

Final Report

**Destination Interpretation Strategy for Hin Nam No National
Protected Area**



Paul Eshoo

Interpretation Planning Expert

30 June 2016

Note: Please refer to the PowerPoint Presentation for more detail on designs and placement of signs and panels

Contents

1. Background	2
1.1 Heritage interpretation, what is it?	2
1.2 Introduction to Hin Nam No National Protected Area	2
1.3 Planning context.....	2
2 Interpretation Strategy	3
2.1 Goals and objectives	3
2.2 Guiding principles.....	4
2.3 Thematic framework.....	4
2.4 Conceptual approach	5
2.5 Target markets	5
2.6 Interpretive design approach.....	6
2.7 Content delivery	8
2.8 Prioritization	10

1. Background

1.1 Heritage interpretation, what is it?

Heritage interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.

— Freeman Tilden for the US National Park Service

Interpretation refers to the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural heritage site. These can include print and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programmes, community activities, and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the interpretation process itself.

Presentation more specifically denotes the carefully planned communication of interpretive content through the arrangement of interpretive information, physical access, and interpretive infrastructure at a cultural heritage site. It can be conveyed through a variety of technical means, including, yet not requiring, such elements as informational panels, museum-type displays, formalized walking tours, lectures and guided tours, and multimedia applications and websites.

Source: The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites

1.2 Introduction to Hin Nam No National Protected Area

The main attraction of Hin Nam No National Protected Area is the Xe Bang Fai Cave, a river cave that is a very preserved and has very unique formations that separate it from other caves in the country and the region. Most notable about the cave and the protected area is its cave biodiversity, including newly discovered species of spiders, scorpion, and fish and possibly more species yet to be discovered. The protected area also has some areas for seeing primates, including the rare black langur and Assamese macaque. The existing trekking trails recently developed start from a couple villages on the park's edge and pass through excellent forest, karst landscape, and caves. Hin Nam No is important as a historical attraction, as the starting point of the Ho Chi Minh Trail passed through the area. Many of the caves and villages have a war history, which brings to life this attraction.

1.3 Planning context

Current situation (in terms of heritage interpretation in the destination)

There is no interpretation available at any of the existing sites. There were some brochures and poster that were produced. Some of the posters can be found in a couple restaurants, guesthouses and motorbike rental shops, but the material is not easily seen and does not provide comprehensive information due to it being split into three different posters with two different languages. There is a website (www.hinmamno.org) that has some information about the tourism attractions, but it is quite difficult to get the required travel information from the site due to its organization.

On the Internet, there is listing for Hin Nam No NPA on TripAdvisor. The Xe Bang Fai Cave is also not listed on TripAdvisor, and the Ho Chi Minh Trail listing on that same

site is has only one review and is written about the attractions in Savannakhet Province, mainly the museum. “Xe Bang Fai Cave” and “Bualapha” are found on Google Maps. However, other sites on the Ho Chi Minh Trail are not found or have wrong names. There are some good promotional videos found on Youtube, with one being linked to the Hin Nam No website.

There are a handful of tour companies who are seen to be promoting tours to the Xe Bang Fai Cave by searching “Xe Bang Fai Cave” on Google. Green Discovery is the only company operating tours to the cave from Thakek, but information about the cave found at their office is not easily found without flipping through their product book. There is one poster of the cave on the companies wall, but it would not be noticeable or underdable by a tourist unless they asked to look closer, as it is behind the desk placed low with no photos or large heading.

There are black and white maps of the “Xe Bang Fai cave Loop” available at two of the three motorbike rental shops in Thakek, but the maps are not given out unless the tourist asks for it, according to the owners; and the motorbike shop owners estimate that only about 5% of their customers ask for the information.

The Xe Bang Fai Cave is highlighted on a large tourist map posted in the town square (created by Tektraktys), as well as on a map posted in the Provincial Tourism Information Center in Thakek. However, there was clear promotion of Hin Nam No NPA or the Xe Bang Fai Cave found at the information office or other public areas.

There are color signs located on Route 12 just heading out of Thakek and in Boualapha, but the colors are faded and text not easily read without stopping and reading.

