The Asian elephant differs from its African counterpart by its height at the withers and its smaller ears. Another distinguishing feature is the shape of its head, which has two prominent bumps on the forehead.

It is now considered to be a species in danger of extinction.
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Born in Vientiane in 1982, Nithaya Somsanith left for France when he was 19, where he intended to study and make his name. After working initially as a court artist, he enrolled at the Formamod fashion school in Paris, later launching his first collection, aged only 22.

In 2011, Nithaya’s designs inspired by African themes were very well received by the fashion world, and, in September, his creations could be seen in Paris during Paris Fashion Week.

In early 2012, Nithaya presented his own designs at Vientiane’s Lao Plaza Hotel, with the help of 32 French and Asian fashion models wearing his latest creations. Amongst them were three Lycée Hoffet students, whose charm and natural presence had given them this opportunity to be fashion models for the evening. All the outfits were made exclusively from traditional Laotian fabrics, including silk, whose dazzling colours and rich textures were beautifully set off by the daring combinations created by the talented designer. Organised jointly with the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), the money collected at this charity event was donated to the Somsanga Treatment and Rehabilitation Center in Vientiane. A very worthwhile way of combining ‘business’ with pleasure!
In 2011, a contest was organised inviting young Laotians aged 16 to 25 to invent a cartoon strip based on the theme “counterfeit products can be deadly”.

Organised by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) in connection with the Mekong Priority Solidarity Fund’s programme of support for the fight against counterfeiters, the operation was intended to increase young people’s awareness of the dangers of counterfeit products, particularly counterfeit medicines and drugs. Altogether 46 cartoon strips were submitted for consideration by a panel comprising numerous experts from the worlds of drawing and health.

The efforts of the four winners were rewarded with a trip to France, which took place from January 21st to 29th, 2012, and affording them the opportunity to exhibit their prize-winning work at the 39th International Comic Strip Festival in Angoulême. They also met the MAEE’s special representative for counterfeit medicines, Mr Thierry Le Lay, and members of the Fondation Chirac’s scientific committee, before visiting the Counterfeit Museum in Paris.

The youngest student to be awarded a prize was Sayasane Mongkonepeth, the Laotian winner. The twenty-year-old is currently studying science at Laos National University, with the aim of becoming a computer specialist and one day inventing video games for children. The winning comic strip, which was about the dangers of using counterfeit hair products, was based on the true story of an unfortunate member of his family, whose hair had fallen out after using a counterfeit shampoo.

The son of a cartographer and a French teacher, Sayasane learned to draw, under his father’s guidance, when he was still a very small child. An ardent admirer and practitioner of the graphic arts, he was keen to compete in this regional cartoon strip contest, particularly when he realised that the prize was a trip to France. The opportunity to take part in the Angoulême comic strip festival was a wonderful reward for his work, and served to encourage him with his efforts to pursue a career in the graphic arts.
France in Laos

Francophonie

You can see the videos of the Recital and the Miss and Mister Institute contest on the embassy’s Facebook page, as well as lots of photos of the various events that took place during Francophonie month: http://www.facebook.com/ambassade.france.laos

'Francophonie' in beautiful music and full colour

From Vientiane to Savannakhet, Pakse and Luang Prabang, festivities were organised throughout March to celebrate the French-Speaking World, or francophonie.

In 1886, French geographer Onésime Reclus invented the word francophonie, to refer to “everyone who is, or appears to be, destined to stay or become a speaker of our language.”

International Francophonie Day was celebrated throughout the world this year, as always, on March 20th. Over 120 years after Onésime Reclus first used his neologism, its initial meaning still applies today. Celebrations in Laos throughout the month of March spotlighted the French language, giving francophiles an opportunity to express their many and varied artistic and creative talents in all manner of events and shows.

When the program of events was first announced, Bernard Vanthomme, director of the Vientiane branch of the AUF (Francophone University Agency), announced that “The French-speaking world is a family, and families should all get together and have fun on a regular basis.” He clearly got his message across, as over forty different events took place altogether in Laos, each combining the notions of French and festivities.

