

LAOS

THAKHEK LOOP

TOUR



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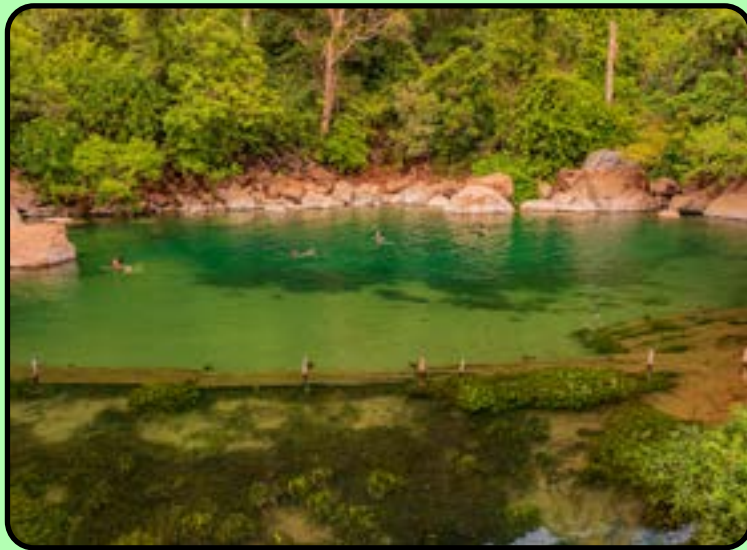
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The Thakhek Loop



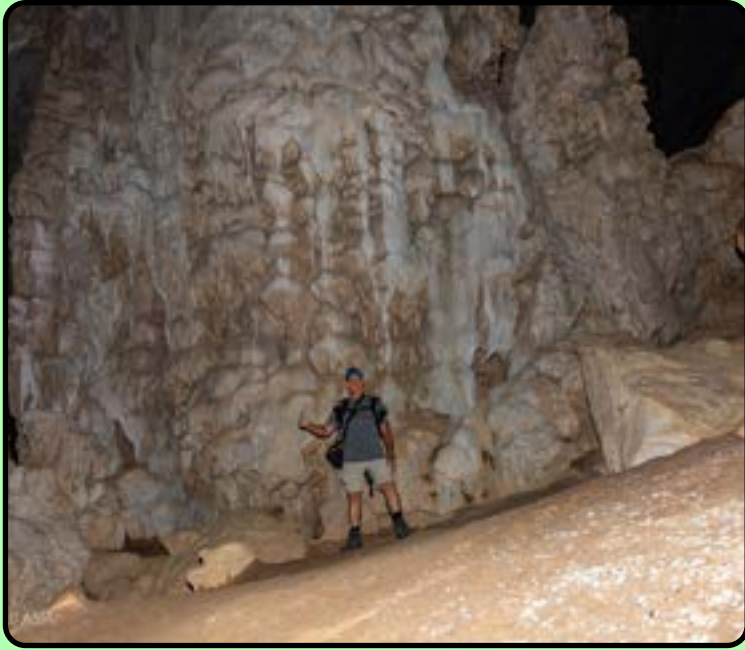
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FOREWORD



Thanks for downloading this FREE interactive travel guide. You've made an excellent choice if you plan on **GETTING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK** in LAOS. 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 mainstream tourist locations (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

The Thakhek Loop & Kong Lor Cave

Table Of Contents

General Info = Getting There, Accommodation, Transport & Dining

1: How To Use This Interactive Guide.....	Page	5
2: The Thakhek Loop - General Information.....	Page	6
3: Thakhek City - General Information.....	Page	7
4: Stage One - Thakhek To Thalang.....	Page	10
5: Cave Alley (along hwy 12).....	Page	11
6: Gnommalat - Golden Rabbit Viewpoint.....	Page	15
7: The Nakai Plateau - The Orchid Trail.....	Page	16
8: Thalang Village - General Information.....	Page	18
9: Stage Two - Thalang To Na Hin.....	Page	19
10: The Spirit Wailing Wall.....	Page	20
11: The Dragon Cave.....	Page	21
12: The Cold Springs.....	Page	22
13: Na Hin Area - The Rock Zip-line Circuit.....	Page	23
14: Na Hin Area - Nam Sanam Waterfall.....	Page	24
15: Stage Three - Na Hin To Kong Lor Village.....	Page	25
16: Kong Lor Village - General Information.....	Page	26
17: Kong Lor Cave Tour.....	Page	27
18: Stage Four - Kong Lor To Thakhek.....	Page	30
19: Taking The Back Road.....	Page	31
20: Doing The Extended Loop.....	Page	32



**Your Next Adventure
Is Just One Click Away**

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:



**Your Next Adventure
Is Just One Click Away**



THE THAKHEK LOOP - GENERAL INFORMATION

About: The Thakhek Loop is an off the beaten track travel experience and is gaining notoriety as one of the best motor bike touring trips in South East Asia. In years gone by it was considered an arduous undertaking, due to some long stretches of dirt road along hwy 1E. That is no longer the case. As of 2016, all roads on hwy 1E are sealed.

Distance: The full distance, including side trips to KONG LOR CAVE and KONG LENG LAKE, is 485 km. With that in mind I would recommend 4 days to complete the trip to enable a more satisfying, unhurried sightseeing experience. Additionally if you're inexperienced on a motorbike, I suggest allowing more time.

