

Issues for Promoting Ecotourism in Laos

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Paper for ANDA International Conference at Phnom Penh

January 8-10, 2010

SUMMARY

Tourism industry consists of about 10 percent of GDP in developed countries and larger than automobile or IT sector. It is an integrated industry covering a wide range of sectors and provides huge employment opportunities. Under the world trend for sustainable development, ecotourism is the fastest growing sector in tourism. Lao government has been enthusiastic in promoting tourism by utilizing its rich nature, culture and historical heritages. Ecotourism has three categories: ecotourism in its original meaning, ecotourism mixed with various types of nature tourism, ecotourism mixed with ordinary mass tourism. Genuine ecotourism is still a major phenomenon in developed countries. Majority of foreign tourists coming to Laos are from neighboring developing countries where people still don't pass the stage of mass tourism. The direction of Lao tourism strategy is to increase ecotourism elements into tourism in general that fits into sustainable tourism.

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1. Introduction: The Importance of Tourism in Economy and Society

In 1950, the total arrival of foreign tourists from across the world was 25 million (with a total sale of US\$2.1 billion), while in 2006 it became 840 million. The total labor force counted to 234.3 million (8.7% of total labor force in the world). The number of foreign tourists is predicted to grow up to 1 billion by 2010 and 1.5 billion by 2020. The scale of tourism industry became US\$ 5 trillion which consisted of 10.3% of world's total GDP according to the annual report of WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council). It needs to be understood that tourism industry is larger than automobile industry or IT industry in developed countries.

However, the tourism industry depends upon the scale of the middle class and about 76% of tourists concentrate in North America and Europe where they have geographical proximity with other countries.² The number one country receiving foreign tourists in 2006 is France (79 Million), followed by Spain (58M), USA (52M), China (50M), and Italy (33M). Japan had 7.3M. ASEAN in 2006 received a total of 56.9M foreign tourists. The number one was Malaysia (18.5M), followed by Thailand (13.8M), Singapore (9.8M), Indonesia (4.9M), Vietnam (3.6M), the Philippines (2.7M), Cambodia (1.7M), Laos (1.2M), and Myanmar (0.65M)³.

Although the big scale tourism industry is still the phenomena of industrialized countries, tourism is an integrated industry covering a wide range of economic activities. Although not a recent data, in Thailand in 1998, the distribution of tourism consumption expenditure was 29% in shopping, 27% in accommodation, 16% in food & beverages,

²額賀信(2004)、『観光革命：スペインに学ぶ地域活性化』(Nukaga Shin, Tourism Revolution: Local Vitalization learning from Spain)、日刊工業新聞社、p.121.

³ <http://www.aseansec.org/Stat/Table28.pdf>

Table 1 Total Structure of Tourism in Industry and Public Institutions⁴

Business sector		Actual fields
Tourism	(1) travel (2) hotel (3) transportation (4) convention	Travel agency, tour conductor, guide, Hotel, resort, inn Railway, airline, bus, taxi, ship, rental car,
Tourism related sectors	(1) souvenir (2) restaurants in tourism sites (3) retails (4) photo industry (5) insurance (6) credit card (7) bank (8) IT service (9) Publication (10)Media and advertisement (11)Amusement & sports (12)Education & culture (13)Freight transport (14)Guard and security (15)cleaning	(Food sector should be included) Restaurants, bar, Travel bags & goods Camera, Video, DVD Travel insurance Travelers check, Currency exchange Net sale, reservation Guidebook, travel story, map Periodicals, TV, radio, newspaper Theater, theme-park, golf, skiing, sport center, Museum, zoo, botanical garden, aqua-museum Delivery Guard of facilities \$ events
Public institutions	(1) domestic institutions (2) international institutions	tourism association, local government,

⁴ 中尾清 (2008)『自治体の観光政策と地域活性化』イマジン出版 (Nakao Kiyoshi, Tourism Policy and Local Vitalization by Local Governments) , p.40.

11% in entertainment, 13 in local transportation, 5% others.⁵ In addition to that, food supply (agricultural sector) to restaurants, including sales in souvenir shops, is an indispensable sector for promoting tourism. In Japan, agriculture, fishery and forestry sectors are big pillars for supporting tourism. Agricultural sector is widely regarded to be the 6th industrial sector. That means the 1st industrial sector (agriculture, fishery and forestry) × 2nd industrial sector (food processing) × 3rd industrial sector (direct deal, restaurant, souvenir shop) = 6th industrial sector. Value added income in the 1st industrial sector is to change the 1st industrial sector into the 6th industrial sector. For organizing such system, tourism is one of the major means.

