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Lasting Laos

SUSTOUR Laos Project

Information Package



About the SUSTOUR Project

Supporting Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises (MSME) in the Lao Tourism Industry Supply Chain to Access Markets for Sustainable Practices Project (SUSTOUR Laos) (2021 – 2024)



Key Facts



Project Duration:

From Project Approval to July 31, 2024



Target Areas:

Vientiane Capital, Vientiane Province and
Luang Prabang Province. 11 districts total.



Target Groups:

120 Tourism SMEs (20 tour operators and 100 hotels); 500 Supplier MSMEs in the tourism industry; 40 Local Communities involved in tourism activities; 20 major international travel agencies; 500,000 tourists (domestic and international)



Final Beneficiaries:

3,600 employees of Lao tour operators and hotels; 2,500 employees of MSMEs in the tourism supply chain; 5,000 men, 5,000 women, 5,000 girls, 5,000 boys in local communities participating in CBT; 500,000 tourists in Laos choosing certified tourism MSMEs.

Summary

The project “Supporting Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises (MSME) in the Lao Tourism Industry Supply Chain to Access Markets for Sustainable Practices Project (SUSTOUR Laos)” is funded by the European Union and implemented by Plan International and key partners, Department of Trade Promotion (MOIC), the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism (ECEAT).

The project will utilize an integrated business-led approach to support Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) within the Lao tourism industry supply chain to adopt and promote sustainable consumption and production (SCP) practices. This includes involving local suppliers, purchasing environmentally friendly products, conserving natural resources and applying socially responsible ways of interacting with local communities. Adoption of sustainable practices will be certified and awarded by the Travelife certification standards, which has been developed by ECEAT and is recognized internationally as the leading sustainability certification system in the tourism industry. The project will trigger market demand for SCP practices in the Lao tourism industry supply chain by marketing Laos as a green des-

tinuation and by raising awareness on sustainable MSMEs among consumers, specifically tourists and international travel agents. This will ultimately benefit MSMEs in the tourism industry supply chain that are adopting sustainable practices will be a competitive advantage resulting in increased income and employment opportunities. In cooperation with LNCCI as the local partner, the project will seek to advocate for SCP practices in public and private institutions and work with LNCCI business members to implement SCP practices throughout the tourism industry supply chain as well as promoting domestic production and practices of Lao MSMEs.



Objectives and Expected Outcomes



Overall Objective:

To contribute to the Laos National Green Growth Strategy, 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan, the LNCCI Private Sector Strategy (2021 to 2025) and the National Tourism Strategy as well as the Sustainable Development Goals 8 (decent work) and 12 (responsible consumption and production) by promoting sustainable consumption and production practices in the Lao tourism industry supply chain.

1> Outcome 1:

The Lao tourism industry supply chain will become more sustainable through the implementation of the Travelife sustainability programme among MSMEs in the tourism industry supply chain. The project will develop and implement sustainability initiatives within the Lao tourism supply chain and improve conditions for tourist-host communities.

→ Key Activities:

Adaptation of the Travelife programme to the Lao context; support tour operators and hotels to achieve the Travelife certification through training and coaching; develop a sustainability certification for supplier MSMEs in 5 key sectors of the Lao tourism supply chain; support supplier MSMEs to achieve the sustainable supplier certification through training and coaching; develop and implement green products/solutions for the tourism industry; provide information on access to finance for MSMEs; improve community based tourism practices with tour operators and local communities involved in tourism.

2> Outcome 2:

MSMEs will be encouraged to support sustainable tourism in Laos which in turn will raise consumer awareness thus creating competitive advantages and incentives for MSMEs in the tourism supply chain to implement sustainable practices.

→ Key Activities:

Implement promotional activities targeting international and online travel agents (through business to business matchmaking, attending travel fairs, familiarization trips, product promotion), domestic and international tourists (through videos, social media campaigns, posters, brochures, billboards) as well as Government agencies, INGOs and companies (through forums, expos, etc.).

