



MEDIA RELEASE

Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Luang Prabang's inaugural Ethnic Cultural Festival took place this last weekend (29-31 October) and was an extremely successful community event. The festival was a colourful celebration of ethnic diversity in Luang Prabang, featuring song, dance, games, activities, food and handicrafts. **Seven different ethnic minority communities** from ten districts in the province travelled to the festival to share their traditional culture, including Hmong, Tai Dam, Kassak, Yao Mien and Kmhmu.

The event opened at 4:00pm on Friday, 29 October with a "Mak Man Mak Nyeun" procession by the Kassak ethnic group, which featured two men dancing with swords and picking up clay jars full of water with their teeth. Two more performances by the Yao Mien and a Lao dance troupe were followed by speeches from Mr. Somock Phanthavong, Vice-Director of the Luang Prabang Department of Information and Culture, Tara Gujadhur, Co-Director of the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre, and Mr. Saysamone Komthavong, Vice-Governor of Luang Prabang Province. Mr Peter Haymond, Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy to Lao PDR was a special guest, as the US Embassy was the event's major sponsor.

"We are excited to co-organise the first ever Luang Prabang Ethnic Cultural Festival. This is an important step in preserving ethnic diversity and building a strong multicultural community in Luang Prabang."
Ms Thongkhoun Souththivilay, Co-Director, Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre.

Performances ran for three nights and two days, featuring such unusual arts as Hmong leaf blowing, Tai Lue 'fighting' dances and Kmhmu a bamboo-jumping dance. Visitors also had the opportunity to learn these traditional performing arts, as **the communities invited guests to join them** in dancing, singing and instrument playing.

The big hits of the festival were **children's craft activities and traditional games**. A constant stream of children sat down to make a pom-pom, a feature of traditional Yao Mien and Hmong clothing. Also popular were the Lao flower stupa making and bamboo weaving, where children learned to make toys, baskets and protective *taleo* talismans from Kmhmu and Kassak bamboo weavers. Participating villagers and **visitors to the festival had fun trying to master traditional games** such as the *mai yok yek*, bamboo stilts from Tai Lue, Yao and Kmhmu communities, and competitive Hmong top-spinning.

In each of the **10 handicraft booths**, ethnic minority communities from 10 districts sold their handmade crafts and provided demonstrations of how they were made. Villagers showed visitors cotton spinning, bamboo weaving, mulberry-paper making and silk weaving, and invited them to try it themselves. This was a very successful element of the 3-day festival, and **communities reported an estimated total of 20,000,000 kip in sales** (around US\$2,500). This was a wonderful opportunity for rural ethnic artisans to earn income from their arts and crafts, as well as raise people's appreciation for their unique craft skills.

The Luang Prabang Ethnic Cultural Festival was a true community event, bringing together 7 different ethnic minority groups, Luang Prabang locals and tourists from around the world. Participating communities were proud and excited to share their traditional culture, as well as exchange with others.

"I'm so happy to be part of this festival. I am proud that people find our Tai Lue culture interesting and important. We want to come to this festival again to keep our culture alive in the future" Mrs. Chandee, Tai Lue woman from Ban Had Kho, Pak Ou District.

The inaugural Luang Prabang Ethnic Cultural Festival was co-organized by the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre (www.taeclaos.org) and the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Information and Culture. For more information, or to request high resolution images, contact Lola Ellis at the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre: lauren@taeclaos.org or +856.71.253.364.



Guests learn how to make music with a leaf, a traditional Hmong art



Tai Lue boys showing off their bamboo stilt skills.



*A Kassak man from Xieng Ngeun district, dancing with a clay jar filled with water between his teeth. **



Local Luang Prabang children learning how to weave bamboo.



Tourists browsing Yao Mien handicrafts.



*Guests at the Opening Ceremony being presented with coloured eggs, a New Year's tradition for the Yao Mien. **

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