Both seasons: It is now possible to do the trip comfortably during the wet (monsoon) season. Having completed it in both seasons, it's my considered opinion the end of the wet season (October) is actually the best time to do the loop due to the amazingly scenic rice fields (just before the harvest) along the karst corridor between Na Hin and Lak Sao.

Circuit time: Some information sources on the web will say the Thakhek Loop can be completed in 3 days. While that is true, you will definitely feel rushed and not have much time to enjoy the attractions on the way. For example, a trip through Kong Lor Cave, followed by a visit to the ROCK VIEWPOINT ZIPLINE CIRCUIT will encompass a full day. In this regard an extra night at Na Hin Village is recommended before undertaking the ride back to Thakhek. At a minimum, this will make your loop trip a 4 day/3 night circuit. **Click the following link for a full Google Map of the Thakhek Loop:**



Thakhek Loop: Hwy # 1 E

GETTING TO THAKHEK

In Laos: Thakhek has no airport, so road travel is the only means of getting there. If you're already in Laos, it's a six hour bus ride South on Highway # 13 from Vientiane, or a three hour ride North on Highway # 13 from Savanakheth. Daily busses to Thakhek depart from the Southern Bus Terminal, in Vientiane. From Savanakheth the only transportation option available is a minivan from the city bus terminal.

Coming from Cambodia: LAO AIRLINES has direct flights from Siem Reap to Vientiane. You'll then need to take a bus down Hwy # 13 to Thakhek.

Coming from Thailand: the most direct route is to travel to NAKHON PHANOM, and then take a bus across FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE TWO, into Laos. For travel options from Bangkok to Nakhon Phanom, click the link below: [Crossing the border:](#)

Crossing to Laos: Once you arrive at Nakhon Phanom airport it's simply a matter of taking a taxi to the Nakhon Phanom Bus Station, and then boarding a bus to Thakhek. Buses depart every 90 minutes between 8 am and 5 pm and the trip is currently 70 THB each way. The ride is normally approximately 2 hours from the Nakhon Phanom (Thailand) bus station, to the Thakhek (Laos) bus station.

Immigration: The journey also includes stops at immigration check points at each end of the bridge. A one month entry visa for Laos can be purchased for approx 30 USD when you arrive on the Laotian side of the bridge. NOTE: it's advisable to have the 30 USD in the correct amount to speed things up. One passport photo is also needed for the visa.

Tuk-tuk transport: After arriving at the Thakhek bus station you will then need to get transport to the traveler's accommodation area of town. This is approximately 5 km from the bus station and the only transport that is readily available is the three wheeled tuk-tuk. Be aware the correct fare is 30,000 Laotian Kip but the tuk-tuk drivers will often quote double, or triple, upon initial inquiry.



THAKHEK CITY - GENERAL INFORMATION

About: Thakhek is a laid back town, on the edge of the Mekong River, in Central Laos. It is the capital of Khammouane Province and also the start and finish point for the loop trip. Keep in mind the main traveller's area, along the river front, is a five km ride from the bus station. This is where most of the guesthouses, restaurants, cafés and roadside vendors are located. It's also the place where motor-bikes can be rented for the Loop trip, and day trips to the nearby surrounds of Thakhek.

Accommodation: Most of the hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants are situated along the riverfront and around the town center. A popular choice is the Inthira Hotel, which offers comfortable rooms, good food, free WIFI, and a relaxed ambiance. **For booking inquiries click the link below:**



The river front: The riverfront has many roadside vendors, and open air beer bars overlooking the Mekong, and is just a short walk from the Inthira as well. For those wanting budget accommodation in the town center, KGB GUESTHOUSE is another option.

KGB GUESTHOUSE

Motorbike Rentals: There is two shops in the town centre area offering motorbikes for rent. Most bikes (scooters) are in the 100 - 150 CC range, are well maintained and cost approximately 100,000 Laotian Kip per day. There is also larger capacity dirt bikes, such as a 250 CC motor cross, available if you want to get off road. The longest operating motorbike rental shop in Thakhek is Wang Wang Motorbike Rentals. They also have cheap guesthouse accommodation (KGB Guesthouse) above the shop. The staff are very Knowledgeable about the loop trip and can provide a nice map with all the key points of interest and good accommodation choices on the trip.



Thakhek Riverfront

THAKHEK CITY - GENERAL INFORMATION

Where to eat: There are two excellent restaurant choices in Thakhek.

- The Shong fang khong Thai food restaurant
- The Six Friends outdoor restaurant

The Shong Fang Khong: is situated on the town square and although the more expensive of the two, it serves very good Thai food. **The Six Friends Restaurant** is an outdoor eatery, located one block south of the town square, which opens at 6 PM each evening and serves good portions of Lao Food for just 10,000 LAK.

Day trips from Thakhek: For those who don't feel up to the demands of the multi-day Loop Trip, there are a number of sites - mainly caves - within easy reach of Thakhek, which can be visited in a single day. Hire a motorbike for the day from one of the vendors, grab a map from their tour desk, and ride out to the nearby sites. A trip to the renowned **Kong Lor Cave** can also be completed as a single day visit with the local tour company, **Green Discovery Laos**.



Inthira Thakhek

Green Discovery: Are a Laotian tour operator who specialise in adventure activities such as kayaking, caving, trekking and rock climbing. They have a **Thakhek office** in the **Inthira Hotel**. To contact **Green Discovery Laos**, click the link below:



Shong Fang Kong Restaurant

THE THAKHEK LOOP - DAY ONE

DOING THE THAKHEK LOOP: The normal route for the Thakhek Loop is to go in an anti-clockwise direction. The primary reason for this is to avoid the potentially hazardous long ride north on Hwy 13, at the beginning of your trip. This road is the main highway to Vientiane and as such has a constant flow of articulated trucks running to and from Vietnam.

