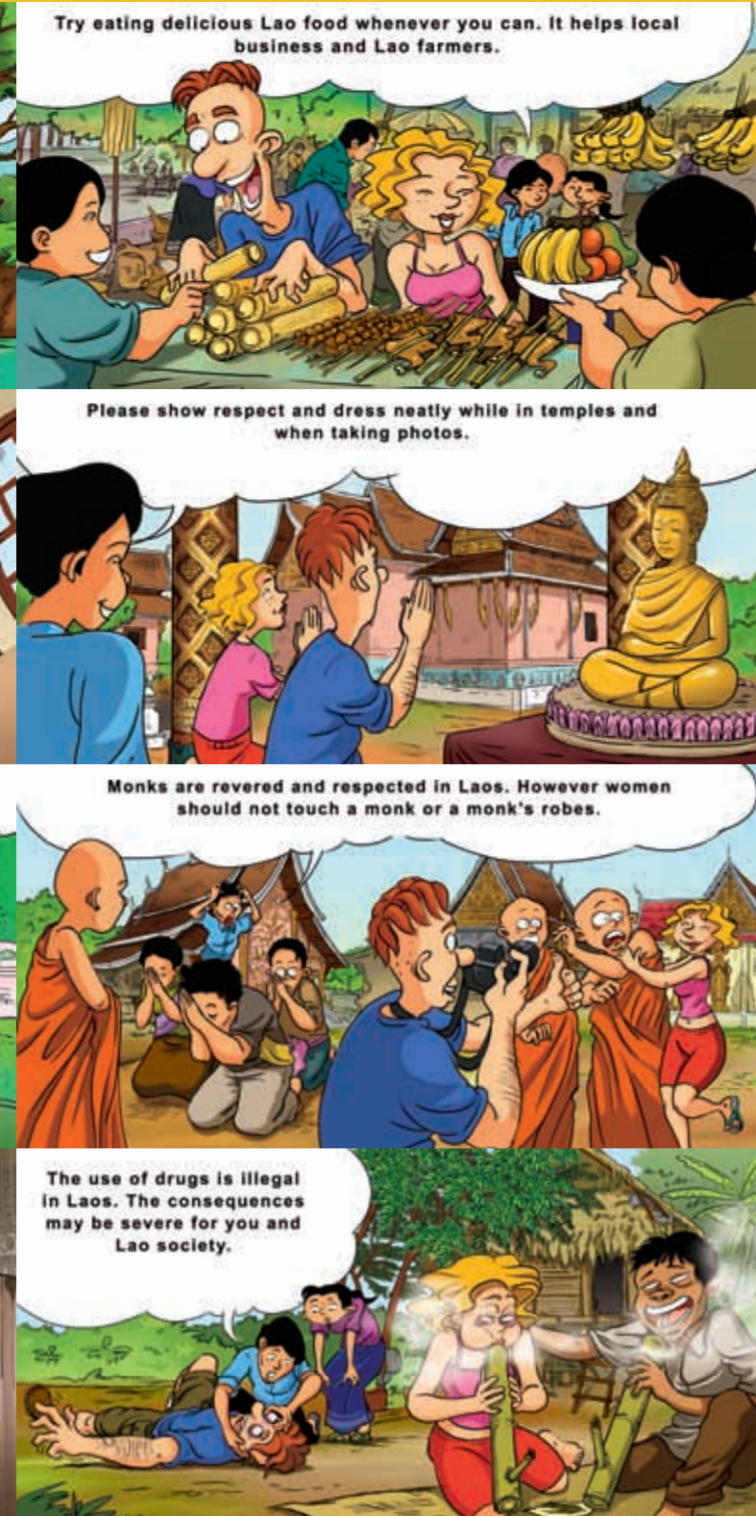
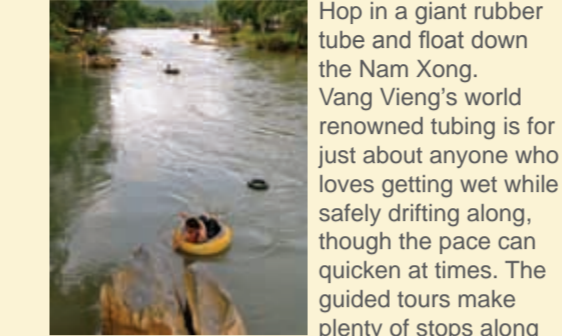