Government role is indispensable and decisive for promoting tourism like safety of the society, infrastructure building (roads, railroad, airline, power, water), cleanliness of tourist areas, guide boards, brochures to be delivered at government tourist centers, education to people concerning hospitality to tourists, promotion of flowers along the streets in cooperation with communities, etc.

Because of its scale in economy, employment opportunities and the wide range of economic sectors it covers, tourism has a huge potential to be the leading industry for promoting regional (or local) development even for developing countries. More foreign tourists and the expanded development of the middle class certainly increase tourism and income from the sector. The basic of tourism is not only historical remains and beautiful views, but also soft power based on cultural power, intellectual power (including hospitality) and information power (like flower season, restaurant and tourist site map, and safety information). It should be one of the national strategies (responsive power) for the government to pursue. For upgrading these elements, the government ~~even~~ needs to build them from the beginning. For example, Jerez City, Spain was well

⁵ Busaba Kunasirin (1998), Tourism Policy in Thailand, in Datai Tdasi ed., *Asia, Kyushu and Tourism in the 21st Century*, Asia Pacific Center, Fukuoka, p.90.

known to be the city of sherry. But the city “added” two more new attractions later: flamenco dance and horse riding.⁶

There is another dimension of importance in tourism. In Japan, rapid urbanization followed by industrialization facilitated a serious depopulation in rural areas after the WW II. Majority of educated and young population, especially women who despite semi-feudal men’s society, left rural areas for urban jobs, and East Asian countries have followed that trend. Facing depopulation, Japan’s rural local governments have done many efforts for the “Local Revitalization” movement⁷ which proliferated nation-wide for the last 40 years or so extending to urban local governments through the following processes:

- (a) Continuity: based upon the long-lived culture in various parts of Japan which has been maintained for long years;
- (b) Capacity mechanism for pursuing “kaizen” (improvement) by incorporating things from the outside world as parts of “translation adaptation.”
- (c) Building mutation functions by producing an “emergence” as the mechanism of change that facilitates the “creation of tradition.”⁸

“Regional Development”⁹ is famous throughout the world for pursuing a balanced development between the capital region and other areas. Largely, it has been designed by the central government focusing upon the industrialization of local cities and also how to connect regions with more dynamic economic centers (capital region) via communication and transportation networks. However nowadays, there emerged a trend

⁶額賀信(2004)、『観光革命：スペインに学ぶ地域活性化』(Nukaga Shin, Tourism Revolution: Local Vitalization learning from Spain)、pp.138, 156, 162, 187.

⁷ In Japanese, it is called Chiiki Okoshi, Machi Okoshi or Machi Dukuri.

⁸ KIMURA, Hirotsune(2005), “Pursuing Sustainable Community and Promoting Japan’s Culture: towards the 21st Century,” Discussion Paper Series No. 151 English version, GSID Nagoya University, pp.6-7, <http://ir.nul.nagoya-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2237/8639/5/Kimura+Hirotsune+151en.pdf>

⁹ Often times it is called “rural development” neglecting local cities.

of highlighting culture and “mental richness” especially in developed countries. The major challenge of local governments has changed from the “age of regional development” to the “age of human development.” Eventually, the need for local governments to tackle the issue of building attractive local revitalization is “to make clear what the present citizens desire.” The answer is that while enjoying urban and physical civilization in urban areas, at the same time, they would like to enjoy a distinctive local culture that breathes the unique characteristics of the areas. Now is the age of a new life culture upgrading the quality of daily life enjoying both civilization and nature/ local culture.¹⁰ Eventually, tourism is now the most active industrial sector (if not the leading sector) in rural Japan. Even in Laos, farmers are bored in their daily lives and jobs, which don’t change their life for decades. Everyone needs something different in his/her life, determining which key word will be the hope for “casual up” if people can have income.

The definition of tourism is “various activities tourists practice in their non-daily spaces accompanying tourist consumption. It is the practice containing the “rule of non-resident” and the “rule of non-profit” having the sense of “lifelong learning.”¹¹ Tourism has been proliferated and will proliferate in the 21st century continuously with economic growth as a big part of economic activity and people’s “mental richness.”