3> Outcome 3:

Tourism industry business needs related to sustainable practices in the Lao tourism industry supply chain will be advocated in Lao institutions and forums and in relevant regional networks and forums.

→ Key Activities:

Promote sustainable practices in relevant Lao forums (e.g. destination management network, Lao business forum); strengthen feedback mechanisms between LNCCI and tourism industry businesses; support LNCCI to advocate for business needs related to sustainable practices to the public sector; promote the project's approach and Travelife programme in regional forums (e.g. Tourism Forums).

Benefits for Participating Businesses



For TOs, DMCs, Travel Agents and Accommodations

- Training and coaching of management and staff on sustainable business practices and sustainability certification programmes, including Travelife
- Opportunity to achieve the Travelife sustainability certification and gain international recognition for sustainable business practices
- Opportunities for resource conservation and potential cost saving opportunities (e.g. energy efficiency, water conservation)
- Opportunities for marketing and promotion of your business to international travel agents (via webinars, travel fairs, trade shows, etc.) to domestic and international tourists (via social media, domestic travel fairs, etc.) and to local companies and organizations (e.g. through local forums and expos)
- Opportunity to adapt to emerging trends in the tourism industry and access new markets
- Improve the sustainability of your supply chain through access to sustainable suppliers and products
- Input into the development of new sustainable products or solutions for the tourism supply chain (e.g. eco-friendly products, digital tools, etc.)
- Participate in information sessions on access to finance



For Supplier MSMEs

- Training and coaching of management and staff on sustainable business practices and sustainability certification programmes
- Opportunity to achieve a local sustainability certification for your business
- Opportunities for resource conservation and potential cost saving opportunities (e.g. energy efficiency, water conservation)
- Marketing and promotion of your business (via social media, magazines, familiarization trips, promotion of products/services at trade shows/travel fairs, etc.)
- Opportunity to adapt to emerging trends in the tourism industry and access new markets
- Business-to-business matchmaking with tourism businesses (e.g. tour operators, travel agents, and accommodations)
- Input into the development of sustainable products or solutions for the tourism supply chain (e.g. eco-friendly products, digital tools, etc.)
- Participate in information sessions on access to finance

Travelife Certification

Overview of the Travelife Criteria and Process

The Travelife certification programme consists of standards which are supported by the global travel sector as the leading sustainability system for the tourism industry. Travelife is a leading training, management and certification initiative for tourism companies committed to reaching sustainability throughout their supply chain. The Travelife criteria has been previously established within the frame of an EU LIFE project (2004 – 2007) based on sustainability management concepts developed by United Nation Environment Programme and the Tour Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development (TOI). The Travelife criteria complies with ISO 14001, EMAS III standards, the full set of ISO 26000, OECD Corporate Social Responsibility guidelines and is accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

The methodology includes integrated training packages; a sector specific sustainability management system; policies & guidelines; online planning & reporting tools; suppliers minimum and best practice standards; an online supplier database; and audit & certification of tour operators, hotels and their suppliers. The criteria for tour operators and hotels are highly comprehensive and locally adapted and include environmental components (climate change, carbon offset, waste management, plastic reduction, energy efficiency, water conservation, etc.), social components (human rights, gender awareness, child rights, sexual exploitation, community relations, labour rights, occupational health and safety, etc.) and economic components (decent jobs, employment conditions, buying local, etc.).” To achieve the certification status, a business must register in the online system, pay a modest membership fee, complete the online reporting process and undergo an external assessment/audit.



Eligible Businesses

Only tour operators, travel agents and accommodations (hotels, guest houses) are eligible to receive the Travelife certification.



