

LAOS

Simply Beautiful



Patuxay Monument @Vientiane



*Slowness,
Simplicity
&
Supporting
climate
resilience
from the
ground up*

Champa flowers @Luang Prabang



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Where it All Began

What should I do after graduation?

It's a common question among final-year students, and so is it for me.

As a nature lover, I've always wanted to pursue a career that allows me to contribute to environmental conservation. However, with a technical Bachelor's degree in Land Surveying and Geo-Informatics, it's hard to jump out of the circle. Most of my peers would become Land Surveying Graduates, starting their paths to becoming a chartered Land Surveyor. To me, I feel that my cause lies in the natural environment. I'm driven to apply what I learnt - geospatial science to help support informed decision-making and alleviate climate change impacts. So, how to achieve this?

With these questions in mind, I spotted the opportunity of being a United Nations Volunteer (UNV), a chance of letting you work overseas in a developing country for half a year, assisting the development work, and experiencing a life different from Hong Kong.

It is a perfect timing for me.

Standing at the roundabouts of graduation, this is the best chance for me to speak and listen to myself, explore my interests, and navigate my future career. More importantly, stepping one step closer to my dream job - working for nature, and contributing to halting environmental degradation. Let's go for it! I applied to this program.

Gratefully, I was assigned to my 2nd choice, working at UN-Habitat Lao PDR to support climate projects. I then started my 6 months assignment in Vientiane, Laos, as a Knowledge Management Assistant.



Clouds & fields @Vientiane Province

Impression of Laos

Vientiane - Capital of Laos

With the less than 2-hr HKG-VTE direct flight, I came to Vientiane and started my 6-month journey.

Safe

Although Laos is often deemed dangerous, one of the first impressions I have of Laos is safe. I seldom hear any crimes here and never encounter one. Without convenient public transport here, I often walk on the street, even at night, without feeling scared. The only concern would be traffic. Be careful when you cross the roads!

Kind

People here are nice and kind, always smiling. Despite the language barrier, we can feel the kindness of Laotians. Probably related to their religion - Buddhism, we can feel most people here live peacefully and gratefully.

Although Laos is still a developing country with an average monthly salary of only 150 USD, people here know the way to live and embrace what they have. Instead of complaining all the time, they choose to be happy.

Slow & Simple

You can live a slow and simple life here, contrary to the hustle and bustle life in Hong Kong. While Laos has a similar population size as Hong Kong, its population density is much lower. You can hardly find people walking on the street, especially during weekdays. Even during weekends, you can't see crowds in the malls, coffee shops, or boutiques. You don't have to rush or squeeze. There is not much entertainment here. Just enjoy the pace, enjoy the time with friends, and live a simple life :)



Land of a Million Elephants



Lao Elephant Home @ Sayaboury Province

The Work that Shaped my Days



UN House atrium @Vientiane

Knowledge Management

One of my main tasks is knowledge management. At UN-Habitat Lao PDR, we only have a small team. It is unavoidable that everyone is multitasking. Hence, having an efficient data and information storage and management system becomes crucial. Therefore, my role is to regularly maintain the folder structure and organization, including managing the website, and other social media platforms. I also sought ways to introduce new digital tools to enhance the office's work efficiency.

Communications

I am a part of the UN Communications Group (UNCG). Besides managing existing knowledge, I create communications materials, including social media posts, videos, presentation slides, name cards, event proceedings, and the annual report.

Before this assignment, I had limited experience in designing publications, editing videos, managing websites, and posting official social media posts. Therefore, I learnt quite a lot of digital software/tools, such as InDesign, Photoshop, WordPress, and video editor.



Patuxay Room @UN House

Event Planning & Management

The biggest highlight of my assignment was to organize the annual **Lao National Urban Forum**, where I was involved from the beginning with event planning, invitation, coordinating with stakeholders, designing the 5-day programme, meeting with government officials, managing volunteers, overseeing the event flow, posting social media posts, etc.

It was my first time managing an event with this scale. It was held at the National University of Laos. We invited more than 50 organizations, including government ministries, UN agencies, development partners, NGOs, and chambers of commerce. It was eye-opening to coordinate and interact with youth and people from different sectors and learn more about their work in Laos.

Administrative & Project Support

I was also responsible for administrative and project support, such as creating travel requests and claims for colleagues through the UN management system Umoja. For example, one of the tasks was to help fund the government officials in Laos to attend the World Urban Forum in Cairo, Laos.

In terms of project support, I was a part of the discussion in the climate and disaster data integration initiatives, where we would like to gather data and efforts from different UN agencies and government into a GIS-based database for data retrieval, visualization and analysis.