The undisputed flagship event this year was the Francophonie Recital. At each of the concerts in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Pakse, the performances by the eleven young Laotian singers were received with great enthusiasm. The programme consisted of hit songs both ancient and modern, ranging from Edith Piaf’s ‘Mon Amant de Saint-Jean’ and ‘La Bohème’, by Charles Aznavour, to Yannick Noah’s ‘Les Lions’ and Jenifer’s ‘J’attends l’Amour’. The wide variety of songs selected reflected the great diversity of French culture. Based on a language with a rich history and deeply rooted in the past, francophonie today is above all a young, vibrant phenomenon, with French being spoken by 220 million people over the world, 60% of whom are under 30 years old.

In his excellent article ‘Le français, langue de culture’ (‘French, language of culture’), published in 1962 in L’Esprit magazine, Léopold Sedar Senghor stressed at length Francophonie’s cultural dimension. This dimension was most apparent in all the celebrations organised in Laos, from reading contests to showings of French language films in Savannakhet and the brilliant ‘Dictation Evening’ at the French Lycée Hoffet. The dialogue between cultures, always so dear to francophonie enthusiasts, was symbolised to perfection in the show staged by students at Laos National University, which included both Victor Hugo’s poem ‘À une jeune fille’ and displays of traditional Laotian dancing.

The quest for beauty and elegance was also manifest during this year’s francophonie month at the Miss and Mister Institute contest, where candidates wore creations by Laotian designer Nithaya Somsanith. The young Laotian couturier, now living in Paris, had already invited students from the Lycée Hoffet to model his designs once, and had even selected some to be his models at a major Franco-Laotian fashion show held on March 17th at the Lao Plaza in Vientiane.

Last but not least, these celebrations provided an opportunity to think and work, and the Olympiades invited students aged 16 to 20 to think, reflect and write about the subject of Human Rights. This portrayed yet another fundamental aspect of francophonie enshrined in Laos during francophonie month: “the need felt by our era...to build a new humanism”, as expressed by Léopold Sedar Senghor. “Le français, Soleil qui brille hors de l’hexagone,” (“The French language, a sun shining on the rest of the world,”) was high in the sky in Laos in March – let us hope it stays there until next year’s family gathering.
Entreprises

'A new type of store' opens in Laos

A new supermarket has just opened in Vientiane, opposite the Mitthaphab Hospital on the road to Phonetong. The store belongs to a chain that is very familiar to our French compatriots - "U" or "Les nouveaux commerçants" (‘a new type of store’), as we often hear it described over the French air-waves.

The man behind the opening of the first ‘U Express’ in Laos is Breton entrepreneur Bernard Guillerm. CEO of Pont de Bois, a company in Saint-Renan, near Brest, which owns several U supermarkets, he has visited Laos many times and is one of the country’s greatest admirers, which is why he decided in 2008 to launch a project to open a store here.

Vientiane’s newest supermarket is open every day from 7am to 11pm. Covering 385 m², it stocks a wide variety of Laotian, Thai and French products. Although the range of dairy produce is as limited as in the city’s other stores, ‘U Express’ has an excellent, reasonably priced selection of wines and numerous own-brand products, including chocolate, pasta, and biscuits!

One of the store’s strategic objectives is to develop its own local brand, starting with ‘U rice from Laos’, a pioneering move for the brand in Laos which may lead to more such products in the future, particularly water, coffee, poultry and vegetables. The shop is also developing a fairly unusual human resources policy, whereby young Laotians showing high potential could be sent to France to work as a trainee, first studying at a business school in Brest and then working in nearby U supermarkets.

Association

Year’s term of office comes to an end for the 2011-2012 team at Vientiane Accueil

The committee will be handing over to a new team at the next AGM, due to take place at 7pm on May 4th, 2012, in the Simeuang room.

