

Private Sector Tourism Investment Opportunities

Khoun Xe-Nong Ma National Protected Area

Investment Highlights 2025

➤ Trekking Expeditions into the Wild



Issued: September 2025

Site Visit: Contact laosnationalparks@gmail.com for a site visit

Notification of Intent Due: First-come, first-served

Proposals Due: According to the MOU after receiving initial approval to move forward



Khoun Xe-Nong Ma National Protected Area

Lao PDR

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PHOTOS PAUL ESHOO



Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods



The Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) is developing sustainable, private-sector driven nature-based tourism (NBT) as one of the pillars of its 5-Year National Socio-Economic Plan and 2030 National Green Growth Strategy (NGGS). With an impressive diversity of natural capital, Laos' comparative advantage in NBT is a reflection of its expansive national protected area (NPA) network, which covers roughly 20% of the country's total land mass. The Lao protected area system plays an essential role in protecting endangered wildlife species, including endemic species of the Annamite Mountain range, a global biodiversity hotspot. It is also home to a diverse group of ethnic minority peoples, whose history, culture and religious traditions are intertwined with nature.

Laos has been making a name for itself as an international and regional destination for NBT, adventure tourism, ecotourism, and community-based tourism. Tourism has the potential to become Laos' top export and revenue earner, but this will require sustainable private sector investment and proactive public-private partnerships (PPP). With the right planned investments, tourism in protected areas has the potential to be positive force for lasting economic growth, local employment, and sustainable conservation financing. The Lao Landscapes and Livelihoods (LLL) Project is working towards promoting inclusive private sector investment to leverage the natural assets of Lao PDR for sustainable tourism growth that benefits investors, local people, and conservation.

Khoun Xe-Nong Ma NPA is an extremely important refuge for biodiversity and evergreen forests with relatively good chances of seeing endemic species. Although the area is remote, trips into the forest are very rewarding. Khoun Xe-Nong Ma also serves as the upper watershed of the Xe Bang Fai River, which flows through the Xe Bang Fai Cave. The area is also home to a multi-ethnic population who are the stewards of this globally-important ecosystem. Entrepreneurs with a love of nature a long-term vision for sustainable ecotourism development and an eye for an investment opportunity are sought to help promote this unique area.



