

Phou Khao Khouay National Protected Area



TAD LEUK

A Brief Introduction and Trail Map for Tourists

The most accessible and developed place inside Phou Khao Khouay National Protected Area is the locally well-known **Tad Leuk** waterfall along the *Nam Leuk*, one of the three major rivers of the reserve. With its 6 Meters height, the waterfall itself is not a spectacular one, but the whole landscape around *Tad Leuk* is simply beautiful and invites for a retreat from the stress of traveling or work in the capital *Vientiane*, and can easily be visited all year round.

A wonderful place to rest

Tad Leuk is a place for recreation and fun indeed. Here you also have the opportunity for numerous activities and to learn about the eco-system *Phou Khao Khouay*. The huge, modern 'Visitor Center' with a permanent exhibition and a 'Nature Trail' connected to it can give the interested a glimpse into flora and fauna of the park. Is there time to relax, one can do it in the small restaurant with a nice view on the waterfall and the river. Or you just look for a cozy place somewhere close to the river.

Mrs. Khampheng and her daughter offer you a simple meal and usually have soft drinks and beer available. Since there is no electricity, ice cubes have to be bought in *Thabok* and sometimes transported even by bicycle (over a distance of about 20 km and you've seen the road...). That's the reason why the drinks may not always be as cold as the visitor would wish them to be. But please, understand the difficult task for the friendly restaurant owners, it's simply not easy for them and be sure, they try their best to please their guests.

By the way, *Tad Leuk* also offers clean toilets and washing facilities. A refreshing bath can be taken in the clean river as well (for the environment's sake, please avoid to use too much soap). One special area is designated for camping and tents and other camping equipment are available for a small fee at the restaurant.

The waterfall, though not very high, can be a great and noisy experience during the rainy season, when the river turns into a wild and torrential 'beast'. Crossing the stream is impossible in this period of the year (approximately June to October). On the other hand, the river will get calm and gentle during late October/November and quickly fall dry (but never completely) thereafter. By then the once roaring 'waterfall' turns into a trickle only - until the rains will start to fall again in May or June.

During the dry season, the riverbed is an ideal place for picnic and small bonfires in the evening. Please do not make a fire when it is windy - ask for permission first. Take special care not to start a forest fire and extinguish any remains of the fire before you depart!). The whole *Tad Leuk* area is also a great wild place for children to explore. On special holidays, *Tad Leuk* is a favorite destination for many Lao people from as far as *Vientiane*.

Watching wildlife is difficult. Most of the year it may even appear to be totally 'quiet', giving the wrong impression, the forest is dead. But it's not! Just stroll quietly, pause from time to time, and with open eyes and ears along the trails or the access road, also at night, you will certainly notice the abundant life in the wilderness. Birds are abundantly heard in the early morning hours, while monkeys may visit the place at nightfall.

How to get there?

Tad Leuk can be reached easily by car or motorbike from *Vientiane*. Turning left at *Thabok* (Km 90, highway 13 south; with plenty of signboards), the road passes *Ban Houay Leuk* (5 km). The main road crosses an iron bridge over the *Nam Leuk* short after the village. Always follow the road signs. After another four kilometer you will reach the checkpoint ('201') at the park's border, where you have to pay a minimal entrance fee. Few kilometers ahead, you turn left. You can't miss it.

Note: Adjust your speed, especially when you're in a cloud of dust. Then traffic ahead is difficult to see and it can be too late to react. Please think of other people, too. Since the road is extremely dusty during the dry season, avoid covering passing people and houses with sand.... Thank you!

If you don't have your own vehicle, please contact your tour operator in *Vientiane*. In *Thabok* (market) you can also find public transport heading for *Long Xan* valley. These are bigger trucks or pick-ups ('songtaews') with no fixed schedule. Drop off at the junction to *Tad Leuk*. From here you have to walk (about 3.5 Km).

Information Center

A stroll through the "Visitor Information Center" (donated by the Swedish government) on the same compound should not be missed! Its informative exhibition offers a glimpse on the wildlife and botanical features of the park. Did you know that there are still tigers and elephants so near to Vientiane? Here you also can get more information about the different forest types and why such forests exist. A three-dimensional model of the park can give you an impression on the geological feature. The small "visitor library" with survey reports and field guides on the region's trees, butterflies, wildlife and so on may be used by the visitor for further information. If you spot any interesting animals or find noteworthy plants or anything else, it is highly appreciated if you note your observation in the "Visitor Sighting Book". For any other comment, feel free to express your impressions and suggestions in our guest book.

Houey Bone Nature Trail

Connected with the Visitor Center is a Nature Trail, which leads the first 150 m upstream on a marked path (follow the red/white triangular signs), crosses the sling bridge over the *Houey Bone* creek and turns sharp right into the forest. After few hundred meters the trail crosses again the *Houey Bone* and after a loop it ends again at the sling bridge. The total length of the trail is about 1.5 km and is easy to walk through in a relatively short period of time. Some tree bridges have to be crossed, which may be a bit difficult for untrained, but it's really not a problem. Many interesting spots along the trail are marked and small booklet (available at the restaurant) gives you further information about the beautiful and exciting nature of *Phou Khao Khouay*. Bring along a binocular which can be rented at the restaurant.

