

Stopover in Savannakhet reveals 'land link' province

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The first caravan of tourists crossing the newly-opened Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge during the official opening ceremony signaled a new influx of tourists to Savannakhet province.

The bridge is part of the country's move from being landlocked to land-linked, as the gateway to the east-west economic corridor.

Savannakhet province will become a common stopover for tourists and, to promote the tourism industry, the local tourism office is planning to build more facilities to serve them.

"The government has agreed to let investors build four and five-star hotels in the province," said the Chief of the Tourism Office, Ms Bounmy Khantivong.

Savan-Vegas, one of the largest hotels and Casinos in Laos, is expected to be completed in the next three years, while a four-star hotel will be built on the banks of the Mekong in town, according to the office.

The province currently has eight hotels and more than 60 guesthouses with almost 2,000 rooms. When the two big hotels are complete, the province will have enough accommodation for the inevitable influx of tourists travelling through the province as a result of the new bridge, Ms Bounmy said.

The authority is also working on improving the quality of hospitality staff throughout the area.

At first glance, Savannakhet province doesn't seem to have as many tourist attractions as elsewhere, but according to Ms Bounmy this is not in fact the case.

Many historical and natural attractions have been developed for tourists, especially those located along road No 9. There are about 24 tourism sites and three national conservation areas in the province, and other sites are being surveyed for further development, she explained.

According to the office, Kaysone district itself is among the interesting areas.

Fine French architecture bears testimony to the importance of Savannakhet during the colonial era. Dinosaur fossils were discovered in 1930 and are housed in the Dinosaur Exhibition Hall in the provincial capital.

Vat Sayaphoum is one of several historic temples in the old city. The site dates back to around the time of *Bane Tha Hae* or *Nakham* in 1542, although the modern temple architecture reflects early 20 century renovations.

In the centre of the Savannakhet city, on the banks of the Mekong river, this temple is the site of the local Lao New Year ceremonies, the boat-racing festival marking the end of Buddhist Lent and

an ancient, Hindu temple, that now lies in scenic ruins 66 km south of Savannakhet city on road 13. The site was constructed by ancient Khmer inhabitants of the area, with a design similar to Vat Phou Champassak, and Buddhist statuary inside.

This ancient temple is located in Dongdokmay village, Xayphouthong district.

Some sources claim the origins of the site are as early as the 6th century. Annual rites are celebrated at the sacred site on the full moon of March, following the Vat Phou festival.

While in the province, tourists can see animals millions of years old at the province's Dinosaur Exhibition Hall, situated half a kilometre north of Vat Xayaphoum.

This is where Dinosaur fossils are displayed, showing off the gigantic lizards' bones



French colonial architecture in Kaysone Phomvihane town.

also serves as a high school for monks.

That Inghang is another sacred site in Laos, 12 km east of Savannakhet city.

There is a local fable that the Buddha rested here under a tree, visiting a fabled, ancient kingdom in the 6th century B.C. However, the earliest temple remains here date from the 16th century, attributed to King Phothisarath, and most of the architecture that is visible dates from the 19th century.

The *Heuan Hin*, or so called 'stone house', is actually

that were excavated from Tangvai village, Xonboury, and other artifacts discovered across Savannakhet. This is a suitable place for study, research and informal learning about the ancient world.

Hotay Pidok Library in Nong Lamchan village, 70 km to the south of Savannakhet city, is a classical wooden structure on pillars, used to house palm-leaf manuscripts. It was built about 200 years ago, and still preserves manuscripts in the ancient languages and scripts of Laos: *Lao-Tham*, *Khorm* and



The 300 year old Hotay Pidok Library in Nong Lamchan village, Savannakhet.

classical Lao.

There are about 361 stories preserved in nearly 4,000 hand-bound volumes. This is a sacred place for Lao literary heritage.

The That Nang Lao stupa is a 13 metre high religious structure, built in the memory of a servant girl (named Nang Lao) who cared for the last king to rule all of *Lane Xang Kingdom* from Vientiane.

The site was abandoned for more than 300 years, and villagers associate it with black magic.

Dong Na Tat is one of three conservation areas, where tourists can visit the That Ing

Hang Stupa, called the spiritual Soul of Savannakhet, before enjoying a gentle trek through the towering forests.

Tourists can also take a challenging five-day trek to the misty mountains where elephants still work the fields in the cradle of Phuthai civilisation. A mixture of camping in the wilderness and staying with local communities gives tourists the chance to learn more about local lifestyles, to meet local people and get closer to the nature.

A three day trip to Dong Phou Vieng conservation area will lead visitors into the heart of the Katang ethnic group's

culture, in their scenic jungle home.

Highlights include moderately challenging trekking through jungles, woodlands and rocky outcrops, along with boat riding and relaxing on white sand riverbanks.

Ms Bounmy explained that, at the moment, the tourism authorities are trying to promote ecotourism through local community participation, with a view to reducing poverty.

Ecotourism is popular among foreign trekkers, and the number of tourists increases each year, she said.

JOB VACANCY District Administrator/Field Assistant

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) is an international NGO working to save lives and build futures in communities affected by landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). Due to continued growth we are looking for a **District Administrator/Field Assistant** to work in our District office in Lang Khan, Boulapha District.

The District Administrator/Field Assistant will report to the Technical Field Manager and will be responsible for supporting UXO clearance teams to ensure that MAG Lao policies and procedures are followed and field operations are supported in a timely and appropriate manner.

Main duties and Responsibilities:

- Government liaison;
- Local procurement and ensure MAG Lao policies and procedures are followed;
- Maintain administrative and HR filing systems;
- Provide logistical support to UXO clearance teams;
- Store management and maintain inventory;
- Assist in checking and monitoring expenditure.

Qualifications and Experience

- Diploma in Public/Business Administration or other related field;
- Understanding of development and NGO work in the Lao PDR;
- Good computing skills, being able to use Words, Excel, Outlook Express and Internet;
- Good planning, problem solving, communication and reporting skills;
- Good understanding of local government, polices and practices;
- Excellent written and spoken Lao;
- Ability to work in cross cultural environment;
- Willing to live in remote location.

MAG Lao offers a professional work environment, a competitive monthly salary and benefits, and opportunities for training and promotion through our professional development policy.

All interested applicants should submit an application letter, CV and work references to MAG Vientiane.

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Closing date for application: 15 January 2007. Only short listed candidates will be contacted.



Tourists enjoy their lunch at Dong Na Tat conservation area.