"Some 170 families are currently members of the association as this year comes to an end, and we would like to thank everyone who has contributed to its success over the past 12 months. Our thanks firstly to the teachers involved in the weekly activities, who have taught their subjects with such energy and enthusiasm: Vine (ballet), Isabelle (drawing), Sarah (aquaerobics), Marie Claire (majong), Jean Jacques and Mickael (tai-chi), Patrick (football), La & Lay and Van (tae-kwon-do), and Simon (swimming). We would also like to thank the many people who have taken part in the various events that have been held this year: the drinks party in Simeuang in April, 2011, the trip to Ban Su Fa in May, the car-boot sale in June - which attracted 60 exhibitors, the coffee meeting in September, the drinks party at the Ranch in October, the WIG bazaar in November, the drinks party at the Patuxay at the end of January this year, and so on.

Many of you also helped with and donated to the collection for the victims of the floods in October 2011, as well as collecting clothes, shoes and toys in March 2012. Patrick also organised a football themed cultural exchange, when some of our children, teenagers and their parents played in two matches against a Hmong village near Hinkana Falls. Wonderful times to have shared, wonderfully warm and friendly memories! A very big thank you to all our members! "

The Committee (Lalaina, Tuy, Cathy)
Training and Research at the Institut Pasteur in Laos

The inauguration of the Laos Institut Pasteur took place on January 23rd, 2012, five years after the project was first launched in 2007. The French Development Agency (AFD) provided €1.6 million to fund the actual building, the site was provided by the Laotian government, and funding for the Institute’s initial operations came from the Paris Institut Pasteur, the French Ministry for Health, and Luxemburg.

Interview with Doctor Paul Brey, director of the Laos Institut Pasteur:

- How did the idea of opening an Institut Pasteur in Laos come about?
  Following the SARS and bird flu epidemics in 2003, Ponmek Dalaloy, Laos’ former Health Minister, went to France to ask the Institut Pasteur in Paris and the French government for their help in opening an institute in Vientiane. The minister expressed his concern that Laos might be responsible for the spread of emerging diseases towards neighbouring countries like Vietnam, China and Thailand, and felt that if there were an Institut Pasteur in Laos it might be possible to limit the risk of spreading these diseases, and at the same time it could train dynamic young Laotian scientists.

- What is the IPL’s mandate?
  Our work focuses primarily on the traditional mission of all Pasteur Institutes, which is to carry out research into emerging diseases (particularly with respect to arboviruses such as dengue and chikungunya), diseases which could be prevented by vaccination (such as measles and rubella), and of course parasitic illnesses like malaria, which are still a problem in Laos.

  But ours is also a training role, to help the government and young people of Laos to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as these, and this work is the real raison d’être of the institute in Vientiane. We are here to spread the Pasteur spirit, that is, to make the institute a centre of excellence, and pass on a body of knowledge infused with humanist values, just as Louis Pasteur and his disciples did. More than a hundred years later, this philosophy still lives on and we want to share it with our friends in Laos.

- What is your relationship with other research establishments?
  We maintain very close links with the other Pasteur institutes. The IPL is the 32nd child born to this great family of Pasteur institutes across the world, all of which are members of the Institut Pasteur International Network.

  We work in collaboration with the Paris Institut Pasteur, and those in Vietnam and Cambodia, but we also work with other big French research organisations like the IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement/Development Research Institute) and the CIRAD (Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement/International Cooperation Centre of Agricultural Research for Development), as well as international agencies like the American Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), whose headquarters are in Atlanta in the USA.

  Another advantage is that we have a teaching centre comprising a wet lab, a lecture room, and, most importantly, a Biosafety Level 2 laboratory, where students can learn to handle pathogens – this is an entirely unique facility in the region. Thus training could be extended to people from all over South East Asia.

  Lastly, the scientists we have recruited to train the young people of Laos come not just from France, but from Luxemburg, Germany, Belgium and Japan. This international dimension is extremely valuable and recalls the origins of the Institut Pasteur in Paris when it was founded in 1888.
Elephants hold a very special place in the collective imagination in Laos and frequently appear in traditional folk-tales and Buddhist parables. This is why Prince Fa Ngum baptised the country ‘Lan Xang Hom Khao’ (literally the ‘Kingdom of the Million Elephants and the White Parasol’) when the ancient kingdom of Laos was united in 1354.

