

rice and the weaving of distinctive baskets.

Trekkers stay in a lodge overlooking the Nam Ha River. The evening meal is usually eaten with a prominent member of the village, and afterwards visitors have the opportunity to spend the evening with villagers, exchanging information about themselves and learning about Khmu life and culture.

Ban Namkoy and Ban Namlue

Ban Namkoy is a Lanten (also known as Lao Huay) village, while Ban Namlue is a mixed Lanten and Khmu village. During the day, most of the adults will be away working in their rice fields, but trekkers will be invited inside a villager's house for refreshments and, in Ban Namlue, there may be an opportunity to purchase traditional Lanten handicrafts.

In compliance with Provincial Laws, trekking in Luang Namtha Province may only be undertaken with a certified guide.

Buuc Gadong

In Ban Nalan or elsewhere in Laos, you may be invited to try a local drink, known as *lao hai* in Lao, and *buuc gadong* in Khmu. Sweet yet surprisingly strong, *lao hai* is made by fermenting rice, spices and rice husks in a large earthen jar. These jars of alcohol are an important part of any Khmu ceremony celebration, from weddings and rituals for ancestors, to a simple gathering of a few friends who want to relax and socialize. Traditionally one must drink "two horns full" through long curved bamboo straws, before passing the straw on to the next person.



Guidelines for Low Impact Tourism

These suggestions are a result of direct consultation with villagers and residents of Luang Namtha Province.

Photographs – Always ask before taking close-ups or portraits. Respect those who choose not to be photographed.

Dress modestly – Please wear shirts that cover the shoulders and pants or skirts that cover your knees. Shirts with a low neckline are not appropriate.

Gifts – Please do not give anything to children as this practice encourages begging. Also, do not give medicine to anyone but a doctor or nurse.

Wildlife Products – Hunting and the sale of wildlife products endangers many species of animals native to Laos. You can help by simply not buying or eating wildlife products.

Respect Local Traditions – Please do not touch anything that may be of religious significance, such as spirit gates, altars, and burial grounds.

Purchasing Local Crafts – Please do not purchase unique items such as books, antiques or family heirlooms that may be irreplaceable.

Drugs – Please don't do drugs in Laos. Drug tourism does damage.



Trekking Gently in Luang Namtha

National Tourism Authority Lao/ UNESCO Nam Ha Ecotourism Project Objectives:

Ensure that tourism contributes to the conservation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage

Ensure community participation and management in tourism development and activities in order to protect the cultural rights of affected indigenous people

Provide members of local communities with essential training and skills relevant to the local tourism industry

Integrate public and private sector activities



Two day trek:
Ban Nalan Trail

Trail description

Day One: Ban Chalernsouk to Ban Nalan (5-6 hours)

The trail begins at Ban Chalernsouk, a Khmu village approximately 20 km from Luang Namtha. From here the trail ascends through 10-20-year-old secondary forest until emerging into the upland rice fields of the village. The path offers great views as it levels out along a ridge before re-entering the forest. The trees here are older and support a wide range of plant and animal life. Your guide will explain some of the natural history of the area you are trekking through.

A Lao-style picnic lunch is eaten along the way, either in the forest or in the shade of a farmer's hut. In the afternoon, the trail enters the community forest of Ban Nalan. As the trail begins to descend to the village, it passes a small clearing which served as a gun position during the early 1960s, at the time when Pathet Lao revolutionaries and Royalist forces fought in the area.

The Guides

On your trek you will be led by certified guides. Trained as part of the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project, these men and women are locals, with knowledge of and respect for the natural and cultural features of the Luang Namtha area and the Nam Ha National Protected Area.

Be sure to ask them questions about the environment you are trekking through and consult them if you have any questions about village or forest protocol.



Above: Villagers and tourists meeting in Ban Nalan.
Below left: Nam Ha NPA.

Day Two: Ban Nalan to Ban Namlue (6-7 hours)

The second morning is a pleasant walk following the Nam Ha River. Here the forest varies from stands of large hardwoods to new growths of bamboo. On the way it passes through the village of Ban Nalan Tai (South Ban Nalan) and the open cultivated areas of the Lanten village of Ban Namkoy. Lunch is eaten in one of the houses of this village.

Next, the trail leaves the river and climbs for a couple of hours. This is the most challenging section of the trail, but also the most beautiful, as it passes through the least impacted forest of the trip. Trees up to four or five hundred years old create a dense canopy which provides a habitat for many birds. Pause quietly for a minute or two and you will hear the

forest come alive with the sounds of birds and insects.

From the top of the ridge there are spectacular views to the north with Luang Namtha visible in the distance. The final descent takes you past the mountain rice fields and cultivated areas of the mixed Lanten and Khmu village of Ban Namlue. The trail here can be steep and slippery in places, so take your time, especially after a rainfall.

The trail ends at the Lanten village of Ban Namlue. Trekkers return to Luang Namtha by tuk tuk towards the end of the afternoon.

Villages along the way

Ban Nalan

Situated on the banks of the Nam Ha River, Ban Nalan is a Khmu village of approximately 35 families. While there you will see evidence of traditional Khmu culture, such as their method of pounding