Past, ongoing and planned interventions affecting management in the destination

In 2006, Green Discovery surveyed the Xe Bang Fai Cave and thereafter started offering kayaking tours in the cave. Since 2010, GIZ has been developing tourism in Hin Nam No NPA. A survey of tourism sites was conducted; a set of three brochures and posters in two languages was written and printed; by-laws and regulations for managing the Xe Bang Fai Cave were created and agreed to with the community; guide trainings were conducted by the provincial tourism department in Thong Xam and Nong Ping villages; and a tourism development strategy was written and approved. Street signs were put up in some key locations, as well. The company responsible for managing the Phong Nha Ke Bang caves in Vietnam, Oxalis, was invited to investigate the potential for managing the Xe Bang Fai Cave, but the company decided not to explore the option further after making its visit to the site due to its large responsibility in Vietnam and the perceived issue of limiting access to the cave for its company solely.

2 Interpretation Strategy

2.1 Goals and objectives

The goal for this interpretation follows the official vision of Hin Nam No NPA of the tourism development strategy, which is ““By 2025, Hin Nam No National Protected

Area will connect visitors with local communities through sustainable eco-adventure tourism which contributes to conservation and livelihoods. “

Goal of the Interpretation Strategy

Enrich the visitor experience and improve promotion and signage so that the Hin Nam No NPA receives more visitors.

Objectives

- Promote the Xe Bang Fai-Hin Nam No Route as a hidden treasure of Laos not to be missed
- Make it easier and more interesting to visit sights through good signage and information, setting it apart from other areas in Lao PDR.
- Attract a variety of visitors through multi-language materials
- Increase awareness among all visitors, especially with Lao nationals, by using a variety of media materials including audio books.
- Promote the universal values of the protected area
- Facilitate communication with local stakeholders by helping to tell their stories and provide information they feel is important through a variety of media

2.2 Guiding principles

Messaging

- Simplicity
- Easy to follow
- Capture imagination through beautiful media
- Speak to a variety of national, regional and international audiences
- Inspire and educate
- Reduce impacts through clear and repeated messaging
- Encourage support of local economy
- Manage expectations

Infrastructure & Production

- Sturdy and long lasting
- Local materials and design
- Adaptable and expandable
- Cost efficient production and reproduction of materials
- Consistent
- Professional

2.3 Thematic framework

The thematic framework is based on observations during the field visit and surveys of the route and on the consultant’s previous background and understanding of the

province’s attractions. It also follows the three main themes presented in the tourism development strategy.

- Underground Discovery
 - Use cave map with photos to bring out awesomeness of cave
 - Promote uniqueness of other caves
 - Promote different aspects of caves (animals, bats, geology)
- Conservation through Participation
 - Highlight nature at each site and how tours promote conservation
 - Create awareness about do’s and don’ts
 - Educate about universal values of HNN nature
- Hardship & Survival
 - Promote Ho Chi Minh Trail as part of the trip with nodes at each major site
 - Encourage stay in key villages through all materials and by making it possible through clear and simple directions and communication tools

2.4 Conceptual approach

Key conceptual groupings (e.g. routes, corridors, villages, tourist sites (historic, heritage, nature sites), interpretation nodes, gateways into the destination etc.)

Routes

- **Roundtrip from Thakek (3-4-day):** Thakek –Nong Ping – Nong Boua – Nong Seua - Thongxam – Thakek
- **Combine with The Loop (add 2-3 days to The Loop):** Nakai – Langkhang – Nong Boua – Pakphanang – Nong Ping – Thakek
- **Long Weekend from Vientiane or Nakon Phanom:** To Bualapha/Nong Ping – Full Day at Cave – Return
- Provide options for motorbike, 4x4 and public/local transport transportation for each route.

Villages and Interpretation Nodes:

- Ho Chi Minh Trail – North: Nong Boua, Phanop, Vangkhone, Sen Phan?, Viet-Lao Memorial on Route 12
- Hin Nam No: Nong Seng, Thong Xam, Nong Ping, Lookout near Sen Phan, expandable to ...
- Xe Bang Fai Cave - Nong Ping, Bualapha

Gateways

- Motorbike rental shops in Thakek and Vientiane
- Website
- Partner tour companies
- Tourist guesthouses and restaurants in Thakek and Langkhang
- Tourism Information Centers in Khammouane
- Border crossings

2.5 Target markets

The target markets listed here are identified in the tourism development strategy.