2. Ordinary Tourism (Mass Tourism) and Ecotourism

¹⁰ KIMURA, Hirotsumi(2005), op. cit., pp. 7-8; 松野弘・森巖夫編集、日本青年会議所監修 (1992) 『講座まちづくり入門』 (Matsuno& Mori eds. An Introduction to Local Revitalization. Series)。ぎょうせい, p.47; 木村尚三郎 (1990) 『まちづくりの心』 (Kimura Naozaburo. The Spirit of Local Revitalization) ぎょうせい.

¹¹ Nakao Kiyoshi, op. cit., p.31.

Wikipedia explains that in mass tourism, “there has been an upmarket trend in the tourism over the last few decades, especially in Europe, where international travel for short breaks is common. Tourists have higher levels of disposable income and greater leisure time and they are also better-educated and have more sophisticated tastes. There is now a demand for a better quality products, which has resulted in a fragmenting of the mass market for beach vacations; people want more specialised versions, quieter resorts, family-oriented holidays or niche market-targeted destination hotels.”

Datai Tadashi insisted that “in the 20th century, Western civilization was thought to have become universal. But the 21st century is destined to be an era when cultural originality will be respected over universality. Diversity will carry greater weight than uniformity.” “Attractive cities should not only be beautiful and have character, but must also be safe, environmentally clean, high in moral standards and kind to people.”¹²

Generally speaking, the annual growth rate of world tourism is 4%, ecotourism (ecological tourism) has 10 to 15% rate of increase (Wikipedia). Eventually, from 1990s, ecotourism became the new and promising field of tourism. For example, Japanese likes Waikiki beach of Hawaii very much. Japanese constitutes about 71% of total foreign tourists (2.14 million) in 2005. But nowadays, Waikiki can't attract Japanese tourists. Combining ecotourism in traditional mass-tourism is more popular. Tourists now prefer to go to unexplored sites. Ecotourism in Wikipedia is defined along the following: “The concept of ecotourism is widely misunderstood and in practice is often used as a marketing tool to promote tourism, which is related to nature. This is an especially frequent malpractice in the realm of jungle tourism.” During the increasing trend of ecotourism, the definition or contents of ecotourism became very vague.

¹² Datai Tadashi (1998), “The Significance of Tourism Policy for the 21st Century,” in Datai ed., *Asia, Kyushu and Tourism in the 21st Century*, Asia Pacific Center, Fukuoka, pp.3, 7.

The concept of ecotourism was given birth in late 1980s as nature tourism looking for expensive and precious butterflies and giant beetles etc. which was contrary to the present understanding of ecotourism. Mass tourism is largely not sustainable by introducing so many tourists to places over their carrying capacity and often destroys or harms the environment. On the other hand, ecotourism ensures that the human impact on environment is kept at a minimum and is basically practiced by

- (1) small groups so as not to harm the environment,
- (2) with specialist guide
- (3) having learning process of nature and culture of the place, and
- (4) contribution to local communities.

In this strict or genuine meaning, one of the Japanese specialists of ecotourism counts only 35 ecotourism sites in Japan and insists Japan's ecotourism is still in its infancy stage, especially in the sense of guides. At the same time, she insists that as far as it is a part of tourism, ecotourism must have attractive elements in the program. It should be an entertainment.¹³ Ecotourism is part of a movement to promote sustainable development in the field of tourism in general where hundreds of millions of people participate every year.¹⁴

There are several similar terms with ecotourism:

- (1) Nature tourism (≒jungle tourism)
- (2) Agro-tourism (≒green tourism) enjoying village life (agriculture, forestry and fishery villages). This is more proliferating combined with slow food and slow life movements.

¹³ 薮田麻美編著 (2008) 『地域からのエコツーリズム：観光・交流による持続可能な地域づくり』(Yabuta Asami, *Ecotourism from the Local: Sustainable Local Vitalization through Tourism and Interchange*), pp.58, 37, 120.

¹⁴ The relation between mass tourism and ecotourism is widely discussed in 吉田春生 (2004)、『エコツーリズムとマス・ツーリズム：現代観光の実像と課題』(Yoshida Haruo, *Ecotourism and mass tourism: Reality and Issues of Contemporary Tourism*) 原書房.

(3) Eco-tourism: four indicators explained above.

