

Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality

Lao People's Democratic Republic is located in the centre of the Mekong sub-region, sharing borders with five countries: Burma, Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam. It may be landlocked, but all doors are open when it comes to tourism. However, three quarters of the Lao population lives in rural areas and works in subsistence agriculture, so education that offers opportunities in the growing tourism sector is fundamental. A need that has been catered for by the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH). Set up in 2008, this organisation stands to revolutionise an industry that is vital to the future economic growth of one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations. Tourism is growing, but it still lags way behind its neighbours, but with substantial investment in training aimed not just at school leavers but also tourism professionals, Laos' tourism industry is aiming to maximise service and product capacity.

LANITH has, therefore, two key arms: for the newbies, a two year Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality, which began as a pilot program for around 300 students in June 2012 and now has a new college in Vientiane with sixty fulltime students, supported by Luxembourg Development (LuxDev) in terms of supplying bursaries. The curriculum was formally accredited by the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports in 2013, becoming the first such course of its kind in Laos.

The Passport to Success training program is the arm that reaches out to people already working in the industry. Started in 2011, it is now the biggest industry training program in Laos, offering short vocational courses in areas such as customer service, kitchen management and food production. To date, nearly a thousand hospitality and tourism staff have studied subjects such as customer service, food and beverage operations, management and communications.

At the training centre in Luang Prabang, built in 2012, there are four guest rooms, a restaurant and bar, training kitchens and a meeting room. The centre has a dual function – to train people in hospitality and tourism using The Passport to Success program and also to operate as a social enterprise generating revenue that can be directly reinvested into these facilities.

LANITH has a strict inclusion ethos for minority and disadvantaged groups in its programs, funding bursaries for low income students. A tourism industry wasn't built overnight, of course, but with structured, accredited training such as LANITH, there is employment optimism for the young people of Laos who are seeking to make their mark in tourism. And with fifty per cent of the country's population under twenty years old, facilities like LANITH that offer quality training and opportunities, are going to grow and grow.