

IMPACT SHEET: Luang Prabang Handle with Care

Luang Prabang - Handle with Care



Sustainable Destination Development for a Fragile UNESCO World Heritage Town Facing Emerging Mass Tourism



PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The project addresses the three aspects of sustainability:

- **Nature:** Reduction of natural resources and waste during the provision of tourism goods and services. SCP measures include food waste management/composting, energy and water saving measures at hotels as well as plastic reduction and avoidance actions. ASEAN and industry standards are supported in this context.
- **Culture:** Cultural and heritage assets and the living Buddhist social fabric are essential for maintaining Luang Prabang as a UNESCO World Heritage town. The project supports public-private policy dialogues on village, district and provincial level (“community based heritage management”). In cooperation with UNESCO, local capacity is shared regionally and globally.
- **Economic:** The project supports local value-chains that link village producer groups of the Luang Prabang Handicraft Association (“hand-made in Luang Prabang” brand) with the economic opportunities of the well-visited Luang Prabang Night Market. This creates additional value and income for many families.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Luang Prabang Handle with Care project is located in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. This is a UNESCO World Heritage site of about 60.000 inhabitants, and welcomes about 650.000 domestic and international visitors mainly from Thailand, China, Korea and Europe. Luang Prabang is famous for its intact nature, culture and inclusive approach to responsible tourism development. However, the small size of the site and the increasing numbers of tourists, make Luang Prabang a fragile destination, that is increasingly under pressure from emerging mass tourism. The Handle with Care project supports a broad range of local stakeholders by providing capacity building programmes, product development and policy dialogues to ensure the preservation of Luang Prabang as a responsible tourism destination. While tourism can undoubtedly contribute positively to employment and income opportunities for a young population in a least developed country, there might very well be an inverse tipping point where the economic costs of unregulated mass tourism are higher than the benefits. This project engages with these existing and emerging problems by addressing all aspects of sustainability – nature, culture and economy.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the project was to develop and promote sustainable tourism (products) in a fragile destination. Specific objectives include increased provision and consumption of sustainable tourism products to preserve the destination with regards to:

- Assurance of private sector uptake and benefit;
- Responsible utilisation of natural resources;
- Protection of cultural heritage, minorities and inclusive economic participation.

TARGET GROUPS

- **Tourism & Hospitality SMEs and Investors**
- **Business Membership Organisations (BMOs)** Travel Agents, Hotels & Restaurants, Handicraft Association
- **Government Departments** Luang Prabang Province Department of Information, Culture and Tourism; UNESCO World Heritage Office Luang Prabang; Urban Planning and Administration Authority (UDAA), as well as the National Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism
- **General Public** Schools, Universities, Neighbourhoods in Laos; International Tourists

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Capacity Building

- SCP Measures for tourism and hospitality SMEs (trainings, workshops, on-the-job coaching).
- Product and Tailoring training for local producer groups for the Hand-Made-in-Luang-Prabang brand by the Luang Prabang Handicraft Association.
- Public (Private) Policy dialogue events.

New Products

- Organic menus incorporating local ingredients and food traditions.
- 30 new handicraft products suitable for village producer groups and local tailors have been developed and are sold in the Luang Prabang Night Market.
- Cultural tourism policy is improved to reduce the negative impacts of cultural tourism on local communities.
- Tourism services are improved to reduce their natural resource impact, e.g. reduction or removal of plastic from excursion services or energy/water saving measures.

ASEAN and Industry Standards

- ASEAN Standards are implemented across the local tourism industry, e.g. the village of Ban Nayang will be developed as a Community Based Tourism (CBT) and homestay tourism product.
- The Travel-life Elephant Camp Animal Welfare standard supports the promotion of responsible tourism involving domesticated animals.

Promotion & Awareness

- Environmental outreach and awareness activities for elementary and middle schools are delivered through theatre and drama on how to protect the environment, and reduce waste & plastics.
- Culture and heritage awareness activities for high-schools and universities are delivered to sensitise students about heritage conservation and their cultural traditions.
- Promotion of Luang Prabang as a sustainable tourism destination at international trade shows, such as ITB Singapore, ITB Berlin, Mekong Tourism Forum and ASEAN Tourism Forum.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

The Luang Prabang Handle with Care Project achieved results across a number of sustainable tourism issues:

- 100 SMEs implement improved SCP measures ranging from plastic reduction, food waste composting, to energy and water saving.
- Over 150 members of producer weaving and tailoring groups are producing some of our 30 newly developed handicraft products and could increase their income.
- 7 ASEAN sustainable tourism standards are being implemented.
- Luang Prabang has been promoted as a sustainable tourism destination in four international trade fairs.
- 2000+ students and citizens participated in environmental outreach activities or in heritage community actions.



PROJECT CHALLENGES

Our project is working in a very small, yet fragmented environment with a broad range of stakeholders. Advanced stakeholder coordination proved to be far more complex and time-consuming than initially anticipated. A fair amount of time had to be allocated for partnership and beneficiary management. In Laos, work goes beyond office hours; attending social events and spending time with our stakeholders proved to be essential to the success of this project.



