

Welcome to

Champasak

Ministry of Information and Culture, Lao National Tourism Administration

We are very pleased to welcome you to Vat Phou and the Champasak Cultural Landscape. While the monumental complex of Vat Phou is the most famous of the archaeological sites in Champasak, it is only one component of a rich and dense archaeological and cultural landscape. We invite you to experience and learn from all elements of the vast cultural landscape. We would be grateful to receive your suggestions on how we can improve the site.



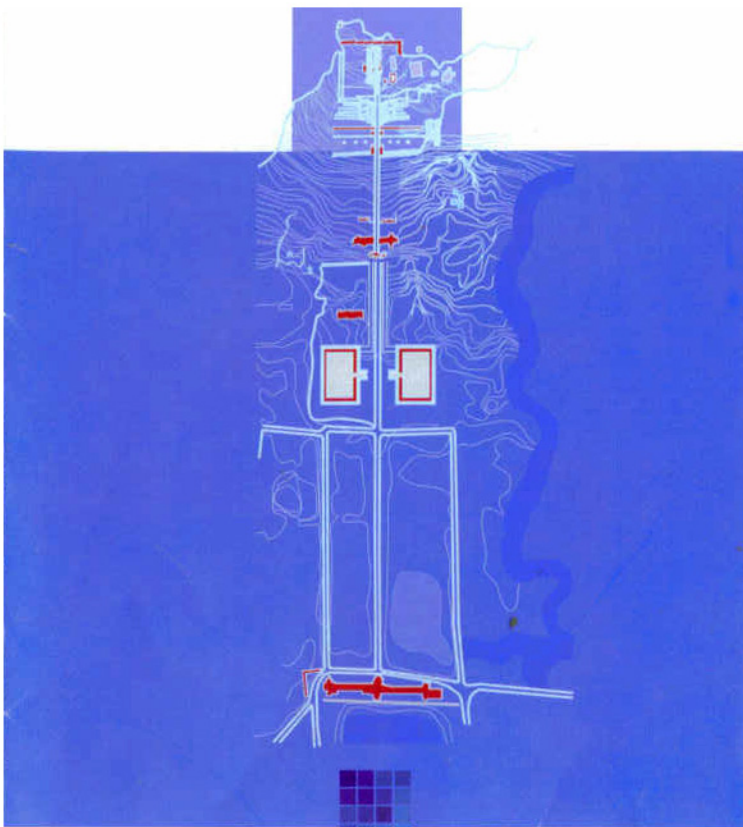
Champasak District and Vat Phou Heritage Office

Sabbai dee. Welcome to Champasak district. Aside from the Vat Phou monument and other archaeological sites in our district, we hope you find the time to appreciate our vernacular architecture, Buddhist temples and French colonial buildings, and to enjoy and experience our local life style, cuisine, festivals and special events. Please enjoy your stay in Champasak.



UNESCO

Welcome to the World Heritage Site of Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape. For the last ten years, UNESCO has closely collaborated with the government of Lao PDR on the conservation and management of this World Heritage Site. The site is not only a historic landscape with archaeological monuments, but it also represents one of the world's best examples of the planning and engineering of a landscape to reflect the religious beliefs and economic concerns of the ancient Khmer city-states of Shrestapura and Lingapura. It requires special care and attention. You can help preserve the site by respecting the site and its religious significance, and by following the guidelines and signages. We hope you enjoy your stay in Champasak.



The World Heritage Site of Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape

Champasak Cultural Landscape

What You Can Do in Champasak

There are many activities you can do while in Champasak. To make your visit interesting and worthwhile, we suggest you start your tour with a briefing at the Visitor Center, where you can get all the information you need about the site and activities you can experience.