Tad Xang waterfall

Tad Xang, about two to three hours walk from *Tad Leuk* upstream, is another beautiful waterfall well worth a visit. Two bridges crossing the fiery and deep tributary *Houay Bone* (during the rainy season) allow you to enter the nearby forest at any time. Follow the trail along the river. One can try to find *Tad Xang* alone, but it is strongly recommended to hire Mr. Savay, the caretaker of *Tad Leuk*, for a reasonable fee as guide. He knows the area very well and you will not get lost in the sometimes tricky labyrinth of trails. The main trail is also marked (yellow/red) but the signs are frequently removed by strangers, so the path may be sometimes difficult to track. Sorry for the inconvenience! At *Tad Xang*, a large pool is inviting for a refreshing swim. During the dry season, returning to *Tad Leuk* you may walk on the other side of the river. The landscape and vegetation appear to be quite different here.

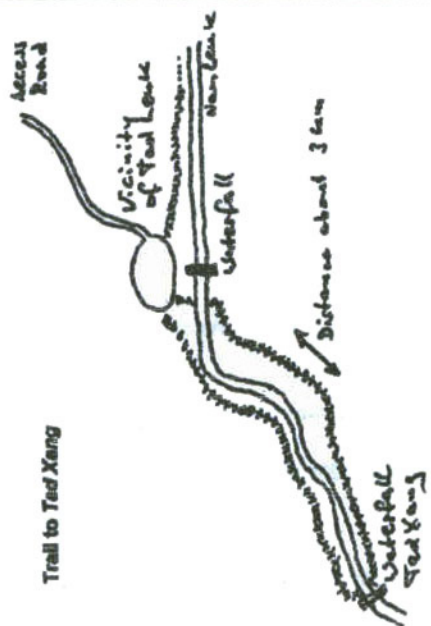
The Ang Nam Leuk reservoir and its impact on the Nam Leuk river system

The river *Nam Leuk* originates in the far north-west of the park on *Phou Sang* Mountain (1666 m). A dam, about 15 km upstream of *Tad Leuk* and opened only in 2001, has been constructed for power generation. The long but narrow reservoir, called *Ang Nam Leuk*, nestles beautifully in hilly ever-green forest. Unfortunately, the whole construction is a so-called "diversion dam", so the water does not continue to flow in its original river towards south and ultimately into the *Mekong* river. Instead, being redirected, it will flow to the north, helping to fill the huge *Nam Ngum* reservoir. The water intake is at the most northern knee of the reservoir, from where the water plunges downhill in huge concrete pipes to the power station in the *Long Xan* valley.

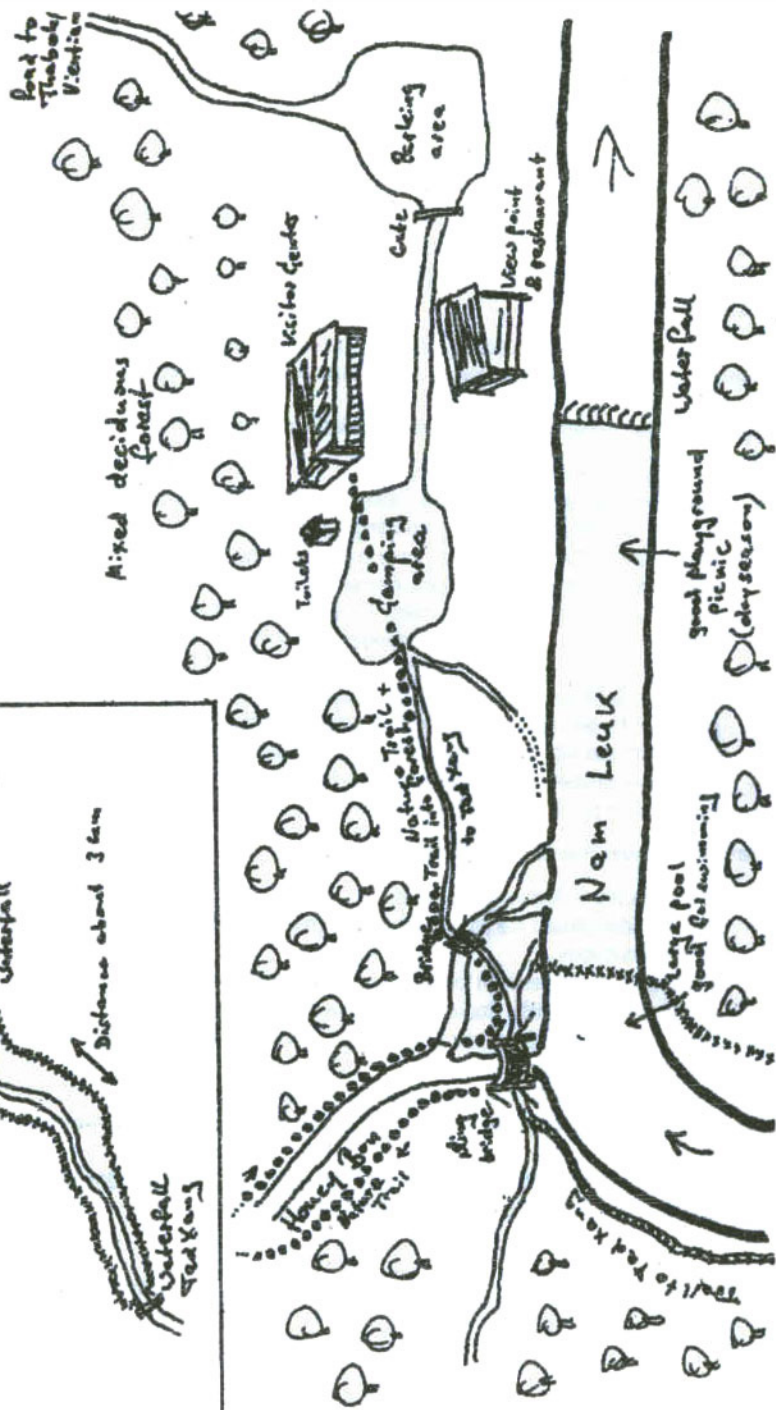
Since the lower half of the river is cut off from its natural water resources by the dam, only a small portion of the original amount of water will reach *Tad Leuk*. Below the dam, the river is now fed by the watershed between here and *Tad Leuk* – a stretch of approximately 15 Km only. This may be the reason why falling so quickly dry after the last rains stopped. To set things straight: *Phou Khao Khouay* is by nature very dry, the dam can't be made responsible entirely. The extent of the impact on the environment will probably be seen only in the years to come.