Nowadays, however, although the people still honour the elephant, it is in serious danger of extinction. There are an estimated 300 to 800 wild elephants left in the country, plus about 500 domesticated elephants, whereas less than a hundred years ago there were tens of thousands of them.

The species is in decline for a number of reasons

For thousands of years, man hunted elephants for food and to sell the ivory from their tusks. Elephants were also caught in large numbers for domestication, right up until the early ‘80s, when the Laotian government banned the practice. Elephants are now considered a protected species and trade in ivory was banned in 1989, by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), also known as the Washington Convention.

The main cause of the disappearance of the Asian elephant is the destruction of its natural habitat through deforestation and urban expansion, which has resulted in their being confined to increasingly small areas. Because of this, the unfortunate animals often tend to be found near villages, where they are sometimes responsible for damage to infrastructure and crops – much to the annoyance of local inhabitants. Such pressure on space has fragmented the elephant’s former domains, making population stability increasingly fragile.

The growing scarcity of elephants in Asia, as elsewhere, is also partially a result of the animal’s particular reproductive cycle, which can span up to five years. Elephants have the longest gestation period of all land mammals – around 20 to 22 months. There is usually a gap of four or five years between births, and as a rule only one baby elephant is born at a time. The mothers feed their young for up to three years or more.

Species renewal is no longer guaranteed in Laos, as only two or three elephants are born each year, whereas about fifteen die. With a very small genetic reservoir (just a few dozen females under 20 years of age), the domestic elephant is in danger of extinction if nothing is done to encourage reproduction. This demographic regression is further accelerated by the amount of work imposed on the animals, which are a source of income for many families. In Laos, an estimated 10,000 people live on income generated by the work of these elephants, which are used primarily for unloading. In view of all this, many people and organisations are trying to reverse the trend and encourage elephants to reproduce.
Promoting the reproduction of domestic elephants

In 2001, Gilles Maurer and Sébastien Duffillot, both French, founded the non-profit organisation ‘ElefantAsia’, with the aim of helping to protect the Asian elephant. One of its objectives is to promote changing the work carried out by domestic elephants, so that instead of working in the wood industry they are used in good quality tourist activities. This would mean that although they would be carrying out less arduous tasks, their owners would still be able to derive income from them.

In 2006, the association also set up a mobile clinic (in an off-road vehicle) to provide free veterinary treatment for elephants and teach their owners some rudimentary medical techniques. ElefantAsia has also started organising a big elephant festival in partnership with the Laotian authorities. Started in 2007, the event has the dual purpose of drawing the public’s attention to the fact that the Asian elephant is facing extinction, whilst promoting the ancestral tradition of domestication and elephant-driving, or mahouting, so dear to the Laotian people.

In 2011, the ElefantAsia team started working with the Elephant Conservation Centre, which is located eight kilometres from the town of Sayabouri, on the banks of the Nam Tien river. The centre consists of a natural park covering a hundred acres, where female elephants and their new-born young can wander freely throughout the gestation and nursing periods. To compensate for the years taken up by the reproductive cycle, owners are paid a salary in return for guiding visitors to the centre, who come to admire the elephants during their prolonged maternity leave.

Last, but by no means least, ElefantAsia has launched a vast mahout training programme in Hongsa in Sayabouri province, with the help of funding from the Social Development Fund (FSD) established by the French Embassy in Laos. The village mahouts, who between them own around fifty elephants, have formed an association to help them deal with the changes likely to affect their traditional activity, and plan to develop ecotourism projects in the region;

The funds provided by the Embassy, totalling some $40,000, are intended to help get the association off to a good start by financing the purchase of materials and preparation of suitable premises, as well as paying for staff recruitment and training. One of the association’s objectives is to develop an offer of elephant rides and treks, which would be promoted by the Laotian tourist office network. 70% of the income generated by such tourist activities would be given to the mahouts and their families. ElefantAsia is supporting the newly created Hongsa Mahout Association by training the elephant-drivers and teaching them about ecotourism, thus providing temporary support to ensure the project’s success.