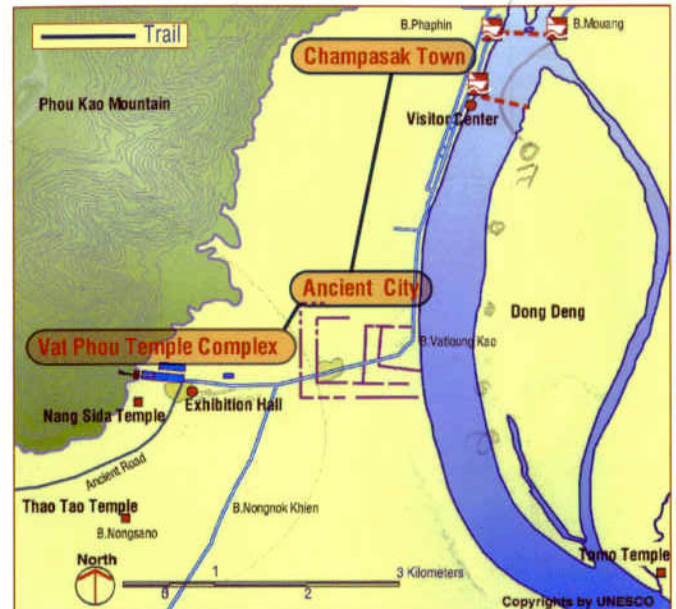
Leaving the Visitor Center, you can explore the two parallel streets of the Champasak Town where Buddhist temples, French colonial houses, traditional shop-houses and vernacular residences and local eateries are located (See map of Champasak). Observe the lifestyle of the local people quietly going about their daily lives. Enjoy the scenic beauty of the Mekong River where water buffalos and fishermen continue to live in harmony as they have for centuries.

After exploring the town, you may proceed to the Ancient City which is a rare example of ancient urban settlement in Southeast Asia.

Your next stop should be the Exhibition Hall where archaeological material and relics from archaeological excavations and local collections are exhibited. The collection consists of sculptures and ceramic ware from the Khmer period (from 7th to 13th centuries AD), as well as Lao-Buddhist art (from 18th to 19th AD), and miscellaneous objects, including copies of original relics and folk statues, produced during the 20th century.

From the Exhibition Hall, you can proceed to explore the monumental complex of Vat Phou, a major example of both the early and classical periods of Khmer architecture. Vat Phou is the focal point of a complex cultural landscape centered on the Champasak Plain bounded by the Phou Kao Mountain to the west and the Mekong River to the east.

Dominating the cultural landscape is the Phou Kao Mountain, whose peak is a natural linga, a representation of Shiva, the god of fertility. The remains of a temple were found on the top of the rock outcrop, with a carved sandstone linga lying at its foot. On the slope of Phou Kao Mountain, the Hindu religious complex of Vat Phou was built.



There are other archaeological sites within the Champasak Cultural Landscape, such as the Nang Sida Temple, Thao Tao Temple and Tomo Temple. But these sites are not yet open to the public. They are being stabilized and restored before they can be visited.

Where to Stay and Dine

Guesthouses line the two parallel streets within Champasak town. Room rates range from 2 to 10 US Dollars, depending on the facilities provided. When planning a visit to Champasak during Vat Phou Festival in February, you need to make room reservations ahead of time, due to the heavy influx of visitors. Local restaurants can be found in some guesthouses, along the streets of Champasak Town and near the entrance to the Ancient City.

How to Move Around Champasak

To move from Champasak town to the Ancient City and the Vat Phou temple complex, we suggest you rent a bicycle, and not a motorcycle which pollutes the air and disturbs the tranquility of the site. For small groups, you may hire small vans, locally known as sawngtaew.