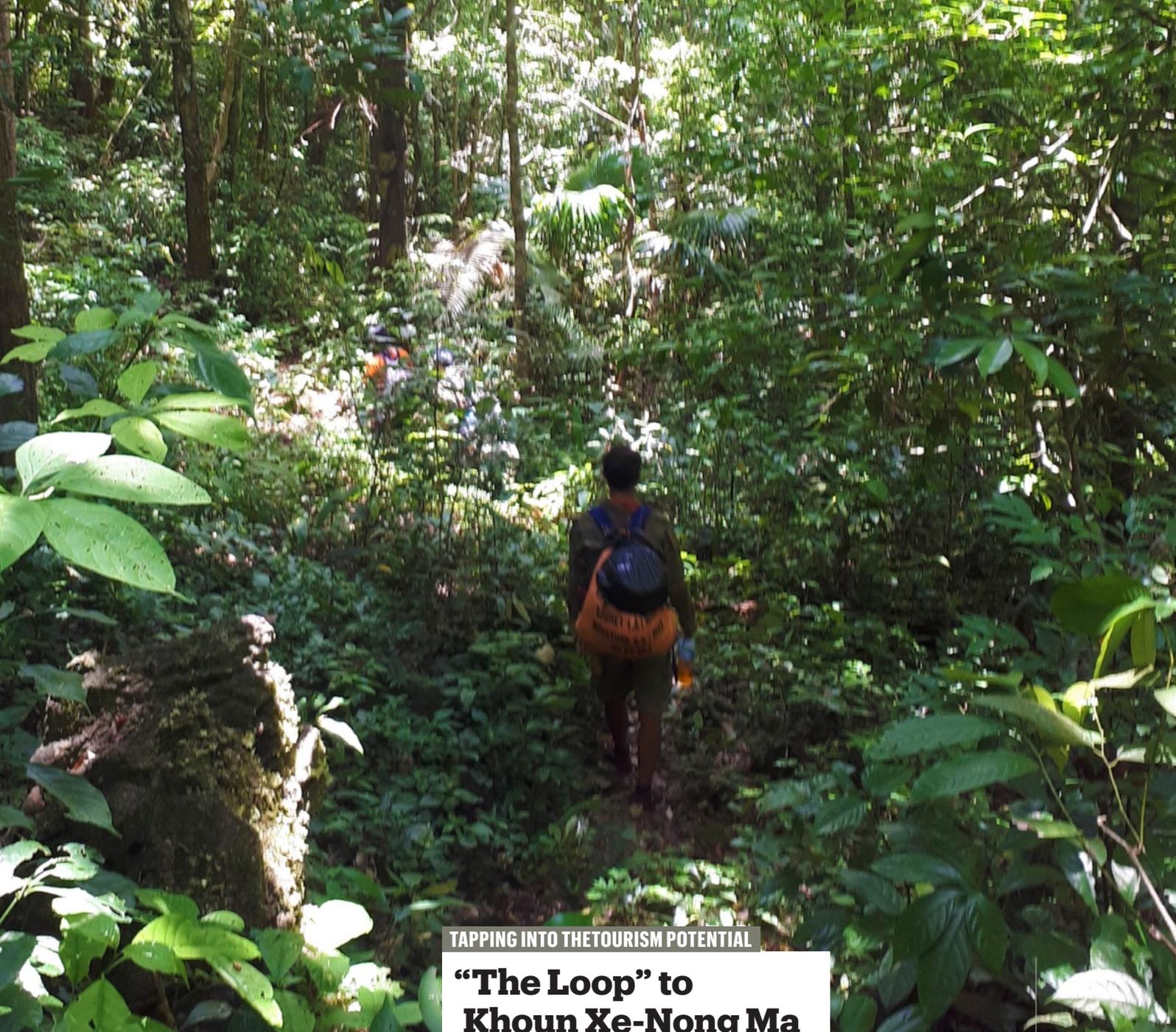
Assoc. Professor Dr. Somvang Phimmavong
 Director General, Department of Forestry, Lao PDR



Trekking in Koun Xe Nong Ma

Houay Het Village





TAPPING INTO THE TOURISM POTENTIAL

“The Loop” to Khoun Xe-Nong Ma



- Khoun Xe-Nong Ma (KXNM) can be visited as part of the “The Loop”, a motorbike adventure route in Khammouane Province that starts and ends in Thakek town and links various protected areas, caves, waterfalls and other natural and cultural attractions.
- Trips to KXNM can be combined with Xe Bang Fai Cave, Hin Nam No National Park, located along the same route through Boualapha town, Khammouane and Bolikhamxay Province.
- Most visitors stay a night in Boualapha before traveling onward to KXNM, which is located about 80km from town.
- KXNM is located along the northern part of the historical Ho Chi Minh Trail, which continues through remote villages and southward to Savannakhet Province.
- As the park has yet to be opened for visitors, there is a great opportunity to develop a very unique, high-end wildlife trekking tour program.

PHOTOS PAUL ESHOO/KFW



KEY ATTRACTIONS

Khoun Xe-Nong Ma - Home of Endemic Annamite Biodiversity

- One of the best places in the Annamite Mountain Range to see endemic Annamite species, many of which have been newly discovered by science.
- Expansive wilderness that is one of the best preserved areas on either side of the Lao-Vietnam border.
- Traditional, ethnic Tri communities.
- Xe Bang Fai River expeditions that flow from Khoun Xe-Nong Ma to the Xe Bang Fai Cave in Hin Nam No National Park.

PHOTOS GREEN DISCOVERY





Forest in Khoun Xe Nong Ma

Key Markets

- Independent travelers touring “The Loop” by motorbike, bicycle or private car and visiting the Xe Bang Fai Cave in Hin Nam No National Park.
- Small tour groups visiting attractions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- Thai adventure and nature enthusiast groups entering from Nakhon Phanom.
- Vietnamese adventure and nature enthusiast groups entering from the Na Phao border crossing.
- Tourists visiting other attractions in Khammouane Province, including the Rock Viewpoint, Green Climbers, Nakai Nam Theun National Park and others.