Audience/Target Market	Estimated size	Benefits from the interpretation strategy	Priority
Local Lao Visitors (Day Trips)	High (mainly during	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower impacts • Education of general public 	Medium

	festivals)		
Overnight Lao Visitors who use homestay & guesthouses	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visitors • Lower impacts • Education of townspeople 	Low
Thai & Vietnamese day and overnight	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visitors • Improved experience • More spent in villages • More tour groups 	High
Other foreign tourists on The Loop or traveling Khammouane	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visitors • More days and sights visited 	High
Niche groups (researchers, etc.)	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better link with tour companies 	Low
Group tours (w/Green Discovery)	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved experience 	Medium

2.6 Interpretive design approach

Design criteria

- **Languages:** Interpretation panels, street signs and promotional posters should be in two languages, Lao and English, due to space limits in production. Headings and titles can be read and understood by Thai and Vietnamese, thus not requiring Thai and Vietnamese on such interpretation media. However, other materials (website, brochure, e-Pub) should be offered in the additional languages of Thai and Vietnamese to facilitate more visitation by those markets.
- **Pictures:** The current photo bank is sufficient for making materials. However, an effort should be made to not reuse photos.
- **Colors:** The colors currently used on the website (aqua blue, yellow, brown, and white background) should continued to be used in all materials.
- **Simplicity:** Keep continuity throughout all materials and use fonts and design that can be easily be reproduced by the project in the future.

Brand identity

- The Hin Nam No NPA logo should be used on all promotional materials.
- The logo should be placed at the top left of all materials.
- The website should be clearly displayed on all materials (except street signs).

Signage/wayfinding:

- **Directional Signs:** Directional signs should follow the standard format used for tourism street signs in Khammouane Province. Refer to the presentation for dimensions and style.
- **Promotional Posters:** Promotional posters should be printed in 3-5 varieties that use a single photo each that can draw tourists to want to visit with a simple slogan and website advertisement. Previously printed posters that have detailed information should be discontinued in order to create a more simple and appealing campaign.

Interpretive signage

- Xe Bang Fai Cave Open Visitor Center: An open visitor center (i.e. without doors that is open to tourists to enter and exit freely) should be built at Nong Ping Village at the cave ticket location. The building should be built using local architecture (wooden shingle roof) with panels explain the values and attractions of Hin Nam No NPA and Xe Bang Fai Cave.
- Ho Chi Minh Trail Node Signs: Each location on the Ho Chi Minh Trail should have a panel, roofed under a wooden shingle roof in similar style to the open visitor center.

Other media

- Brochure/map: A color brochure with map should highlight the main attractions and provide a clear, attractive map that points out all attractions that makes it easy for tourists to follow. The brochure should be in a large, A3-type size following the format used for other NPAs in Laos, folded to a pocket size brochure. The brochures should be printed in multiple languages and available at all tourist guesthouses, hotels, restaurants, visitor centers and motorbike rental shops. They can also be given out to tour companies and at tourism trade fairs.
- e-Pub: The guidebook will be downloadable (from both the website and Amazon.com for free) in an e-pub format that can be used on a phone, Pad or Kindle. The e-pub will be useable offline and will have an offline map that will show route. The e-pub will have links to more detailed information, which can be accessed online through the Internet. This will allow more flexibility to add or change information without having to continually update the e-pub. Advertising from local tourism businesses and companies can be used to generate revenue for making the e-Pub and printing the brochure in the future.
- Website: The current website should continue to be used, but reformatted using a more attractive template (Joomla Build.R recommended) and reorganization of content to make it friendly for tourists looking for the important information on sights and how to visit.

Programs (guided or self-guided tours etc.)

The biggest weakness with tourism at Hin Nam No NPA currently is lack of a strong private sector partner to help operate and promote tours to all of the sites. It is recommended the steps outlined in the tourism development strategy for selecting a private sector operator be followed as soon as possible.

