



HIN NAM NO National Protected Area

Tourism Strategy
2015-2020



implemented by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH





Acknowledgements

The Hin Nam No National Protected Area Tourism Strategy 2015-2020 has been prepared by TRC Tourism Ltd.

TRC Tourism would like to thank the Hin Nam No NPA Bualapha district team, the GIZ team, Government officers and the villagers in the Hin Nam No area for their assistance and support for this project.

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Part A. Introduction and Context

INTRODUCTION

With growing interest in Hin Nam No as a tourism destination and recognition of the opportunities it offers for local villages to benefit from tourism, this Tourism Strategy for Hin Nam No proposes a way forward to create a sustainable tourism industry that complements the long term protection of the natural values and local culture of the region.

The strategy recognises that Hin Nam No National Protected Area lies within a broader region with villages located outside the park seeking to benefit from the assets of the park. The strategy recognises the aspiration for the protected area to become World Heritage and, as such, proposes tourism opportunities that are consistent with this aspiration and build on the special values of the park as a point of difference from the many other natural areas in the region and the country.

Co-Management of the park with local communities is a strength that offers significant opportunities for tourism and for conservation and the strategy identifies ways that villages can benefit from the linkages between tourism and conservation.

This strategy is not an exhaustive list of everything that should be done in terms of tourism in the park. It is a strategic approach to implementing a small number of projects that will make a difference in how the park is seen by visitors and how it is better promoted to ensure long term sustainable tourism and economic and social benefits are realised.

HIN NAM NO

The Hin Nam No National Protected Area (HNN NPA) is located in central Laos about 450 km southeast of the capital Vientiane in the Bualapha District, roughly 170 km east of Thakhek in Khammouane province.

The reserve is 88,500 ha in size, and in the east it borders Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park in Vietnam. Together these areas form one of the world's largest karst regions, rich in natural scenery and density of biodiversity, spectacular landscape with limestone formations, caves, with high conservation values. Phong Nha-Ke Bang has been listed as a World Heritage site, and currently the Lao government is proposing Hin Nam No NPA also be included in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

There are more than 8,000 people in 19 villages living around the reserve, and these are mostly ethnic minorities whose living depends on the natural resources in and around Hin Nam No NPA. Each village has traditional links with an identified area within the reserve, and the Co-Management strategy allows for subsistence use of non-timber forest products (NTFP) by villages within their identified areas.

During the Indochina war the Ho Chi Minh trail, used by the North Vietnamese as a supply route, passed into Laos and through some villages near Hin Nam No NPA. Some strategic locations were heavily bombed and these areas are considered the most heavily bombed places in history. The trail route passes near Hin Nam No NPA from Route 12 in the north through the District centre of Bualapha to Routes 9 and 20 to the south.

Hin Nam No NPA is the first National Protected Area in Laos in which local communities are actively involved and co-manage the area's natural resources and environment. The goal of Co-Management is to create economic opportunities for villagers from the conservation of the place. An important component will be delivered through increased opportunities from tourism.

MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

Hin Nam No National Protected Area is managed through a Co-Management arrangement involving villages, village clusters, and District, Provincial and National levels of government.

As a national protected area, the national Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) Forest Resource Management Division has a role in oversight of reserve management. At the provincial level the Forest Resource Management Section of the Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) is responsible and locally the Natural Resources and Water Unit of the District Office (DONRE) is responsible for day-to-day management. There are six local units (Database, Area Management, Research & Patrolling, Outreach, Eco-tourism and Livelihoods).

In the village, there are village ranger teams who are responsible for patrolling their area of the reserve, as well as tourism service groups delivering boat, cave tours, and homestay services. Other groups at the village level include village eco-tourism service groups, NTFP group, and the natural resource management group that identifies local conservation areas such as fish conservation zones.

There is an annual operational plan and this is reviewed at quarterly meetings led by PONRE and implemented by the six units of DONRE working with the village ranger teams.

Park management work involves monitoring and research, patrolling especially in areas subject to timber and other poaching, awareness raising, eco-tourism and livelihood improvement through sustainable use of NTFP.

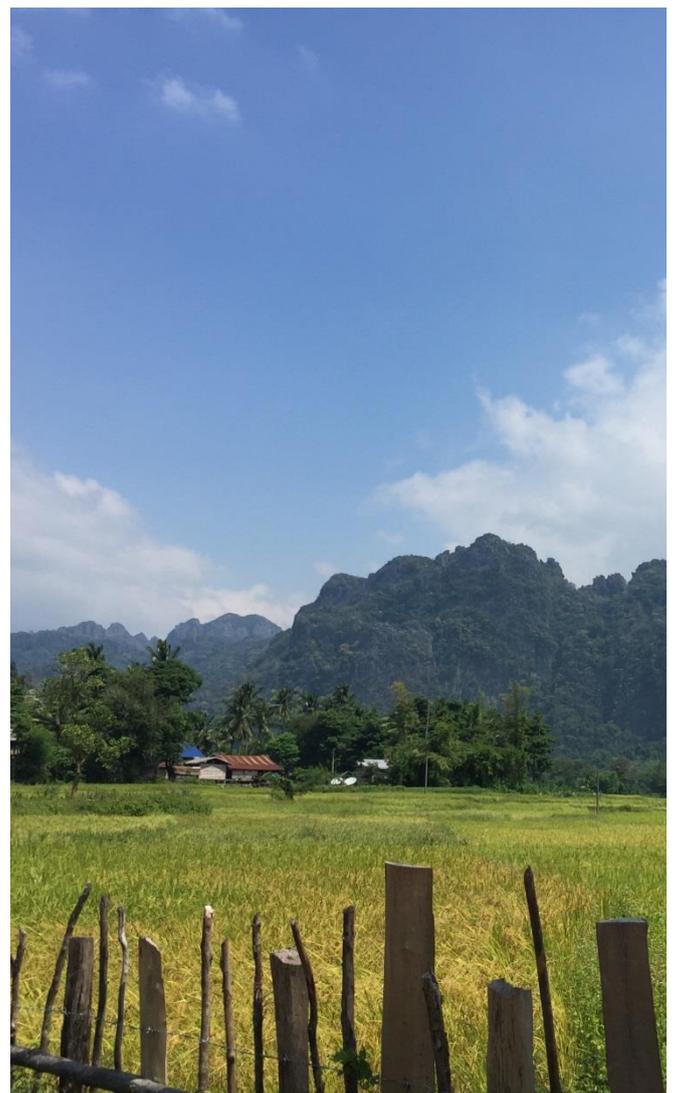
The Co-Management system is implemented through a number of Co-Management committees operating at individual villages, village clusters, and at the District level. The District Co-Management Committee meets every six months and is the main body overseeing the Co-Management arrangements.

Outside the reserve tourism is managed by the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT), which also operates at provincial (PICT) and district (DICT) levels. There are national and provincial tourism strategies.

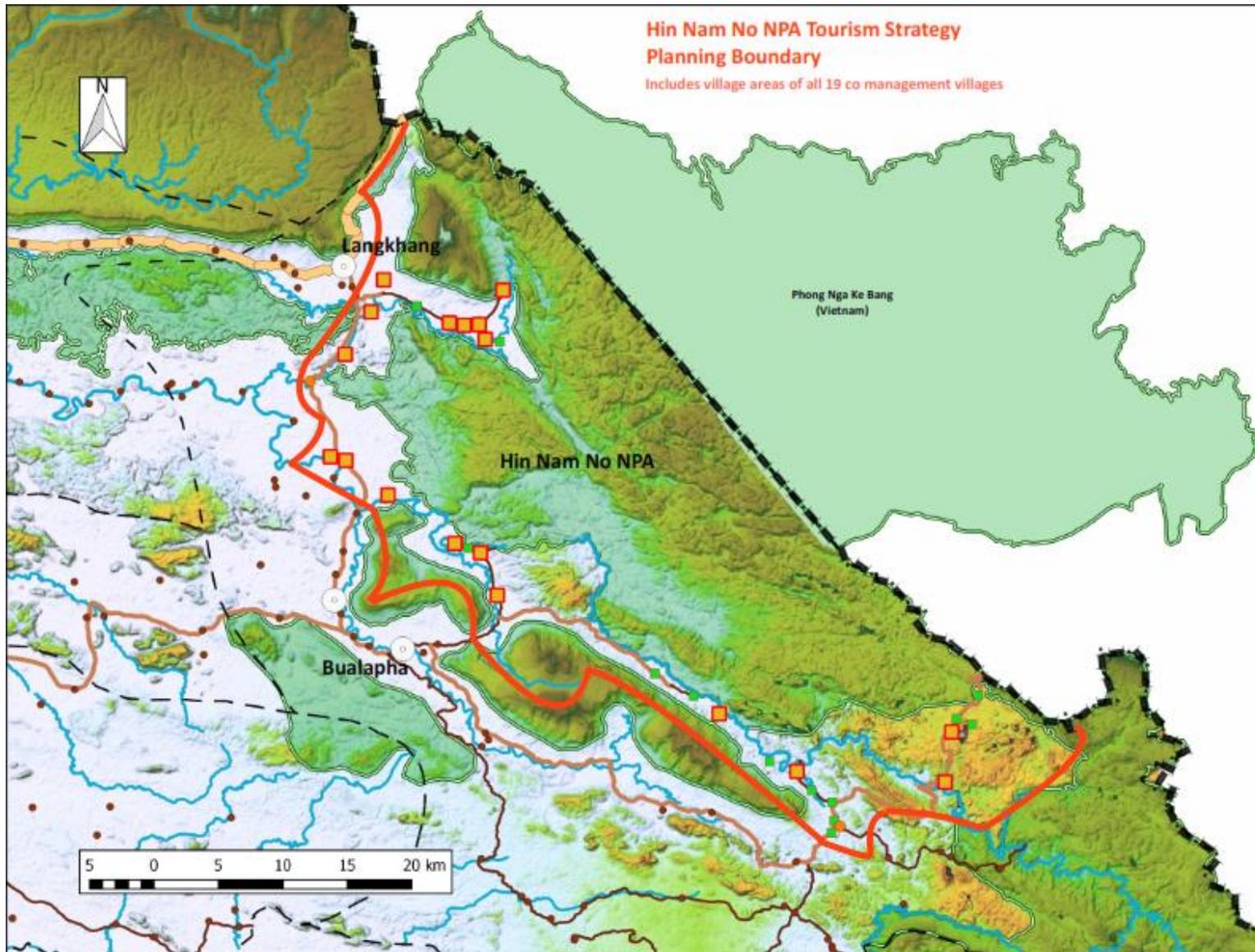
Hi Nam No NPA is a rugged and remote place and because of this most tourism activity and developments will occur outside or on the edges of the protected area.

Therefore most of the actions and developments required to realise the vision of sustainable tourism will occur outside the reserve, and will be delivered by a range of local officials from different agencies, non-government organisations, and villagers, as well as carefully selected private sector operators.

The geographic area covered by this strategy includes all lands within the area of the 19 villages that are part of the Co-Management arrangements. This includes the whole of the reserve as well as land surrounding it as shown in Map 1.



Map 1. Hin Nam No NPA tourism strategy planning boundary



LINKS TO PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Hin Nam No National Protected Area is managed under the *Hin Nam No National Protected Area Co-Management Plan* October 2015. This Plan is intended to cover the period 2016-2020. This updates an earlier plan prepared in 2010 which covered the period to 2015.

This tourism strategy will help realise the overall goal of the Co-Management Plan that *“The Hin Nam No authorities and the villagers together conserve the biodiversity, ecosystem services, tourism and historic/cultural values of the Hin Nam No NPA while being paid and recognised for their services.”*

It will do this by ensuring that local villagers are an integral part of the tourism experience in the reserve and surrounding areas and that they receive the benefits of that tourism activity.

There are three main objectives for Co-Management in Hin Nam No. These are:

1. Protection of the area’s geodiversity and the biodiversity, and natural values, especially the forest, plants and wildlife
2. Promotion of scientific research, as well as cultural and tourism
3. Ensure the sustainable use of natural resources by the villagers.

The tourism strategy is intended to contribute to all of these objectives, however is primarily concerned with objective 2.