Click the link below to see a short highlights video of the Thakhek Loop Tour:



DAY ONE: THAKHEK to THALANG:

- **Distance** = 94 km (via hwy 12 and hwy 1E).
- **Approximate travel time** = 6 hours.

From Thakhek head due east on hwy 12, then turn left at **Gnommalath Junction** on to hwy 1E. Head north on hwy 1E to Thalang. For directions from Thakhek to Thalang, click the link below:



Day one sightseeing attractions:

- **Cave Alley** - along hwy 12;
- **Golden Rabbit Viewpoint** - (at Gnommalath Junction);
- **Nakai Plateau Ascent** - along hwy 1E (between Gnommalath and Nakai Township);
- **The Orchid Trail** - along hwy 1E (approximately 12 km north of Nakai Township);
- **Nam Thuen Dam** - along hwy 1E (on the ride to Thalang).



CAVE ALLEY - ALONG HWY 12

CAVE ALLEY: The caves along Hwy 12, between Thakhek and Mahaxay, are on what is known locally as Cave Alley. In order, these caves are:

- Chang (Elephant) Cave;
- Pa Sueam Cave & Turtle Lake;
- Pa Chan Cave;
- Xieng Liap Cave;
- Nang Ene Cave.

Of these, only Nang Ene Cave has an entry fee. Pa Chan cave is 23 km off Hwy 12 and is difficult to locate. Coming from Thakhek, Chang Cave, Xieng Liap Cave, and Nang Ene Cave are on the right and only a short distance from the Hwy.

Exploring Cave Alley: Understandably, these three caves are the most popular as they absorb only minimum of time to access and explore. On the left side, another cave which is very popular is Buddha Cave. However, **Tham Pa Fa (the Buddha Cave)** is a religious site and is definitely not an adventure experience. For this reason I have not listed it as one of the sites to visit. It is a small cave,



crammed with Buddha Statues, and you cannot take photos once inside.

Elephant Cave: This small but interesting cave is the nearest to Thakhek, and is relatively easy to access. It also appears to be an important religious site for the locals. Click the link below for directions:



CAVE ALLEY - ALONG HWY 12

Pa Sueam Cave & Turtle Lake: If you go down to Buddha Cave, a better sightseeing experience is to make the short hike around to Turtle Lake and Pa Sueam Cave, approximately 200 meters further on. The trail to Turtle Lake is on the far side of the Buddha cave parking area. Ride down the 800 meter trail, keep to the left, and then park your bike at the wooden bridge. Cross the bridge and then walk the short distance to Turtle Lake and Pa Sueam Cave beyond. The cave has a stream running through it, which feeds the lake.

Pa Sueam Cave Tour: A trip into Pa Sueam Cave can be arranged with **Green Discovery Laos** (tour desk at the **Inthira Hotel, Thakhek**). Pa Sueam Cave is water filled and penetrating its 400 meter length involves a good deal of swimming. To do it safely, Green Discovery Laos provides life jackets, helmets & lights, and an experienced guide. **For directions, click the link below:**



Pa Sueam Cave

Alternate Schedule: If you depart Thakhek early enough (8 am) it is entirely possible to visit four caves - including **Pa Chan Cave** - along hwy 12, and then **overnight at Gnommalath**. However, if you can't depart Thakhek by 8 am at the latest, I would advise against going to Pa Chan Cave as it's a difficult site to locate and will absorb at least three hours of your time.



Turtle Lake

CAVE ALLEY - ALONG HWY 12

Pa Chan Cave: After visiting Pa Sueam Cave you can continue on to Pa Chan Cave. To do so you'll need to go back to the dirt road T-Junction. Instead of turning right, and going back to Hwy 12, take the left turn. Approximately 5 km on from the T-Junction, you'll come to another junction (cross roads) at a village. Turn left and continue on through the remote terrain until you come to a sign-post which indicates a turn off (on the right) to a local **Stupa**. Take that and continue to the Stupa. **Click the link below for directions from Pa Sueam to Pa Chan Cave:**



Cave Entrance: The final 2 km (from the stupa to the cave entrance) is over an open landscape of crisscrossed tracks heading in the general direction of some limestone cliffs. Keep heading towards the cliffs and as you get closer the apex of the cave entrance will come into view (above the treeline). When you see it just keep heading in that direction and even-



Cave Rear

tually you'll find a trail skirting the small river which flows from the cave.

Large Tunnel: Pa Chan Cave is a large tunnel of approximately 600 meters in length. There's a walkway through to the far side but a torch should be used to allow for safe exploration. At the upstream entrance (cave rear) there's a deeper river pool where a refreshing swim can be taken, before heading back.



Pa Chan Cave Main Entrance

CAVE ALLEY - ALONG HWY 12

Xieng Liap Cave: Is located along Hwy 12, and 14 km from traveler central in Thakhek. If you're on a tight schedule I'd recommend foregoing Xieng Liap Cave and heading straight to **Nang Ene Cave**. Even though there's an entry fee for Nang Ene Cave, the fact is it's a far more impressive sightseeing experience. If you have an hour or so to spare then Xieng Liap Cave is worth checking out. Coming from Pa Sueam Cave, Xieng Liap is the next cave on the right. **For directions, click the link below:**



From the turn off there's a short track down to a building, approx. 100 meters from the road. Behind the building there's a narrow trail (approx. 200 meters) to the cave entrances. During the dry season this trail is good enough to take a motorbike over. There's a small parking area near the cave entrances and then a short walk down into the river bed. This side of the cave has two entrances and both are accessed from the river bed.