It is possible to trek from *Tad Leuk* to the dam, but it's a long way. Don't attempt to do it on your own. Ask Mr. Savay of the restaurant to guide you for a reasonable fee. It has some good forest on the way there. The dam site has no infrastructure, yet. You may organize that someone picks you up there or you have to walk all the way back. If you're interested in boat tours on the lake, try to find a company in *Vientiane*, which may be able to provide boats and transportation. The lake is long and narrow and very beautiful during the rainy season while full. It is surrounded by good forest (even some small patches of primary forest).

Trail to Tad Xang



Map of Tad Leuk and environs



Further information

Please visit our website: www.trekkingcentralaos.com.

Have also a look in our brochures on Phou Khao Khouay in general and the destinations *Tad Xay/Pha Xay, Ban Hatkhai and Ban Na*.

For inquiries you may also visit the Tourist Information Center at the in *Vientiane*.

Some useful advises and regulations for visitors at *Phou Khao Khouay*

Welcome to *Phou Khao Khouay National Protected Area* for enjoying an unspoiled and memorable visit in this magnificent park.

To minimize any negative impact on the environment, your cooperation is highly appreciated in helping to protect and preserve the natural beauty and in respecting the dignity of the local people.

Please observe the following rules and safety codes during your visit:

- ◆ Be yourself an example for others.
- ◆ Awareness and responsibility are the first things to take into the park. Remind other visitors – in a most polite but firm way – on the importance of respecting the environment.
- ◆ Stop pollution: Carry out what you carry in (i.e. wrapping, bottles, metal, glass or plastic). Where available, place your garbage in containers provided. Remember, litter can kill wildlife.
- ◆ Protect wildlife and the environment: Please do not collect, disturb, harm or destroy animals and plants, respectively. This includes the scratching of graffiti on trees and rocks. Don't buy wildlife or souvenirs made out of it.
- ◆ Prevent forest fires – particularly in the dry season: campfires are allowed in designated areas only. Ask the park personnel for permission. Make sure all fires are completely extinguished before you depart. Please take care not to start fires with discarded cigarette butts. Broken glass, left unattended, can start fires, too.
- ◆ If you have children, take special care close to the river!
- ◆ Please abide by all notices in the park.

On trek and tours into unknown territory

- ◆ Never trek alone. Always hire a guide.
- ◆ Do not underestimate the physical strain you may encounter during trekking tours in difficult terrain and strange climatic conditions.
- ◆ Don't forget to bring enough food and especially drinking water with you.
- ◆ Do not climb steep cliffs. Rocks may be loose and slippery.
- ◆ Don't underestimate the power of water when crossing rivers with strong currents. Always use a stick to check the depth of the water.
- ◆ Never reach into holes and crevices with an unprotected hand.
- ◆ Watch out for thorny plants and sharp edges of bamboo (particularly at eye level).

And - please keep in mind: The park authorities cannot take any responsibility for injuries or damage to your equipment. There is no telephone (and signal) at Tad Leuk.

This brochure has been compiled by the National Tourism Administration of Lao PDR
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