Under the Ecotourism Sub-Programme there are four Management Objectives. This strategy contributes directly to realising the following Desired Outcomes under those Objectives as follows:

Management Objective	Desired Outcome
Tourism attracts visitors and provides a reason for the existence of HNN NPA	Market-based tourism product development
	Promote investment by private sector through concessions for small infrastructure development
Tourism assets creates jobs and additional income for villagers living around HNN NPA	Build the capacity of village tourism service groups to provide good service standards and share in the benefits from tourism income
Manage tourism activity to become a source of sustainable funding HNN NPA	Contribution of tourism to conservation and park management
Tourism motivates local people to conserve nature and environment	Maximizing linkages between tourism and conservation by conservation contracts

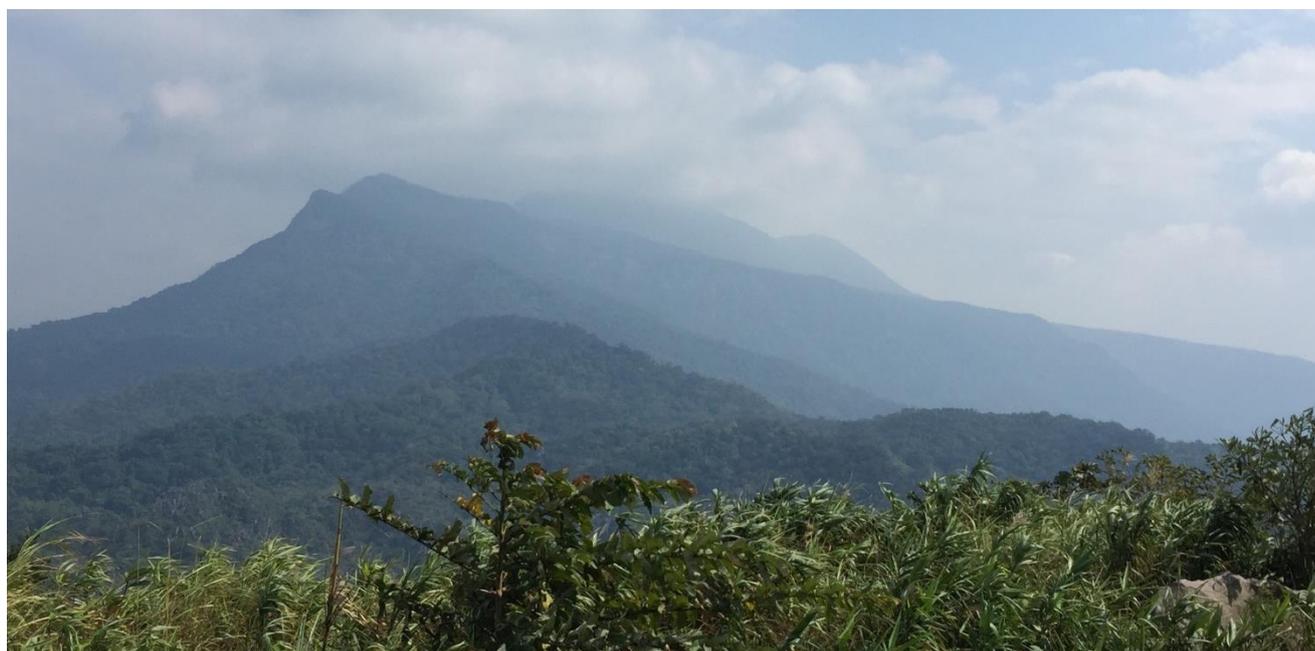
The Plan identifies a number of sites considered attractive or suitable for tourism activities and zones these areas as Tourism Zones. These zones allow for walking and caving activities and minor infrastructure, however there are few areas within the reserve boundary that are suitable for development and therefore most built infrastructure will occur outside and adjacent to the Park on village lands.

The Plan also calls for the preparation of a specific plan for sustainable tourism development. This tourism strategy delivers on that action.

Operational Plans are prepared annually. The following table describes how this strategy contributes to implementing the current operational plan.

Table 1. How the Tourism Strategy contributes to the current operational plan

Outcome	Output	Tourism Strategy role
Tourism attracts visitors and provides a reason for the existence of HNN NPA	Creating an enabling policy environment for tourism in Hin Nam No	Delivers on action to prepare a strategy and sets out priorities for infrastructure development, concessions, and PPP
	Market-based tourism product development (priority tourism sites and products in Hin Nam No NPA)	Sets out a strategic framework for decision making at specific sites
	Promote investment by private sector through concessions for infrastructure development	Provides a strategic framework for involving private sector Sets out a process to proactively identify and market the opportunities
	Tourism destinations in Hin Nam No NPA promoted through national and local medias	Provides a strategic framework for promotion and identifies positioning, key messages and markets
Tourism assets creates jobs and additional income for villagers living around HNN NPA	Capacity building of village tourism service groups and Tourism Working Group	Recommends capacity building activities and identifies a role for private sector in achieving this
Tourism activity become a source of sustainable funding HNN NPA	Institution building and monitoring for equitable benefit sharing	Builds livelihood benefits as an integral part of private sector opportunities Recommends a governance structure for oversight and delivery of strategic projects
Tourism motivates local people to conserve nature and environment	Maximizing linkages between tourism and conservation by conservation contracts	Builds conservation benefits as an integral part of private sector opportunities



LINKS TO NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL TOURISM STRATEGIES

This tourism strategy for Hin Nam No has been developed to be consistent with the national and provincial tourism strategies.

The strategy seeks to implement the relevant priorities of the *Lao PDR Tourism Strategy 2006-2020* by focussing on ecotourism, building capacity in tourism providers, and promoting participatory tourism as a way of contributing to poverty reduction. It promotes tourism along route 12 and in the limestone mountain national protected areas in Khammouane province¹.

This tourism strategy for Hin Nam No also aims to implement the vision of the *Tourism Strategy until 2020 - Development Plan and Tourism Promotion of Khammouane Province 2007*. The vision of the provincial strategy is:

“Khammouane is a wonderful region, gateway to a world of tourism opportunities with many activities to assist in achieving sustainable income, poverty eradication and prosperity for the ethnic population” .

The Hin Nam No Tourism Strategy aims to deliver on all of the relevant activities of the provincial strategy, including in particular:

Program 2 - Tourism development, cooperation and investment promotion	Main Activity 2 - community based tourism
	Main Activity 6 – tourism development in national protected areas
	Main Activity 13 – promote joint ventures involving community and villages
Program 3 - Advertising and tourism marketing promotion	Main Activity 6 - Promote and attract foreign tourists come to stay longer
Program 5 - Construction program and management of facilities infrastructure	Main activity 1: Construction and improvement of large scale infrastructure
	Main activity 2: Construction and improvement of small scale infrastructure
	Main activity 3: Building sustainable infrastructure



¹ p38, Lao PDR Tourism Strategy 2006-2020, <http://www.tourismlaos.org/files/files/Lao%20PDR%20Tourism%20Strategy%202006-2020%20in%20English.pdf>

UNESCO MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

UNESCO has long understood the reasons that make world heritage sites significant are also the reasons why many people wish to visit them. This high demand for access to world heritage sites can compromise the values for which these places were listed.

UNESCO's vision for sustainable tourism in World Heritage sites is that *“World Heritage and tourism stakeholders share responsibility for conservation of our common cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value and for sustainable development through appropriate tourism management.”*²

In 2002 UNESCO produced *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: A Practical Guide for World Heritage Site Managers* in order to provide advice and support to encourage sustainable tourism practices which did not negatively impact on world heritage values.

Hin Nam No NPA is not currently a world heritage site, however the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic has been in discussions with UNESCO for a number of years about its potential inscription on the World Heritage List. Management wish to ensure tourism in and adjacent to the reserve does not compromise the significant values of the place nor the site's potential to be eventually listed.

Hin Nam No NPA is a potential Natural World Heritage site because of its natural landscape, unique geomorphologic formations of limestone karst, and the area's rich biodiversity of wildlife and plants. The reserve covers an area of 88,500 ha; it is home to over 40 mammal species, over 200 bird species, 25 bat species, 46 species of amphibians and reptiles, over 100 fish species, and more than 520 plant species. Many of these species are considered as endangered or vulnerable not only in Lao PDR but also globally.

Hin Nam No NPA could be nominated as a natural property against the following criteria:

Criteria vii: contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.

Criteria viii: be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.

Criteria ix: be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals.

Criteria x: contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation.

UNESCO³ have made a series of recommendations to assist managers ensure tourism does not negatively impact on world heritage values. These include the need to take those values into account when developing tourism policies and strategies, ensuring the site's values are used as the basis for interpretation of the place, and programs to monitor tourism activities and their impacts on world heritage values.

Tourism strategies should identify the type of tourist at the site and the desired market segment for the place. Existing and potential impacts of tourism should be identified and mitigation strategies developed to address these. Stakeholders should be identified and potential issues and benefits of tourism on them should be discussed with them and their views taken into account.

The tourism strategy should have a clear statement of intent, and identify the goal of tourism activity and how this contributes to the management of the place. It should take into account government policy and local tourism strategies, existing patterns of visitation and stakeholder concerns.

The capacity of the site to sustain visitation needs to be assessed, monitored, and action taken where acceptable levels of change are exceeded.

Marketing and promotion of the site needs to be carefully considered so that realistic visitor expectations are developed and the desired market segment is encouraged.

² <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/#strategy>

³ Pederson, A, *Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites: A Practical Guide for World Heritage Site Managers*, UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2002

This Tourism Strategy considers the existing visitor use of the park, and its special Co-Management arrangements to recommend strategies and solutions to address the unique circumstances at Hin Nam No National Protected Area. These strategies are consistent with the intent and practice of the UNESCO guidelines, to protect the special values of the site while realising the benefits to local communities that well managed tourism can bring.

CURRENT TOURISM IN HIN NAM NO

The essence of the Hin Nam No visitor experience has traditionally been to connect with nature. Visitors are able to trek on some established tracks, explore caves and travel the region primarily by motorbikes. Hin Nam No is a remote area with amazing unspoiled limestone scenery where rivers run through caves and rare animals can be seen. Visitors get to travel, eat, drink and stay with local people who lived through the history of the Ho Chi Minh trail during the Indochina war and have many stories to tell. Visitors can learn and join the life of people living directly off the forest, looking after the forest and paying respect to the spirits of nature.

Village groups providing tourism services exist in four villages: Nong Ping, Nong Bua, Nong Saeng and Thongxam. The most successful groups are in Nong Ping, providing access to the Xe Bang Fai cave along the river. This cave is not accessible during the rainy season because of high water levels. Over the last three years, tourism numbers have grown rapidly (see text box). The other three villages in the Langkhang area have just started to receive visitors walking nature trails and visiting the old Ho Chi Minh trail. Due to the poor road conditions, tourists can visit only in the dry season (November-April).

Tourist numbers are low due to the difficult road access to Bualapha district and the lack of tourism facilities. Khammouane province is investing in road construction to ensure all year round paved road access to Bualapha district. The further development of road no 12 via Panam and Langkhang is expected to be completed over the period 2017-2019 and other roads are being progressively upgraded. These roads will allow regular bus services and bring an increase in tourism to the area.

Visitor numbers to Hin Nam No NPA have steadily increased over the last 3 years since consistent data was collected. During the last dry season ending in May 2015, a total 1,743 people visited the park, an increase of 275% over the previous year. Of these visitors most were Lao nationals with only 15% foreigners.

Most (94%) people visited Xe Bangfai cave near Nong Ping village including 75% of the foreigners. The only other area of the park where visitors were recorded was the northern valley accessed off Route 12 at Langkhang.

Part B. Sustainable tourism for Hin Nam No

VISION

In 2025, Hin Nam No National Protected Area will *connect visitors with local communities through sustainable eco-adventure tourism which contributes to conservation and livelihoods.*

In achieving that Vision, Hin Nam No will have a discernible impact on:

- ▶ Visitor contribution: visitors enjoying the park in ways that contribute to village economies and conservation outcomes
- ▶ Public awareness and support: local communities will be active supporters engaging in tourism and conservation partnerships
- ▶ Village empowerment: communities will be integrated throughout the Hin Nam No experiences
- ▶ International visitors: Experience Seekers from overseas will increasingly choose Bualapha District and Khammouane Province over other provinces in Laos
- ▶ Domestic visitors: visitors from Laos and nearby neighbours will be inspired and motivated to visit attracted by the depth and quality of experiences on offer
- ▶ Tourism will make a greater contribution to protected area budgets and conservation funding allocations will increase and visitor facilities and experiences will improve.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In support of this vision the following guiding principles have been developed:

- ▶ Sustainability: tourism contributes positively to sustainability in terms of environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, preservation of culture and economic development
- ▶ Co-Management: tourism contributes to strengthening the Co-Management system, respecting communities rights, involving communities and sharing benefits
- ▶ Good Governance: tourism is implemented according to the principles of good governance: consensus, participation, rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitability and inclusiveness
- ▶ Market-based Approach: Tourism development is focused on market needs and an enabling environment for private sector investments and community partnerships.

