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FOREWORD



Thanks for downloading this FREE interactive travel guide. You've made an excellent choice if you plan on **GETTING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK** in THAILAND. Before you delve into the content of this travel guide, please take a few minutes to read this foreword. It outlines how to make the best use of the information contained within.

First-hand experience: This travel guide has been put together using first-hand experience gained from traveling to, and exploring, all the locations presented within. The information and photos featured in my travel guides, have been collated over years of putting boots on the ground. There is no second-hand information, or information which is plagiarized from other travel sources, within this guide. Every cave, waterfall, river, viewpoint, jungle trail, temple site, guesthouse and restaurant presented, or promoted, I have been to and seen and/or experienced myself.

Getting off the beaten track: The primary focus of my travel guides is **ADVENTURE TRAVEL** (and activities) to locations which are non-mainstream tourist destinations. As an example, there is no information for the mainstream tourist locations of LAOS (except as transit hub's before heading off to a more remote location) listed in this travel guide. As such, the information in this guide is directed towards travelers (not tourists) who are keen

for a bit of adventure - caving, climbing, jungle trekking, kayaking - in an off the beaten track location, of South East Asia. If these types of activities aren't to your liking, then this travel guide won't be much use to you. There's no information in here about the party towns in South East Asia.

Budget travel: Knowing the importance of making the most of your hard-earned currency, my travel links ([12GO ASIA](#)) and accommodation links ([AGODA](#)) are predominantly budget oriented. They provide a range of options for getting to a central hub, or base, from which you can make your daily explorations.

Independent sightseeing: Instead of going on group tours, I strongly promote the idea of renting your own vehicle (car or motorbike) and venturing out yourself. To help you get to the exact location, there's always a [GOOGLE MAPS](#) link to show the route from a hub (hotel or guesthouse) to the sightseeing attraction. If there's a local tour operator offering excellent adventure type tours, or activities, I'll provide links to their website. A good example of a great adventure tour operator is [GREEN DISCOVERY LAOS](#), who offer excellent caving, kayaking and trekking tours throughout Laos.

The Table of Contents: This is page four of the travel guide and has a sequential list of sections, which you can go to directly by clicking on the **GREEN** numbered tab.

YouTube Links: These take you directly to my YouTube Vlog ([Megaworld Asia](#)) where you can see short, high quality travel videos of the numerous attractions listed in my travel guides. If you enjoy the videos, please hit the like button and don't forget to subscribe to see my upcoming adventures.

Your next adventure is just one click away

Safe travels,

MEGA

NONGKEHIAW

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How To Use This Interactive Travel Guide

The Table Of Contents: To effortlessly move from the TOC to the page you want to view, simply click on the **page number**: 

YouTube Links: These will take you to a short highlights video, of the sightseeing attraction, in the section you're looking at:



Other Links: These take you to ancillary services such as recommended restaurants, or car and motorbike rental agencies, in the location you're traveling to:

ANCILLARY SERVICES

Travel Links: This takes you to **12GO ASIA**, an excellent travel group which provides a range of options for getting around the region:



The Table Of Contents: To move back to the TOC, click on the **yellow arrows**, at the bottom of each Page: 

Google Maps Links: These provide a route from a designated location (e.g., a hotel) to a particular sightseeing attraction:



Information Links: These links take you to information sites, such as Wikipedia or Wiki-voyage, to provide more in-depth info on a particular subject or location:



Accommodation Links: This takes you to the Agoda website to check accommodation availability and make bookings:



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GENERAL INFORMATION - GETTING THERE

About: This amazingly picturesque location should be at the top of the bucket list for all travelers coming to Laos. The town sits along the edges of the Nam Ou River and is surrounded by jungle covered, karst peaks. At around 800 meters in height, the peaks are mountains and not hills. Accordingly, the primary attraction of Nongkhiaw is the hikes to the top of the peaks surrounding the town and one, and two, day treks starting from the nearby village of Muang Noi.