Accessibility

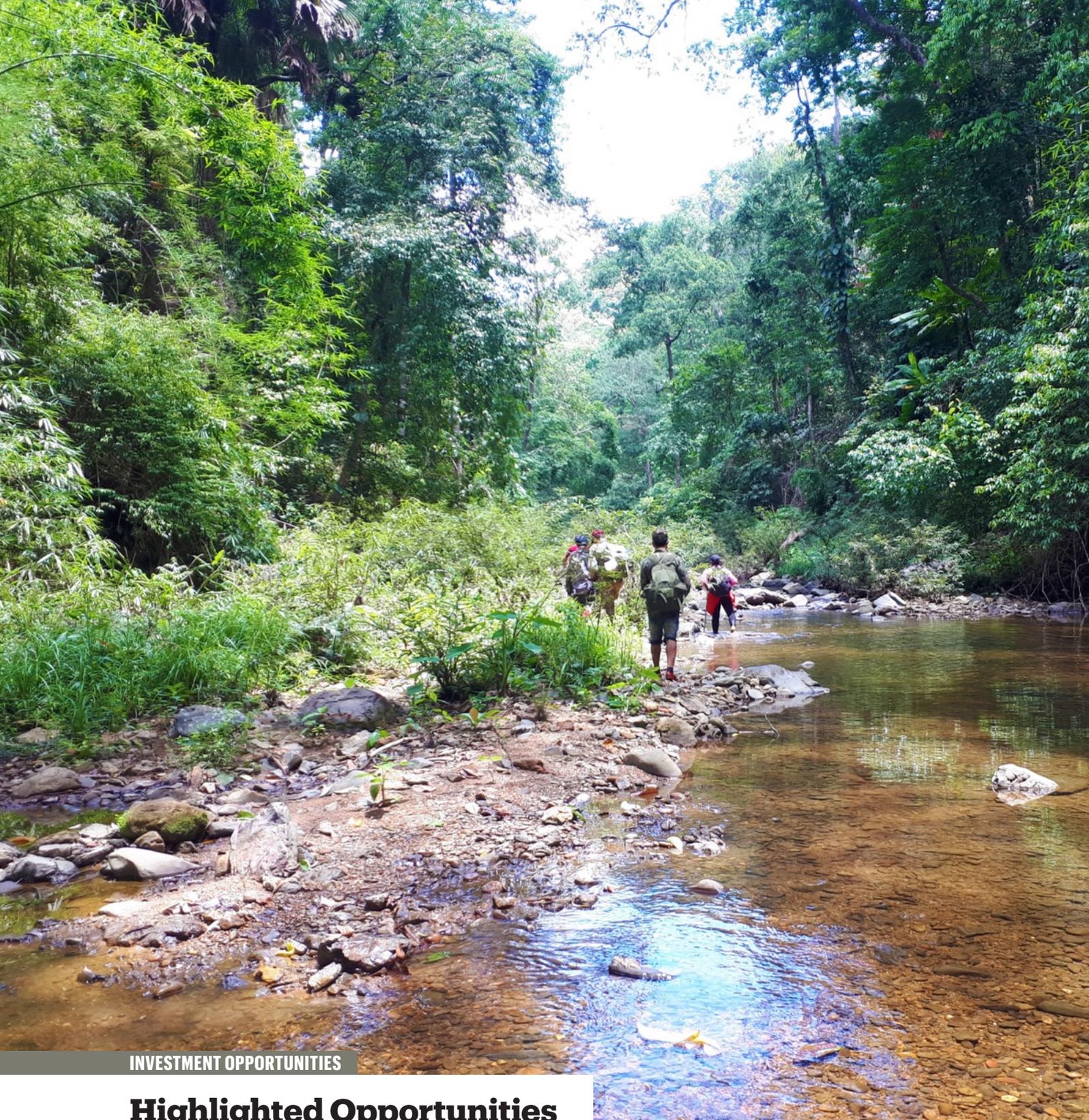
- **Getting to KXNM via Boualapha town:** Nakhon Phanom Airport, Thailand: Fly from Bangkok (1 hour) + 5.5 hours (250km) by road to KXNM (passing through Boualapha).
- **Dong Hoi Airport, Quang Binh, Viet Nam:** Flights from Saigon (1.5 hours) and Hanoi (1 hour) + 4 hours (150km) by road to the Na Phao border + 4 hours (134km) to KXNM by road from Na Phao on laterite roads (passing through Boualapha).
- **Thakek, Laos:** 5.5-hour drive (210km) to KXNM, which is 2 hours (80km) from Boualapha.
- **Savannakhet, Laos:** 7-hour drive (258km) to KXNM (passing through Boualapha). Daily flights to Savannakhet from Vientiane (1 hour).