Success indicators

- ▶ Tourism attracts visitors and provides a reason for the existence of the NPA
- ▶ Tourism promotion policies are market-driven and support Co-Management
- ▶ Jobs and income from tourism becomes an incentive for conservation by local people
- ▶ Tourism provides a basis for sustainable funding of the NPA management budget
- ▶ Tourism development remains compatible with conservation

OUR VALUES - HOW WE WANT TO DEVELOP AS A DESTINATION

- ▶ We want to be front-of-mind for adventure tourism and for tourists being involved in conservation
- ▶ It is critical that we are known for the right things - conservation, our village communities, Co-Management, environmental ethic
- ▶ We do not want to see inappropriate development wreck our landscape and our future – we want to see the environment improved
- ▶ We want a balanced approach between tourism, lifestyle and conservation
- ▶ We want to retain our lifestyle, our character and our sense of place
- ▶ The whole destination needs to offer high quality, seamless experiences and consistent customer services
- ▶ We need all the village communities to understand the park and its importance and what it offers for visitors and be committed to it.



WHAT MAKES HIN NAM NO UNIQUE?

There are 6 important attributes that combine to make Hin Nam No stand out as a destination.

These are shown in the diagram below.



DESTINATION POSITIONING

The brand essence of Hin Nam No is *a place of discovery*. It provides visitors with the opportunity to find new places, learn local stories, explore different landscapes, be surprised by the flora and fauna, and walk with local villagers protecting their country.

The proposition to *discerning, respectful high yield visitors* is grounded in two main dimensions:

- ▶ an extraordinary landscape and rich biodiversity both above and below ground with such high values that it could become World Heritage listed
- ▶ authentic and culturally rich villages

The brand promise to the market is two fold:

- ▶ conserving local culture through conservation
- ▶ adventure tourism through discovery with traditional custodians.

This describes the experience that is to be delivered to the *target markets* through this strategy. The hero experiences recommended have been identified to deliver on this promise.

THE TARGET MARKETS

Current markets to the region are predominantly:

- ▶ local Lao visitors on day trips to view the cave, have a picnic, swim and socialise with family and friends
- ▶ some overnight Lao visitors that use home stay and guest houses
- ▶ Thai and Vietnamese day and overnight tourists
- ▶ Other foreign tourists travelling in the region and around the 'loop'
- ▶ niche groups such as research and speleological groups
- ▶ some tourists who come on commercial group tours with Green Discovery.

There will always be local day visitors and this is likely to increase with improved road access. The opportunity exists to continue to provide for these existing markets, but position Hin Nam No for a discerning and higher yield market that has the potential to increase the social and economic return to local villages as well as contribute to conservation of the significant natural and cultural values of the protected area.

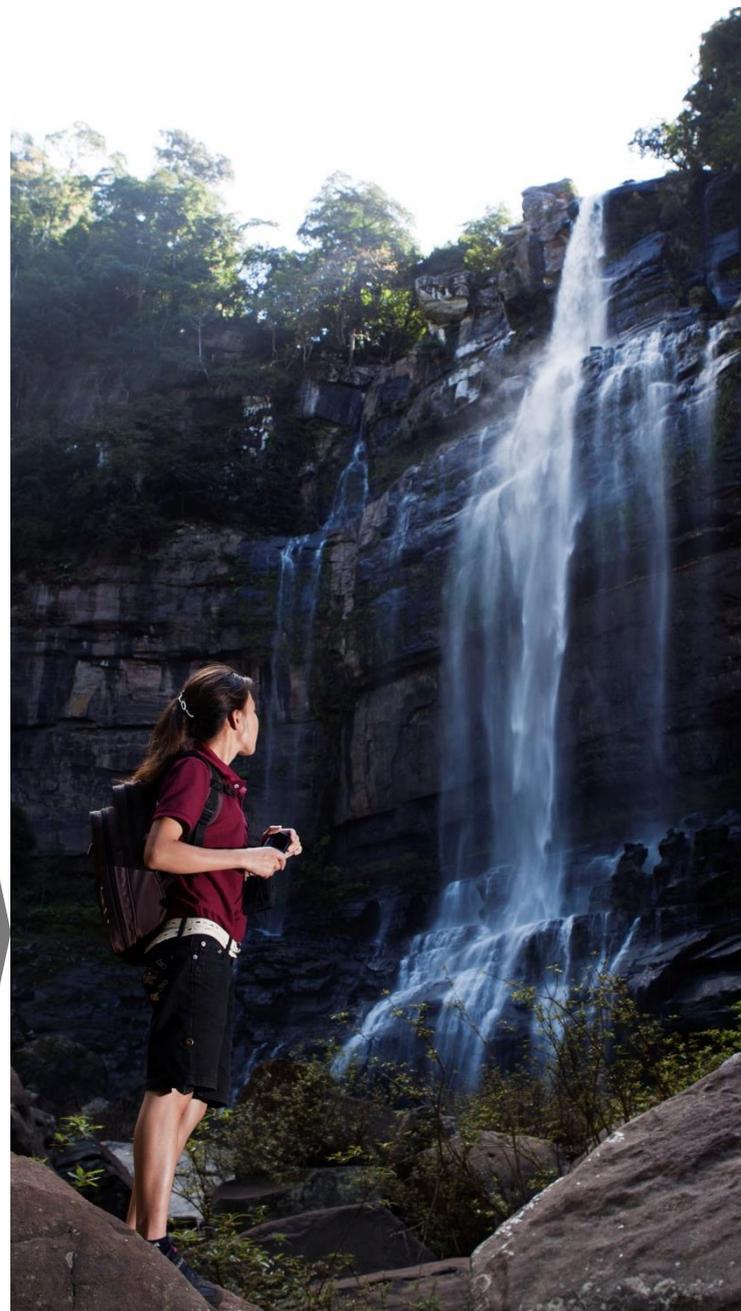
'Experience seekers' are a varied market differing by age, country of origin and spending power, but similar in values, attitudes and motivations. Typically well educated, motivated by opportunities for personal growth, fulfilment and learning, they are discerning about the experiences they are seeking, and passionate about natural and cultural heritage.

Experience seekers are looking for the following in a destination:

- ▶ Authenticity
- ▶ Interaction and immersion in people, culture and places
- ▶ Points of difference
- ▶ Physical and emotional challenges
- ▶ Learning opportunities.

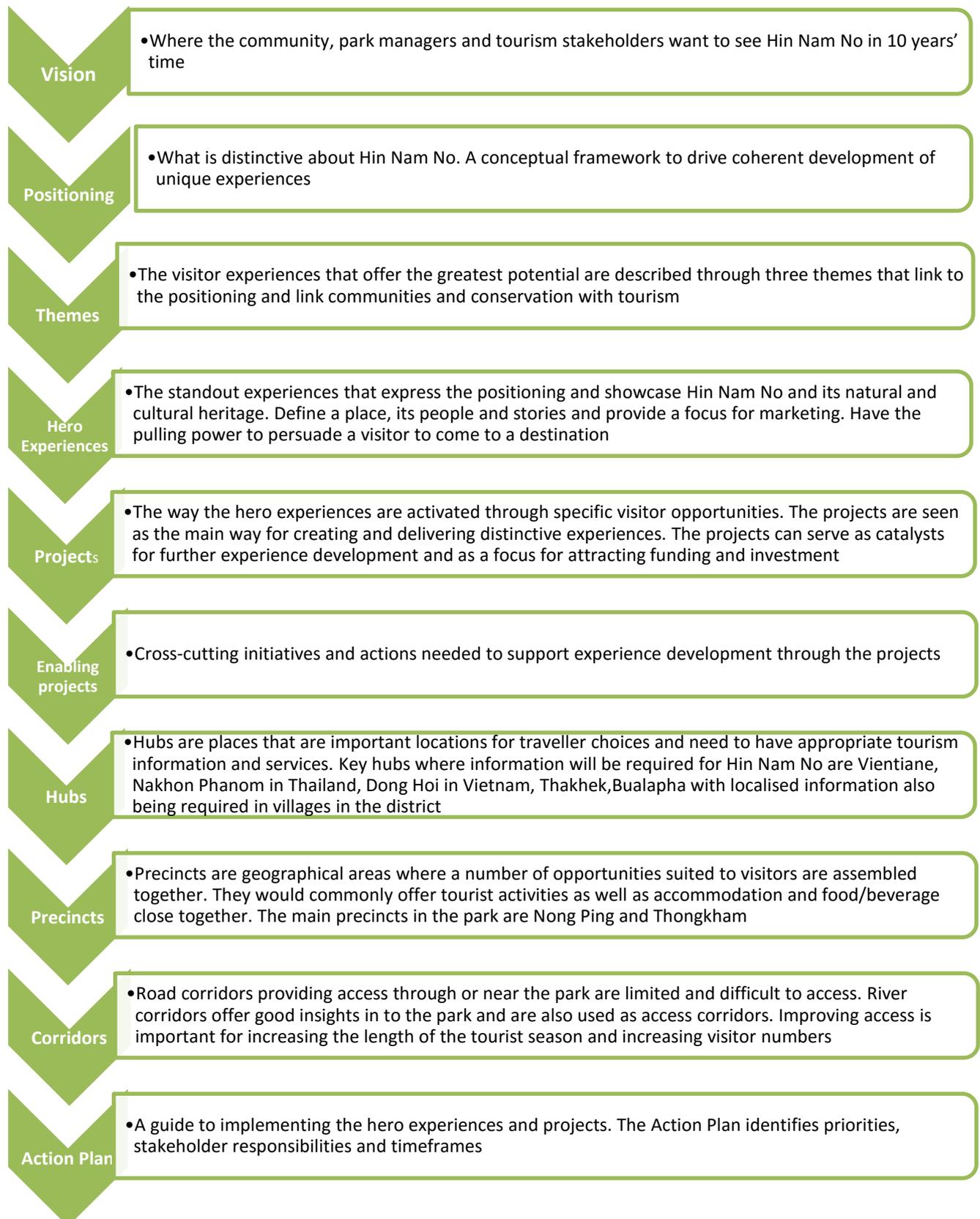
By positioning Hin Nam No in a way that will be attractive to the *Experience Seeker* market, offering a number of distinctive experiences across and around the protected area, and ensuring good quality products and accommodation, growth can be expected in visitors, their length of stay and their spend.

By getting the tourism offering right for this target market, the destination will also be attractive to others.



TOURISM STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The strategy is described in themes, experiences and projects supported by hubs, precincts and corridors.



Themes

The visitor experiences that offer the greatest potential for Hin Nam No are described through three themes. Each of the themes links to the positioning and brand promise and links communities and conservation with tourism.

The first of the themes, *Underground Discovery* links the well-known underground karst of Hin Nam No with an invitation for actively engaging in it. The second, *Conservation through participation*, is about the opportunities that exist to contribute to the long term protection of Hin Nam No and the local culture through relevant experiences in the park and local villages. *Hardship and survival* is about the way of life of the local communities and the history and stories of the war as it affected the people of the region.

Hero experiences

Hero experiences are the standout experiences for a destination that reflect the destination's brand promise and positioning. They help define the place, its people and stories and provide a focus for marketing the region and differentiating it from other destinations. These types of experiences tend to be few in number but rich in quality.

Hero experiences showcase points of difference and help drive conversion – meaning they have the pulling power to make a visitor decide to visit the destination. While several destinations may share features such as karst, wildlife, village life, heritage sites, a hero experience will offer it in a way that is distinctive.

Projects

Projects are proposed to activate each of the hero experiences. These projects have been identified as they offer:

- › A distinctive opportunity for Hin Nam No
- › Linkages with conservation and culture
- › Alignment with the positioning
- › Market appeal to target markets.

Enabling projects are also identified that will address issues across the destination where improvements are required or where projects sit across all themes and experiences.