Did you know?

- An elephant’s tusks are just extremely long teeth, and they only grow one set in their lives. While only the male Asian elephants grow tusks, both male and female African elephants have them as a rule.
- An elephant’s skeleton consists of 282 bones, but there are none at all in the trunk – instead the trunk has around 15,000 muscles and it takes baby elephants a very long time to learn to control them all.
- Adult elephants drink up to 225 litres of water a day. When full, their trunks can contain up to 8 litres.
- Elephants are herbivorous and spend 75% of their time choosing, sorting and eating their food. An adult eats anything from 100kg to 200kg of plants per day, depending on its size and where it lives.
- Elephants only sleep for three or four hours per night.

In Laos, elephants symbolise strength, longevity, wisdom and fertility.

In Laos, elephants symbolise strength, longevity, wisdom and fertility.
What's on at the French Institute?

Slam, a new form of poetry

“C’est celle qui m’a donné la vie, Elle est mon sang, Elle est mes yeux, Elle est mon ange le plus précieux!”

(“She gave me life, She’s my blood and my eyes, She’s an angel, my most treasured prize!”)

These lines were not written by a famous poet, but by apprentice ‘slammer’ Phatida Nouankhampan, who took part in the Slam competition organised by the French Institute in Laos earlier this year. A grey area somewhere between poetry and song, rap and recital, as yet no clear definition of slam is on offer. It all started in 1986, when American poet Marc Smith launched the first ‘Uptown Poetry Slam’ in a Chicago bar. His purpose was clear: to pick poetry up, dust it down, make rhyming more popular, and inject some excitement into the recitals he organised. His method was simple: a panel of judges to be selected at random from amongst the audience, anyone to be allowed on stage to recite the poem of their choice, with or without notes, and the only prize to be the admiration of a bar full of people. And so it was that the French Institute followed these very rules when launching its own poetry competition for its students.

Students were able to choose whatever subject and style of verse they pleased, with the only rule being that the recital should last between ninety seconds and three minutes. Of course, in Marc Smith’s day the first slammers were not primed with lessons, whereas our Laotian apprentice poets were offered four hours a week to prepare their entries with the assistance of Akummar Aghali, a musician and student of French as a Foreign Language (FLE), who is currently writing a thesis on language-learning through the medium of musical creative activity.

In Chicago, Marc Smith managed to democratise poetry by taking it to the working classes. Similar initiatives then began to spring up in New York, San Francisco, and Boston, until in 1990 a first national slam competition was held in New York. In France, the first slam evenings took place in a bar in the Pigalle district of Paris in 1997, following which the movement gained momentum with Marc Levin’s film ‘Slam’ and spread throughout the country. The version of slam popular in France is very close to Marc Smith’s initial idea, but with a French twist: read your poem and get a free drink!

Rather than a drink, students at the French Institute who took part in the competition were rewarded with prizes, the three best entries receiving a camera, an MP3 player, and a memory stick. During their two month course, the students were introduced to the slam movement, wrote their texts, and took elocution lessons. The recital differed from those taking place in Chicago or Paris however, as instead of performing live on stage, each student’s entry was recorded on their mobile phone, the latest craze to hit the slam movement, and then submitted to a panel of judges, who decided which three were the best.

To sum up, slam might best be described as a movement promoting freely recited poetry, whose aim is to reach the widest possible audience and offer everyone the chance to express themselves through poetry. Although slam is sometimes set to music, it is not the same as rap, because it is spoken not sung. All in all, slam is poetry that is intended to be heard not read. It is a free, broad-based movement, with artists like Grand Corps Malade and Abd Al Malick leading the fray in France, while in Laos the slam flag is currently flown by a few students from the French Institute - Vannida Phoutthachith, Phatida Nouankhamphan, Dalouny Xayavong and Thiphavanh Phouthavong.