These are similar but different. Different but mixed and duplicated in reality. In recent years, there came out other concepts like industrial tourism, cultural tourism and tourism to visit indigenous people and things became even more complex.

The important thing is to change or mix the present characteristics of mass-tourism, the major trend in tourism, to nature, agro- and eco-tourism by introducing a one-day eco-tourism in mass tourism, among other approaches. Actually, the majority of mass-tourism contains nature tourism and cultural tourism visiting historical remains or enjoying traditional dances and events. Complementary movement is slow food and slow life. Both promote sustainable development. When the author interviewed the head of the National Tourism Agency Luang Prabang Branch Office, Laos, he is a very enthusiastic promoter of ecotourism and insisted that “our target is to make 50% of tourists participate in ecotourism” by promoting, for example, a one-day waterfall tour with guides. His definition of ecotourism was wide.¹⁵

A representative travel agency of ecotourism (Green Discovery) in Laos advertizes all nature, agro and eco tourism in connection with mass tourism. The website of “Green Discovery Laos¹⁶” writes as follows:

Laos' Pioneer in Adventure Travel and Ecotourism since 2000

- (a) We offer far more than 100 unique tour programs all around the country, involving rafting, kayaking, trekking, rock climbing, mountain biking, cycling, caving and river trips.
- (b) We also organize guided motorcycle excursions and help you design your own self-guided caving, river trips and motorcycle expeditions.
- (c) In addition to our pre-organized tour programs, we also offer customized guided

¹⁵ Interview, August 5, 2009 at Luang Phrabang.

¹⁶ <http://www.greendiscoverylaos.com/>

and self-guided travel as well as incentive tours.

- (d) We also can help to organize wildlife watching tours. If you prefer the comfort of a car, the thrill of a 4-wheeling, or just want to hang out and do the "tourist thing", we organize caravan holidays and classical vacations, too.

So, the actual definition is wide and confusing. But it will be the direction of the majority of tourist companies combining mass tourism with nature tourism. The reality is that the majority of tourists takes much interest in nature but not always directly and narrowly defined as ecotourism. The clear proof is that tourists prefer to stay in good hotel which is a symbol of mass tourism. Even under the growing trend of ecotourism or sustainable tourism (or responsible tourism), mass tourism is and will be the major trend and it is especially so among tourists in developing countries. Ecotourism and others are not to take over mass tourism but coexist with mass tourism. Actually, agro-tourism (green tourism in Japan) is the bigger trend in Europe than ecotourism as the sustainable tourism. The problem is how to make them coexist.¹⁷

Australia is said to be an ecotourism developed country, being helped by one month holiday system a year to all Australians, there are several thousands of ecotourism operators. Now it is not simply a niche but a pillar of tourism.¹⁸ We can say there are three categories in ecotourism: (1) ecotourism in its original meaning, (2) ecotourism mixed with various types of nature tourism, and (3) ecotourism mixed with ordinary mass tourism.

Lao government focuses upon the promotion of ecotourism although the majority of international tourists are mass tourism participants. As a communist country, Laos had a closed policy to foreign tourists up to 1990 and the total foreign tourists of the

¹⁷吉田 『エコツーリズムとマス・ツーリズム』 (Yoshida, *Ecotourism and mass tourism*, op.cit., pp.44-45, 60, 66, 90, 136.

¹⁸ Sue Beeton (1998), *Eco Tourism: A Practical Guide for Rural Communities*, Csiro Publication (Japanese translation 2002, 小林英俊訳 『エコツーリズム教本』 平凡社)。

year were 14 thousand. From then on, Laos has opened its door to foreigners and in 2007, the total foreign tourists increased to 1.62 million. Laos is a very mountainous country (more than 90%). Arable land is 3%. They would like to use their nature and unexploited cultural heritages to be the targets of tourist destinations.

Foreign tourists had grown up to 27% annually between 1990 and 2004. Over half of them are interested in the natural environment, while 67% are interested in cultural attractions. Tourism and hydropower serves as the two key sources of foreign exchange earnings for ~~the~~ Lao.¹⁹

Majority of foreign tourists to Laos are one-day tourists; all of whom visit by bus:

(a) 59% of tourists came from Thailand in 2007: sight seeing of Buddhist temples and enjoy shopping at souvenir shops

(b) 18% of tourists came from Vietnam: after opening horizontal road passing Thailand – South Laos (Savannakhet) – Da Nang of central Vietnam. They enjoy shopping coming by group of buses.