Dos and Don'ts in Laos



Get the most out of your stay in Vang Vieng by jumping into the many soft and hard activities presented in this geological wonderland. From rafting down the Nam Xong and mountain biking along rural trails to inspecting the town's temples and savoring organic Lao meals, Vang Vieng offers plenty of stunning natural and cultural adventures that can keep you busy for days.

1. Tubing



Hop in a giant rubber tube and float down the Nam Xong. Vang Vieng's world renowned tubing is for just about anyone who loves getting wet while safely drifting along, though the pace can quicken at times. The guided tours make plenty of stops along the way, but please refrain from drinking alcohol during your adventure. Plenty of registered shops around town offer tubing, and no matter which one you choose, all benefit through their cooperative business association.

Note: Please remember to respect local culture and customs, and when it comes to choosing clothes to wear, forget about skimpy bathers and do like the Lao people do: put on a pair of knee-length shorts and a T-shirt.

4. Trekking

Step away from the tourist hub and explore Vang Vieng's unrivalled natural surroundings on an organized multi-day trek. You can also spend the day walking on your own along marked trails, or strolling on the cultural side of town to visit four peaceful temples. Check out some of the treks offered by the tour companies and enter a side of Vang Vieng that's well-worth the hike. You can follow streams, explore caves, eat organic local foods, go for a swim, camp out, and visit villages with an overnight stay.

6. Motorbike Riding

Grip the handles of a motorcycle for a stunning adventure a bit further a field. Shops around town rent everything from powerful motocross bikes to simple scooters, which are fine for most out-of-town excursions. You can motor your way to waterfalls and caves, and journey along a 5-km unpaved road south then west of town to the popular 100-meter-deep Tham Poukham (Golden Crab Cave) and water hole for a cool swim. Four-wheel ATV treks are also now available for those who don't mind the mud.

Note: Be very careful when driving motorcycles, especially when traveling off road. Always wear a helmet and never drink and drive.

8. Swimming

Looking to take a dip? Vang Vieng offers several swimming opportunities with a natural backdrop. East of town, Kenlon Waterfall in the Kaeng Nyui group offers a pleasant swimming hole. Along Route 13, you can wade in the Po River at the KM 161 Bridge, swim in the Nam Xong near the river at "Water Fun Park" at Ban Phoudindaeng. West of Vang Vieng, visitors to Tham Pou Kham (Crab Cave) can dive into a Ka River water hole, and Tham Pha Pheung (Bee Cliff Cave) offers a natural swimming pool inside. And, for those seeking really cold water, jump into the water basin inside Tham Chang south of town.

For more information on individual caverns, visit the "Stunning Caves" section of this map.

10. Hot New Adventure – "Balloons over Vang Vieng"

Float over the Nam Xong River and amidst the upper cliffs of the limestone karsts on Vang Vieng's latest stunning adventure, Balloons over Vang Vieng. This "nature walk in the sky" trims the treetops and rises higher for a panoramic view of the surrounding area before a precision landing. Balloons over Vang Vieng offers three flights a day: two sunrise tours and a sunset journey.

For more information, look out for the posters at booking agents or phone 020 9691 8111.

2. Kayaking

Tackle the rapids around Vang Vieng on a choice of a half-day run down the Nam Xong to multi-day camping trips. More than 10 registered companies offer kayaking with lessons for paddlers of all abilities. Enjoy Vang Vieng's spectacular scenery in silence and steer your way through rough water on a stunning kayaking adventure.

3. Caving

When it comes to caves, Vang Vieng is king, with 17 distinct caves, many of which are conveniently clustered in groups. You can visit the caves on your own, hire a local guide, or join a tour. Most of the caves are easy to reach by motorbike, cycle, and foot, and each one has its own tale to tell, whether legend or historical fact. All the caves are managed and maintained by the communities or local entrepreneurs, and they charge a small entrance fee for the effort. You may also have to pay a modest toll to cross bridges leading to the caves, with much of the payment going into village funds.

