



Good Practice Story Title: Preservation of the Architectural Form of Houses in the World Heritage Area

Destination: Luang Prabang City, Luang Prabang Province

Country: Lao PDR

Submitting Organization: Department of Information, Culture and Tourism of Luang Prabang province

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description: Luang Prabang is one of the oldest cities in Laos, having been established, preserved, and developed for over 1200 years. It was the capital of the Lao Lan Xang Kingdom for many centuries. Sometimes referred to as the "City of 15 Nagas" from the word "Nakhood" meaning large serpent or dragon in mythology, which symbolizes power. Also known as the "City of 65 Temples" or "The Jewel of Southeast Asia". Luang Prabang has a rich diversity in architecture and traditional arts, reflecting the blending of local Lao architecture with colonial architecture from the 19th and 20th centuries. The city has successfully preserved its unique townscape, becoming a significant international value, recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1995. This has attracted tourists from around the world who are interested in Luang Prabang's uniqueness, especially its way of life, religion, beliefs, and beauty. However, the rapid expansion of tourism has significantly impacted the local community.



Summary of Good Practice Story: Tourism in Luang Prabang has significantly impacted local lifestyles, causing challenges in preserving the town's visual identity and architectural authenticity. For 29 years, provincial authorities have worked to maintain Luang Prabang's status as a World Heritage site. The Luang Prabang World Heritage Office, Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism, acting as a secretariat for the local World Heritage Committee, ensures the conservation and management of the site, preventing alterations that could change its unique character. In 1996, the Conservation and Development Plan (Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur or PSMV) was created to guide effective heritage management. Heritage buildings have been surveyed and registered for ongoing preservation. The office educates residents and monks on heritage management and local craftsmanship, fostering preservation skills. Collaborating with urban services and local governance, they monitor and regulate construction within the heritage zone, enforcing strict penalties for violations. As a result, Luang Prabang has successfully maintained its outstanding universal value and charm, making it a top global tourist destination, as evidenced by its recognition by Wanderlust Travel Magazine of the UK, ranking as the number one travel destination nine times between 2006 and 2019.

Issues faced: The preservation of the architectural integrity of residential houses within the World Heritage Site is currently facing numerous challenges. These challenges are primarily driven by the need for economic and social development through tourism, the influences of globalization, modernization, the high cost of materials, and the lack of traditional craftsmen skilled in restoration techniques. These factors have led to the deterioration or replacement of many traditional houses with modern buildings.

Additionally, the relocation of local residents, business owners, and workers within the heritage zone, who often lack a sense of place and a deep understanding of heritage management regulations, has resulted in numerous violations of construction and renovation guidelines. Consequently, many traditional buildings have been converted into tourism amenities such as hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants. This transformation has severely impacted the value, uniqueness, and harmony of the heritage buildings and their surrounding environment.





Solution: To address the aforementioned issues, the government of Laos, through the Luang Prabang Provincial Administration, established local and national heritage committees with the Luang Prabang World Heritage Office serving as the secretariat. This office guides and manages the conservation of Luang Prabang's World Heritage site. They developed the Conservation and Development Plan (Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur or PSMV) in collaboration with relevant sectors, which includes strict regulations for construction and preservation which officially endorsed and enacted by the Central Government in 2003. Additionally, they created a heritage conservation fund to assist local residents in repairing buildings and provide training in traditional crafts. The office also promotes awareness and understanding of heritage values among local communities, ensuring active participation in preservation efforts. Furthermore, public-private partnerships have been initiated to protect and conserve heritage houses.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

- The local and national World Heritage Management Committees were established one year after Luang Prabang was designated as a World Heritage site. The provincial committee is chaired by the Vice Governor of Luang Prabang, with relevant departments and local residents participating. The aim is to foster ownership and participation from all sectors of society in preserving the World Heritage of Luang Prabang sustainably.
- The establishment of the heritage management committees at both local and national levels involved the following steps:
 - Formation of Committees: Setting up the committees with representatives from various sectors, including government officials, local communities, and experts.
 - o **Drafting Regulations:** Collaborating with UNESCO and international experts to draft guidelines and regulations for heritage management.



o **Training Programs:** Conducting training for local craftsmen in traditional skills such as carving, floral painting, and the use of local materials to ensure the continuation of traditional building techniques.