The third entrance (the most distant from the road) is on the backside of the cave, and must be accessed from the Green Discovery Climbers Camp. Xieng Liap is an easy cave to access and explore (only 300 meters in length), and is worth an hour or two of your time from the Loop Trip. **Note: there's no entry fee for this cave.**



CAVE ALLEY - ALONG HWY 12

Nang Ene Cave: Is 19 km from traveler central in Thakhek, and 5 km further along Hwy 12 from Xieng Liap Cave. The turn off is on the right, and there's a directional sign approximately 100 meters before the turn-off. For directions, click the link below:



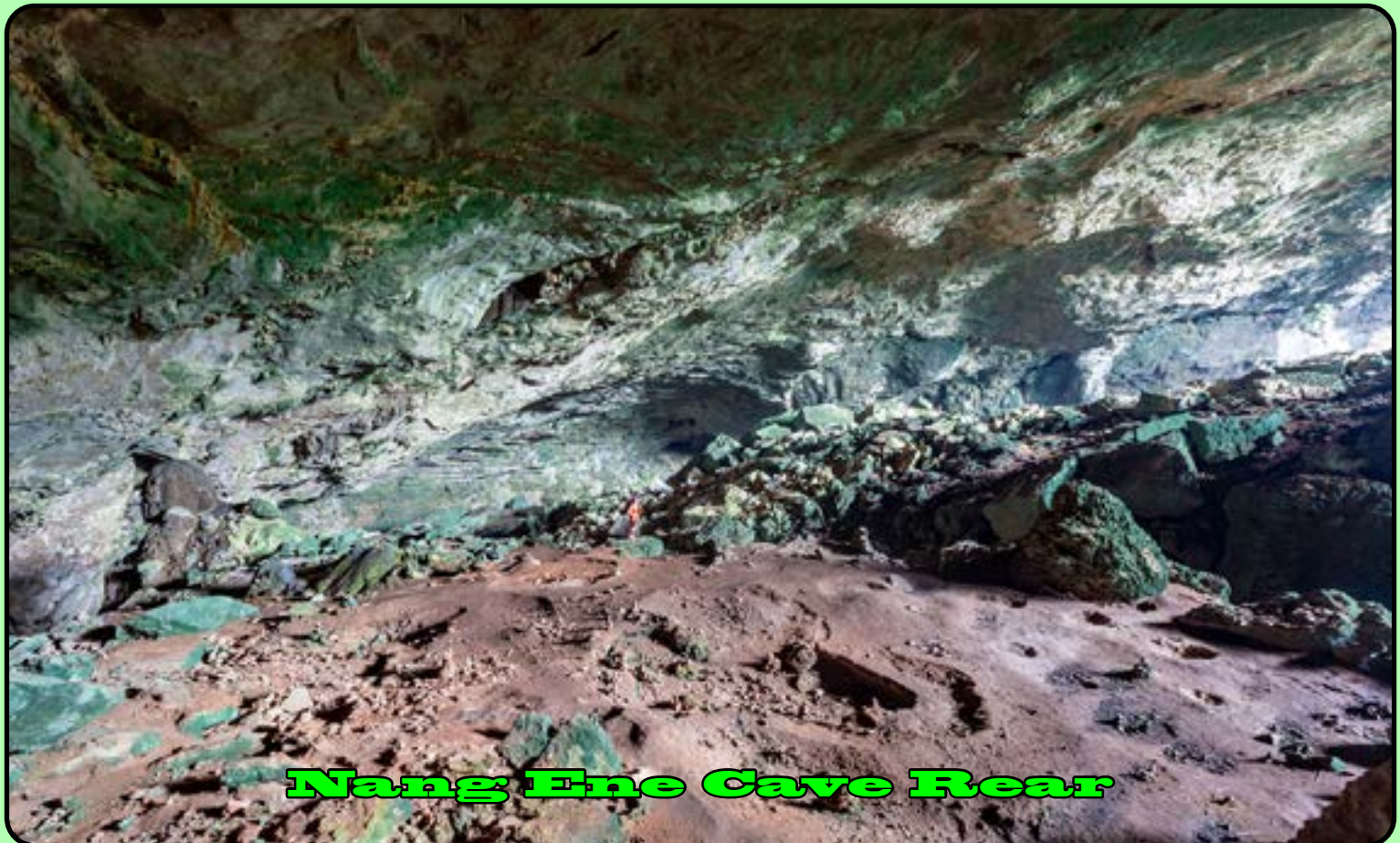
Two sightseeing options for this cave: 1. The front section only; 2. The additional boat tour which takes in the much more spectacular rear section. The entry fee for the front section is 30k Laotian Kip (LAK). Pay 50k LAK (an additional 20k LAK) and you will be able to do the entire cave system, which includes the boat trip, and the walk through the rear section (which is actually the highlight of the cave).

Note: a minimum of three paying customers is needed for a boat tour. Life jackets are included with the ticket price and must be worn at all times while in the boat. Additionally, the boats are small so unnecessary movement should be kept to a minimum to avoid capsizing.