Champasak Town



1. Ferry at Ban Phaphin
2. Ferry to Don Deng



3. Visitor Center
4. Resting Area



5. Bank



6. Post Office



7. Hospital



Attractive Architecture

8. Old French Style House
9. Former Royal Residence
10. Old Traditional Local House



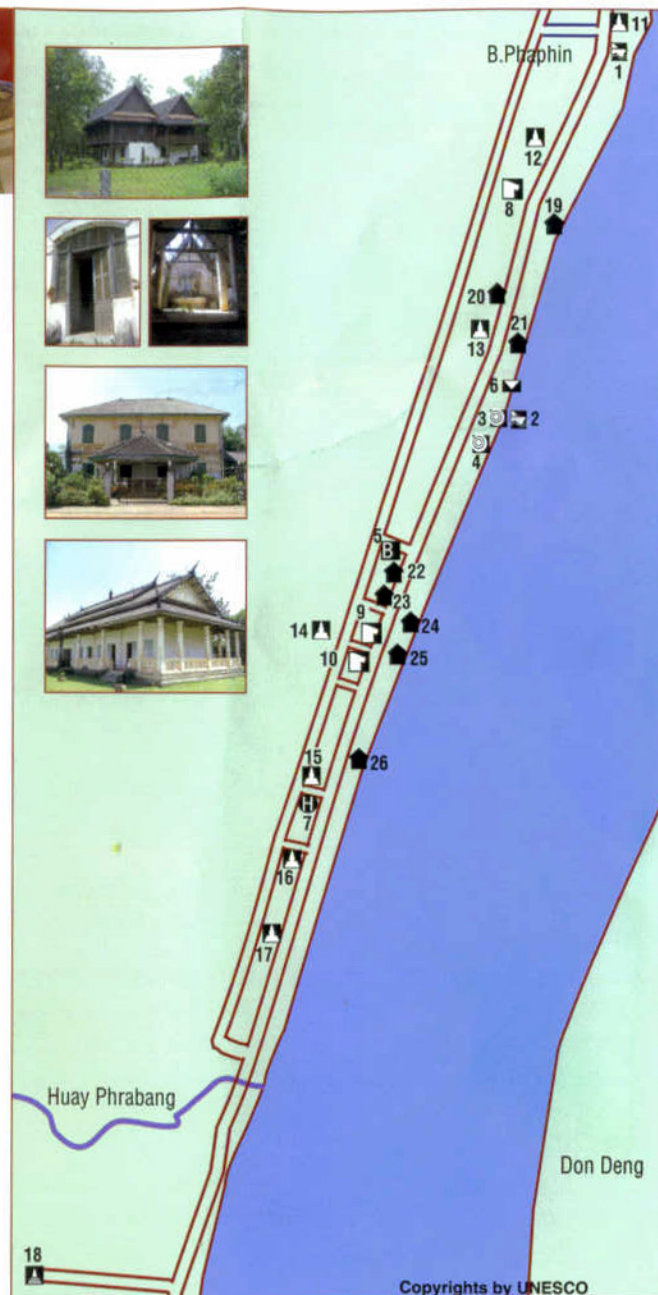
Vat (Temples)

11. Vat Phaphin
12. Vat Phoxay
13. Vat Muangsene
14. Vat Thong
15. Vat Amad
16. Vat Nakhone
17. Vat Phonepheng
18. Vat That



Accommodation

19. Anuxa Guest House
20. Thavisap Hotel
21. Dokchampa Guest House (1)
22. Dokchampa Guest House (2)
23. Khamphoui Guest House
24. Saythong Guest House
25. Suchitra Guest House
26. Vong Paseuth Guest House