For more information on individual caverns, visit the "Stunning Caves" section of this map.

5. Biking

Whether you're looking to tackle the trails on a rugged mountain bike or take a leisurely pedal in and around Vang Vieng, a number of shops in town rent a range of two-wheel cycles to meet your needs. You can head out on your own and follow the roads and trails or join a mountain-bike trek organized by a local tour company. Families, couples, and friends can take a relaxing ride to see Vang Vieng's temples, quiet rural outskirts, and several of its caves.

7. Rock Climbing

Ardent rock climbers will feel an adrenaline surge when they see the sheer cliffs around Vang Vieng, and would-be climbers can also learn the art of scaling rock walls. Green Discovery and Adam's Climbing School have recently teamed with climbing enthusiasts from Australia and Europe to carve out almost 100 routes on eight of Vang Vieng's crags. Be among the first to claw your way up one of the area's cliffs as word of this newfound climbers paradise is spreading fast.

9. Visiting Temples

Take a short walking or cycling tour of Vang Vieng's quiet cultural side, and visit the town's four Buddhist temples, each with its own distinct history and architecture. Start at the 18-stone-pillared Vat Mahathat built in 1880 in the town's north, before heading south to 100-year-old Vat Kang, the peaceful home of four monks, 21 novices, and three nuns. Continue to Vat Sisoumang built in 1944 by a local named Chanthao, and then complete your cultural tour at Vat Meuang Xong constructed in 1889.

Note: Please dress appropriately when entering the vats.

For more information on self-guided temple tours, visit the "Vang Vieng Temples" section on the right.



Vang Vieng Temples

Immerse yourself in Vang Vieng's culture by visiting the town's four Buddhist temples, each with its own distinct history and architecture, on a short walking or cycling tour of town.

Begin your cultural adventure at **Vat Mahathat** in Ban Vang Vieng located in the town's north. Originally built in 1880 as Vat Siviengxong, the temple was moved to its present location shortly after and renamed Vat Don Hor before today's title of Vat Mahathat or simply Vat That. Constructed with money donated by Lord Isan Outhaidesanasongkham, Vat That's original plans called for a three-room temple with a small stupa inside. However, as the building began, a man named Duangsi suggested to Lord Isan that the temple's 18 pillars be made of rock. Though Vat Mahathat, with its brick floor and crocodile and dog statues at the stair's base, suffered damage over the years, the temple was restored in the 1990s with roof ornaments added around the turn of the century.

Just south of Vat Mahathat sits the 5,272-sqm, cobblestone **Vat Kang** in Savang Village. Constructed in 1900 under the patronage of Xiang Ti, Phiaphommaline, Meuan Souvhan, Mr Phoma and Mr Chanphenxay, Vat Kang today houses four monks, 21 novices, and three nuns. **Vat Sisoumang**, in the southern end of Vang Vieng in Ban Vieng Keo, was built in 1944 by a local named Chanthao. Upon his death, the temple was renamed Vat Thao Sao, before it was changed to Sisoumang Temple. **Vat Meuang Xong** (Vat Mixay) in Van Vieng's southernmost Ban Meuang Xong was built in 1889 by Ta Saeng Koum Mane, and was originally named Vat Khoua Phane. However, once the French colonialists left, the name was changed to its present Vat Meuang Xong.

Note: Please dress appropriately when entering the vats. For more information on individual temples, please contact the Visitor Information Center staff.