- o **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launching campaigns to educate local residents and stakeholders about the importance of heritage preservation and the regulations in place.
- o **Funding and Financial Support:** Establishing a heritage preservation fund to assist local residents in purchasing materials for restoration and to support craftsmen.
- o **Monitoring and Enforcement:** Regularly monitoring construction activities within the heritage zone to ensure compliance with regulations and taking enforcement actions when necessary.
- The tools applied include:
 - o **PSMV (Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur):** This comprehensive document outlines the guidelines for preservation and development within the World Heritage site. It serves as the blueprint for all construction and restoration activities to ensure they align with heritage preservation goals.
 - o **Training Workshops:** These workshops are conducted to enhance the skills of local craftsmen and ensure the use of traditional methods and materials in restoration projects.
 - o **Public Information Campaigns:** Utilizing various media to disseminate information about the heritage site's value and the importance of following preservation guidelines.
 - o **Financial and Technical Assistance Programs:** Providing grants and technical support to local residents for restoration projects to alleviate the financial burden and encourage compliance with heritage regulations.
- Additionally, Luang Prabang has collaborated with the private sector to ensure the conservation of heritage buildings. Notable successful projects include: TAEC (Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre): Private sector involvement led to the renovation of the heritage building No. 370, transforming it into a center dedicated to preserving and showcasing traditional arts and ethnology. Heuan Chan: A public-private partnership developed and managed the heritage house No. 119. This project turned the building into a venue for period exhibitions and a museum



displaying traditional Lao houses, providing a model for heritage preservation through adaptive reuse.

These methods, steps, and tools collectively ensure that the World Heritage site of Luang Prabang is preserved efficiently, balancing development needs with cultural and historical integrity. The holistic approach fosters collaboration among government bodies, local communities, and the private sector, securing the site's sustainability for future generations.

Achievements and Results: The unwavering dedication and commitment of the government and provincial authorities to uphold their pledge to UNESCO have been instrumental in maintaining Luang Prabang's status as a World Heritage City for 29 years (1995-2024). This ongoing effort ensures the long-term preservation of the city's historical and cultural integrity. Presently, 443 residential and public buildings (including schools and office buildings), 168 religious structures, and 183 preserved ponds are being meticulously conserved to remain in optimal condition.

Private heritage buildings, repurposed for tourism, are under strict restoration and renovation supervision to comply with heritage building regulations. This vigilant management has successfully preserved the city's unique architectural and aesthetic identity.

The collaboration with the private sector (PPP) has significantly contributed to these preservation efforts. For instance, the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (TAEC) was established through a partnership where a heritage building was transformed into a renowned educational and tourist center. Since its inception, over 200,000 visitors have explored the TAEC, which not only showcases cultural artifacts but also serves as a market for local handicrafts. Another notable achievement is the restoration of Heuan Chan, initially a heritage information center, now hosting community markets, a small Lao-style museum, and various exhibitions. Since 2024, 13 festivals and exhibitions have been held here, attracting an average of 300 participants per event and 4,400 visitors annually. These events have fostered a vibrant cultural scene and provided significant educational value about Luang





Prabang's rich heritage. Overall, the successful conservation of these two key heritage buildings exemplifies the city's dedication to preserving its invaluable local heritage.

Lessons Learned and Advice: Over the past 29 years, safeguarding and managing the Luang Prabang World Heritage site has been a formidable and challenging task. Preserving the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage Luang Prabang, which is a source of pride for all Laotians, requires continuous effort and dedication. A critical lesson learned is the necessity of establishing regulations and management practices that align with local contexts. Enforcing these regulations diligently and consistently is vital to maintain the heritage site's integrity. There are many cases where we have to destroy buildings that do not comply with the regulations.

Public understanding and engagement are crucial for successful heritage conservation. Ensuring that local residents and stakeholders appreciate the importance of these efforts helps foster a community that supports and participates in preservation activities. Striking a balance between tourism development and heritage preservation is essential. Utilizing cultural resources sustainably requires collaboration among government, business, and local communities. This collective responsibility ensures that Luang Prabang remains a treasured destination for future generations while benefiting the present community.

Recognitions and Additional References

<https://www.facebook.com/HeuanChanHeritageLuangPrabang/>

<https://www.taeclaos.org/>

<https://www.wanderlustmagazine.com/news/reader-travel-awards-2019-results-namibia-new-zealand-japan/>

<https://www.wanderlustmagazine.com/news/reader-travel-award-results-2018/>

<https://www.tourismluangprabang.org/about-luangprabang/unesco-world-heritage/>

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/479/>

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/1454/>