Kayaking adventures linking with Hin Nam No



Trailhead in Houay Het



INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Highlighted Opportunities

There is one principal featured tourism investment opportunity based on park management and stakeholder input.

👉 **Trekking Expeditions into the Wild**

Other Opportunities:

Investors are free to propose other activities or areas inside or around the protected area that have high potential and follow park regulations and guidelines.



Trekking Expeditions into the Wild

Houay Het and Pakeun Village Areas, Boualapha District, Khammouane Province, **Totally Protected Zone** of Khoun Xe-Nong Ma

The Opportunity

The main attraction of KXNM is endemic Annamite species, with a relatively high chance of spotting the wildlife here compared with other areas. Trips into KXNM require a minimum of five days, departing from Boualapha Town by 4WD truck to the trailhead at Houay Het or Pakeun villages. Currently, there are no organized tours into the area, with only rangers and researchers allowed access. A private sector partner is sought to work together with communities and protected area authorities to develop high-end wildlife trekking expeditions.

Unique Selling Points

- Untouched wilderness;
- One of the best areas to see endemic Annamite species;
- Can combine with tours to the Xe Bang Fai Cave in Hin Nam No National Park, including kayaking expeditions starting from KXNM;
- Partner villages, Houay Het and Pakeun, are remote, ethnic minority Tri villages with a rich, traditional culture.

Investment Needs

- Develop and market high-end wildlife expeditions;
- Construct campsite(s) at key locations;
- Construct a small visitor center at one of the main village entry points;
- Improve the road to Houay Het and Pakeun villages;
- Develop waste management facilities in the villages;
- Train village guides and porters;
- Provide equipment for trekking, camera trapping, and kayaking.

Accessibility

- Houay Het and Pakeun villages are accessible by laterite road from Boualapha;
- Access is limited during the rainy season.

Partner Communities

- Houay Het, an ethnic Tri (Jri) village;
- Pakeun, an ethnic Tri (Jri) village;



PHOTOS: P. ESHOONKEM

Trekking into Khoun Xe



Sambar deer in Khou Xe



Wild bee hive along the trail

Other Areas

There are other areas with tourism potential in KXNM including

- Xe Bang Fai River kayaking expeditions;
- Tham Leu Neum Cave has historical significance as it was used for refuge from some of the most intense bombing along the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the Secret War;
- Other attractions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail;
- Wildlife learning and volunteer programs in cooperation with researchers and patrol teams;
- Langhi Waterfall.

Investors are also welcome to propose for investment and development other attractions in Khoun Xe-Nong Ma not listed in this manual.



Waterfall in KXNM



Trekking in KXNM

PHOTOS P. ESHOO/KFW



Environmental & Socially Responsible Investment



Reminder of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

Zoning

- For investments inside the **Totally Protected Zone (TPZ)**, no permanent infrastructure is allowed. Only campsites, toilets, trails, zip lines, boating, viewpoints and picnic spots are allowed.
- For investments inside the **Controlled Use Zone (CUZ)**, no large infrastructure such as hotels and resorts are allowed. Only low-impact infrastructure such as ecolodges, community guesthouses, and semi-permanent tented camps are permitted.
- For investments in the **buffer zone**, other tourism infrastructure types are allowed, including hotels and resorts.