(c) 3% (55 thousand) of tourists came from China largely to national border areas:

Japanese counts to 30 thousand. Largely, only a small portion of tourists coming from EU and US (200 thousand tourists) participate in ecotourism (1-2% among total foreign tourists). A similar phenomenon can be observed in Takayama City, Japan where Asian tourists come as groups but Europeans come individually and a part of them would like to learn how local nature and local culture are preserved, and practice cultural exchange with local people through guides.

3. Two Examples of Ecotourism in Laos

¹⁹ Lao National Tourism Administration, *National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2005-2010 Summary*, p.7.

One of the authors, Kimura, participated in two ecotourism in Laos in August 2009.

Only two persons participated.

(1) Ecotourism near Luang Phrabang, an Old Capital of World Heritage (2 days)

Luang Phrabang Province is the most developed area in ecotourism in Laos because of the enthusiastic organizing by the Luang Phrabang Office of National Tourism Administration. In 11 districts, there are 129 ecotourism sites (56 cultural sites, 62 natural sites and 11 historical sites) and 77 sites among them are operating and others are supposed to be operated in 2010. The co-author experienced the following program:

- (a) Visiting 3 villages: ethnic minority (H'mong) village, liquor making village and hand weaving village
- (b) Staying overnight at a lodge in the forest near the river
- (c) Elephant ride and participatory bathing
- (d) Enjoying a river trip
- (e) Visit to a waterfall (Tad Sae waterfall)

The guide in Luang Phrabang was a high school graduate. He was not trained as a guide and could only provide a scarce explanation about things. His English was clumsy and sometimes, had difficulty in communication. He was a contract worker with a travel agency being called only when there are eco-tourists. There are many guides like him. Eventually, the communication and explanation about the villages we visited was scarce. Still, one could very much enjoy all the visits. The lodge where the author stayed was like a three star hotel room and one can observe similar lodges during the river trip. Dinner was local dish full of vegetables with two bamboo shoot varieties. We enjoyed distilled rice wine dipped with snake and lemon grass and another bottle dipped with scorpion and lemon grass which we bought in the liquor making village we visited.

Waterfall is really good but it becomes less attractive during dry season. The guide prepared lunch box for us.

(2) Ancient Stone Jars in the Battlefield of Jar (2 days, near Phonsavan City, Xieng Khouang Province):

- (a) Visiting the tourist center (a small museum)
- (b) Visiting plain of Jar to see 3 sites of stone jars
- (c) Staying overnight in the city hotel
- (d) Visiting ethnic minority (H'mong) village
- (e) Visiting the evacuation cave where more than a thousand people were killed by the US missile bomb

In Phonsavan City, our guide was a graduate of normal school (college) having 3 years. His English was good. At first he became a teacher but he could not last because of the low salary. Eventually, he changed his job to be a guide. He was a contract worker being employed when tourists come. During the peak season from November to February (dry season), he has a job every day but on other months he only has a job about 3 days a week. Moreover, after working for 3 years, he could participate in training of guides organized by the government and financed by the tourist agency. It was a 20-day course and he was taught government policy on tourism, history and what tourism is. He had known the term ecotourism but with this training, he could understand the contents. There are many guides who don't know tourism, ecotourism, and information about tourist sites, according to our guide. With the help of a guide, the author could interview a family in ethnic Hmong village who were not accustomed to be interviewed and it was very interesting to hear the family history. Xieng Khouang Province is not the major tourist destination and lodges outside the capital city were not available. Even restaurants were scarce in tourist sites and they served only simple noodle. I advised the

restaurant should prepare various meats to mix with noodle. They can get more income. But the answer was that the restaurant is just the side job for the owner and they are too busy. It's difficult to understand the level of their entrepreneurship. In Xieng Khouang Province, they also have a good waterfall but it is too far to walk. The transportation system is not yet developed well, other than Vientiane and Luang Phrabang (and most probably Champasak in Southern Laos). In both programs, it has been observed that villagers were consulted for them to accept foreign tourists in exchange for some money the village could get. However, villagers were not consulted to allow community participation where villagers can discuss what kind of exchange and communication they organize. There is no community based ecotourism to be seen. In Laos, villagers don't have effective village organizations among themselves.