Vang Vieng Regulations for Tourists

- To ensure a rewarding visit to VangVieng, you are requested to observe the following:
- Respect and follow the laws of the Lao PDR
- Spend the night in guesthouses, hotels or other authorized accommodation only
- Protect the environment
- Behave in an orderly manner and respect local customs and traditions
- Do not enter caves and other sites that are not officially opened for tourists
- It is prohibited for tourists to work as DJs, bartenders or in any capacity
- The sale and use of illegal drugs is strictly prohibited under the Laws of the Lao PDR
- Persons already intoxicated are prohibited from engaging in any Xong River activities including swimming, tubing, kayaking, rafting etc.
- Do not litter the Nam Xong River or other public areas
- Do not engage in lewd or obscene behavior. It is not polite to wear bikinis, bathing suits, swimming trunks or be shirtless while walking along streets in the town

Violators will be held responsible according to the gravity of the violations



Getting To & Around Vang Vieng

Getting There: You'll find a variety of choices from *sawng teaws* (pickup trucks with benches) to busses and vans, for getting to Vang Vieng from Vientiane Capital (4-5 hours) and Luang Prabang (5-6 hours). Most tour companies in Vientiane and Luang Prabang sell air-con bus and van tickets, which usually come with a hotel pickup, and departures tend to leave in the early morning. For those more adventurous, take a *sawng teaw* from Vientiane's Northern Bus Terminal located west to the city for a slow, scenic ride with plenty of stops.

Getting Around: Self-guided adventures to Vang Vieng's attractions are easy with a wide choice of transportation available, while guided tours also present a range of ways of getting around.

By Foot: Stroll around Vang Vieng Town and see its temples, enjoy a meal, or cross a suspended river bridge to a relaxing hammock on the Nam Xong River. Many of the outlying attractions require a short hike or climb after a vehicle ride, though longer treks are available from local tour companies.

By Bicycle: Whether you're looking for a simple cycle to pedal around town or a rugged mountain bike to battle over rougher roads to the caves west of Vang Vieng, loads of shops and guesthouses rent all types of bikes. Be sure to read the description of the attractions you plan to visit, to decide what type of cycle is best for you.

By Motorcycle: Looking for a faster way to catch more of stunning Vang Vieng? Several shops around town rent everything from scooters to motocross bikes, depending on your needs, and a recently opened company offers off-road quad tours. Be sure to read the description of the attraction to decide on a suitable motor bike. And remember, always wear a helmet and never drink and drive.

By Tuk-tuk: You can find *tuk-tuks* around town to take you to nearby locations, but if you travel to the outlying areas, it's best to pay for the driver to wait to ensure a ride back. You can create your own itinerary and negotiate with a *tuk-tuk* to take you, and plenty of tour companies use *tuk-tuks* on part of their journeys.



For more information, visit the Vang Vieng Tourist Information Center

www.ecotourismlaos.com
www.tourismlaos.org



Text: Bernia Rosenbloom
Photos courtesy of: Green Discovery Laos, Jim Johnston, Riverside Tour, Vientiane Provincial Tourism Department, VLT Natural Tours, www.vang-vieng-hotels.com
Cover photo courtesy of: Green Discovery Laos
Layout and design: X-Eye Design



Vang Vieng- Stunning Adventure
Vientiane Province

Caves West of Vang Vieng

Tham Pou Kham



Tham Pou Kham (Golden Crab Cave) dives 100 meters into the ground after passing through the small entrance hole. However, the cave widens once inside, where a reclining Buddha statue welcomes visitors to a place once serving as the home to bats, gibbons, monkeys, and antelopes. Tham Pou Kham displays several wet rock formations including a pair of "Golden Crabs". Don't forget your torch. After exploring the cavern, go for a cold swim in the Ka River's water hole. The water is clean, deep, and safe for jumping in from the trees, and a small shop and

restaurant run by locals serve meals and snacks.

Location: Cross the Nam Xong in the southern end of town at the Paradise Island Bridge to Ban Houay Nyae. Follow the dirt road past the village and turn right (north) at the sharp left-hand turn at Nathong Tai Village. The trail to the cave starts about 1 km past the junction in Ban Nathong Neua.

Pha Ngeun (Silver Cliff)

Among the most magnificent of Vang Vieng's geological wonders, **Pha Ngeun (Silver Cliff)** rises 250 meters high and offers stunning views of Vang Vieng from atop its sheer silver-colored rock face. The 2-km-wide cliff looks down on the forests, rice fields, and villages below as well as across the valley to Pha Boua Mountain, but it takes a bit of a climb to reach the peak. The cliff's name is clouded in confusion. Local villagers had always called it Noi (Small) Cliff, while the national map labeled it Kang Cliff. In 1995, villagers moved closer to Pha Ngeun and started to more thoroughly explore it. They fell in love with the beauty offered by the monolith, and all agreed it should take on the name, "Silver Cliff".