Getting there: In years past it was possible to travel from Luang Prabang to Nongkhiaw, by boat. However, with the recent damming of the Nam Ou River, this is no longer an option. As of November 2022 the only way of getting to Nongkhiaw is to take a bus from LUANG PRABANG, or a minivan from MUANG XAY. The bus from Luang Prabang, departs from the NORTHERN BUS TERMINAL on a daily basis. The minivan service, from Muang Xay, departs from the SOUTHERN BUS TERMINAL on a daily basis. **NOTE: For travel from either location, you should arrive at least an hour before departure time and buy your ticket.**

Bus departure times: The bus departure times from LUANG PRABANG are 0900, 1100, and 1400. **Click the following link for the location of the northern bus terminal in Luang Prabang.**



The minivan departure time from MUANG XAY is 0830. **NOTE:** The minivan from Muang Xay does not go directly to Nongkhiaw. You are required to change minivans in PAK MONG, and pay an additional charge to get to Nongkhiaw. **Click the following link for the location of the Southern Bus Terminal in Muang Xay:**



Arrival: The 140 kilometers of winding mountainous road from Luang Prabang are a bit of a patience test. But once you arrive and see the magnificent scenery, the four hour ride seems a small price to pay. The drop point for all arrivals is the intersection just before the bridge.



Arrival point in Nongkhiaw

GENERAL INFORMATION - ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation: From the drop point, it's an easy walk to the guesthouses nearby. The main strip (with all the shops and cafe's) has plenty of inexpensive guesthouses to choose from. NOTE: There's also quite a few guesthouses on the far side of the bridge. If you don't have anything booked, and you don't want to walk too far, try the SENGDAO CHIT-TAVONG GUESTHOUSE & RESTAURANT - opposite the drop point and next to the bridge. The Sengdao has nice fan bungalows for 80,000 Kip per night. The air-con bungalows are 150,000 Kip per night. The restaurant has a great view over the river and their food is very good. **Click the following link for the location of the Sengdao:**



Getting around: Most of the local hikes to the peaks surrounding the town are close enough to walk to. If you want to go further, a good option is to hire a bicycle. Daily hire rates are 50,000 - 60,000 Kip and the bikes can be sourced at the adventure tour companies near the bridge.



Where to eat: There are plenty of local (Lao Food) restaurants around town but if you want excellent western food, and great coffee, the best two go are the COULEUR CAFE RESTAURANT and DELILAH's. Delilah's also has inexpensive accommodation and is well regarded for it's delicious cakes. The Couleur tends to be a bit busier but has the best breakfasts in town. **Click the following link for the location of the Couleur Cafe:**



The Sengdao Guesthouse

LOCAL HIKES - SOM NANG VIEWPOINT

Cool weather: During the dry (cool) season the mist enshrouds the surrounding peaks until 10.00 am each day. The mornings during the months of November, December, and January are quite brisk, with temperatures down to 12 degrees Celsius.

Local hikes: The peaks surrounding the town have lookouts (viewpoints) which can be reached independently, without hiring a guide. The trails are well developed with steps and handrails in place on the steeper sections. The start points for all the hikes are well signposted and all have a ticket booth where an entry fee (20,000 Kip) must be paid.

Som Nang Viewpoint: This is probably the easiest local hike. There's a large viewing platform near the top of the peak, which can be seen from ground level. The start point (trail head) is just past the eastern end of the bridge (on the left) and as with the other local hikes, there's an entry fee of 20,000 Kip. Compared with the other local hikes, this one is much shorter and will normally take around 30 minutes to reach the lookout. The trail is well developed with stairs and handrails in place for a safe ascent. The lookout area at the top is also



well developed with a large boarded platform and seats in place for comfortable sightseeing. **NOTE:** this location is generally considered a sunset viewpoint, rather than sunrise. Unless you camp overnight at the lookout, early morning access (before 8 am) isn't possible, as there's a locked gate at the start of the trail. **Click the following link for the location of Som Nang Viewpoint:**



LOCAL HIKES - PHA DAENG VIEWPOINT

Pha Daeng Viewpoint: The pick of the local hikes is PHA DAENG VIEWPOINT. The summit is just over 800 meters above sea level and the vertical elevation of 640 meters, from the ticket booth to the lookout. The start point is approximately 450 meters from the eastern end of the bridge (the BCEL ATM). **Click the following link for directions:**



The hike: This is a bit of slog to be sure, particularly if you're carrying camera gear. It normally takes around an hour and twenty minutes to get to the top. The trail is properly developed with steps and handrails on the steeper sections. There are some rest stops on way with seats where you can take a breather, if needed. Approximately two hundred meters from the top, the trail levels out for easier hike to the peak. Once there, the views to the north and south are spectacular. **NOTE:** For anyone going up for the sunset, be sure to take a headlamp for the trip back down.