4. Issues to be tackled for Promoting Ecotourism in Laos

There are three factors for considering the promotion of ecotourism. The first is to promote the basic rule based or genuine ecotourism. The second is to enlarge ecotourism mixing with nature tourism and green (agro) tourism. The third is to enlarge ecotourism mixing with mass tourism so as the total structure of tourism can be changed into sustainable tourism. An additional way is to mix ecotourism with the world trend of slow life, slow food movements so as movement participants can have more interest to participate in ecotourism.

In ecotourism, there are four rules. First, for organizing small groups so as not to harm the environment, the problem is how to gather such kind of tourists. For making ecotourism an industry so as some people can make it a job, certain scale is necessary and it is unavoidable for establishing fairly large scale ecotourism programs. Largely in ecotourism, participants are foreign tourists coming from developed countries. It is

unavoidable to cooperate with foreign travel agencies for inviting more foreign tourists. And, it is unavoidable for foreign investment for promotion or start up of ecotourism. Eventually, “Most forms of ecotourism are owned by foreign investors and corporations that provide few benefits to local communities. An overwhelming majority of profits are put into the pockets of investors instead of reinvestment into the local economy or environmental protection.” “In Zimbabwe and Nepal's Annapurna region, where underdevelopment is taking place, more than 90 percent of ecotourism revenues are expatriated to the parent countries, and less than 5 percent go into local communities (Ecotourism in Wikipedia)”

Internet website is promising for increasing customers in ecotourism. But as far as various eco-tour programs are prepared, there comes out different quality of ecotourism. Some are good but some are not good. For keeping the total quality control, it will be a good idea to introduce the Western European system, where the National Tourist Bureau checks the quality of B&B (Bead and Breakfast inn). Eventually, all B&B fulfill the quality and all B&B nation-wide could fully satisfy the customers.

Concerning the specialist guide, Laos has a definite weak point to prepare guides. Guides are employed as contract workers and only when customers participate in ecotourism are they employed on a daily wage basis. Eventually, their income is unstable. Moreover, the travel agencies don't train guides very well. Many guides have insufficient understanding of what ecotourism is and how to give satisfaction to tourists. Many can't explain tourist sites/ culture of people/ names of trees and flowers. Some are weak in speaking English. The government needs to have a systematic training system for guides or such kind of publications and require guides to get a license with an examination.

For providing tourists the learning process to appreciate nature and the culture of the place, the government needs to prepare explanation boards, maps and brochures.

Guides need to have not only training but also the opportunity to exchange their lessons associating with customers to upgrade the CS (Customer Satisfaction) and TQC (Total Quality Control).

Concerning the contribution to local communities, Laos government set a regulation where 15% of tourist participation fee is provided to the communities visited. But it has been observed in the villages visited that the villagers seem to be accustomed to be observed by tourists but they have no idea how to associate and communicate with tourists. It was definitely not the community participation way of ecotourism. The ideal ecotourism will be a locally-managed one, prioritizing local benefit and environmental conservation as villagers hope. Within that framework, villagers can sell the attractive points of their sites like flower season, fishing points, beautiful viewpoints etc. Organizing villagers' discussion is a part of networking and village governance. One of Japanese town (Gujo Hachiman town, Gifu Province) organizes the local people and made them guides for teaching traditional dance, caving, horse riding, wood curving, wood painting, dyeing, ceramic making, paper craft, sausage making, chicken egg picking, canoeing, fishing, village walk while being taught effectiveness of planted trees and flowers etc.²⁰ But the reality is far from that.

Rich nature is one of the strong points for promoting eco-tourism in Laos. More than 90% of total land of Laos is mountainous. But mountains are highly denuded by slash- and- burn agriculture which is allowed to the people except in 20 National Protected Areas occupying 14% of the total land area.²¹ It is a weak point of Laos.

Phonsavan is the capital city of Xieng Khouang Province. Its population is 57 thousand including suburban rural areas. Because of the small population, road from Luang Phrabang to Phonsavan was paved but full of curves in mountainous area. It took

²⁰ <http://www.gujohachiman.com/tatuzin/index.htm>

²¹ Lao National Tourism Administration, *National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2005-2010 Summary*, p.6.

8 hours to go by mini-bus. Airline access is only at Vientiane. Infrastructure building is a big issue for Laos. Because of that, 80-90% of tourists go only to Vientiane and Luang Phrabang.²²

²² Ibid.