Nang Ene Cave

Cave Lighting: The river tunnel has internal lighting all the way through so getting photos or video with your phone isn't a problem. Nang Ene Cave is a must do stop, on the Thakhek Loop. The following short video features highlights of the Nang Ene Cave Tour:



Nang Ene Cave Rear

GNOMMALAT TO THALANG - ALONG HWY 1E

Gnommalat to Thalang: Gnommalat Junction is where you turn left off Hwy 12, and head north on Hwy 1E. It's a few km before the start of the ascent on to the Nakai Plateau and an important marker on the Loop trip. If you miss the turn off you'll be heading towards the Vietnam border.

Golden Rabbit Viewpoint: The only sightseeing attraction of significance at Gnommalat is the **Golden Rabbit Viewpoint** (Pha Katai Viewpoint). For directions to the **Golden Rabbit Viewpoint**, click the link below:



Golden Rabbit Sunrise: The sunrise view is spectacular, but to see this you'll need to spend one night at a guesthouse in Gnommalat. A recommended accommodation option in Gnommalath (nearby the Golden Rabbit Viewpoint) is the View Thuen Guesthouse: **Click the link below for inquiries:**

VIEW THUEN GUESTHOUSE



Nam Thuen Dam

A few km beyond Gnommalat Junction, the steep winding ascent up to the **Nakai Plateau** begins. There is some spectacular jungle covered terrain en-route, but care should be observed at all times due to some of the precipitous drop offs. After a few km of twisting and turning, the road eventually levels out at the top of the plateau. Nakai is a reasonable size town and appears to be the government headquarters for the **Nam Thuen Dam** project.



Golden Rabbit Viewpoint Sunrise

THE NAKAI PLATEAU

Sanseda Viewpoint: Approximately 12 km north of Nakai Township is a hike to a great viewpoint, which overlooks the wide expanse of the Dam. The attraction is known as the **Orchid Path**, apparently because at the right time of year (spring) the trail is inundated with wild orchids.

Start Point: There is a small parking area, with information billboards, just a few meters off the highway (on the left if coming from Thakhek). The start of the 870 meter hike up to the viewpoint, begins right next to the parking area. The hike is not difficult and at various points along the trail there's indicating signs to keep you going in the right direction.

Sanseda Lookout: The lookout is called Sanseda and there's small shelter, with a roof and bench seats, to relax on while you take in the water filled landscape below. **For directions to the Orchid Trail, click the link Below:**



Start Point

Continuing on to Thalang: From the Orchid trail location it's approximately 16 km to Thalang Village, the first overnight stop on the loop trip. The road skirts the edge of the Nam Thuen Dam and offers some nice views of the water filled terrain to you weave through an undulating landscape.

Hazard: In the late afternoon riders should be on the lookout for wandering herds of water buffalo, particularly in the rainy season. For one reason or another they like to gather on the roads and are significant hazard for an unwary motorbike rider.



Sanseda Viewpoint

THALANG VILLAGE - GENERAL INFORMATION

Thalang Village: This is traditionally the first overnight stop on the loop trip. It sits approximately at the mid-point of the Nakai Plateau and is at the edge of a huge lake, formed when the dam was built. The lake's surface is broken by thousands of the dead trees, the remnants of forests which were inundated by the rising waters. The water-filled landscape is visually impressive.

Thalang Accommodation: The two most popular guesthouses in Thalang are the **Sabaidee Thalang Guesthouse**, and the **Posey Thalang Guesthouse**. Both are bungalow style accommodation with fan only rooms and luke-warm showers. Prices at the Sabaidee Thalang Guesthouse range between 60k - 80k LAK. This seems to be the most popular overnight stopping point. Possibly because they provide a very good buffet meal at 7.30 PM every night. **Click the link below to arrange a booking at the Sabaidee Guesthouse:**

Click the link below to arrange a booking at the Phosy Thalang Guesthouse:

PHOSY THALANG GH

The sunrise boat tour: The highlight of a stay at Thalang has to be the **sunrise boat tour**. If you're staying at the Sabaidee Thalang Guesthouse, the staff can arrange a tour for you. Prices are 50,000 LAK per person and a minimum of three passengers is normally required. The departure time is just before 6 am and the tour lasts for approximately 1.5 hours.

A Flooded Forest: As you cruise across the lake in an open boat, the bleached tops of thousands of dead trees are silhouetted against the bright glare of the rising sun. It's definitely a trip to remember. **Click on the video below for highlights of the sunrise tour:**

SABAIDEE GUESTHOUSE



Sunrise at Thalang

STAGE TWO - THALANG TO NA HIN

THALANG TO NA HIN: Head north on hwy 1E, from Thalang to Lak Sao. At Lak Sao, turn left onto hwy 8 and head due west to Na Hin Village. For directions, click the link below:



Distance: 107 km (via hwy 1E & hwy 8). **Approximate travel time:** 6 hours (allowing for stops on the way).

Stage two sightseeing attractions:

- **Flooded Forest Viewpoint:** hwy 1E (16 km north of Thalang);
- **Sandstone Buddha Carvings:** hwy 1E (26 km north of Thalang);
- **Wat Pa Pha Nang Rong Buddhist Temple:** hwy 8 (5 km west of Lak Sao);
- **Dragon Cave:** hwy 8 (20 km west of Lak Sao);
- **Cool Springs:** hwy 8 (38 km west of Lak Sao);
- **The Bomb Boats:** hwy 8 (Namkading River - 38 km west of Lak Sao)
- **The Rock Zip-line Circuit:** Hwy 8 (8 km west of Na Hin)



The Flooded Forest Viewpoint: Approx. 16 km north of Thalang is a viewpoint called the Flooded Forest. It's an elevated stretch of road where the waters of the dam can be seen on both sides. On the western side dead trees, like white skeletons, protrude from the wide expanse of water.