Paris Opera
The Paris Opera Children’s Choir, or Maîtrise des Hauts-de-Seine, will be performing Ravel’s lyrical fantasy ‘The Child and the Enchantments’.
Performances will be taking place at 7pm on April 21st, at the Vientiane Hall of Culture, and at 6pm on April 23rd in Luang Prabang – Admission 20,000 kips

Piano Recital
The writer, composer, pianist and conductor Laurent Couson will be giving a piano recital in Vientiane.
7pm on May 2nd, at the Budo Center - Admission: 20,000 kips

Lao Traditional Dance Display
Regional dances from Laos, performed by dancers and musicians from Vientiane Music School.
The performance will take place at 7pm on May 11th at the French Institute - Admission: 20,000 kips

‘Fête de la musique’, the French nationwide musical celebration
Book your stage slot for the 2012 music festival now at: www.if-laos.org
To be held on June 16th, in the French Institute gardens
Admission free
In March, three school tournaments were organised by the Josué Hoffet French Lycée – two sports competitions (football and swimming) and a spelling contest – thus guaranteeing all concerned a healthy mind and a healthy body!

The football tournament, organised by P.E. teacher Patrick Duveau, took place on Sunday March 25th at the Durand-Chastel playing field in Simuang, and some twenty teams played a number of friendly matches, with the boys competing in the morning and the girls in the afternoon. Some of the parents (Marie Apovy, Soutikno Gindroz and Enrique Ortega) kindly provided a meal for all the participants with the assistance of the Patuxay café and ParadIce ice-creams. Competition sponsors Europcar, Ford, Land Rover and BFL financed souvenir T-shirts for all the children as well as cups for the three winning teams in each category. The tournament also served as a fund-raiser for planned school trips to Hanoï and Singapore.

The next sporting event was the swimming gala held a few days later at the national pool in Vientiane. The organiser and Master of Ceremonies was life-guard Simon Vaslet, and the swimming gala attracted some 60 swimmers from the Lycée Hoffet and other international schools in Vientiane (Kiettisack, Panyathip, VIS), as well as from Laotian schools (Neerada, Kaona, and Pattana) and the Russian School. The event was sponsored by Europcar, Green Discovery, Croissant d’Or, DataCom, FruitEven, and the Banque Franco-Lao (BFL).

There were individual breast-stroke, back-stroke and front crawl races, as well as 4x100 metres freestyle relays, and food stands and other attractions made sure the budding champions had plenty to do and eat once their race was over! The participants were all given a souvenir T-shirt to reward their efforts, while swimmers coming first, second or third in their event all received cups and certificates.

The Lycée Hoffet also asked its students (and their parents!) to combine physical effort with concentration of the mind, when it invited them to a grand Dictation Evening to celebrate Francophonie Month. Following last year’s successful first version, Jacques Barret went on to organise the 2012 edition, once again drafting a text that would challenge his would-be spelling experts. A hundred or so competitors turned up to try this exercise, which proved to be a fun way of revising half-remembered spelling rules, with many of our ‘big children’ forgetting that both Poil and Carotte needed capital letters (TN: the novella ‘Poil de Carotte’ is practically required reading for French children)!

To close this period of intense activity, Lycée Hoffet pupils invited their parents to a flower-themed show to celebrate the Lao New Year.
Art and culture

'Flowers of Devotion', the first study of ethnobotanical traditions in Laos

In early 2012, Biba Vilayleck and Baj Strobel published ‘Les fleurs de la dévotion’ (‘Flowers of Devotion’), a study of the role of flowers in Laotian religious, social and artistic life. The book gives us an opportunity to find out more about both the temples in Vientiane and Laotian culture in general.

Abundantly illustrated, it represents the culmination of almost three years’ work by its two authors, the former an ethnobotanist and the latter an art historian. The book has been beautifully put together by Olivier Leduc Stein, a graphic designer and friend of the authors, and was printed in Laos, as the first title in a programme started in Luang Prabang by Rik Gadella, director of the Pha Tad Ké botanical garden.