Criteria

The Travelife criteria is highly comprehensive, locally adapted and includes environmental components (climate change, carbon offset, waste management, plastic reduction, energy efficiency, water conservation, etc.), social components (human rights, gender awareness, child rights, community relations, labour rights, etc.) and economic components (decent jobs, employment conditions, buying local, etc.). In total, there are 256 individual sustainability criteria, 199 of which is obligatory, meaning a business must meet the criteria in order to receive a certification, and 57 are voluntary. Although voluntary criteria do not need to be fulfilled in order to qualify for certification, applicant companies are still required to report in detail about their compliance regarding these criteria.

The criteria are summarized into 10 main themes as outlined in the table:

Theme	Total criteria	Voluntary criteria	Obligatory criteria
1. Sustainability management and legal compliance	33	3	30
2. Social policy & human rights	28	6	22
3. Environment & community relations	65	14	51
4. Partner agencies	16	6	10
5. Transport	20	4	16
6. Accommodation	16	3	13
7. Excursions	27	5	22
8. Tour leaders, local reps. / guides	10	3	7
9. Destinations	11	5	6
10. Customer Communication & protection	30	8	22
Total	256	57	199



Certification Process

In order to become Travelife certified, each business goes through the following step-by-step process:

- 1> Step 1: Engagement.**
The business is motivated to undertake the Travelife process and registers in the online system.
- 2> Step 2: Training.**
The business appoints a Sustainability Coordinator(s) who receive an introductory 3-day training course provided by ECEAT and ABTA certified trainers.
- 3> Step 3: Reporting and Coaching.**
The appointed Sustainability Coordinator(s) begin reporting compliance for each sustainability criteria in the online reporting system. The reporting process requires showing evidence of compliance (e.g. uploading relevant company policies). The online reporting system includes guidance and training materials (which will be translated into Lao). Furthermore, throughout the reporting process the businesses are supported with ongoing coaching and support by the project team in Laos and online support and coaching by ECEAT experts based in Europe.
- 4> Step 4: Assessment/Audit.**
Once the business has completed the reporting process they will request an assessment/audit from ECEAT. To achieve the Travelife for Tour Operator “Partner” status, only an online assessment of the reporting is required. To achieve the certified status for tour operators, travel agents and accommodations, an external, in-person audit of the business is required. ECEAT or ABTA will hire a qualified freelance auditor to visit the business for 1-2 days to verify compliance with the Travelife reporting and send the results and their recommendation to ECEAT or ABTA. ECEAT or ABTA will then review the audit report and determine if the business has achieved the certification status.
- 5> Step 5: Awarded.**
If the business has achieved the certification status, ECEAT or ABTA will provide them with a Travelife Certificate. The businesses are then promoted among other Travelife members and to the general public through online marketing (e.g. Travelife website, social media) and award ceremonies (e.g. at international travel fairs and trade shows). The certification status is valid for 2 years, if the business wishes to keep the certified status they must undergo another audit.

Travelife Process in Laos



Membership Fees

Travelife has modest membership fees which only cover the costs of the online system and the fees and travel costs of the auditor. Businesses are normally required to pay the fee at 2 year intervals. The membership fees for Tour Operators and Accommodations are dependent on the size of the business and subject to change. The prices are available on the Travelife websites www.travelife.info and www.travelifestaybetter.com. During the lifetime of the SUSTOUR project, the Travelife fee, including the cost of the audit, will be waived for Lao tourism businesses.

Travelife for Accommodations:

Property Size	2-Year Membership Fee in USD (reduced due to C-19, including audit costs)*
Micro (Maximum occupancy of 1 to 30 guests)	\$675
Small (maximum occupancy of 31 to 160 guests)	\$915
Medium & Large (maximum occupancy of 161 to 1000 guests)	\$1,600
Mega (maximum occupancy of 1001 + guests)	\$2,270

* Membership fees for Travelife for Accommodations include the cost of the independent audit required to become a certified member.

Travelife for Tour Operators:

Business Size	2-Year Membership Fee in USD (reduced due to C-19, including audit costs)*
Small (<25 full time employees)	\$240
Medium (≥25 full time employees)	\$360
Large (>100 full time employees)	\$480

* Membership fees for Travelife for Tour Operators does not include the cost of the independent audit required to become a certified member. The cost of the audit varies and depends on the businesses size, ranging from \$500 for smaller companies to \$2,400 for very large companies.