Sandstone Buddha Carvings: Another 10 km further on, Buddha images have been sculptured in to the sandstone rock along the edges of the road.



THE SPIRIT WAILING WALL - ALONG HWY 8

Lak Sao to Na Hin: The 65 km drive between Lak Sao and Na Hin is arguably the most scenic stretch of the entire loop. Especially so towards the end of the rainy season when the vibrant green vegetation, topping the karst geography, forms a nice backdrop to the yellow rice fields. As you get closer to Lak Sao a spectacular wall of limestone will come into view. If the sun is out it will be lit up and is visible from a few km away.

The Spirit Wailing Wall: Towards the end of the karst wall, where it tapers off towards Lak Sao, there's an interesting attraction worth looking at. Perched up on a small hill (directly under the high cliffs) is **Wat Pa Pha Nang Rong Buddhist Temple**. The location is approximately 4 km west of Lak Sao (on hwy 8).

Note: On loop maps it's indicated as the **Spirit Wailing Wall**. According to local information the sound of the wind whistling along the karst wall makes an eerie sound, like a wailing ghost. **For directions, click the link below:**



Wat Pa Pha Nang Rong

The Peak: To the right of the upper most temple building is a limestone peak, with a flag at its apex. If you are fit and have rock climbing experience, this climb won't be too difficult. If you are out of shape, I wouldn't recommend trying to make the ascent. There is three vertical sections where the ascent is definitely rock climbing grade. It will take approximately one hour to get up to the flag on the peak. Once there, the view is impressive.



The Spirit Wailing Wall

THE DRAGON CAVE - ALONG HWY 8

Dragon Cave: This is a small but visually impressive cave on hwy 8, between Lak Sao and Baan Na Hin. Located 30 km from Lak Sao, it's normally visited on day two of the Thakhek Loop trip. The cave is easy to access as the parking area is just off the highway. After a long ride from Thalang it's a good place to take a break as there's also a restaurant on the premises. The entrance fee is 20k LAK. For directions, click the link below:



Cave Tour: To enter the cave take the cement stairway down to the entrance area. After squeezing through the narrow entry point, a cement path follows the stream and eventually leads to a low hanging rock ceiling. This runs for approximately 50 meters. You will need to duck your head as you make your way across the sand to the other side. The cave then opens up spectacularly to reveal a large room full of impressive formations, illuminated by an array of colorful lights.



The primary feature: Is the large drapery formation in the front area of the main cave room. Dragon cave isn't as big as Nang Ene Cave but it's got some nice formations, particularly in the rear section, and is well worth an hour of your time. The following short video features highlights of the Dragon cave:



THE COOL SPRINGS - ALONG HWY 8

Cold Springs: This is one of the most popular attractions on the loop trip. The turn off is a further 18 km beyond the Dragon Cave. There's a large advertising sign on the right of hwy 8. From there, it's an additional 4.5 km of dirt road to the parking area. As of January 2020 the entry fee is 20k LAK a person. Visitors are also required to pay a motorbike parking fee of 5k LAK. **Note:** In the rainy season the track to the Cold Springs is extremely difficult to negotiate and many sections are flooded with large pools of water. If you want to visit in the rainy season, it's highly recommended to rent an off road bike. **For directions, click the link Below:**



The primary attraction: Is the clear, turquoise waters of the Cool Pool. It's a spring fed natural pool where Looper's can cool off after the heat of the 90 km ride from Thalang. It's a great spot to relax and chill out, while swimming and taking in the surrounding scenery.



Note: Something to keep in mind, if you're planning to make it to **Kong Lor** on the same day, is you still have a 60 km ride in front of you. Between Cool Springs and Na Hin there's a difficult section of mountainous road to negotiate, followed by the 42 km stretch to Kong Lor Village. This road has some hazardous stretches of dirt (10 km before Kong Lor) and is a difficult ride in the dark. Leave Cool Springs by 4 PM to arrive in good time.



Cold Springs

NA HIN AREA - THE ROCK ZIP-LINE CIRCUIT

Na Hin Village: Na Hin Village is nestled in against an impressive wall of jungle covered, limestone peaks. It's a picturesque setting with a number of reasonably priced guest-houses and restaurants around the town center area. A popular accommodation option in Na Hin is the **Sanhak Guesthouse**, which has a choice of fan and air-conditioned rooms at reasonable rates. **Click the link below for booking inquiries:**



Adventure activities: Overnighting in Na Hin is a good option for checking out a couple of adventure activities in the area. The best and most exciting is the new zip-line circuit, set up by **Green Discovery Laos**, a further 8 km west along hwy 8. This adventure activity/circuit is a recent addition to the loop and is known officially as the **Rock Viewpoint Zip-line Circuit**.