Location: Cross the Nam Xong in the southern end of town at the Paradise Island Bridge to Ban Houay Nyae. Follow the dirt road for around 4 km until Phone Ngeun Village. From here, hike up the trail to the top of Pha Ngeun.

Bee Cliff Cave Complex



Located on the northern face of Pha Khongkao Mountain southwest of town, the **Bee Cliff Cave Complex** consists of several caverns clustered together. The most popular is **Tham Pha Pheung (Bee Cliff**

Cave), which is often called **Tham Phou Thong**. Others include Tiger Cave, Diamond Cave, and the Gold Mine Cave. The 70-meter-long Bee Cliff/ Phou Thong Cave deceives its visitors with a small entrance leading to a 5-sqm room with a 4-meter-high ceiling and elephant head with a golden tint reflected from the dangling bee hives. The view looking back outside the cave reveals a scene of rice fields, green trees, and the Ka River snaking past the entrance. Inside, a water basin offers a fresh and clean bathing pool.

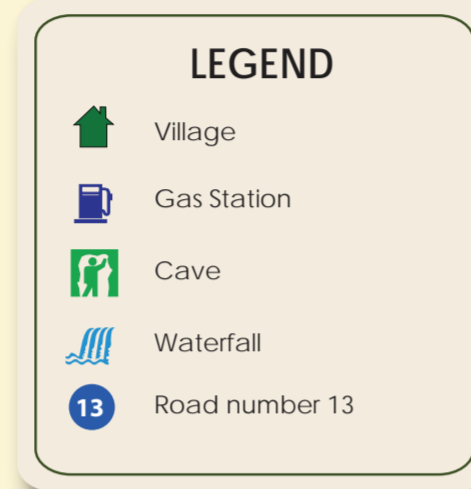
Location: Cross the Nam Xong in the southern end of town at the Paradise Island Bridge to Ban Houay Nyae. Follow the dirt road for around a kilometer until you see the sign for the Bee Cliff Caves, and the trail leading south to the cliff.

Tham Khan



Adventure and history await at **Tham Khan (Silver Bow Cave)** just 3 km west of town. A hedgehog hunter discovered the cave with its 1.9-meter-high sitting Buddha at the entrance. Archaeologists examined the cavern and turned up prehistoric knives, small spades, and axes as well as a khan or silver bow for which the cave was named. The three-meter-wide, 200-meter-long cave sits at the foot of Oua Mountain and offers good access throughout. The daring can try to find the secret passage out...it's adventurous but quite safe.

Location: Cross the Nam Xong in the southern end of town at the Paradise Island Bridge to the Long Kouang Route past Ban Houay Nyae. At electric pole 18, look for a sign to Tham Khan, turn north, and follow the rugged road along Laeng Stream to the cave's entrance.



Vang Vieng – Stunning Caves

Mysterious labyrinths riddle Vang Vieng's cliffs, with each geological wonder hiding interesting histories and legends. Most are easy to access and many are clustered together, making it simple to see several in a single trip. Most caves can be visited without a guide, but the sites charge a small entrance fee for maintenance and upkeep. Accessing some caves requires crossing bridges, which may also charge a toll.



Tham Chang



Considered by many as Vang Vieng's most important cave, **Tham Chang (or Jang)** became the home for migrating people, who settled near the town's southern Meuang Xong Village to raise vegetables. The locals stumbled into the cavern during a civil war, while seeking refuge deep in the forest. Because its high location offered perfect views of Vang Vieng, the entire village moved there to sit out the war, and named their haven, Tham Jang (Hang Around Cave). Years later during the colonial era, the locals returned to cultivating the nearby fields and would bathe in the cave's basin, where the water was so cold they said it could freeze your legs to a firm stiffness. They then adjusted the cave's name to Tham Chang, which means "unable to move", leaving locals no choice but to "hang around".

