

KONG LOR CAVE: LAOS' LOST TUNNEL



Located a half-day drive south of Vientiane in Khammouanne Province, Kong Lor Cave is an amazing 7.5 km-long limestone tunnel formed by the Hinboun River, which flows through the cave year-round. You can take a boat ride right through the main cavern, which is up to 90 meters wide and 100 meters high.

The Hinboun River fills the entire width of Kong Lor passage except for a large white sandy beach located about halfway through the cave. Villagers also have names for rock features seen along the way: Frog, Soft-shelled Turtle, Owl, Buddha, and Fish Trap. The dry season from November to April is the best time to

view these stone oddities as you can step from the boat onto the shore and enjoy the “Beauty in the Dark”.

Along with a paved road that leads to Kong Lor Village from Route 8, the cave riverride can be reached via a 40-km overland trek from Ban Na Hin Village, the “Gateway to Kong Lor” or by taking a slightly longer but more adventurous boat trip up the Hinboun River beginning in Napouk Village.

Home stay accommodation is available in both Kong Lor and Natan villages. Before heading to Kong Lor, stop at Ban Na Hin for a walk to That Mouang and That Namsanam waterfalls. Tours to Kong Lor and Ban Na Hin can be arranged from Thakhek, the provincial capital, through the Khammouane Guide Service Unit or directly with local guides stationed in Na Hin Village.

The popular two-night/three-day “Kong Lor Cave & Home Stay” tour departs Thakhek by local transport with an English-speaking guide onboard for the three-hour trip to Na Hin Village to explain the upcoming adventure.

After checking into a guesthouse, a local guide takes you to a protected forest to visit That Mouang and That Namsanam waterfalls. The guide teaches you about the forest and its wildlife and non-timber forest products, and organizes a picnic lunch. In the late afternoon, you return to your guesthouse in Ban Na Hin, with time to explore the town and its market.

Following breakfast, you travel by local transport for three hours to Kong Lor village. After exploring the village, you walk to the cave entrance, board a local long-tail boat





and travel through the 7.5-km cave/tunnel to the valley beyond, stopping along the way to observe stalactites and other limestone formations. The tunnel is still used by local villagers as a communication route.

Following a picnic lunch, you continue to Ban Natan (or return to Kong Lor) for an overnight home stay with a local family. There is ample time to wander around the village and observe traditional activities such as weaving and rice polishing. In the evening the villagers organize a traditional *baci* ceremony. The following day, you return to Na Hin and your next destination.

Other accommodation options for visitors to the Kong Lor Caves include guesthouses in Khoun Kham Town on Lao Route 8. More upscale eco-lodges are also available in Kong Lor Village.

There are also several nearby caves to explore. Nam Nyaeng Cave leads to an underground river that runs all year round. The Tham Nam Cave, or "Water Balance Cave, has a permanent pool of water fed by an underground spring. Near Kong Lor village's Sala Hinboun Lodge is Tham Kee Cave surrounded by the remnants of mysterious centuries-old structure.

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