2.7 Content delivery

Conceptual grouping	Conceptual Area/Location	Interpretive theme	Media Details
Gateways	Restaurants, hotels, guesthouses, bus station, border checkpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hin Nam No is an attractive place not to be missed • There’s a lot to do an see in Hin Nam No • The Xe Bang Fai Cave is another world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful posters with simple title “Hin Nam No National Protected Area” and slogan; promotion of the website on posters
	Motorbike Rental Shops, Tourism Information Offices and Hin Nam No NPA Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hin Nam No is an attractive place not to be missed • There’s a lot to do an see in Hin Nam No • The Xe Bang Fai Cave is another world • It’s easy to visit Hin Nam No and combine with The Loop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful posters with simple title “Hin Nam No National Protected Area” and slogan; promotion of the website on posters • Map of the route with highlights (using same map, text and photos from the brochure but reformatted to view as a poster) • Pocket size brochures that fold out with color map and attraction highlights (based on format used in other Lao NPAs)

Nodes	Xe Bang Fai Cave Open Visitor Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values of Hin Nam No NPA • Biodiversity of Hin Nam No • Xe Bang Fai Cave • Cave biodiversity • Tourism attractions of the cave and Hin Nam No • Co-management and conservation • Do's and Don'ts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build one structure using local architecture • Arrange posters inside the structure
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ho Chi Minh Trail attractions (Mu Gia Pass, Nong Boua and Tham Nam, Phanop, Vangkhone, Senphan) • Nature Trails (Thong Xam and Nong Seng) • Pak Phanang • Boualapha 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories about the Ho Chi Minh Trail • Information on attractions along the nature trails • Details on how to get a tour and arrange local accommodation • Information on boat transportation and ways to the Xe Bang Fai Cave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information boards with posters and some empty space for posting updated information and prices
Routes	Village Entrance Signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear names in Lao and English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paint the English names on existing village entrance signs where necessary
	Directional Signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of visiting the Hin Nam No – Xe Bang Fai Cave route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All turns have a sign • Signs are made using the sturdiest materials and using the standard tourism street sign format

2.8 Prioritization

2.8.1 Additional visitor experience

Interpretive/wayfinding element	Extent to which element may attract visitors	Extent to which element may extend length of stay
Street Signs	Medium	Medium
Promotional Posters		Low
Brochures		High
e-Pub		High
Interpretative Panels at key attractions		Medium
Xe Bang Fai Cave Open Visitor Center		Medium
Village Entrance Sign Improvements		Low

2.8.2 Costs of the interpretation strategy

Interpretive/wayfinding element	Cost assumptions	Unit cost (rounded up)	Unit cost estimate for maintenance	Sources of information
Street Signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using strong metal and high quality production 	USD150 per sign x 50 signs = USD7,500 (includes production and placement).	USD2,500 (USD50 x 50 signs) every 7-10 years for repainting	All text and locations in the Powerpoint Presentation
Promotional Posters	Designed by professional company	USD1,500 for printing USD500 for design	Reprinted every 2-3 years	Should be designed by the same person/company as the other promotional materials
Brochures	Designed by professional company	USD5,000	Reprinted every 2-3 years	Should be designed by the same person/company as the other promotional materials
e-Pub	Designed by professional company	USD2,500 for design, production and uploading to Amazon.com	Revised as needed at no cost	Should be designed by the same person/company as the other promotional materials
Interpretive Posters at Key Attractions	Designed by professional company	USD2,000 for design + USD3,000 for printing	Revise and reprint every 5 years	Should be designed by the same person/company as the other promotional materials
Construction of Interpretive Information Boards	Done by local carpenter	USD4,000 for 12 information boards	Repairs every 2 years	
Construction of Xe Bang Fai Open Visitor Center	Done by local carpenter	USD7,500	Repairs every years	
Village Entrance Sign Improvements	Done by local person	USD25 for paint	Not necessary	

2.8.3 Timeline for Implementing the Strategy

No.	Task	Month(s)
1	Source additional photos	July-August '16
2	Translate text to Lao	July-August '16
3	Approve Lao text	September-October '16
4	Contract street sign designer	October '16
5	Hire Designer	October '16
6	Redesign website	November '16
7	Review poster, brochure, interpretation panels and e-Pub	November '16
8	Street signs are finished	November '16
9	Print all materials	December '16
10	Construct open visitor center & information boards	December '16
11	Attach panels to information boards	January '16
12	Hold fam trip for key motorbike rental managers, guesthouses and restaurants	February '16
13	Distribute posters and brochures	February – March '16