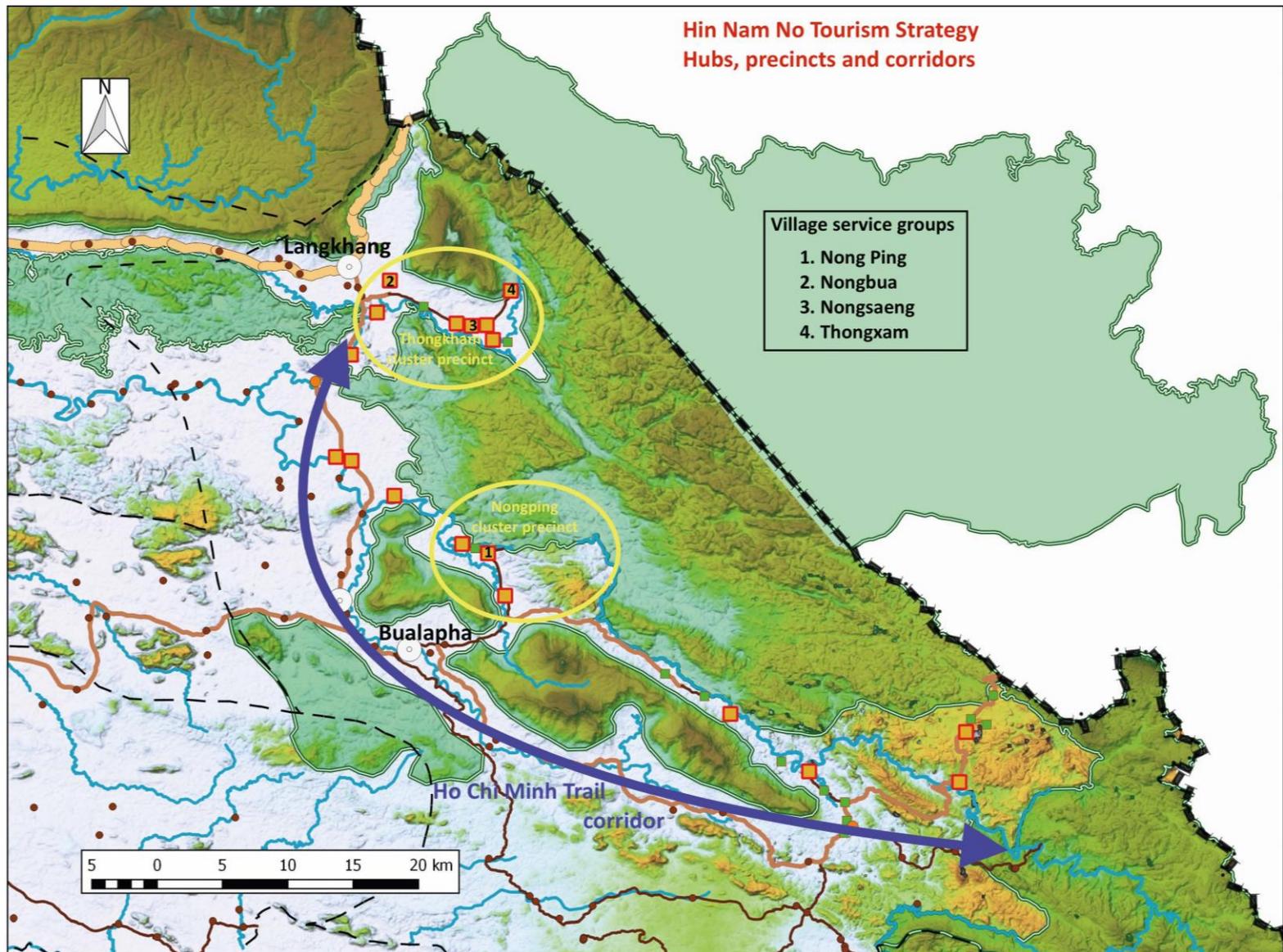


What are experiences

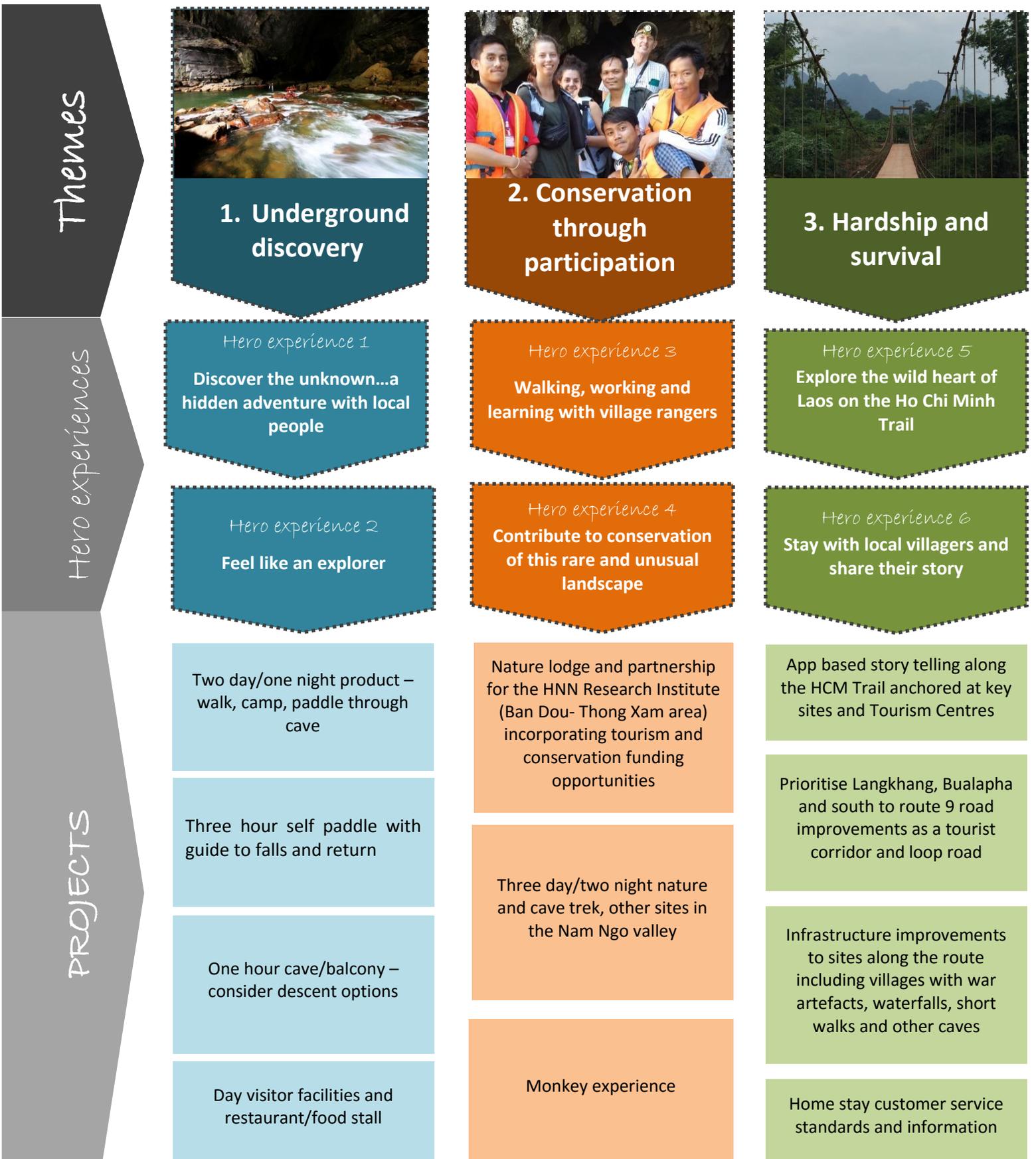
Experiences are an interaction between visitors (their motivations, expectations, interests) and a place and its people. *Experience Seekers* are looking for quality (regardless of price point), authenticity and compatibility with a destination's character and brand promise at every touch point in their interactions including:

- ▶ adequate information and ease of booking (which will affect the decision to visit)
- ▶ appropriate access to the destination and its activities
- ▶ the right services and accommodation for their needs
- ▶ memorable activities, products and storytelling authentic to the natural and cultural settings.

Map 2. Hin Nam No NPA tourism strategy hubs, precincts and corridors



A place of discovery - Hin Nam No



Theme

1



Underground discovery

Hin Nam No is currently known for its extensive karst system and the opportunity to visit the Xe Bang Fai cave by boat. Poor road access results in lower visitor numbers than visit some of the other well- known and readily accessible caves in Khammouane Province.

The opportunity exists to create a point of difference for Hin Nam No that offers a range of more distinctive ways to experience the caves system that create an attraction for higher yield markets and are compatible with the significant values of the area and the potential for World Heritage status.

The extensive karst system and the stages of the river offer settings that can provide experiences suited to different markets that allow a range of adventure and skill levels to feel discovery. Further discussions should be held with commercial operators to identify other opportunities such as Tam Bing Cave.

Hero experience 1

Discover the unknown...a hidden adventure with local people

The hero experience is about immersive and adventurous ways of going deep into the cave system, exploring and learning about it with local villagers.

Hero experience 2

Feel like an explorer

For those who are less adventurous but want to see the cave or go underground, the opportunity exists to have shorter safe activities that still offer an exceptional interaction with the Nong Ping Cave.

PROJECTS

Create a two day/one night product – walk, camp, and paddle through Xe Bang Fai cave

Description

The project is about creating an exceptional adventure product that is attractive to new experience seeker markets.

Visitors will be introduced and briefed in Nong Ping village from where they will walk with light weight back packs along the Xe Bang Fai river and climb for four hours high above Xe Bang Fai cave to a campsite on the river. A camp will already be established at this point and the tourists will be hosted and have stories told with local villagers. Meals will be provided.

The following morning, the tourists will enter the cave and travel by boat back through the cave to Nong Ping village. The journey will involve them paddling with their guides, riding the rapids and assisting with the portage of boats over the rapids they cannot paddle, dependent on river conditions.

Road access close to the river upstream of the cave allows for seasonal access to supply the overnight camp. It could also offer the option for paddling to the campsite as an alternative from the trek over the hill.

Tourists would have the opportunity to package an overnight stay in Nong Ping before and/or after the trip.

In the early stages of offering the product, it is proposed that a reputable tour operator enter a partnership with Nong Ping village to develop and promote the experience. Their role would be product development, marketing/distribution, equipment supply, visitor safety, interpretation and capacity building of local people. The village role would be guiding, boat operations, story-telling, camp hosting and food preparation. Over time Nong Ping village could assume further roles and in time the total business.

Why is it needed?

The trip will be undertaken in small groups and will be a stand out experience not offered in other karst systems in Laos or Khammouane Province. It will become popular with new markets and will become one of the images for which Hin Nam No will become known.

Enabling actions for the project:

- Ensure Nong Ping village guides capacity and interest
- Investigate potential partner for delivery and distribution of the product
- Establish and refine the route and itinerary and establish the camp.

Three hour self-paddle with guide to falls and return

Description

This product will enable tourists to choose to self-paddle on a journey of underground discovery well into the cave to the bottom of the first falls. Whilst this can be done at the moment in a boat with a village guide, the opportunity to self-paddle will be attractive to some sectors of the market.

The product would provide for tourists to gather and be briefed at Nong Ping village where they would then walk up the river to a floating pontoon where they would get into their boats to start their self-paddle trip into the cave. They would be supplied with high strength caving lights and accompanied by local village guides.

Interpretation of the features and biodiversity of the cave system will be important. Options to ensure effective interpretation will need to be explored and staged over time but could include an English speaking person interpreting village stories, waterproof story cards provided to tourists, and possibly a portable oral guide supplied.

On the return journey they will be offered the opportunity to climb up to the side chambers and balcony before leaving the cave.

This product could be promoted locally as well as being made available for pre-sale at Tourist Centres in the hubs and to tour companies. It could be package with an overnight stay in Nong Ping before or after the trip.

Why is it needed?

This product offers something more adventurous for the experience seeker market that does not want to undertake an overnight trip. This product is distinctive from others on offer across other caves in Khammouane Province.

PROJECTS

Enabling actions for the project:

- Acquire appropriate number of suitable canoes (and/or make local traditional vessels)
- Install safe visitor access point at river bank
- Develop appropriate interpretive materials
- Investigate and establish marketing and sales approach.

One hour cave/ balcony

Description

This product would be similar to the current tour where visitors can walk over an improved path to the mouth of the cave. From there, guides will paddle tourists a short distance into the cave where they have the option to climb up one of the side chambers where rock formations can be seen thorough to a balcony overlooking the entrance.

To ensure a high quality product, a number of improvements could be made:

- Establish a removable floating pontoon to make access onto boats easier and safer at the cave entrance
- Establish a removable floating pontoon to assist access to the steps to the side chamber
- Investigate options for descent from the balcony to make a one way circuit for the more adventurous (e.g. fixed ladder, abseil, caving ladders).

This product could be promoted locally as well as being made available for pre-sale at Tourist Centres in the hubs and to tour companies.



Floating pontoons such as this could facilitate access by tourists entering boats at the cave entrance and be removable for the wet season

Why is it needed?