Sustainable Capacity

- The capacity of any tour area will depend on the sensitivity of the area and zoning.
- For trekking and camping tours inside the totally protected zone groups should be limited (e.g.: one group per area per day with approximately 10 visitors per group plus guides). Actual limits will be mutually agreed with the investor based to an impact assessment and needs of the investor.
- Investment proposals should provide details on the capacity requirements of the tour, and proposed facilities, balancing impact management, tour experience, and sustainable benefit sharing for all partners.

Environmental Guidelines

- For tours inside the TPZ, strict waste management procedures are required. All waste



Trail leading out of Houay Het Village to KXNM

must be carried out, and no burning or burying waste allowed. For facilities in the CUZ and buffer zone, waste must be managed according to district waste management regulations, with maximum effort to reduce overall waste and promote responsible recycling.

- Investment proposals that do not propose large infrastructure are not required to conduct a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) but must pass an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) according to MAE regulations. Proposals for lodging and larger infrastructure may be required to conduct an EIA.
- All investments must be designed to limit impacts on the environment, landscape, water resources, and biodiversity. Architectural and landscape designs should demonstrate that potential impacts have been addressed.
- Infrastructure and tours should also ensure no loud noises or disturbances in natural areas or villages and surrounding communities.
- All materials used for infrastructure inside the park must be reviewed by the park in advance to ensure that no prohibited wood or other materials are used.

Social Guidelines (Community Participation)

- Communities must be partners in developing and managing the investment.
- Communities must be consulted and engaged during the proposal and negotiation process
- Villagers must be trained and hired by the investor as local guides, cooks, camp managers, lodge or resort staff, and other roles in the hospitality sector.

Nature-based Tourism Business Leveraging Facility

The Lao Landscapes & Livelihoods (LLL) Project supports the Nature-based Tourism Business Leveraging Facility (BLF), which has matching funds available to support investments in tourism and tour service management cooperative contracts. Prospective investors can apply for matching funds as needed. The facility has three types of financing available:

Planning and feasibility work:

This will have no minimum amount per selected application, no matching required and a maximum contribution of US\$2500 to support surveys, consultations with communities and other field work required for preparation of proposals. Such funds will account for no more than 10 percent of the total funds available through the BLF.

Challenge Funds:

These will target investment in particular areas or for more specific investments, typically to attracting concession investments or public

private partnerships identified by the project as high priorities. Maximum contribution of US\$200,000 per challenge to support investments of US\$400,000 or more. Such funds will account for roughly 50 percent of the total matching grants (approximately nine challenge grants) available through the BLF.

Matching funds for MSMEs:

For product development and marketing work for businesses located in and around the project protected areas of up to US\$20,000 per application and a maximum of two applications per MSME (Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises). This type of funding will account for no more than 50 percent of the total matching grants (approximately 90 MSMEs). Businesses selected for challenge grants can recommend financing for its partner MSMEs in order to develop NBT value-chains. The following matching requirements can include in-kind contributions. Matching requirements will be as follows:

Type of work	Project funds up to:	Applicant will contribute:
Construction of new facilities/buildings	50%	50% (can include in-kind contributions of materials and labor)
Upgrade existing facilities and equipment	70%	30% (can include in-kind contributions of materials and labor)
Staff/Community Training	90%	10% (can include in-kind contributions of accommodation/food/travel for trainers and trainees)
Development of new or improved activities, attractions and tours (including upgrade to boats)	70%	30%
New or improved websites, brochures, marketing campaigns, marketing materials/advertising campaigns	90%	10% (can include in-kind contributions of accommodation, food and travel)



Agreement types

- For large investments that include significant infrastructure investments, concessions agreements are encouraged, which can be made for up to 30 years according to the Investment Promotion Law.
- For smaller investments that have only small-scale infrastructure, Cooperation Agreements with partner communities and the protected area authority are allowed, which can be made for up to 20 years.

Maintenance & Conservation Fees

- The company is responsible for all maintenance costs of facilities, trails and other infrastructure or equipment used to manage and operate their tour services.
- Entry fees per visitor must be paid in addition to negotiated annual concession or cooperation agreement fees, unless otherwise specified in the agreement.

Taxes & Other Fees

- Relevant taxes including 10% VAT are required according to VAT and other tax laws.
- Labour Law must be followed, including the payment of Labor taxes and fees.
- Investments in remote areas (Zone 1) are entitled to a profit tax exemption for up to 10 years.