Supplier Sustainability Certification Programme

Overview of the Supplier Criteria and Process

The Lasting Laos certification is a local sustainability programme for supplier businesses in the tourism industry that have demonstrated sustainable environmental, social and economic practices. The programme has been developed as part of the SUSTOUR Laos project (funded by the European Union) and will be administered locally by the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI). The goal of this programme is to improve the overall sustainability of the tourism supply chain by providing benchmarks and guidance for supplier businesses to measure and improve their sustainability.

The certification is based on a set of sustainability checklists developed for four key sectors of the tourism industry with waste management as a priority cross-cutting issue across all sectors. These checklists have been developed in consultation with the private and public sectors and based on the Travelife criteria. Supplier businesses must demonstrate compliance with the checklists in order to become a Lasting Laos certified business. Supplier businesses will report their compliance with the checklist through the Travelife online platform. Compliance will be checked and verified by LNCCI with technical support provided by the SUSTOUR project. Businesses that have proven compliance with the checklists will be awarded and recognized as leading sustainable suppliers in the tourism industry supply chain.





Certification Process

In order to become Travelife certified, each business goes through the following step-by-step process:



*The SUSTOUR project will provide technical support to LNCCI during these steps.

1> **Step 1: The business submits an application.**

Following the engagement of business for the certification by LNCCI and the SUSTOUR project, interested businesses will submit an application form in either hardcopy or online format (through this google form: <https://bit.ly/LLapplicationform>) which provides basic information needed to ensure eligibility and contact the business (e.g. businesses type, sector, location, phone number, email, etc.).

2> **Step 2: LNCCI provides a checklist, online, and other tools to the business.**

LNCCI and ECEAT (with technical support from the SUSTOUR project) will provide the businesses with the relevant checklist, login to the Travelife platform (www.travelife.info), and other tools (e.g. documents that provide guidance and demonstrate best practices).

3> **Step 3: Training and coaching are provided to the business (optional).**

An optional, initial training is provided by the SUSTOUR project to businesses on the Lasting Laos certification criteria and process, including how to use the online Travelife platform. For those businesses who are unable to access the website or have difficulty using online platforms will be able to use paper-based reporting. Advisors from the SUSTOUR project and LNCCI (previously trained by the SUSTOUR project) can provide businesses with ongoing coaching as needed as they go through the reporting process. Coaching sessions can be provided through either online communication, phone, or in-person sessions (organized and accompanied by a SUSTOUR project representative).

The initial training is optional and not compulsory for a business to become certified. This is because some businesses may already have the capacity to go straight to steps 4 and 5 (reporting and assessment).

4> **Step 4: The business completes the internal reporting.**

The business will complete the reporting requirements based on the sustainability checklist. The businesses will report on their compliance with the checklist criteria via the Travelife online reporting platform which will track their progress. Reporting via an offline, paper-based checklist and report can be done for those businesses who are unable to access the website or have difficulty using online platforms. During the reporting process, the business can request coaching as mentioned in the previous step.

5> **Step 5: The business applies for an assessment.**

Once the business has completely filled out the checklist (either online or offline), they can apply for an assessment by submitting an online application for assessment (through this google form: <https://bit.ly/reqassessment>). LNCCI (with technical support provided by the SUSTOUR project) will review the application. If the business appears ready, the SUSTOUR project will coordinate with the business and an LNCCI assessor to organize an assessment.