A large proportion of visitors may be satisfied with a short journey into the cave but will still feel a sense of discovery through this opportunity that is different from other caves in the region.

Enabling actions for the project

- Ensure appropriate number of suitable canoes
- Implement improvements to river side access at cave entrance and side chamber access
- Investigate descent options from side chamber balcony to river.

Day visitor facilities and restaurant/ food stall

Description

Improved visitor facilities are required at the day use area where visitors commence the walk to the cave entrance. This needs to allow for ease of orientation, ticketing and access to the walk to the cave as well as a pleasant place for day visitors. It needs to have orientation information that ensures the visitor knows where they are and what opportunities are available for them to enjoy the area.

An opportunity exists for a food stall and/or café run by the village to service visitors.

A booking/ticketing booth and a boat orientation/safety briefing area will be required.

Why is it needed?

This is a popular area for picnics and day use as well as the gathering area for people to commence their underground discovery. Creating a high quality experience here sets the scene for the site and provides for ease of access, booking/ticketing and trip orientation as well as a day visitor experience in its own right.

Enabling actions for the project

- Undertake site plan and establish infrastructure to allow for ticketing, picnics, access to the river, trailhead and waste management
- Support and train villagers in establishing a food outlet on site.

Theme

2



Conservation through participation

The best known aspect of Hin Nam No is the caves and yet it has much more to offer. There is considerable bio-diversity including some endemic species to the park. It is the first protected area in Lao PDR where villagers are directly involved and engaged in the sustainable use and protection of the NPA, making their living out of it.

The conservation of natural and cultural values is important for the park in the long term and is key to achievement of world heritage status. Through Co-Management, the local people are conserving not only the habitat of flora and fauna, but their own natural resources and culture.

Discerning and environmentally aware tourists can become engaged in the long term conservation of Hin Nam No through participation in tourist activities with villagers and rangers.

Hero experience 3

Walking, working and learning with village rangers

The hero experience is about small groups discovering the values and stories of the park through participating in day and overnight activities with village rangers.

Hero experience 4

Contribute to conservation of this rare and unusual landscape

Participating in conservation programs, research and monitoring is attractive to some visitors that want to be immersed in the biodiversity, environment and culture of a destination working alongside local people.

PROJECTS

Nature lodge and partnership for the HNN Research Institute (Ban Dou-Thong Xam area) incorporating tourism and conservation funding opportunities

Description

This project would see the development of a high-end nature lodge that offers accommodation for people staying in the Nam Ngo valley as a basis for participation in a range of conservation and visitor programs. In addition to the up market accommodation, visitors could have the option of local home stays and/or alternative lower cost group accommodation.

Accommodation could provide a base for visitors wishing to participate in:

- conservation and research programs in association with the Institute
- guided activities with village rangers
- base for longer walks
- macaques and other wildlife and bird spotting as well as the training and capacity building of villagers in conservation and tourism activities.

Co-located with the nature lodge would be the Hin Nam No Research Institute, which would include a range of conservation and community studies programs open to the broader community, as well as providing opportunities for local villagers.

Key elements of the Institute would include:

- Opportunities for partnerships with a number of academic institutions
- A base for research and monitoring activities linked to the protected area strategy and achieving world heritage
- Potential for membership base contributing to conservation programs
- Training opportunities for villagers.

The nature lodge would be offered as an investment opportunity with conditions that ensure engagement, employment and capacity building of local people within the business. It would need to be developed consistent with worldwide standards in a sustainable design consistent with the landscape. Opportunities for exclusive nature and conservation based experiences would be offered as part of the tourist package. The product would be distributed through international trade channels.

BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

In Yasuní National Park, Ecuador, the Napo Wildlife Centre has a partnership with the Añangu Community where 93% of paid lodge staff are from the community and the community receives 49% of the net profit.

Why is it needed?

New higher yield markets will be attracted to Hin Nam No if there are high quality accommodation and distinctive experiences that are not readily available elsewhere. This would grow interest from international visitors in conservation and other programs that make a difference to the environment and livelihoods of local people. By packaging good accommodation with research capacity that contributes to park protection a range of benefits are achieved – environmental, social, financial and cultural.

Enabling actions for the project

- Identify an appropriate precinct or parcel of land suited to the development
- Develop an investment prospectus as the basis for attracting an entrepreneur with an interest in developing the nature lodge
- Approach relevant academic institutions in relation to establishment of partnerships for the Research Institute
- Develop a priority research and monitoring program that underpins park management.



BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Malaysia

This 31 room lodge situated in the heart of the Danum Valley Conservation Area, Sabah's largest protected lowland forest was developed by scientists in response to demand created by nearby Danum Valley Field Centre.

The lodge was established as a tourist highlight offering the best of Sabah, attracting VIPs & celebrities. It is the base for wildlife & orangutan conservation projects and one of the only places that visitors can see wild orangutans in pristine rainforest.

There has been a reduction in illegal hunting & illegal logging due to tourism monitoring activities in the core area.

PROJECTS

Monkey experience

Description

The park is recognised as having globally endangered primates including Langurs, Gibbons and Macaques yet they are very hard to spot due to location and habitat high in the trees. The development of a monkey experience that enables visitors to have a non-intrusive yet immersive interaction with the monkeys could have long term conservation benefits through visitors paying a high fee for a quality encounter.

Licence fees from the investor in this opportunity could be directly re-invested in research and conservation of these primates.

The project would see an expression of interest extended to the private sector to propose an innovative and sustainable new experience that enables tourists to observe the species at their own level via some form of treetop infrastructure.

Why is it needed?

An opportunity to observe one of the key species in the park in the *Ban Dou- Thong Xam* area and to offer a unique experience for visitors interested in and prepared to pay for conservation programs.

Enabling actions for the project

- Develop an investment prospectus as the basis for attracting an entrepreneur with an interest in developing the experience.

Three day/two night nature and cave trek, other sites in the Nam Ngo valley

Description

This project would see visitors commence a three day/two night guided trek through the forest from the Nam Ngo valley to link up with the overnight camp upstream from the Xe Bang Fai and then canoe through the Xe Bang Fai cave to the entrance. A new overnight camp would be required between Nam Ngo and Xe Bang Fai.

The small group product would be guided with interpretation about the extensive biodiversity and landscape and would likely involve a partnership between villagers at either end of the walk/cave experience. Overnight accommodation could be provided at the start at the nature lodge and at the end at Nong Ping.

Why is it needed?

Iconic overnight experiences can be strong drivers for tourism amongst experience seeker markets that are looking to do something authentic but different from anything they can do at home. This product that links trekking and underground discovery across the park would have particular appeal.

Enabling actions for the project

- Ensure Nong Ping and Nam Ngo village guides capacity and interest
- Identify appropriate route, itinerary and overnight camp site
- Resolve any zoning issues associated with the route.

BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT



In Bokeo Nature Reserve in Lao, a private company has established a business where guests stay in unique canopy tree houses accessed by zip lines and local guides 'fly' visitors through the forest canopy to view gibbons & other wildlife.

The company works closely with the local people in the Reserve using innovative conservation methods to transform the economy from one based on slash-and-burn farming, logging & poaching, to one based on sustainable, conservation focused activity.

The business employs 40 full time workers and funds a team of dedicated forest guards, who do research as well as protection activities. A successful gibbon rehabilitation & release wildlife programme has also been established.

Theme

3



Hardship and survival

Hero experience 5

Explore the wild heart of Laos on the Ho Chi Minh Trail

This hero experience encourages visitors to use the well know trail as their journey of discovery into this part of the country. The trail is considered as a corridor for travel by a range of transport with side trips into the park

Hero experience 6

Stay with local villagers and share their story

The opportunity to connect with villagers is very enticing for many tourists and can significantly improve their visit. It adds depth to the story of hardship and struggle for the visitor to hear the stories of the past whilst staying in the simple homestays.

PROJECTS

Prioritise Langkhang, Bualapha and south to route 9 road improvements as a tourist corridor and loop road

Description

The project sees the upgrading and improvements to this road as the highest priority in terms of road improvements as it will enable visitors to travel close to the Hin Nam No NPA with outstanding views of the spectacular landscape, an opportunity to follow the Ho Chi Minh Trail as well as a loop road that will encourage visitors.

The project involves the completion of a number of bridges, improved surfacing (not necessarily seal) and identification and development of stopping points at key attractions and lookout points. The road corridor can be promoted as the Hi Chi Minh journey – a journey of discovery.

Why is it needed?

There is currently no clear journey through or near Hin Nam No NPA and the Ho Chi Minh Trail corridor offers one such way of experiencing the region as a place of discovery.

Enabling actions for the project

- Develop road infrastructure plan that addresses road improvements, stopping points, visitor facilities and amenities
- Seek priority investment in road improvements.

App based story telling along the HCM Trail anchored at key sites and Tourism Centres

Description

The Ho Chi Minh Trail is currently used by somewhat intrepid motorbike riders that find their way along the route and stop where they see points of interest. The story of the trail and local people's involvement in the war is extremely interesting and offers a unique opportunity for people to explore this part of Laos.

The project would see the research and development of an app that provides visitors with self-drive itineraries, information about the landscape, the history, key sites, and provides story telling (such as oral history) that would be attractive to different visitors and can be self-selected according to their interests. The app would be supported by way finding and orientation information at key junctions and sites of interest and could also include a series of anchor interpretation panels at a small number of important sites.

Other inclusions might include information about road conditions, accommodation, fuel and attractions.

The App would be available for download in advance of travel to Laos as well as through Tourist Centres at the primary hubs.

Why is it needed?

This story telling tool would add significant value to the Ho Ch Minh Trail experience and would be marketing tool in its own right. It would enable the visitor to truly connect with the positioning of a *place of discovery*.

Enabling actions for the project

- Seek funding for concept development, research and development of app and supporting infrastructure.



BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

In The Nga Tapuwae Heritage Trail tells the story of World War 1 at Gallipoli and the Western Front. The app includes maps, itineraries, stories told by war veterans and their ancestors, and links to tourism attractions. It can be used at specific sites where there are interpretative panels and lookout points over areas of battle.

PROJECTS

Infrastructure improvements to sites along the route including villages with war artefacts, waterfalls, short walks and other caves

Description

Opportunities exist for villages along the Ho Chi Minh journey to benefit from tourists through improving the experience at the villages and encouraging people to stop. The project would identify the best opportunities of interest to tourists including war sites and artefacts, short walks to points of interest and scenic beauty. Plans could be provided for village communities to undertake the improvements.

Why is it needed?

By identifying and creating new experiences along the journey people will be encouraged to stop and stay longer with resultant improved benefits to communities.

Enabling actions for the project

- Identify all potential tourist sites and work with relevant villagers to ensure their interest in promoting, presenting and maintaining these sites
- Plan and design infrastructure works required to access and visit these sites including support infrastructure such as toilets and waste management
- Seek funding to implement these works.



Home stay customer service standards and information

Description

Tourists are interested in connecting with local people and understanding how they live and home stays are an excellent way of doing this. It is critical that the standards of visitor hygiene and safety are maintained and that the experience is one where the visitor is able to learn and enjoy the stay.

Standards such as the 'ASEAN Homestay Standard' exist but need to be communicated and monitored to enable a high standard for visitors. The ASEAN standard focuses on nine criteria relating to host, accommodation, activities, management, location, hygiene & cleanliness, safety & security, marketing and sustainability principles.

It is important to ensure language barriers do not negatively affect visitors. The visitor experience is significantly enhanced when they can learn about the place and the people.

Why is it needed?

The experiential nature of home stay is becoming increasingly popular with foreign tourists, as it is a way of connecting with local people whilst being owned and operated by the local communities so that the economic benefits go directly to them.

Enabling actions for the project

- Identify, develop or adapt appropriate standards for home stay
- Implement training programs for villages engaged in or interested in offering home stays.

Enabling projects

1. Interpretation and information – cave, village, boat transport

Description

Information and interpretation are essential to creating a high-class visitor experience for the experience seeker tourist who wants to understand what they are seeing and hearing and ask questions as well as easily find their way in a destination.

Whilst connecting with local villagers is critical and language will present a challenge, it is important to find ways to enable the visitors to have appropriate interpretation and information they can understand on their tours, transport, village stays and walks/journeys. Options include:

- ▶ an English speaking guide/interpreter accompanying village tours
- ▶ providing printed material to tourists about the experience (e.g. in home stay or on boats) in different languages
- ▶ audio guides or apps in different languages
- ▶ signage in different languages.

Why is it needed?