Camping spot in KXNM



The road to KXNM



PROPOSAL INSTRUCTION AND PROCESS

According to the Agreement on Tourism in Forest Areas of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, No. 1926, 03/06/2025, steps for cooperative agreements are as follows:

1. Send Letter of Intent

Send a letter of intent to the National Protected Area Management Division (PAMD), Lao Department of Forestry.

E-mail: laosnationalparks@gmail.com

2. Forms to Complete:

Fill out application forms:

- Application form (Form #1) that includes technical and financial proposal

E-mail: laosnationalparks@gmail.com

- Business Registration and Tax ID
- Company description and CVs of owner, manager and experts
- Please submit the application to the National Protected Area Management Division (PAMD) in hard copy directly to the PAMD office. Your documents will be stamped and you will receive a receipt slip.

3. Evaluation of Proposals

- Proposals will reviewed by relevant departments and evaluated using the application Evaluation Form (Form #1).

- Within 10 working days, you will receive a response on the initial proposal evaluation.

4. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

- Ecotourism experience (company profile & expert staff) **20%**
- Business vision, marketing strategy and itineraries/packages **20%**
- Involvement of local communities **20%**
- Benefits for conservation & environment **20%**
- Financial Plan & Terms & Conditions **20%**

5. Village Consultations, Site Visit and IEE

If the proposal is agreed to in principle, an MOU will be signed and a site visit, village consultations (Form #2), initial environmental examination (IEE), and feasibility study must be completed.

6. Final Approval & Contracting

- Final approval will be announced 10 working days after receiving the final proposal.
- Contracting will follow a standardized form (Form #3).

PHOTOS SAOLA WORKING GROUP/LUKAS WAHL



Annamite striped rabbit



Opportunity for growth

Contact us for further enquiries about private sector tourism investment opportunities

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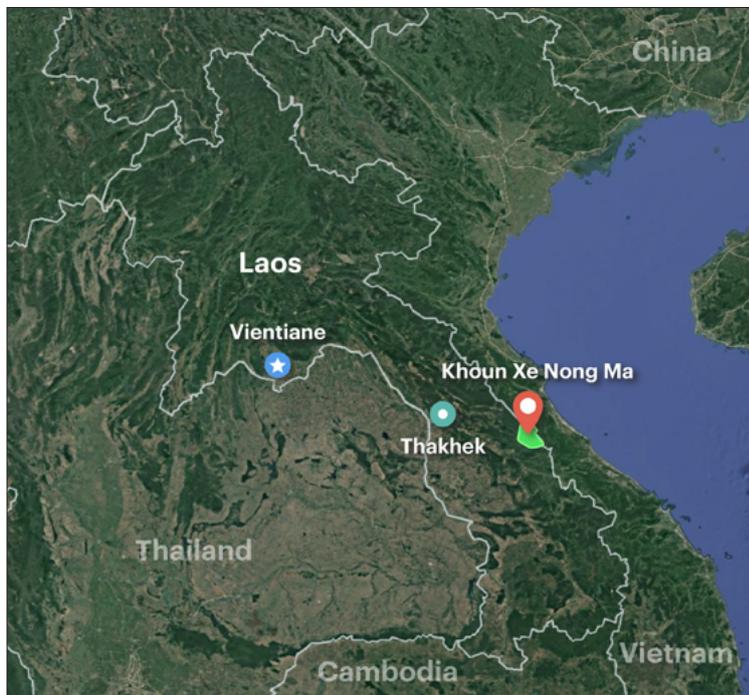
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Khoun Xe-Nong Ma National Protected Area

Location: Central Laos

Province: Khammouane Province

“Khoun Xe-Nong Ma NPA is an extremely important refuge for biodiversity and provides a home to many endemic Annamite species not found anywhere else. Khoun Xe-Nong Ma NPA also serves as the upper watershed of the Xe Bang Fai River, which flows through the Xe Bang Fai Cave in Hin Nam No NPA. The area is also home to a multi-ethnic population who are the stewards of this globally-important ecosystem.”



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