Location: Follow the river road south of Meuang Xong Village, pay the entrance fee at the gate of Vang Vieng Resort and cross the bridge over the Nam Xong to the steps leading up the cliff to Tham Chang.

Caves North of Vang Vieng

Ban Tham Xang Group



Courtesy of: River Side Tour

Journey north of Vang Vieng to explore the Ban Tham Xang Group, a cluster of four caves just across the Nam Xong, with **Tham Xang** (Elephant Cave) at its gateway. A trail to the north winds to **Tham Hoy** (Shell Cave), named for Hoysang (Conch Shell), who protected his aunt from giants in this tunnel with no known end. Moving south along the canal, **Tham Loup** (Hole Cave) appears as a huge cleft created by Laos' massive mythological elephant, Siho, to hide from his enemies. Further along, the 500-meter-long **Tham Nam** (Water Cave)

was once the source of an intricate wooden irrigation system.

Location: Travel north of Vang Vieng on Route 13 for about 14 km, and turn left (west) between KM 169 and KM 170. Follow the road and cross the river to reach the entrance.

Ban Pha Thao Group

Legend and history meet at this pair of caves just north of town. **Tham Pha Thao** (Thao Cliff Cave) once served as the home for locals, and remnants of their underground residences still exist amidst the silver and golden-color rock walls and formations. Legend has it that those who visit Tham Pha Thao will have good luck, which turns first-time visitors into annual returnees. Legend also shrouds nearby **Tham Keo** (Glass Cave) named after a beautiful young woman named Miss Keo, who looked like "sparkling glass" and once lived in the cave.



Location: Travel north of Vang Vieng on Route 13 for about 11 km, and turn west between KM 166 and KM 167. Signs to Tham Pha Thao and Tham Keo indicate the turnoff to a rough dirt road leading to a bridge crossing the Nam Xong and the entrance to Pha Thao Village and its cave group.

Tham Lom

Venture 4 km north of town to **Tham Lom** (Wind Cave) for a memorable cave exploration. The adventure begins with a 300-meter walk through a lush forest and a brief clamber up boulders to the cave's entrance, where a welcome breeze cools you down. A steep path with a handrail leads down into Tham Lom, and the lack of electricity makes a torch essential. You can also hire a local guide. The five-meter-wide cave stretches for a full kilometer, so plan on spending an hour or more exploring the bizarre rock formations with embedded crystals that twinkle like jewels under your torch's light. Afterwards, take a swim at one of the guesthouses along the Nam Xong.

Location: Travel north of Vang Vieng on Route 13 for about 3 km, and turn west between KM 158 and KM 159 near Ban Phoudindaeng. Cross the river and head a bit north to Tham Lom.

Kaeng Nyui Waterfall Loop

Take a spin on the Kaeng Nyui Waterfall loop and marvel at cascades that have been plunging over Vang Vieng's limestone karsts for millions of years, visit the historic village of Ban Naduang, and enjoy a relaxing swim in one of Nam Lao Stream's water holes. Located east of Vang Vieng Town, the Kaeng Nyui Waterfall group consists of three cataracts: **Kenlon's** five-meter tumble into a pleasant swimming pool, **Kaeng Nyui's** 34-meter drop into a fine mist, and the inaccessible **Kaeng Nyeang**. On your return trip, stop for a rest at Ban Naduang, purchase some local delicacies from the food stalls, and enjoy a picnic alongside the stream.



Note: Ban Naduang villagers constructed the paths and bridges you'll take to reach the falls, and they manage the picnic area and surrounding nature reserve. A portion of the small fee they collect goes into a management and village development fund.

Location: Head to the northern end of the old airstrip, where an eastbound road travels some 4 km to Ban Naduang, a village of about 750 Khmu and Tai ethnics who act as caretakers of the falls and trails. Continue 1,400 meters to a right-hand turn, and follow this track for about 900m to the parking area and walking trail to the waterfalls. A 400-meter stroll leads to Kenlon Waterfalls and swimming hole, and a further 400-meter along the stream ends at Kaeng Nyui's magnificent chute.