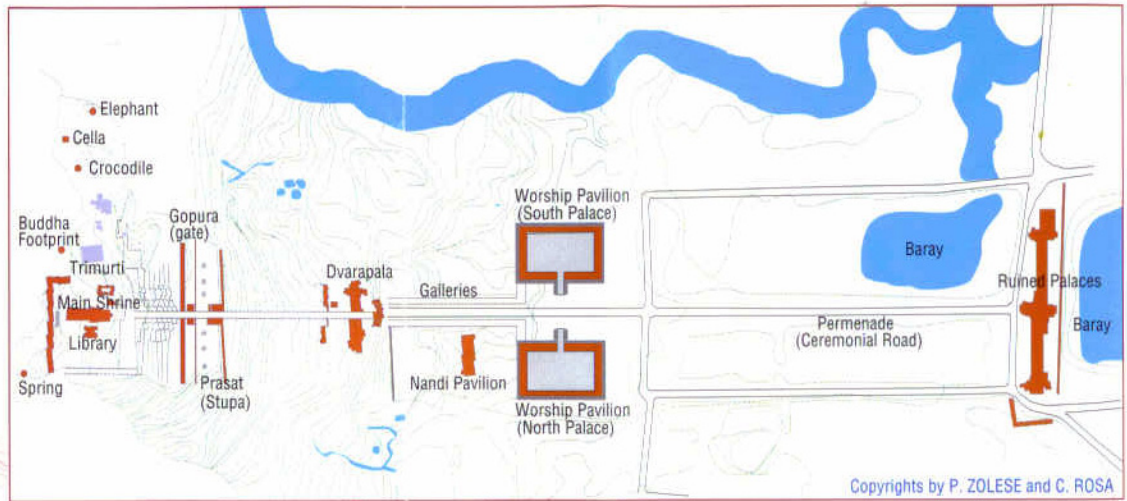
Copyrights by UNESCO

0 0.5 1 Kilometer



The Vat Phou Temple Complex

The Vat Phou Temple is a rare form of hilltop Khmer temple planning, developed to take full advantage of the topography of the site. It stretches 1,400 meters along an east-west axis and was built on the slope of Phou Kao Mountain as a place for people to make offerings to the gods who lived on the mountain. The Phou Kao Mountain and the Vat Phou Temple dictated the placement of ancient settlements, other temples, *barays*, drainage systems and roads. The alignment and placement of these features were intended to replicate their version of the universe and of heaven. The ancient Khmer believed that living in a place that replicate the perfect form of the heavens would guarantee harmony in their lives.



Copyrights by P. ZOLESE and C. ROSA

■ Monumental Structures
■ Modern Structures

Baray

A *baray* is a man-made reservoir used by worshippers to wash themselves before entering the temple. This cleansing is meant to purify one's mind before worshipping at the temple. Water from the *baray* was also used for irrigation in the ancient times.

Worship Pavilions

On the first terrace, there are two large rectangular stone buildings/worship pavilions, sometimes called 'palaces' - the 'North Palace' to the left of the ceremonial road and the 'South Palace' to the right. It is believed that these 'palaces' were used for ceremonial purposes, such as preparing offerings to present to the gods in the temples and hosting worshippers during special ceremonial events.

Nandi Pavilion

At the back of the North Palace is the Nandi Hall - a building for the vehicle of the god Shiva called Nandi or bull. Based on archaeological research, the Nandi Hall may have been connected to the ancient road from Vat Phou to Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

Terraces

From the third terrace up before entering Thevalay there is the natural slope with 77 steps. The stairs end at a sixth and last terrace located about 75 meters above the baray commanding an impressive view over the whole complex and plains to the Mekong River and beyond.





Exhibition Hall

At the main gate of the Vat Phou temple complex, there is the Exhibition Hall where you can find detailed information on Vat Phou and archaeological remains within this World Heritage Site.

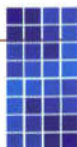


Vat Phou Festival

The Vat Phou Festival, an important religious event which is celebrated yearly for three days in February, embodies the continuing sacred and communal role of the site. Each year, people from all over Lao PDR come to worship at Vat Phou during the festival. Aside from the religious Buddhist ceremonies, other traditional cultural activities, such as boat races, boxing matches and elephant procession are organized to entertain visitors.

Main Shrine (Thevalay)

Today the main shrine houses a statue of the Lord Buddha. However, in the ancient times, a Shiva *linga* was worshipped in the main shrine. Water flowing from the spring at the top of Phou Kao Mountain was considered sacred and was diverted into the sanctuary, the water flowing over the Shiva *linga*, down the slopes of the temple into the *baray* below, and from there into the rice fields before overflowing into the Mekong River. Water played an important role in the ancient Khmer religion, as it does today in Buddhist ceremonies.



Opening hours

Visitor Center 8.00 am. - 4.30 pm.

Exhibition Hall 8.00 am. - 4.30 pm.

Vat Phou Temple Complex 8.00 am. - 4.30 pm.

Contact Information

Lao National Commission for UNESCO

Lanexang Road 01 Vientiane Lao PDR

Tel: (856-21) 212-108 Fax: (856-21) 212-108

Email: laonesco@hotmail.com

Lao National Tourism Administration

Office at Champasak Province

Tel: (856-31) 212-021 , 252-667

Government Office of Champasak Province

Tel: (856-31) 212-004 Fax: (856-31) 213-590

Department of Information and Culture of Champasak Province

Tel: (856-31) 212-069

Vat Phou Heritage Office

Tel: (856-20) 576-8280

Office of the Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO

Tel: (66-2) 391-0577 Fax: (66-2) 391-0866



UNESCO



Lao PDR



Photo Credits: UNESCO