Lao National Urban Forum
@National University of Laos



Temple @Vientiane



1 Team lunch at an Indian restaurant



2 Photo of the UNV Family in Laos



3 Photo during the Women's Security Awareness Training

4 Group photo with colleagues and student volunteers at the 3rd Lao National Urban Forum

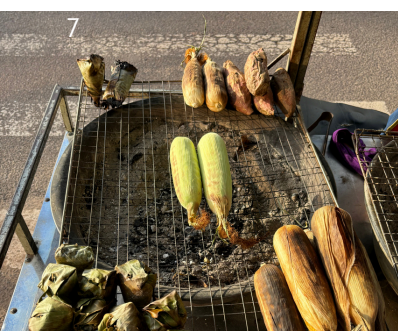


5 UNV FB post

6 Yoga class at UN House after work

7 Street food stalls (grilled bananas, corns, and sweets wrapped with banana leaves)

8 Street view outside the office



Snapshots

Learning Experiences

It is my first full-time job after graduation, and I am living in a developing country for the first time in a long time. It is a truly inspiring learning experience.

All the people I met are so kind. I am impressed by their **optimism** despite their low earning and living quality. They know the right way to live, not to complain but to be grateful for everything they are gifted with.

Another quality I see in Lao youth is their **determination and proactiveness**. When I talk to them, many of them have dreams in their hearts. They want to increase their global perspectives and contribute back to their country.

They actively seek opportunities and openly share them with their friends. Overseas scholarships, entrepreneurial competitions, speaking contests, leadership programmes, short-term exchanges, etc., **no matter how competitive, challenging, and exhausting it is to apply for these opportunities, they just devote their time and energy to go for it.**

I remember a conversation with my Lao colleague who shared how, back in secondary school, they would spend extra time and money attending evening English classes after a full day at school. Their dedication left a deep impression on me.

Growing up in Hong Kong, we are surrounded by opportunities – study exchanges, overseas programmes, extracurricular activities. Each university, faculty, even department has quotas for students to go abroad. It's not hard to gain international exposure. **And yet, somewhere along the way, many of us have stopped seeing these as privileges. We take them for granted. We opt for comfort and familiarity instead of pushing our boundaries.**

Being in Laos reminded me of what it means to strive for something – not because it's required, but because it matters. That quiet determination, that hunger to grow, is something I now hold with renewed respect. It made me more aware of my own privileges, and more committed to using them meaningfully.



Challenges Encountered

Extreme weather events

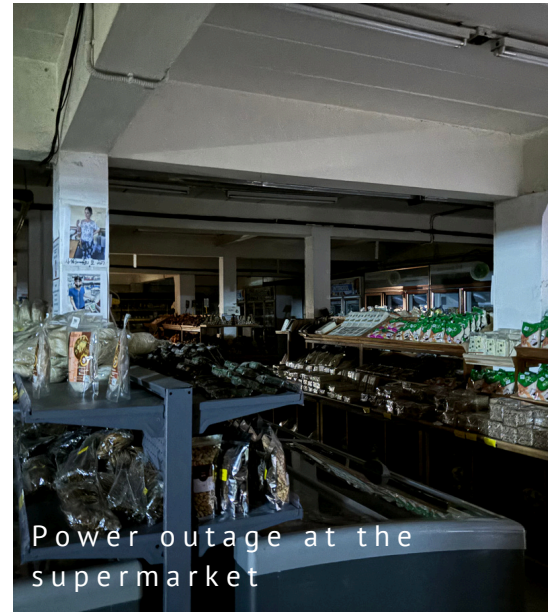
In Laos, there aren't 4 seasons, but rainy and dry seasons. I still remember on the first day of work, my friend and I went to the supermarket after work. Suddenly, it rained so heavily that the whole supermarket was blacked out. The staff immediately took out their torches to light up the supermarket and closed the fridges. People rushed to the cashier to check out. My friend and I stayed in the supermarket. Until the rain got smaller, we called a cab to go back to our apartment.

Since then, I realized power outages are common in Laos. From time to time, even in the office, we could experience sudden power outages.

Language barriers

I didn't attend a class to learn the Lao language formally. I learnt simple and useful phrases from my Lao colleagues and friends instead, which I think is enough.

However, when you need to coordinate with Laotians, especially communicating with government officials, it's important that you have a Lao colleague accompanied. For example, I went to the ministry to discuss the progress and preparation for the Lao National Urban Forum. As a non-Lao speaker, even if I led the discussion in English, they would easily switch to the Lao language and discuss among themselves, which makes me can't follow the discussion. I can only rely on my Lao colleague to translate and update me afterward.





Peace of the Nature

Tad Fane Waterfall@Paksong

Adventures



Outside of work, life in Laos offered many simple, joyful moments, and some adventures.

