

A Day in a Buddhist Temple

A Day in a Buddhist Temple follows the daily routine of a young novice at *Wat Syrimoungkhoun* in Luang Prabang, Laos. Over the course of a day, the story sheds light on the spiritual and personal aspects of temple life. Through the interactions between the novice and the various characters the movie presents the relationship of the Buddhist temples, the local community and tourists in this quiet historic Asian town.

Theravada Buddhism, which is a key to the spiritual well-being of the Laotian, acts as a social anchor for the Laotian society that is deeply embedded in the physical landscape of Luang Prabang. Historically the monks and novices, collectively known as the Sangha, were responsible for community education and formed a significant social and cultural support system for the community. In return, the local residents demonstrating humbleness and respect, provide for the maintenance of the temples and supported the Buddhist Sangha with daily offerings.

The age-old daily ritual of Tak Bat (the morning alms giving), during which hundreds of monks and novices from each temple in the town walk down the street of the city bare-footed and in silence to receive alms offered by the local community, is one of the most charming rituals of this World Heritage destination. More importantly, it is an irreplaceable part of the daily life in Luang Prabang. The local residents cultivate good thoughts, generosity and transfer merit (*boun*) to their deceased relatives and spirits while giving alms. The Buddhist Sangha walk out of their temples to learn about the society and to give blessings to the donors.

Nowadays, this relationship between Buddhism and Luang Prabang's residents has evolved as tourism became one of the main factors in the changing daily life. Tak Bat, which has gradually become part of the tourist experience is the most noticeable aspect of the interaction between foreign visitors and Luang Prabang's living Buddhist community heritage. While most tourists are curious and respectful, increasing numbers are beginning to put pressure on the serene ceremony. The impact and inappropriate behaviour of a minority of tourists during the daily Tak Bat ritual has caught significant attention. The role of tourism is no longer considered an uncritical contribution to economic development and employment. However, there is now a sentiment about the negative influence of tourism on the conservation of intangible Buddhist heritage and Luang Prabang as a community.

A change of perspective provides insights for visitors to understand the living heritage city and the inter-relation between Buddhism and tourism. This movie is created to share the knowledge about Buddhism and promote culturally responsible tourist behaviour. The purpose is to improve the tourist experience, while at the same time preserving and respecting the living Buddhist heritage of Luang Prabang.

About Luang Prabang Handle with Care

The EU Switch Asia project Luang Prabang Handle with Care is managed by the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The project supports Luang Prabang in being a sustainable tourism destination and becoming better at that, too. Sustainability is understood as a holistic approach that includes economic, environmental and crucially also

tangible and intangible cultural aspects. The project supports the safe-keeping of local tradition and cultural heritage by creating a responsible tourism environment.

Credits

Malao Studio