Limestone Forest: The circuit includes 5 zip-lines and traverses a forest of limestone peaks. To complete the full circuit takes approximately 3 hours and the price is 200k LAK (US 30) per person. The ticket price includes all safety gear, training, and zip-line guides. **The following short video features highlights of the Zip-line:**



NA HIN AREA - NAM SANAM WATERFALL

Nam Sanam Waterfall: If you're doing the loop during the rainy season, another sight-seeing option is Sanam Waterfall. This attraction is close to Na Hin Village. The trail access is right next to a Buddhist Temple on hwy 8. From the ticket office ride your motorbike along the trail for approximately 1 km. From there it's a hike over moderately difficult terrain for another 2 km, to the first waterfall level. The trail has thick jungle along the way, with some large old growth trees being quite impressive. **Click the link below for directions:**



Poorly marked trail: Due care should be taken as the trail is slippery and in the eventuality of heavy rain, there's a possibility of tripping or falling. The trail has some directional markers along the way. However some are just chunks of tree bark, cut in arrow shapes, which aren't easy to identify. In this regard if you're walking up a creek bed which doesn't have a clear and obvious trail, turn back and



Jungle Trail

retrace your steps before you get seriously lost. **Note:** To avoid getting lost, hire a **Green Discovery Guide** from the Rock Viewpoint Zip-line Circuit.

Two Levels: The jungle trail leads to a smaller waterfall with pool at the base. Higher up there's two impressive falls spilling over a cliff face. To get to these you'll need to climb up the side of the lower falls, then work your way over a jumble of rocks to the base of the upper falls.



Sanam Waterfall

STAGE THREE - NA HIN TO KONG LOR VILLAGE

Nam Non Cave: This is a large adventure cave, located approximately 10 km before Kong Lor Village. Coming from Na Hin the turn off is on the left, at Nam Non Village. The access track goes through the village and leads to a massive limestone cliff. At the base of cliff, follow the track to the right and ride to the very end. There's a parking area just above the river bed. **For directions from Na Hin, click the link below:**



Dry season only: During the dry season the stream bed through the cave is completely dry, meaning the water flow in the rainy season is only the result of rainfall on the peaks above. There is no upstream entrance for this cave, it's a blind cave. During the rainy season, this cave is inaccessible due to the volume of water flowing from it.

Massive Tunnel: Between the months of November and April, the river bed is dry and the cave is safe to enter. The cave entrance is like



a massive inverted V, which can actually be seen from the main road. Nam Non Cave has bigger internal dimensions than Kong Lor Cave. It's a long, vast passageway with the ceiling, in many sections, at least 50 meters above the cave floor.

Note: As an adventure activity it's still a great experience, being able to hike in 5 km or so. But for safety's sake use good footwear, have back-up lights, and take plenty of drinking water as it gets quite hot inside.



KONG LOR VILLAGE - GENERAL INFORMATION

KONG LOR CAVE: Is situated 42 km south of Na Hin Village, at the furthest point of a dead end road. The turn-off on hwy 8 is well signposted, and the ride will take approximately one hour from Na Hin. **Click the link below for directions:**



Accommodation: There's a village, approximately 1 km from the cave entrance with plenty of guesthouses and restaurants to choose from. A popular choice is the Kong Lor Eco-Lodge. **Click the link below for booking inquiries:**



A Regional highlight: A trip through Kong Lor Cave is one of the highlights of travel in Laos, and one of the best cave tours in the region.



A Cave River: It's also one of the regions longest fully traversable cave rivers; the distance from the downstream to upstream entrance is 7.5 km. The traverse is completed in motorised, flat bottomed, long tail boats (similar to the Thai long tails). **Click the following link to view a highlights video of Kong Lor cave:**



KONG LOR CAVE TOUR

Tour Prices and Ticketing: Tour tickets must be purchased at the **office at the main gate** (approx. 500 meters from the cave entrance) and presented to the ticket kiosk next to the lagoon. As of February 2020, the tour price is approximately **US 8 dollars per person** with a minimum of two paying customers per boat. Life jackets are included in the tour price. **Headlamps can be hired** at the lagoon kiosk for 5000 LAK. **The operating times** for the boat trip are 08.00 - 17.00, daily.

Tour Duration: The round trip will take approximately 2.5 hours (this also includes the stop at the formations plateau).

Tour Safety: For safety, the maximum number of passengers per boat, is three. Life jackets must be worn at all times while in the boat. If you don't have your own flashlight it's highly recommended you rent a headlamp. The cave has a large internal dimension and can be very dark. Without a light you won't see very much. **Note:** The only area of the cave which is illuminated is the **formations plateau**.



The Departure Point: For the trip you will first need to walk around the far side of the lagoon and enter through the cave mouth, which is surrounded by tree growth. After entering (the downstream entrance) the cave opens up quite spectacularly to a much larger internal dimension. A solid cement path leads to the **departure point**, some 200 hundred meters further inside, where the **motorised tour boats** are parked side by side on an underground beach.



KONG LOR CAVE TOUR

Doing The Tour: After a short delay at the departure point - the driver may refuel the boat - you'll be underway on the spectacular run through Kong Lor Cave. Approximately 1 km in, the boat will pull over at an underground beach for the 30 minute stop at the **formations plateau**.

The tour highlight: The stop at the formations plateau is a highlight of the tour. This section of the cave tunnel opens into a massive void, where the cave ceiling is some 40 meters above the river level. After alighting from the boat, sightseers are given ample time to view the beautifully illuminated stalagmites and stalactites, on a wide rock shelf above the river.

For viewing safety: A cement trail has been put in place to provide sure footing as you work your way across the plateau. Handrails and barriers are also in place to keep sightseers at a distance from the fragile speleotherm.

Impressive viewing: The array of formations are certainly impressive. There is a wide plateau (approx. 300 meters long and 50 me-



ters wide) which rises 15 meters above the river. When the cave was set-up for tourism a team of French lighting specialists installed an array of blue, white and orange lights to highlight the forest of formations on the plateau. Viewing time is normally 30 - 40 minutes. The trail eventually leads back down to the river, on a solid stairway, where sightseers can re-join their boats for the continuation of the tour.