Visitors want to learn about a place they are visiting and this adds significant depth to the experience. It is also a condition should the park become World Heritage listed that the site be presented to the public.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Develop a strategy for a consistent and coordinated approach for information and story telling for Hin Nam No NPA that applies to all sites and villages
- ▶ Provide technical support to villages to identify the best options for enabling visitor friendly language in interpretation and information.



2. Host village improvements

Description

Accommodation in villages offers an excellent opportunity for visitors to connect with local people and appreciate the way of life and culture whether in homes stay, guest house or other village accommodation. A number of improvements could be made to ensure the experience is exceptional including:

- ▶ customer service standards for home stay and other accommodation (see earlier project under theme 3)
- ▶ easy access to accommodation through orientation information and/or a 'village welcome centre' hosted by village people to welcome guests and show them to their accommodation
- ▶ simple activities for guests staying in the village such as cooking demonstrations, fishing with a local, craft or gathering local food or medicine.

Why is it needed?

The stay in the village will be one of the highlights for a visitor but the accommodation needs to be complemented by activities that add to the knowledge and appreciation of how local people live.

Enabling actions for the project

Provide technical assistance to the villages to

- ▶ implement and train villagers in hospitality, customer service standards, visitor management, site management, maintenance of equipment
- ▶ improve the experience offering and communicate what is on offer.

BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

In Indonesia, at sites such as Komodo National Park, management is shared between government and a non-profit partner, the Nature Conservancy (TNC). TNC is a non-profit joint venture in which all generated revenue is reinvested in the park. The main focus of the joint venture was visitation management for conservation, with other efforts in research, monitoring, enforcement and sustainable development.

3. English language programs – adults and schools

Description

There has traditionally been limited access to English language teachers in local schools around Hin Nam No although it is part of school curriculum elsewhere in Laos. It is important to the tourism industry that adults and children are able to learn sufficient English to communicate with tourists, with people running tours and boats needing good language skills. English classes are required for adults and for children coming up through schools who will be part of the tourism industry in the future.

Why is it needed?

Being able to communicate with tourists is critical to ensuring a good experience given visitors want to connect with local people. English will be the primary language of non Lao speaking tourists in the future.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Source an English teacher for all communities that are actively engaged in tourism – could be shared across villages.

4. Tourism interns/leaders program

Description

This project would see the recruitment/identification of a number of young people to be trained in tourism that will become leaders in the industry in the future. They will be offered an integrated program of training and capacity building to gain skills in various aspects of the industry including language, cultural knowledge, tourism industry, waste management and recycling education and infrastructure, leadership as well as on ground experience working with tour guides and rangers to understand the natural resources and conservation aspects of the park.

The program could be delivered through the Hin Nam No Research Institute.

Why is it needed?

If tourism is to grow and be successful in Hin Nam No, there needs to be leadership and succession planning for the young people moving into working age. This project will be integral to a new sustainable tourism industry for the park.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Develop a tourism interns program and invite applications from local people to become involved in it.

5. Creating an enabling policy environment for tourism in Hin Nam No

Description

Implementing many of the actions in this plan will require new thinking and some policy changes to create an enabling environment where investors will be able to proceed to development. This will require high level leadership and support across Government agencies to implement.

The Hin Nam No NPA District Co-Management Committee has been established to ensure all relevant groups, including villagers and a range of government agencies are involved in decision making. This is the appropriate forum for oversight of the implementation of this tourism strategy.

Why is it needed?

Without support and policy change, this plan will not be implemented and there will be limited change in the social and economic benefits to villages.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Utilise the HNN NPA District Co-Management Committee to support implementation of this plan.

BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

In **South Africa**, SANParks developed a business strategy and specific legislation considering PPPs in protected areas in 2000. The majority of concession operations are focused around wildlife viewing through lodges, shops, and restaurants. Park concessioners also offer adventure products including cable cars and off-road vehicles for use by park visitors. SANParks uses a high level of financial analysis to review historical data and calculate future profits through a net present value model used to set a minimum fee, which can then be bid up by concessioners. In South Africa and many other developing countries, concessions policies require or encourage bidders to hire local employees, promote local arts, help improve local public services, give preference to local sub-contractors, allow for or require local community participation as shareholders, give reduces prices to local tourists, or otherwise provide special economic benefits to local communities.

6. Institutional capacity building and agreement for equitable benefit sharing

Description

Revenue generated by tour activities in the protected area, and from developments outside the protected area but within the Co-Management area, needs to be distributed through an equitable benefit sharing arrangement so that investors, individuals, village communities and government agencies share the benefits of tourism. There are existing arrangements for benefit sharing and local people support these. The proportional distribution needs to be determined for each type of activity, taking into account the costs and profitability and impacts of each activity.

For the Nature Lodge and Research Institute, this will mean the site will need to be retained in community or government ownership, so the rent from this development can be appropriately shared across the Co-Management partners.

Why is it needed?

To realise the vision of tourism benefiting local communities, revenues generated need to be shared so that village and community improvements can be implemented, and capacity building programs can be delivered for both villagers and for government staff in tourism as well as local natural resources and environment.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Once a preferred site for the Nature Lodge and Research Institute has been selected this land needs to be transferred into an appropriate not for profit community or community ownership
- ▶ If purchase is required this may be able to be funded through donor sources
- ▶ Establish a capacity building program for District and Provincial staff of PONRE and PICT.
- ▶ Negotiate a benefit sharing arrangement for each of the commercial and revenue raising projects recommended in this strategy.

7. Promote investment by private sector through concessions for infrastructure development

Description

A number of projects in this plan will be best delivered by private sector investors and a process will need to be implemented to alert investors of the opportunities. An Expression of Interest process that is distributed internationally including to companies that are known to operate in relevant areas of the tourism sector will be the best approach. The EOI would offer a prospectus of the opportunities that are available and information about the sites, potential experiences, likely markets and broad indicators of potential terms and conditions.

The Nature Lodge and Research Institute is the most significant investment project for the private sector. Commercial investors will need to negotiate partnership arrangements with appropriate research organisations and this will need to be clearly set out in the investor prospectus. If suitable research institutions are known at the time of advertising these could be included in the information package.

Why is it needed?

This process will be the best way to trigger interest in new private sector investment in tourism opportunities in Hin Nam No.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Agree on the projects to be offered to the private sector and the parameters/conditions that are acceptable to Government
- ▶ Develop an investor package and prospectus and distribute internationally as well as actively approaching known potential companies.

8. Marketing and communication plan

Description

As the tourism offering improves and new product opportunities are developed, there will be a need for a focused marketing plan that identifies:

- ▶ Appropriate communication and channels to market for key markets
- ▶ Messages and media to be used
- ▶ Partners and collaborative marketing opportunities
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation.

Hin Nam No as a NPA should not be a marketing body, but work closely with the District, Provincial and National Tourism authorities to provide content and messaging that can be used to promote the opportunities in the park as part of the wider destination.

Why is it needed?

Attracting the right markets for the experiences on offer in Hin Nam No will require focused marketing and distribution of the product opportunities to travel trade.

Enabling actions for the project

- ▶ Contract technical support to develop a marketing plan.

9. Tourist information

Description

Whilst tourists have commonly made their major travel decisions about countries or regions they will visit before they leave home, they still make additional choices such as the route they will travel or the tourism activities they will undertake when they reach a destination.

Information is required:

- ▶ on line for people planning a trip
- ▶ at the gateways for entry to Laos (Vientiane, Nakhon Phanom in Thailand, Dong Hoi in Vietnam)
- ▶ in the location (hubs) at which people either base themselves on their visit, or the regional location where decisions are made about their travel such as Thakhek
- ▶ in the villages in which visitors may stay – Bualapha, Nong Ping

It is important that there is high quality information about the tourism offering of Hin Nam No that will assist the visitor to choose this destination over the others on offer and ensure it is easy to understand how and where they can travel. Important considerations are:

- ▶ Tourism information centre with high quality visitor information including maps and evidence of the experiences and travel options
- ▶ Booking service for tours and accommodation
- ▶ Information in hotels, guesthouses and other accommodation.

When in the area whilst they have made their main decisions about length of stay they need information to ensure they can make the most of their visit in terms of local tours, cultural experiences, local travel, food options. Information needs to be in a range of languages on local attractions, travel conditions, tours, cultural experiences, local stories and natural and cultural values and eating options.

Why is it needed?

Having the right information available before people leave home, when they are in country and when they are in the local area is important to ensuring they firstly come to the destination and secondly have the best experience.

Enabling actions

- ▶ Prepare a communication plan that provides the basis for development of tourism information linked to the marketing plan.

10. Creating new experiences in other villages

Description

Other villages in the district also have the potential to benefit from tourism. Villagers already benefit where tourists board the boat to travel to the cave, but this could be a better experience. Other villages along the river and in other precincts in the park also offer potential for new tourist activities.

Technical support could be provided to work with villages to improve current experiences and develop new and innovative activities to generate benefits for the village.

Why is it needed?

With growth in tourism there will be demand for new and different activities and other villages should have the opportunity to benefit.

Enabling actions

- ▶ Implement a program of technical support to villages looking at tourism opportunities.

11. Improving waste management practice

Description

Visitors who come to environmentally significant destinations have expectations about the management of environmental issues and expect a high standard at important sites.

A comprehensive strategy to reduce litter and manage waste in the catchment of the Xe Bang Fai River and local villages will be required to bring this problem under control.

Why is it needed?

Currently there are unacceptable levels of plastic waste visible in the environment and this will detract from the visitor experience and send the wrong message about the value placed on that environment by managers and the local community.

Enabling actions

- ▶ Prepare a waste management program that considers reduction in packaging and especially plastic bottles, reuse and recycling of potential waste in the village context, recycling, and control of waste to minimise litter
- ▶ Conduct an awareness and education campaign to implement this program.



BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

The Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island in South Australia has initiated the Kangaroo Island Expedition (following the success of similar programs on Lord Howe Island). This product is a partnership between the accommodation operator and a local well recognised and highly experienced tour operator. Staying at the high-end lodge, 'expeditioners' are engaged in a full week program of activities that capitalise on the wildlife of the island. In addition to small group and exclusive wildlife experiences (sea lions, whales, birds, other wildlife), there is a program of hiking and natural history lectures. The week is spent with the guide in an immersive program that is complemented by gourmet food and wine.

A program such as this could include a contribution towards a flagship species or endangered fauna.

Opportunities for exclusive sites add value to a package such as this where there is an opportunity to interact with wildlife in a way that the general public may not be able to do.

Experience Seekers are prepared to pay for high quality products that offer engaging interpretation and a range of activities with good accommodation.

Part C. Implementation

ADOPTION OF THIS STRATEGY

Stakeholders relevant to the preparation of this plan include the Co-Management partners (villages and village clusters), Khammouane Province and Bualapha District Tourism and Natural Resources & Environment Offices, the District Governor, GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and partners, and the broader community in the local region.

The process for the finalisation, adoption and implementation of this Tourism Strategy for Hin Nam No NPA is shown in Table 2.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

This tourism strategy is aimed at ensuring Hin Nam No National Protected Area is promoted and managed in a sustainable manner to the benefit of local communities. Hin Nam No NPA is a rugged and remote place, and because of this most tourism activity will occur outside or on the edges of the protected area.

Therefore most of the actions and developments required to realise the vision of sustainable tourism will occur outside the reserve and will be delivered by a range of local officials from different agencies, non-government organisations, and villagers, as well as carefully selected private sector operators.

This creates a need for a coordinated and integrated approach to managing tourism and its impacts. To achieve this, the tourism strategy covers a broader area than just the boundaries of the protected area and includes all lands of the 19 villages that are a part of the Co-Management arrangements.

Implementation of the strategy must be overseen by a body with the appropriate representation and scale to take into account the range of interests affected by its implementation.

The Hin Nam No NPA District Co-Management Committee is recommended as the appropriate body to oversee the implementation of the strategy. This committee includes representatives from village clusters, as well as a range of District officials, and in particular local heads of Natural Resources and Environment and Information,

Culture and Tourism. The Deputy District Governor chairs the HNN NPA DCMC.

Each agency, non-government organisation, and village Co-Management committee will be accountable to the HNN NPA District Co-Management Committee for the implementation actions they are responsible for delivering.

Because of the importance of the success of the tourism strategy to the management of the park and efforts to have the place inscribed on the World Heritage List, we recommend the local park management team at DONRE, supported by the Integrated Nature Conservation and Sustainable Resource Management project team, be responsible for the day to day management, coordination and delivery of the Action Plan.

An individual with adequate skills and seniority to coordinate the work with other delivery partners and village committees, and provide regular updates and submissions to the HNN NPA DCMC, will be required to ensure the successful implementation of the strategy. Tourism technical support may also be required.