6> **Step 6: LNCCI conducts the assessment.**

An LNCCI representative who has previously received training from the SUSTOUR project on the assessment process, will visit the business establishment and conduct an assessment based on the checklist which was submitted by the business. The assessor from LNCCI must not be the same person who had been providing coaching to the business to ensure the assessment is impartial. During the lifetime of the SUSTOUR project, any assessment will be accompanied by a representative of the SUSTOUR project. The assessor will inspect the business and interview the business owner, manager, and/or staff to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the information provided by the business and their compliance with the checklist. The assessor will fill out a brief assessment report (<https://bit.ly/llcriteriabve>) which will be submitted to the SUSTOUR project for final verification.

There are three potential outcomes for an assessment:

- ➔ **The business passes the assessment and is awarded:** the assessment finds that the checklist submitted by the business is accurate and demonstrates 100 % compliance with the mandatory sustainability criteria. The business is then awarded the Lasting Laos certification, which includes a plaque and sticker that the business can display, as well as recognition of their achievement (e.g. through social media or events).
- ➔ **The business complies with at least 70% of mandatory criteria and is given 1 month to become fully compliant.** If the business is found to be compliant with 70 % or more of the mandatory criteria, they will be given a period of 1 month to become compliant with the remaining criteria. The business can demonstrate compliance by providing evidence that the criteria have been fulfilled to the assessor (e.g. supporting documents, pictures, etc.). Another in-person assessment is not necessary. Should the business demonstrate compliance with all mandatory criteria within 1 month, they will pass the assessment and be awarded with the Lasting Laos certification.
- ➔ **The business fails (complies with less than 70% of the criteria) and is given suggestions for improvement.** If the assessment finds that the business is not in compliance with the sustainability checklist. The businesses are given feedback on their assessment and provided with suggestions for improvement. The business can then make the necessary changes and reapply for an assessment at a later date.



COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

Addressing the Pandemic's Impact on the Lao Tourism Industry

Response Theme 1

Providing Technical Assistance and Building Resilience of Tourism MSMEs

- 1> Evaluate the impact of COVID-19 of Lao MSMEs involved in tourism sector, incl. utilizing the baseline to measure the impact and needs of MSMEs which can be incorporated into the projects' COVID-19 response activities.
- 2> Optimize the projects current technical approaches for the COVID-19 context, incl. cost saving benefits of SCP and identifying access to finance for MSMEs.
- 3> Support the development and implementation of a common set of COVID-19 prevention and hygiene standards, guidelines and a certification program (based on international standards and best practices) for MSMEs in the tourism sector.

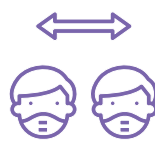


COVID-19 Prevention in Tourism & Hospitality

SUSTOUR will support the development of COVID-19 hygiene and infectious disease prevention standards and support our partners and tourism MSMEs to adhere to them.



Hygiene



Infectious Disease Prevention



Integrate into Travelife Standards

Response Theme 2

Restoring Consumer Confidence and Stimulating Demand



- 1> **Gather, share market intelligence with tourism MSMEs** and formulate appropriate marketing strategies, esp. for domestic tourism market.
- 2> **Restore consumer confidence** related to COVID-19 prevention and hygiene standards and practices of tourism MSMEs. Utilize both traditional and digital marketing to promote.
- 3> **Stimulate demand through promotion of domestic and regional tourism**, incl. involvement in the “Lao-Thiao-Lao” campaign.

Response Theme 3

Public-Private Cooperation

- 1> **Develop feedback mechanisms** for the needs of MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic, improve the communication between the public and private sector for COVID-19 mitigation and recovery.
- 2> Build the capacity of LNCCI to **advocate for the needs of MSMEs** as a result of COVID-19 and provide inputs into government plans for COVID-19 mitigation and recovery.
- 3> **Improve national and regional cooperation** related to information exchange and collaboration between the public and private sector, especially regarding COVID-19 prevention and hygiene standards, practices and certification.



Look out for the Travelife and Lasting Laos logos to find a certified sustainable business!

You can also check which businesses in your area are Travelife certified by scanning the QR code below ('select country as Laos').



travelife.info



[@lastinglao](https://www.facebook.com/lastinglao)