based Tourism Business Leveraging Facility (BLF), which has matching funds available to support investments in tourism concessions and tour service management partnerships. Prospective investors can apply for matching funds as needed. The facility has three types of financing available:

- **Planning and feasibility work** (No matching required from the applicant): which will have no minimum amount per selected application, no matching required and a maximum contribution of US\$2,500 to support surveys, consultations with communities and other field work required for preparation of proposals. Such funds will account for no more than 10 percent of the total funds available.
- **Challenge Funds:** These will target investment in particular areas or for more specific investments, typically to attracting concession investments or public private partnerships identified by the project as high priorities. Maximum contribution of US\$200,000 per challenge to support investments of US\$400,000 or more. Such funds will account for roughly 50 percent of the total matching grants (approximately 9 challenge grants).
- **Matching funds for MSMEs:** For product development and marketing work for businesses located in and around the project protected areas of up to US\$20,000 per application and a maximum of 2 applications per MSME. This type of funding will account for no more than 50 percent of the total matching grants (approximately 90 MSMEs). Businesses selected for challenge grants can recommend financing for its partner MSMEs in order to develop NBT value-chains. The following matching requirements can include in-kind contributions. Matching requirement will be as follows:

Type of work	Project funds up to:	Applicant will contribute:
Construction of new facilities / buildings	50%	50% (can include in-kind contributions of materials and labor)
Upgrade existing facilities and equipment	70%	30% (can include in-kind contributions of materials and labor)
Training	90%	10% (can include in-kind contributions of accommodation/food/travel for trainers and trainees)
Development of new or improved activities, attractions and tours (including upgrade to boats)	70%	30%
New or improved websites, brochures, marketing campaigns, marketing materials / advertising	90%	10% (can include in-kind contributions of accommodation, food and travel)



Terms & Conditions

Agreement types	• For large investments that include significant infrastructure investments, concessions agreements are encouraged, which can be made for up to 30 years according to Investment Promotion Law. • For smaller investments that have only small-scale infrastructure, Cooperation Agreements with partner communities and the protected area authority are allowed, which can be made for up to 20 years.
Maintenance & Conservation Fees	• The company is responsible for all maintenance costs of facilities, trails and other infrastructure or equipment used to manage and operate their tour services. • Entry fees per visitor must be paid in addition to negotiated annual concession or cooperation agreement fees, unless otherwise specified in the agreement.
Taxes & Other Fees	• Relevant taxes including 10% VAT are required according to VAT and other tax laws. • Labour Law must be followed, including the payment of Labour taxes and fees. • Investments in remote areas (Zone 1) are entitled to a profit tax exemption for up to 10 years.

Camping along the Xe Bang Fai | credit: giz



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Proposal Instructions & Process

According to the Regulation on Tourism in Forest Areas, No / xx/xx2025 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry steps for cooperative agreements are as follows:

1

Send Letter of Intent

Send a letter of intent to Tourism Unit, National Protected Area Management Division, Lao Department of Forestry, email: invest@parkslaos.gov.la.

2

Fill Out Forms: Fill out attached application forms

- Application form (form #1) that includes technical and financial proposal (email: invest@parkslaos.gov.la)
- Business Registration and Tax ID
- Company description and CVs of owner, manager and experts
- Please submit your application to the Tourism Unit, National Protected Area Management Division (PAMD) by email to invest@parkslaos.gov.la or in hard copy directly to the PAMD office. Your documents will be stamped and you will receive a receipt slip.

3

Evaluation of Proposals

- Proposals will reviewed by relevant departments and evaluated using the application Evaluation Form (form #2).
- Within 10 working days, you will receive a response on the initial proposal evaluation.

4

Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

- Ecotourism experience (company profile & expert staff) – 20%
- Business vision, marketing strategy and itineraries/packages – 20%
- How local people will be involved – 20%
- Support for Conservation – 20%
- Financial Plan & Terms & Conditions - 20%

5

Village Consultations, Site Visit and IEE

If the proposal is agreed to in principle, a site visit, village consultations, and initial environmental examination (IEE) will be scheduled and must be completed in 60 days.

6

Final Approval & Contracting

- Final approval will be announced 10 working days after receiving the final proposal,
- Contracting will follow a standardized form (form #4).

Footpath from Nong Ping to the Xe Bang Fai Cave | credit: P. Eshoo



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Xe Bang Fai Cave | credit: giz



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