LESSONS LEARNED

The tourism and hospitality sector in Laos is very fragmented and companies operate at vastly different levels of professional expertise. It was therefore important not to rely on “globally best solutions”, rather, to search for the most effective local and context-sensitive approaches. Every change and development process must start at the current level of knowledge of a public partner or SME beneficiary respectively. In this context, the project supported in parallel the implementation of entry-level ASEAN Standards, as well as more demanding industry standards and SCP measures for SMEs. These very focused consultations with partners and on equal level beneficiaries proved to be time-consuming, however, in return, the project managed to deliver self-sustaining solutions, ensuring sustainability even after project completion.



Luang Prabang is a fragile heritage tourism destination facing an era of emerging mass tourism. The Handle with Care project engaged an astonishingly diverse set of public and private stakeholders, ensuring that all aspects of sustainability were considered. Only such a detailed and holistic approach will ensure Luang Prabang to become a responsible, sustainable and most of all resilient destination.



Dr. Andreas Hofmann

GIZ Team Leader,
Luang Prabang - Handle with Care

Long-term project sustainability

The project is currently developing an interactive online learning platform that will gather all SCP measures, documents, ToT and training materials, as well as other relevant results of the project in such a way to ensure partners and SMEs can continue implementing SCP measures after the project completion. The final months of the projects will emphasize the uptake and self-sustained application of lessons learnt, and of the instruments that have been developed. Opportunities to scaling-up successful approaches and instruments with other public and development partners are also being explored. Finally, the project always ensures that the SME partners implementing SCP measures take ownership of their initiatives.

Project contributions to Climate Change Mitigation and SDGs



The main focus of the project is on the environmental impact of the rapidly emerging mass tourism in Luang Prabang. In this context, de-coupling economic progress from natural resource use is essential to sustainable development. The project directly contributes to **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** by working with the local tourism and hospitality industry in Luang Prabang on implementing energy and resource efficient SCP measures to reduce the impact of climate change. In addition, it also contributes to **SDG 8: Good Work Conditions**, by supporting local sourcing of artisan products and organic agricultural products as part of improving the tourism value chain. **SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** is also taken into account in the work with UNESCO to improve heritage and buffer zone management for Luang Prabang.

Impacts at a Glance

Economic Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 new locally sourced souvenir products increase local incomes • 2 New Community Based Tourism (CBT) and homestay products • 60 SMEs upgrade hospitality branding due to sustainability measures • 4 producer groups join local production of souvenirs design and capacity building • 60 SMEs implement sustainable hotel and restaurant management and measures (e.g. resource management, energy saving, food waste composting, water saving) • Introduction of ASEAN Standards • Introduction of Elephant Camp Animal Welfare Industry Standard by Travel-life • Plastic free service level for tourism services (accommodation, excursion, food and beverage)
Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy saving • Food Waste Composting • Water Saving • Plastic Waste reduction (e.g. refillable bottles and refill stations) • Reduce carbon footprint by sourcing organic food locally • Local sourcing of handicraft products using only natural components (home-grown cotton or silk, natural dying) • Animal welfare of captive elephants working tourism increased (but baseline was already good)
Social Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H&S trainings for tourism and hospitality staff • The project supports Luang Prabang to remain a cultural, environmental and economic sustainable tourism destination • Participants are 50% or more women • Old men have been included in village producer trainings (esp. Bamboo Products) • Monks and Novices for cultural tourism have been considered • 2,500 elementary school students from ca. 15 local schools are involved in environmental awareness and plastic avoidance trainings using theatre and role play. • 1,500 older youth from colleges and university are involved in similar activities for heritage and culture awareness
Climate Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localisation of the souvenir and organic food supply chain for participating hotels and restaurants, reducing transportation needs • Energy saving measures for 60 hospitality SMEs
Green Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Supplies and Practices EXPO matching sustainable hospitality suppliers and local businesses • Discussion Events with Western and Chinese investors about environmental and cultural responsible investment • Discussion event on green finance and SCP Uptake Study • Public-Private Policy Dialogues on SCP measures • Instead of developing new instruments, the awareness of under-utilized or unknown existing financial instruments and funding lines has been increased
Target Group Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60+ Hotels, restaurants, and guest houses • 20+ DMC (tourism destination management companies) • 30 temples • 7 elephant camps • Ca. 500 public and private stakeholders, of which ca. 100 are in the intensive core group • 20+ Community Environment Outreach Activities
Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Public-Private Dialogues • 30+ Discussion Events and Technical Workshops • Implementation of ASEAN Tourism Standards and Adaption of Lao National Standards • Promulgation of Ministerial Regulations for Heritage Tourism Management with the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism in cooperation with UNESCO Paris and Vietnam • Policy recommendations put forward: 7 ASEAN Standards; UNESCO Visitor and Destination Management Regulations • Types of policy changes/new regulations contributed to: Sustainable Hospitality Management; Responsible Culture and Heritage Destination Management
Europe-Asia cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Conferences and Symposia, e.g. joint conference with UNESCO Paris, National Ministry and Provincial Authorities • National and Provincial Discussion Events with local and European investors and business leaders



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DURATION

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