Welcome to Mu Gia Pass & Ho Chi Minh Trail

Mu Gia Pass - Phanop choke-point and Nam Ngo River.

Hin Nam No National Protected Area Eco-Tourism adventure.

Khammouane Province

Each village who lived through the war have a story of an epic struggle for survival that has remained largely unknown. Visiting this area provides an unforgettable experience mixing with those villagers who survived in this, their home.

Ban Nongboung
A village with a free standing limestone outcrop which was passed by many thousands of North Vietnamese, on foot, bicycle or truck. This limestone outcrop housed hundreds of local villagers. North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops during the war period. Two larger caves give shelter to villagers. In one of them (Tham Nam), a chimney-like passage goes right through the base of the hill and into another cave that was occupied by Vietnamese soldiers. These soldiers shared their rice rations with the villagers who couldn’t plant or harvest any rice for a 2 year period. Nowadays it is forbidden by villagers to go through the tunnel, as the limestone is still unstable after the Vietnamese soldiers dug a direct hit. Always be aware that there is a danger of unexploded ordinance (UXO) in these caves.

Ban Phanop
Located at a bend of the Nam Ngo River. The legendary trail crossed through this village and paving stones on the riverbank and village road attest to this. This village is the site of the longest search and rescue effort by US forces during the whole Vietnam War period. In 1969 a Phantom F-4C was shot down. The two American airmen ejected and landed each side of the river. One was picked up on the 3rd day (for more information google “cover 22 Phanop”). From 1964, the village school used the weight of what is thought to be from “River 22” as a block and tackle for a period of 10 years. The F-4C wingtip has come to rest in the temple grounds in Ban Phanop.

Ban Vang KHONE
This village was re-established in an area of overlapping bomb craters. As you enter the village, you won’t see any paddy fields. There are only fish ponds, and buffalo pools here. During the dry season, vegetables are grown in the mud depressions still evident after 40 years. One can only wonder, “surely this must be the most bombed place on earth”.

Ban Sermhan:
People here are famous for their cheap metal collection skills. They have even devised metal detectors that can be used under the water in the Kham Ngo river that flows past this village. Risks faced by these villagers to earn a basket of sticky rice are unfathomable. One family has made their house out of ordinance while others have sold direct to Vietnamese traders. See if you can detach the house with flattened aluminumboard bomb dispensers. A letter made from the fuses learns against the verdict.

Safety
The area is highly contaminated with UXO, including land mines, booby traps of assassination hidden in caves, unexploded ordnance left over from the shelling of the trail. Simple rules to follow regarding UXO:

- Avoid walking in mud.
- Follow the direction of local guides.
- If you see anything that looks like a UXO, don’t touch it.

Hin Nam No National Protected Area
The spectacular mountainous layout along the border seen to the south of Nakhon border checkpoint the $2,000 area Hin Nam No National Protected Area. The rugged landscape directed the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the west and turned into Laos. Nowadays, rare primate and birds are amongst the wildlife that still occupy this refuge.

Village Guides Service
Village Guides from Ban Nongboung are available for a “War Refuge Cave Tour” (2hr, 15min walking or about 700m). The caves are about 1km from the village.

Accommodation in Lamthang
Lamthang, the hub for Mu Gia Pass - Ho Chi Minh Trail offers a variety of guesthouse and resort accommodation.

Lamthang Restaurants
A number of both Laos and Vietnamese noodle shops are in Lamthang. In the restaurants if there is no menu there is often pictures displayed to help in food selection.

Getting there
Langthang is about 128km from Thakhek (and 28km from Nakhon border checkpoint). To get to Langthang travel East from Thakhek along route 12 for 85km, then turn left at Gymnole and continue along route 12 for 73km. From Langthang you can find the area mentioned villages within 10km south.