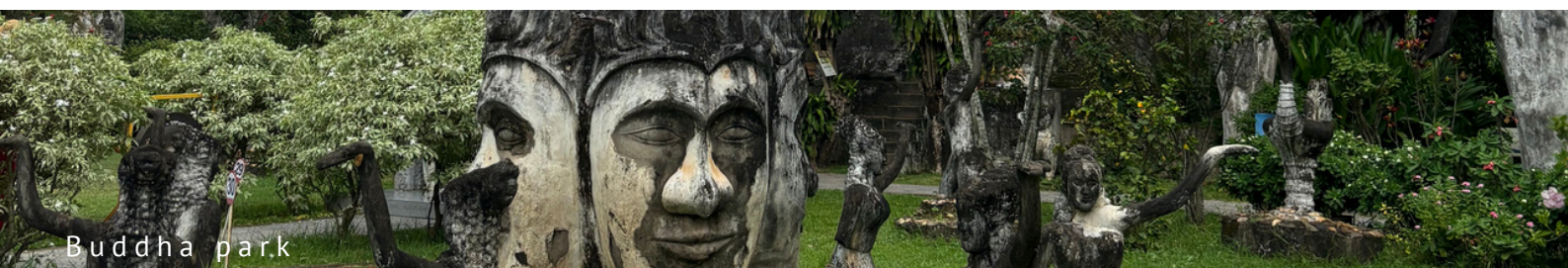
During my first week, I met a few local friends who kindly took us to visit **Buddha Park** – a popular site on the outskirts of Vientiane. It's a bit far from the city centre, so they drove us to the bus station on their motorbikes. That was already a first for me. I had never sat on a motorbike before, and I was both nervous and thrilled!

However, the bus wasn't running on schedule (a very Laos moment!). We then switched plans and squeezed all of us into a Kok Kok – a small local e-Tuk Tuk that fits six people at most. It was a bumpy, breezy, laughter-filled ride.



Buddha Park itself was fascinating, filled with unique and imaginative Buddha statues, each with its own story and charm. We wandered, joked, took photos, and later sat down to chat under the shade.

After leaving the park, we wrapped up the day with a local barbecue – Sin Dart. It's a fun and flavourful 2-in-1 experience: a round grill plate in the centre, surrounded by bubbling soup. We grilled meat, shared vegetables, and swapped stories over the sizzle. That evening showed me that the heart of Lao culture is often found around shared meals, simple laughter, and genuine hospitality.



After work, I usually go to the gym. But during weekends and annual leave, I joined some hiking trips and went camping! I also joined two marathons - one 14km in Luang Prabang, and one 21km in Vientiane (My 1st half marathon!).

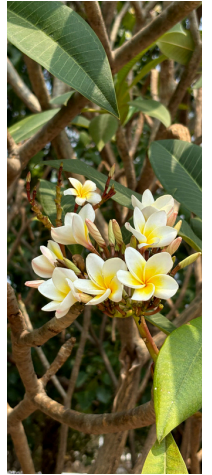


At the year's end, my friend and I did a southern Laos exploration trip! We visited Pakse, 4000 islands, Champasak, Tad Lo and Paksong. We did our year countdown on top of a Lao former volcano, an unforgettable way to step into 2025!



Colours of the Nature

Closing Thoughts: What I'll Carry Forward



My time in Laos reminded me that slowness isn't a setback – it's space.
Space to listen deeply.
Space to understand complexity.
Space to build knowledge systems that are grounded in people's lived realities.

As a developing country, Laos needs the support of development partners and international talents. But being a UN Volunteer here is not only about supporting the UN agency – it's also about bringing in diverse perspectives, especially as youth from Hong Kong.

We came not to lead, but to listen. Not to transfer knowledge, but to exchange it. Volunteering isn't just about giving. It's about learning to understand communities with humility, openness, and without prejudice.

In a world that moves fast, Laos taught me to slow down. And in that stillness, I discovered what it truly means to serve – and what life means to me.



Bonus: Beyond UNV

After my 6-month UN Volunteer assignment, I was fortunate to continue working at UN-Habitat Lao PDR – this time as an international consultant.

With this new role came broader exposure: more projects, more field missions, and more opportunities to grow.

In April, I had my first overseas mission to Bangkok, where I presented how our knowledge management work in UN-Habitat Laos is contributing to both policymaking and community empowerment.

Shortly after, I travelled with my colleagues to Pakse in southern Laos for a field workshop to share the initial findings from our multi-layered vulnerability assessment, a GIS-based analysis. We assessed indicators across urban development, climate change, and biodiversity to identify vulnerable areas where projects can be prioritized.

This extended time in Laos also deepened my connection with colleagues. I have the chance to interact with them more frequently, building stronger bonds and mutual understanding.

I'm deeply grateful for this continuation – a space where I can keep learning, absorbing, and most importantly, contributing back to the community that has taught me so much.



Baci ceremony @UN House

*Slow down and enjoy the
simple pleasures in life*



Rooftop view @Vientiane



Khop Chai Lai Lai

*Be the change you wish to
see in the world.*

- Mahatma Gandhi