Table 2. HNN Tourism Strategy Governance

Activity	Responsible Entity	Comment
Strategy consultation	INCSR project team	GIZ and IP Consult to work with Eco-tourism Working Group to ensure they understand and agree with the proposals
Strategy finalization	INCSR project team	GIZ and IP Consult with TRC Tourism
Strategy Adoption	Provincial Governor	On advice from PONRE, PICT and District CMC
Oversight and Resourcing	District CMC	Major decision-making, e.g. Nature Lodge/Institute site selection, selection of commercial partners etc. Identify Government and other funding sources for individual actions, projects and programs
Tourism Strategy Implementation	Establish a Tourism Strategy Implementation Team of INCSR project team, DONRE, with other members as required	Day to day management, coordination and delivery Identify an individual as Project Lead with sufficient authority for day to day management and reporting to District CMC Engage Tourism Technical support as necessary

INVESTMENT GUIDELINES

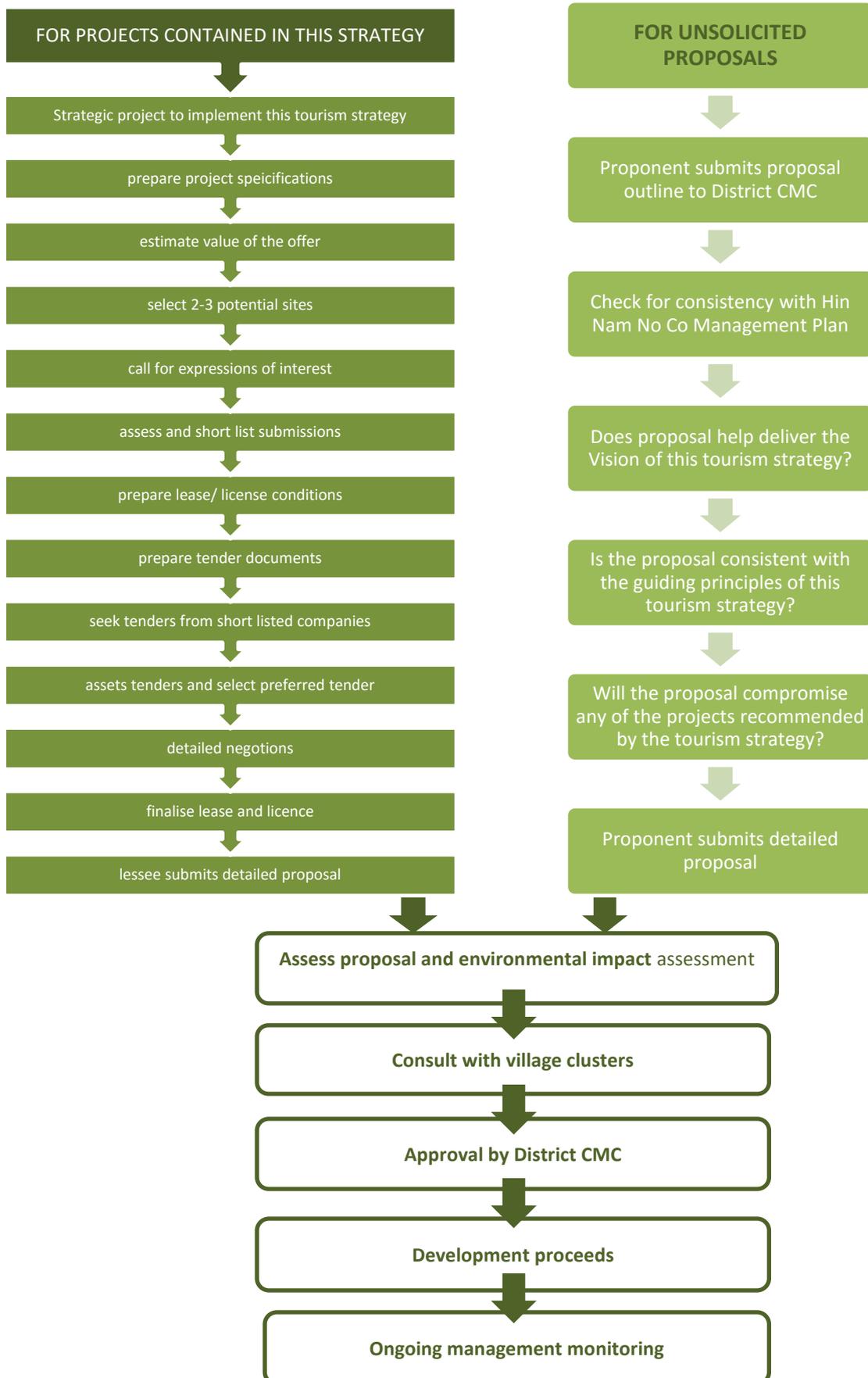
Potential funding sources

The HNN Co-Management Strategy discusses a number of potential domestic and international funding sources for managing the reserve and improving livelihoods. These include Government budget, compensation payments for major infrastructure projects near the park, forest and resource use fees, fines and other contributions at a domestic level. At an international level these sources include fees for filming, various donors for development and research projects, as well as international programs such as carbon credit and REDD schemes.

This strategy recommends a series of *enabling projects* aimed at building capacity and providing information resources for interpretation and on-ground tourism services and activities. These enabling projects could be funded through direct Government budgets or through donor programs.

The main project under the strategy is the *HNN Nature Lodge and Research Institute Partnership*. A commercial investor would be needed to fund the Nature Lodge as a commercial enterprise. This investor would also be required to contribute seed funding for the Research Institute to encourage relevant research organisations such as universities and other centres to participate and contribute funding and other resources. Both the commercial operator and research organisations are likely to be international entities.

DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR NEW INVESTMENTS



A Research Institute of international standing will potentially attract significant philanthropic funding for conservation research and studies of traditional understanding and exploitation of the natural resources in the reserve. The Research Institute could also establish a loyalty and membership program such as exists for conservation organisations such as World Wildlife Fund, or could partner with an existing organisation to access their existing loyalty networks.

Other commercial activities such as nature walks, cave tours and monkey experiences would be established and operated by a commercial adventure tour operator. The commercial investor of the Nature Lodge may require exclusive access to some tourism experiences in order to protect their investment in the Nature Lodge and Research Institute.

Entry fees to the Xe Bang Fai cave precinct, as well as tour operator licence fees at this and other locations will continue to be a direct source of funds for park management.

Benefit sharing arrangements will need to be developed so that operators, villagers, as well as staff of Natural Resources and Environment and Tourism agencies have resources to allow for ongoing training and capacity building.

Definition of 'concession'

"A lease, licence, easement or permit for an operation undertaken by any party other than the protected area agency." (Tourism Concessions in Protected Natural Areas, UNDP, November 2014)

GUIDELINES FOR INVESTMENT

The National and Provincial governments, as well as park managers, local tourism authorities and villagers all want to ensure that any commercial investors deliver specific outcomes if they are to realise the vision for sustainable tourism for Hin Nam No NPA.

These requirements will need to be included in documentation made available to potential commercial operators so there is no doubt about the character and the level of commitment required by them when they are considering whether to invest in the region.

These requirements are described below:

- ▶ Appropriate expertise and proven track record

Any commercial investor will need to demonstrate that they have the relevant experience in developing and operating nature based and ecotourism businesses, preferably in the ASEAN context, at the quality standard to achieve a four star service level and achieve and maintain international eco-tourism accreditation.

- ▶ Direct contribution to improving the environment

All commercial activities conducted in the reserve and local villages, including the development and operation of the Lodge and Institute will need to contribute to improving environmental conditions both locally at and near the development site and within the national park.

Measures may include provision of sealed access roads, water supply and sewerage servicing adjacent villages in addition to the development; waste management measures which also service local villages, corporate staff volunteering programs, visitor involvement and donation programs, and direct financial contributions to environmental programs.

- ▶ Partnership with local village and district

Commercial investors will need to demonstrate an understanding of the challenges facing local villagers and a commitment to working in partnership with them on programs of mutual benefit and interest.

► Partnership with appropriate research institutions

The commercial investor for the Nature Lodge and Institute will need to provide evidence of preliminary agreements with well-respected universities and other research institutions with relevant expertise to cover the fields of investigation of the national protected area's natural values as well as social and community studies to further the Co-Management objectives of the reserve.

These agreements will need to include the provision of appropriate seed funding to ensure the Research Institute can be established concurrent with the preliminary stages of the Nature Lodge.

► Employment and training of local people

All commercial proposals will need to detail capacity building and employment programs to maximise the initial employment of local people and a plan for increasing this involvement over time so that local people can gain skills in more specialised and senior roles.

This could include the initial employment of local staff for hospitality and servicing roles, as well as the compulsory use of local guides for tours and of local rangers for in-park activities.

► Commitment to tourism intern program

All commercial proposals will need to show how they will contribute to the training and employment of local people who are selected for the tourism intern program with the goal of employing successful graduates in senior roles in their organisations.

► Social accountability and environmental standards

All commercial proposals will need to develop and implement employment and operational policies to commit to maintaining equitable and safe workplaces that meet and exceed national standards, and provide secure employment and development opportunities for the whole workforce.

Proposals should demonstrate a commitment to sourcing food and other consumables from local sources, and building local capacity to supply the needs of commercial operations.

All activities and developments must be designed and operated to meet the highest environmental standards.

For tour and event activities, this includes locating the activity to minimise impact on sensitive environmental features including direct impacts such as trampling and indirect impacts such as noise and light disturbance, avoid unnecessary and extreme hazards and operate to documented health and safety standards, work within existing infrastructure capacity such as transport, water supply, sewer, waste management, or upgrade these services if possible.

The requirements for buildings and other infrastructure works are set out below.

► Marketing and distribution channels

Commercial investors will need to demonstrate their existing and proposed links with national and international organisations for marketing their proposed activities and developments. These links will need to be with credible and competent wholesalers, agents and retailers.

► Appropriate revenue return

The commercial operators will need to offer an appropriate level of financial return that at a minimum meets the requirements of the national legislation for concessions in national protected areas.

Commercial tour operators operating within the reserve will pay a licence fee to the Tourism Development Fund and this primarily goes (70%)⁴ to the Protected Forest and Protected Area Management Fund for use in park management.

Because the proposed Nature Lodge and Research Institute will be located outside the national protected area, revenue from site rental will not be subject to this regulation. Dependent on the exact site selected for this development it is recommended these lands be purchased from the existing owners and transferred to the ownership of the local village cluster so that the benefit from rents can be shared throughout the cluster with a component made available to the protected area management fund, DONRE and DIST. A donor could fund the purchase of the development site, independently of the commercial investor. This would secure control of the development site in the interests of park management and local villagers.

⁴ Regulation 4181 on Tourism Management in Protected Areas and Protected Forests dated 21 July 2015

The appropriate level of return will depend on the level of investment by the commercial partner. Numerous options are possible for rental agreements however a fixed base rent will give certainty of income with a sliding scale of rent based on revenue so that risks and benefits are shared between the landlord and the commercial partner.

Many of the conditions listed above will only be realised at a cost to the commercial investor and to the benefit of the community and park management, and these non-financial benefits will need to be considered when negotiating the required return from the development.

Within an appropriate range, which would be determined by reviewing national and international case studies, the rent level and structure would be subject to detailed negotiations with the successful bidder.

BEST PRACTICE SNAPSHOT

Lease concessions in Nepal

In Nepal's national parks, leases apply to most commercial tourism operations. Typically, a minimum area of land will be leased to build hotels, lodges, resorts, teashops or campsites. A public offering will usually be made for lease opportunities. Currently, lease durations vary from 10 to 15 years for new lodges and teahouse, and in future leases for 20 years will be more typical. All concession contracts specific the transfer the ownership of all buildings and infrastructure constructed by the concessionaire to the government on the expiry of the lease.

Non-financial benefits and lease rentals

In many cases lease conditions specify the provision of infrastructure or services to local communities in addition to requirements for local employment and sourcing of goods and services. In the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust lease arrangements, these non-financial benefits were valued, and discounts on commercial rents were granted while those community benefits were in place.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The proposed Nature Lodge and Research Institute will need to be developed in a way that is consistent with the Vision and Guiding Principles for Hin Nam No NPA and this tourism strategy.

The siting of the development should be on land that has a stable foundation and is not subject to seasonal flooding. Any rare vegetation or other features should be avoided. The land should be accessible by road and the power supply and telecommunications network. Land that is currently used for intensive agriculture such as rice production should not be used as this will impact adversely on villagers.

