



Crowds of local and foreign tourists enjoy taking photos and watching elephants parade at the Elephant Festival last year. --Photo Poonsab

Elephant Festival readies for over 100,000 visitors

Times Reporters

Preparations for this year's Elephant Festival in Xayaboury province are currently well over 80 percent complete, with officials expecting to welcome an expected over 100,000 guests to visit the event next week.

Deputy Head of Information, Culture and Tourism Department Mr Sangvien Saengchanaly told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that a trade fair has been already open since February 12 to attract visitors as well.

"Now, many tourists from European countries are visiting our place and it seems to increase day by day," he said.

He noted that in Xayaboury town they could accommodate over 80,000 people in various facilities including 3 hotels, 29 guesthouses and one resort.

With the expectation of over 100,000 visitors the province has also prepared 12 villages near the town to open home-stays that will charge 30,000 kip per night.

"Meanwhile, the province has also prepared accommodation to welcome the high demand of guests in two neighbouring districts

of Phiang and Nan, in order to ensure we cope with the crowds," he added.

He said for transportation, visitors by land could go three ways, they could travel from Vientiane Road No. 11 to pass Xanakham district of Vientiane province and to Paklai district of Xayaboury province before reaching Xayaboury district.

The second way, visitors could travel from the capital to Kasy district of Vientiane province along Road No 13 North and then turn left to the Kasy-Nan Road. However this road closes to all traffic except construction vehicles from 7am till 11 am and again from 1pm to 5pm. Travel is possible only from 11am-1pm and again after 5pm.

He said the third way was to travel along northern Road No 13 to the T-junction of Xiengngern district in Luang Prabang and then turn left for Xiengngern - Xayaboury road, which would take about eight hours.

"However, travellers who don't like to travel by land, we also have an airport to serve you, with three flights per week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday," he said.

A technician at the Northern Bus Station Mr Khamdee Phimmason said "Our buses are currently on normal service; we usually have three services for buses and two for vans each day from Vientiane to Xayaboury province."

"Local people who travel to join the elephant festival mostly use their own vehicles."

"If there are more customers than our capacity, we can also arrange more buses to catch up the demand," he added.

The Elephant Festival began in 2007; the festival has become one of the most important events to raise awareness about elephant conservation and its meaning for the country, which once was known as the land of a million elephants.

This year, 65 elephants are expecting to show up at the festival to take tourists around the town, taking part in traditional baci ceremony and demonstrating how they engage in work.

Last year more than 100,000 people joined the festival and generated about 28 billion kip for the local economy.

First science-policy exchange aims to improve decision making

Times Reporters

The government of Laos is stepping up efforts to foster closer exchanges between scientists, researchers and policymakers, with the first ever science-policy exchange held in Vientiane last week.

The exchange was co-organised by the National University of Laos (NUOL), in cooperation with the Policy Think Tank of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE).

The aim was to facilitate discussions between science and policy in Laos by researchers and high-ranking decision makers along with representatives from Lao ministries, local and international academic institutions and donor organisations.

The purpose of the event was to create a space for dialogue between the various parties and to take stock of the current status of science-policy exchange in the country.

The event also aimed to obtain answers to questions such as what can decision makers expect from research and how can researchers best support decision makers.

Researchers play a critical role when it comes to producing knowledge about the possible causes of problems, NUOL Vice President, Prof. Dr Phetsamone Khounsavath said at the meeting.

Current challenges include the sustainable use of Laos' hydropower and fostering healthy nutrition habits among the Lao population, he said.

The upcoming task lies in how to exchange information



Dr Souvanpheng Bouphanouong (centre) shares her experience at the meeting in Vientiane.

on problems and solutions, he added.

"Researchers should be visionaries, they should be far-sighted. Can they for instance tell us if the Lao PDR should continue to focus on agriculture?" Economics Research Committee President, Dr Souvanpheng Bouphanouong asked.

Deputy Minister for Planning and Investment, Dr Bounthavy Sisouphanthong pointed out the discrepancies between policymakers needing research results at short notice and in a very condensed format and researchers needing time to prepare lengthy research reports.

Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Science, NUOL, Prof. Dr Souphab Khouangvichit, expressed the desire for better coordination between research and policy, for example a space in which policymakers can define upcoming needs and research activities can be created accordingly.

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Mr Minh Pham emphasised the

importance of synthesising intellectual pursuit into a policy argument.

"Otherwise you have a lot of thoughts and ideas floating around without finding an anchor in the political arena," he said.

Many issues require a multi-sectoral approach, added Mr Minh, giving the example of malnutrition being not just a health issue but also a cultural and trade issue.

Introducing a Swiss perspective, CDE Director Dr Thomas Breu said research has to go beyond discipline borders to focus on the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of development. If we invest in agriculture, for example, what is the effect on social or political issues.

The Science Policy Exchange was followed by a technical meeting the following day to synthesise the outcomes of the exchanges towards concrete next steps. The analysis of current practices of science policy exchanges in Laos will provide the basis for further discussion in the form of a second science policy forum later this year.

New dormitories provide better... FROM PAGE 1

community through the formation of student clubs.

Besides the new dormitories, most classrooms at the faculty have been renovated and a new 'Learning Building' to host the faculty library, facilities for the independent learning of English language and IT, and meeting rooms will open in a few weeks.

President of the National University of Laos, Prof. Dr Soukkongseng Saignaleuth, and Charge d'Affaires of the Luxembourg Embassy Mr Claude Jentgen, cut the ribbon to open the new dormitories.

Mr Jentgen, who co-chaired the review meeting with the Dean of the faculty, and project Manager Mr Viengvilay Thiengchanxay thanked the international experts and all the Lao and foreign officials who contributed to the success of the project.

Participants also discussed a time extension to the project with the Parties agreeing that the project has been very successful in addressing many needs, but that the faculty is still in need of further support, especially in order to strengthen working systems and procedures.

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Tel: (856-21)216364, fax: (856-21)216365
info@vientianetimes.org.la

Supervisor:
Savankhone Razmounry

Editor-in-Chief:
Thongsavath Chansombath

Deputy Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor:
Thonglor Duangsavanh
Tel: 021 216364
lorlor55599@yahoo.com

Deputy Editor-in-Chief:
Phonekeo Vorakhoun
Mobile: 55599207
phonekeo@hotmail.com

News Editor:
Sisay Vilaysack
Mobile: 55615716
vilaysacksisay@hotmail.com

Features Editor:
Phon Thikeyo
Mobile: 55624351
phonthikeyo28@yahoo.com

Business Editor:
Ekaphone Phouthonesy
Tel: 217593, 020 55689209

Graphic Designer/IT:
Malaythong Phayanoung
Tel: 217593, 020 55729209

Finance Manager:
Somphone Vongsa
Tel: 252630, 020 55647291

Marketing Manager:
Phouthasack
Inthakoummane
Mobile: 020 55599209
sale.adv@gmail.com

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