KONG LOR CAVE TOUR

The upstream entrance: From the formations plateau it's another 6.5 km to the **upstream entrance** (exit point). As the boat approaches the exit point the glow of daylight penetrates well into the cave. Approximately 400 meters from the exit (upstream entrance), there's a change in the river level. Passengers will need to alight so the drivers can haul their boats up and over the barrier created by the abrupt one meter drop in water levels. At this point sightseers can take some time to walk along the underground beach, on the left side of the river, and admire the sheer size of the cave.

The upstream side: After clearing the obstacle the boat trip continues on to a lost world, beyond the upstream entrance. A place where jungle clad, jagged peaks encroach on the river and groups of water buffaloes graze along its banks. Approximately 1 km beyond the upstream entrance, there's a landing point where passengers can alight and spend some time at the nearby encampment. There is some small restaurants selling drinks and snack foods.



Upstream Entrance

The return run: After relaxing for 20 - 30 minutes at the encampment, sightseers on the standard tour will re-join the boat for the 45 minute run back through the cave. Once again the world of daylight is left behind as one enters the darkened, primordial world of Kong Lor Cave; an experience which is a highlight of a tour through Laos and perhaps, even South East Asia.



The Upstream Side

STAGE FOUR - KONG LOR TO THAKHEK (HWY 8 & 13)

STAGE FOUR: KONG LOR - THAKHEK:

After completing the trip through Kong Lor Cave, the majority of Looper's normally ride back to Thakhek on the same day. The ride down hwy's 8 & 13, from Kong Lor, is 187 km and care should be taken due to the number of heavy trucks on the road. **For directions back to Thakhek, click the link below:**



The zip-line circuit: If you haven't done the zip-line circuit, then it's worth checking out on your way through. **Note:** the zip-line circuit normally takes three hours to complete. So it's recommended departing Kong Lor Village in the morning to allow enough time to get back to Thakhek, before darkness.

Vieng Kham: Is the T-Junction of hwy 13 & hwy 8. From here it's just over 100 km (south) back to Thakhek. The road is flat, most of the way. The only real hazard is the constant flow of articulated trucks running along the hwy.



The road back

Khong Leng Lake: This is the only notable sightseeing attraction on hwy 13. The turn off is 38 km before Thakhek. **Coming from Na Hin, the turn-off is on your left.** It is clearly sign-posted and has an 18 km sealed road all the way to the parking area. The water hole is spring fed and is great spot for a refreshing swim on your way to Thakhek. **Click the link below for directions:**



Khong Leng Lake

KONG LOR TO THAKHEK ON THE BACK ROAD

THE BACK ROAD: Over recent years the back road has become an increasingly popular option for the more adventurous Looper. The idea of taking your motorbike through the cave, and riding the **56 km of dirt road** back to the Nakai Plateau, is an exciting challenge. However, there's a couple of things to consider carefully before taking your motorbike through Kong Lor Cave:

A hazardous ride: Even though the back road route is marginally shorter in distance, it's actually far more hazardous due its rough state from the upstream encampment.

Dry season only: This is normally an extra stage on the loop. It should only be attempted in the dry season, as this remote road is a pot-holed and difficult ride.

The cost: Another prime consideration is the cost. For one person with a motorbike, the **price is US 33** to go through Kong Lor Cave.

Use an off road bike: Additionally, the road is not really suitable for scooters. Especially the final 10 km ascent to the Nakai Plateau, which has some steep and rocky sections

to negotiate. If you've got your heart set on doing the back road, I would highly recommend hiring an off road bike in Thakhek.

Avoid going solo: Travel in a group, or at least with two motorbikes. This area of Laos is very remote and has long stretches without visible habitation. If you break down, it could be a long walk to a bike repair shop.

Start early: You should leave the upstream encampment no later than 1 pm to avoid riding the back road in the dark.

Click the link below for short video on taking a motorbike through Kong Lor Cave:



Back to Thakhek: The dirt road exits on hwy 1 E, near the Orchid Trail. You then have the option of riding back to Thakhek, or doing the **extended Loop**. Click the link below for **directions:**



The Back Road

DOING THE EXTENDED LOOP

About: From Nakai go south on Hwy 1E until you arrive at **Gnommalat Junction**. This is the intersecting point on to Hwy 12. From here, turn left and head out towards the Vietnamese border. **Note:** The only sightseeing attraction of significance at Gnommalat is the **Golden Rabbit Viewpoint**. The lookout is 2 km east of the junction (back towards Thakhek) but is well signposted and easy to locate. There's a steel stairway of 780 steps up to the lookout which offers fantastic views across the landscape. The sunrise view is spectacular, but to see this you'll need to spend one night at a guesthouse in Gnommalat.

Vietnam Border: From Gnommalat it's a flat run of approximately 70 km to **Nong Chan Village (aka Lang Khang)**. Approximately 2 km before Nong Chan is the **Sayphouloung Resort** (approximately 16 km from the Vietnam Border). For directions, click the link below:



Sayphouloung Resort

Note: This is the only decent accommodation choice in town for getting a good night's sleep before hitting the road to Bualapha. There's also some interesting war memorabilia in the parking area; cluster bomb casings set up on display stands. This area is near the **Mu Gia Pass**, a significant location during the Vietnam War:



Cluster Bomb Casing

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