PHA DAENG VIEWPOINT - PHOTOS & VIDEO



Click the link to the right to see video highlights of PHA DAENG VIEWPOINT:



WAR HISTORY - PHATOK CAVE

Pathok Cave: The area has a couple of cave sites which were used as shelters by the Pathet Lao during their fight with the US backed national forces, in the 1960's to 70's. The most significant is the PATHOK CAVE site, located 2 km south of Nongkhiaw Township on route 1C. This site is easy enough to walk to but if you're carrying a camera or a rucksack, it's probably worth hiring a bicycle for a half-day. Click the following link for directions:



On-site: The cave is small and unremarkable, compared to larger caves in Khammouane Province, but it's an historical site with remnants of habitation during the era of conflict. Access to the site is by way of an elevated bamboo walkway across the rice fields. During the war the site was bombed extensively. Evidence of this is the bomb craters, near the cliff where the cave is, and a defused bomb, standing upright, at the ticket office. The entry fee is 20,000 Kip and the cave tour will take around 30 minutes to complete.



The ticket office



Access



Pathok Cave

PATHOK CAVE - PHOTOS & VIDEO



Click the link to the right to see video highlights of PATHOK CAVE:



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THE MUANG NGOY TREK ONE DAY TREK

About: The local adventure tour companies offer some great one-day and two-day treks, further afield. The longest established operator is NONGKHIAW ADVENTURE TRAVEL, located on the corner of the main road into town (before crossing the bridge). The price of the one day trek is 19 USD and includes lunch, and an English speaking local guide. Departure time from the office is approximately 0830 am. **Click the following link for the location of the Nongkhiaw Adventure Travel Office:**



Nam Ou River: The tour begins with a one hour boat ride along the Nam Ou River, to the picturesque village of Muang Ngoy. The morning boat ride, with mist shrouded peaks on either side, is worth the price of the tour alone.

Muang Ngoy: This is a picturesque village, surrounded by jungle clad peaks, along the edge of the Nam Ou River. The one-day trek starts at Muang Ngoy. The trail goes through the village and then follows the river upstream for approximately 500 meters, before ascending to the nearby PHANOY VIEWPOINT.



THE PHANAI CAVE TRAIL

Phanai Cave: On the way up to the viewpoint, sightseers are given a few minutes to take a look at PHANAI CAVE. The cave, although an interesting diversion from the hike to the viewpoint, is hardly remarkable when compared to larger caves in Central Laos. However, it does have some historical significance as it was used as a shelter by the Pathet Lao Forces during the war years of the 1960's and 70's. The total penetration distance is just 200 meters. There are some nice formations at the mid-point of the cave.

Phanoy Viewpoint: This is approximately 100 meters above Phanai Cave. The final section of the hike, from the cave, is quite steep. Handrails and ropes have been put in place to aid with ascent and descent. There's a viewing platform at the top which provides a nice vista back across Muang Ngoy Village, and down the Nam Ou River. From the viewpoint the tour goes back down to the Muang Ngoy village. Sightseers are given approximately 45 minutes to look around, or enjoy a cold drink at a cafe, before boarding the boat and heading back along the river for the waterfall hike.



Phanai Cave



The view over Muang Ngoy

THE TAD MOOK WATERFALL TRAIL

The waterfall hike: From Muang Ngoy, the tour boat heads back towards Nongkhiaw. The tour boat stops at another small village (just a few km downstream from Muang Ngoy) where lunch is taken. Lunch is a basic rice or noodles dish, wrapped in a banana leaf, followed up with some bananas. After lunch there's an easy one-hour trek across rice fields, and through small villages, to the TAD MOOK waterfall site.

The waterfall: The final section of the hike is up the stream bed, where the jungle canopy is a welcome relief from the afternoon heat. The waterfall is in a nice shady spot, and there is seating where everyone can sit down and relax for a while. By Lao standards, the waterfall isn't big but the natural pool is big enough for everyone to enjoy a refreshing swim. The group will normally stay at the waterfall for an hour, before heading back to the river. On the way back to Nongkhiaw, sightseers have the option of Kayaking the last five km in the late afternoon sun.



MUANG NGOY TREK - PHOTOS & VIDEO



Phanoy Viewpoint

Click the link to the right to see video highlights of the MUANG NGOY TREK:



On the trail to Tad Mook Falls

ONWARD TRAVEL

About: If you're heading north to OUDO-MXAY, see the following section. If your next stop is LUANG PRABANG, the best travel option is the daily bus - 11.00 am departure - from the Nongkhiaw Bus Station. **NOTE:** This bus is a large bus, and not a minivan.