Site selection should be subject to discussion with local villagers to ensure the site does not negatively impact on cultural values and is supported by them.

In terms of the character of the development the built facilities and structures need to be at an appropriate scale for the valley setting and constructed of materials that exist in the local traditional context.

For a development in the Ban Du cluster, this means the development should be located so that it does not dominate any of the existing villages. While the overall nature lodge and research institute will be a large complex with a floor area of approximately 3,000 m², this will need to be spread across a number of buildings. The maximum size of any individual building should be limited to minimise its dominance in the rural landscape setting.

Careful site planning within the development area will allow for covered walkways for ease of movement between buildings, maximising capture of prevailing breezes, good natural ventilation for all main spaces, views to distant features and pleasant garden spaces. Site planning should also maintain mature vegetation and ensure privacy for accommodation from public spaces. The orientation of buildings should maximise opportunities for efficient use of solar energy for heating water and power generation, and avoid eastern and western orientation to avoid sun penetration.

Site planning should allow adequate areas for wastewater management and disposal as well as parking and maintenance facilities and consider stormwater disposal that maintains useability on site while avoiding additional downstream impacts. External lighting should be limited to that necessary

for safe movement around the facility and designed to minimise light spill.

Buildings should be restricted to two or at a maximum three storeys, so they don't become too dominant in the landscape, but allow for rooms to access views of the surrounding mountains. High walls on multi storey buildings are more difficult to shade and can become heat traps.

The character of traditional buildings in the area should be reflected in the selection of materials, including responsibly sourced local timber and bamboo for walls, floors and interiors, and traditional timber shakes (sawn shingles) for roofing of feature buildings.

The buildings should be designed to work with the environment to exclude unwanted heat or cold and take advantage of sun and breezes, therefore avoiding or minimising the need for mechanical heating or cooling. Passive design in this context means designing a building to make the most of natural light and cooling breezes, and using shading, orientation and appropriate building materials to reduce heat gain and storage. The use of passive design principles results in a building that is comfortable, energy efficient and results in substantial savings in running costs of both cooling and lighting.

Designing for the local climatic conditions involves providing for maximum ventilation and free air movement and maximum shading to avoid direct and diffuse solar radiation. Design needs to avoid creating opportunities to store heat by fully shading masonry walls and concrete floors, using reflective outer surfaces and ventilated double roofs. Landscaping should be designed to moderate the solar impact.

In order to provide the recommended standard of accommodation the built facilities will need to be designed for long life, durability and adaptability. This approach will generally make the most efficient use of natural resources, energy and water throughout their full life cycle. This approach will also minimise the production and release into the environment of waste products, and maximise opportunities for recycling.

Servicing of the facility should be undertaken to demonstrate efficient and sustainable use of energy and water resources with the use of solar hot water, solar power generation, water and energy efficient lighting and fixtures, and waste avoidance, reuse, recycling and responsible disposal.

Table 3. Checklist for site and building planning and design

Site location	Stable foundation
	Flood
	Rare vegetation
	Access and services
	Existing use
	Village(s) acceptance
Site Planning	Building scale
	Ventilation
	Views
	Privacy
	Solar orientation
	Water supply and wastewater treatment
	Waste management and recycling
	Lighting design
Building design	Building character
	Height
	Materials
	Design for climate
Construction	Responsible and sustainable materials and construction
	Minimize site impacts during construction
	Servicing and maintenance

Action Plan

- ▶ INCSRМ – Integrated Nature Conservation and Sustainable Resource Management Team (i.e. GIZ and IP Consult team)
- ▶ TTA – Tourism Team and/or Technical Advisor
- ▶ Villages – relevant villagers

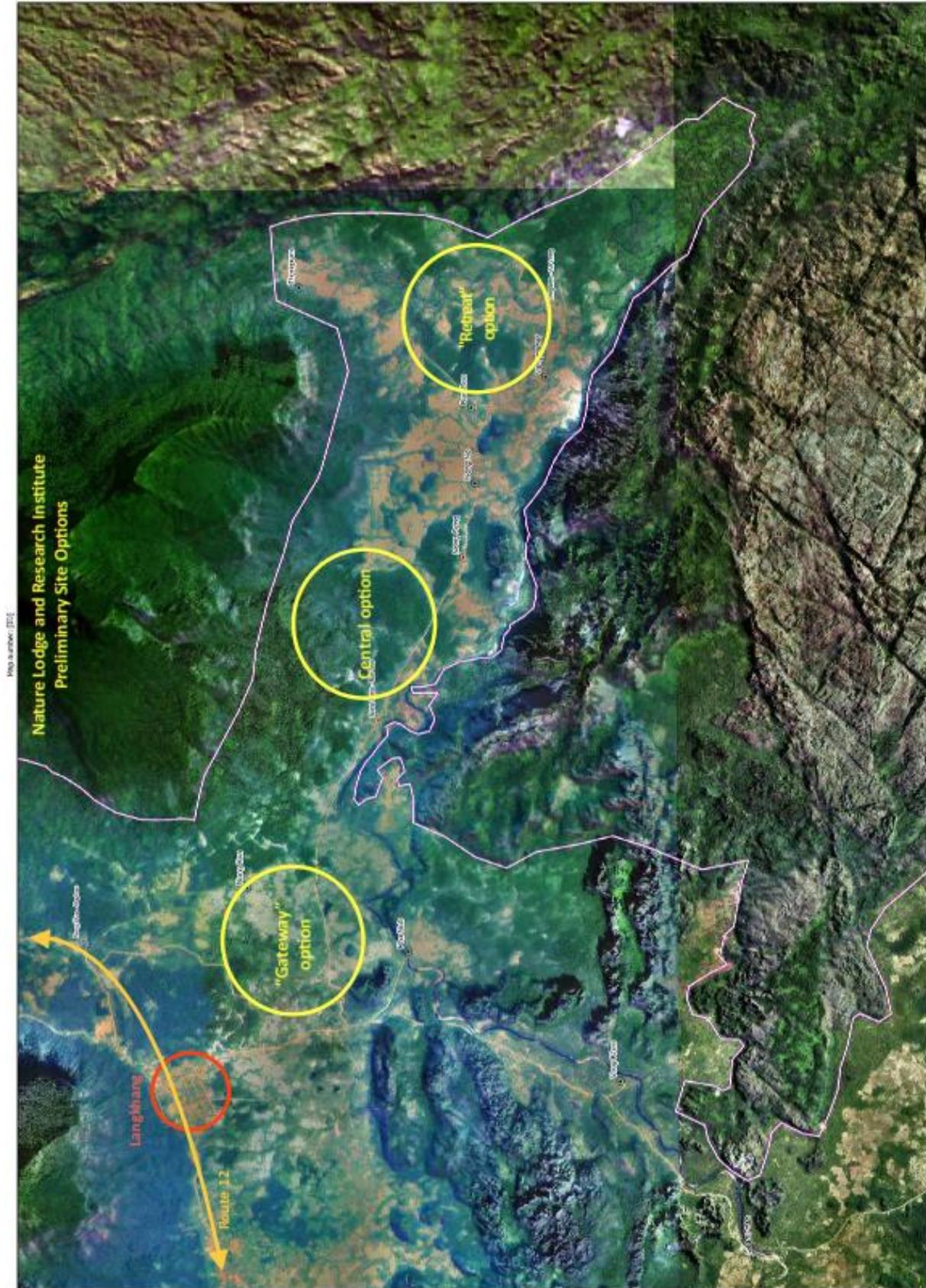
Project	Activity	Who	Priority
Two day/one night nature walk and cave experience	Discuss proposal with Nong Ping villagers and ensure local guides have the capacity and interest in delivering this product	INCSRМ	H
	Seek expressions of interest from commercial tour operators for delivery and distribution	INCSRМ	M
	Establish and refine route(s) and seasonal campsite at upstream cave entrance	Village	M
Nature Lodge and Research Institute	Investigate potential sites in Ban Du cluster area	TTA	H
	Consult with village cluster	INCSRМ	H
	Determine potential ownership and tenure of site	INCSRМ	H
	'Shortlist' 3 sites	TTA/ INCSRМ	M
	Review financial and tenure conditions for similar developments elsewhere	INCSRМ/ TTA	M
	Assess interest from research organisations	TTA/ INCSRМ	M
	Prepare call for expressions of interest document	TTA	
	Advertise development opportunity	TTA	
	Assess submissions and shortlist applicants for tender process	TTA/ INCSRМ	
	Prepare tender documents	TTA	
	Seek detailed response to tender	TTA	
	Assess submissions and select preferred tenderer	TTA	
	Undertake detailed negotiations	TTA	
	Finalise and execute agreement	TTA	
	Development and building approval process	INCSRМ	
Develop a priority research and monitoring program	INCSRМ	H	
Monkey experience	Identify preferred locations for monkey watching and interaction – both inside and outside the park	INCSRМ	H
	Seek expressions of interest from commercial tour operators	TTA/ INCSRМ	

Project	Activity	Who	Priority
Develop HCM trail mobile app	Undertake HCM trail research and oral history project		H
	Seek funding for concept development, research and development of app and supporting infrastructure	INCSRM	M
	Contract interpretive writer and mobile app developer	INCSRM/ TTA	M
	Approval, marketing and distribution	INCSRM/ TTA	
Road improvement priorities	Develop road infrastructure plan that addresses road improvements, stopping points, visitor facilities and amenities	INCSRM	H
	Seek endorsement of the District CMC, including both upgrade and annual maintenance priorities	INCSRM	M
One hour cave and balcony tour	Establish a removable floating pontoon to make access onto boats easier and safer at the cave entrance	INCSRM	M
	Establish a removable floating pontoon to assist access to the steps to the side chamber	INCSRM	M
	Investigate options for descent from the balcony to make a one way circuit for the more adventurous (e.g. fixed ladder, abseil, caving ladders)	INCSRM	H
Three hour self paddle with guide	Acquire suitable canoes or make traditional vessels	INCSRM	M
	Establish a removable floating pontoon to make access onto boats easier and safer at the cave entrance	INCSRM	M
	Develop appropriate interpretive materials	INCSRM	
	Investigate and establish marketing and sales	INCSRM	
Day visitor facilities upgrade	Undertake site plan and establish infrastructure to allow for parking, ticketing, picnics, access to the river, walking trailhead	INCSRM	H
	Support and train villagers in establishing a food outlet on site	INCSRM	M
Three day/two night nature and cave trek	Discuss proposal with relevant villagers and ensure local guides have the capacity and interest in delivering this product	INCSRM	H
	Identify appropriate route, itinerary and overnight camp site	Village	
	Resolve any zoning issues associated with the route	INCSRM	
Nam Ngo valley sites	List potential sites and determine required access and infrastructure improvements	INCSRM	H
	Discuss opportunities with relevant villagers and ensure local guides have the capacity and interest in presenting these sites	INCSRM	H
	Undertake required upgrades	Villages	

Project	Activity	Who	Priority
HCM trail site improvements	Identify all potential tourist sites and work with relevant villagers to ensure their interest in promoting, presenting and maintaining these sites	INCSRM	H
	Plan and design infrastructure works required to access and visit these sites including support infrastructure such as toilets and waste management	INCSRM	H
	Seek funding to implement these works	Villages	
Homestay customer service standards and information	Identify, develop or adapt appropriate standards for home stay	INCSRM	H
	Implement training programs for villages engaged in or interested in offering home stays	INCSRM	H
Interpretation and information program	Develop a Hin Nam No NPA interpretation strategy that uses a consistent approach and standards across all sites and villages and provides information for use across the park and surrounding villages.	INCSRM/ TTA	H
	Provide technical support to villages to identify the best options for enabling visitor friendly language in interpretation and information	INCSRM	H
Village host improvements	Implement and train villagers in hospitality, customer service standards, visitor management, site management, maintenance of equipment	INCSRM/ TTA	H
	Improve the experience offering and communicate what is on offer	INCSRM	M
English language programs	Source an English teacher for all communities that are actively engaged in tourism – could be shared across villages as well as local schools	INCSRM	H
Tourism interns program	Develop a tourism interns program and invite applications from local people to become involved in it	INCSRM/ TTA	
Improving waste management practice	Prepare a waste management program that considers reduction in packaging and especially plastic bottles, reuse and recycling of potential waste in the village context, recycling, and control of waste to minimize litter.	TTA/INCSRM	H
	Conduct an awareness and education campaign to implement this program.	INCSRM	M

APPENDIX 1. MAPS

MAP 3. NATURE LODGE SITE MAP



MAP 4. NONG PING CAVE BASED MAP