Booking: You can book a ticket through NONGKHIAW ADVENTURE TRAVEL, or go directly to the bus station on the day of departure and buy your ticket. **NOTE:** If you choose to buy your ticket at the bus station, you must be there at least ONE HOUR BEFORE departure time to ensure you get a ticket. In the peak season (December - February) the better option is to buy your ticket at a local travel agent the day before, to ensure you get a seat. **Click the following link for the location of the Nongkhiaw Bus Station:**



Travel time to Luang Prabang: This is approximately four hours, and there are no scheduled breaks along the way. If you need a toilet stop, just ask the driver to pullover on the roadside.



Riverfront

Arrival in Luang Prabang: The bus from Nongkhiaw disembarks the passengers at the NALUANG BUS TERMINAL. From here you can get an onward bus to VANG VIENG, or HANOI. If you are staying in Luang Prabang, you will need to pay for a tuk-tuk to take you to your guesthouse/hotel. If you don't have an accommodation booking, the tuk-tuk will drop you at the CITY CENTER. **Click the following link for the location of the Naluang Bus Terminal:**



Luang Prabang Night Markets

UDOMXAY - GENERAL INFORMATION

About: This is an area north of Luang Prabang which is off the beaten track. It's more of a local government administration center than a noted tourist spot. There are few travelers to be seen in the provincial capital of Muang Xay, and the only tourist attraction of note is CHOM ONG CAVE, located 45 km further north. As a traveler/tourist, the only reason for going here is to see the cave.

Getting there: From VIENTIANE the best way of getting to Oudomxay is to get the new rail link. Some of the trains (K class) stop at Oudomxay. **NOTE:** To buy a train ticket in Vientiane, go to the travel agent behind the AUGUST CAFE, on Rue Manthathourath - opposite LUCKY BACKPACKERS HOSTEL. The train ride from Vientiane to Oudomxay is approximately four hours. **Click the following link for the location of Lucky backpackers Hostel:**



From Nongkhiaw: There's a daily minivan service up to Oudomxay. You can book your ticket through NONGKHIW ADVENTURE TRAVEL, the day before.



NOTE: There's a change of minivan at PAK MONG. The ride from Pakmong to Oudomxay is approximately two hours.

Oudomxay Accommodation: A good budget accommodation choice is the VILLA KEOSEUMSACK, on hwy 13. The rooms are Comfortable and clean and priced at 100,000 Kip per night. **NOTE:** Don't prepay with Agoda, as they don't accept Agoda bookings. **Click the following link for the location of Villa Keoseumsack:**



Chom Ong Cave - Oudomxay



CHOM ONG CAVE TOUR

Getting to Chom Ong Cave: There is two options for this. The first is to go there independently, on a rented motorbike. The second is to pay for a tour with a local tour operator and go with a guide. Going independently is the much less expensive option and with the access road now being paved all the way to the cave site, it's not so difficult to get there. **Motorbikes can be rented** on a daily basis at the **VILLA KEOSEUMSACK GUESTHOUSE**.

Directions: Google Maps GPS tracker won't show the route from Muang Xay Township to the cave. **To get there, follow these instructions:**

1. Head north on Hwy 13 for approximately 25 km. You will see a sign which says **CHOM ONG CAVE 18 KM**

2. Turn left from Hwy 13 onto the road to the cave. There are signs on the way so you don't get lost.

3. The road to the cave is now paved so it's not a difficult ride on a motorbike. When you get to the cave entrance area, there's a parking area for motorbikes.

Going on a guided tour: If you choose this option, be warned that it's quite expensive - 100 USD. However, this is only worth doing if you plan to go deeper into the cave - beyond the developed section for mainstream tourism. Doing this type of activity is **ADVENTURE CAVING**, as you'll be going into the dark zone and will need to have your own portable lights (torches). Additionally, the terrain beyond the developed section is full of rock falls and involves a lot of climbing up and down. In other words, you need to have a good level of general fitness and flexibility. **To inquire about a guided tour, click on the following link:**



At Chom Ong Cave: The **ENTRY FEE** is 20,000 Kip. The cave, although nicely developed for tourism, is hardly remarkable when compared to other large caves in Laos. There's a paved walkway and internal lighting for the first 800 meters, which allows sightseers easy and safe access. This first section of the cave is actually the largest and most impressive area.



A Guided Cave Tour

CHOM ONG CAVE - PHOTOS & VIDEO



Click the link to the right to see video highlights of CHOM ONG CAVE:



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