As its title suggests, the main focus of the work is the subtle yet ever-present interweaving of the plant world, in all its forms, with religious and everyday life in the Buddhist populations of Laos. In Laos, the flora, from the simple water lettuce to the majestic and imposing ficus religiosa, is an essential component of all that is sacred, representing through shape and symbol, perfume and colour, the bonds between man and man, in rituals and customs, as well as the bonds between man and the spiritual world beyond him.

Most of the analyses and testimonies focus on the temples and monasteries in Vientiane town centre, but the authors were also keen to demonstrate how, in addition to their sacred role, plants and flowers play an important part in the lives of Laotians throughout their lives, particularly in traditional rites of passage. Thus the book is divided into three main parts:

- **Town temples**: presentation of Vientiane’s vats, organisation of the different areas of the temple, buildings, etc.
- **The role of plants in religious and social life**: analysis of how the sacred domain and religious ceremonies have extended into the home.
- **Art and decor**: the relationship between plants and how they are portrayed, and the passage from natural shapes to artistic representations.

Lastly, there is a **scientific section** comprising a vernacular phytonomy, a list of scientific names, a glossary, a bibliography, etc.

Ethnobotany enables us to decipher the realities of plant lore and customs, first identifying the plants themselves before going on to describe how they are used and the symbolic meanings ascribed to them. In this book the authors introduce us to plant-related gestural codes, how plants are used and what is made from them, whether used directly as part of a traditional ritual or custom, or transformed into a religious artefact, as well as describing their integral presence at robing ceremonies, cremations and pilgrimages. A special bouquet for every celebration!

In Laos, artistic creation has always been highly influenced by plant motifs and follows the recognised Indian tradition of always ensuring that plants and flowers accompany any portrayal of Buddha for his further magnification and honour. Art and religion are closely interwoven and together embody a stylistic form – which is what the authors wanted to make explicit in this book. Over the years a system with its own specific vocabulary has gradually taken shape, which includes a special way of representing flowers and trees so that they are an integral and effective part of the religious and ceremonial decoration of statues and sacred buildings. The authors hope that this study of ethnobotany and art will provide all the elements their readers need to fully understand this key component of Lao culture.

Biba Vilayleck & Baj Strobel
Editions Pha Tad Ke, Luang Prabang, 2011
Located on Rue Simeuang, just opposite the French Embassy Medical Centre, in early 2012 ‘L’Atmosphère’ café and restaurant celebrated the first anniversary of its opening in Vientiane by launching a programme of weekly concert nights.

When Sébastien Louis realised his dream and opened this café, he named it after 20th century French star Arletty’s legendary line in Marcel Carné’s 1938 film Hôtel du Nord: “Atmosphère, atmosphère, est-ce que j’ai une gueule d’atmosphère?” (“Atmosphere, atmosphere, do I look like someone who cares about atmosphere?”) The name is also a nod to his mother, who played Arletty on stage, as well as passing on her love of good food and local produce to her small son.

It was never his intention to become a chef, however. After graduating from business school, Sébastien worked in the actuarial accounting department at the headquarters of a major French bank in the Défense district of Paris, before realising that a career such as this was not for him. He therefore moved into the events field, organising promotional evenings in numerous bars and restaurants, first in Paris, then in Barcelona, where he lived for several years. In 2009, feeling he needed to go further afield and set up his own business, he decided to move to Asia, and chose Laos as the ideal country for his purpose. Sébastien immediately became a fully involved member of the French community, calling on his musical and singing skills to give lessons via the Vientiane Accueil association.

Towards the end of 2010, Sébastien gathered up his savings and acquired premises that had previously been used as an internet café. He and his partner Oudalay refurbished the venue to make it a friendly, welcoming place to eat, similar in style to a Paris brasserie and serving good French cuisine.

L’Atmosphère is more than just a restaurant though and has a whole range of atmospheres: the café-resto serves tasty traditional dishes like pot-au-feu, hachis Parmentier, croque-monsieur and seasonal salads; at the bar in the café-comptoir you can enjoy a glass of wine, a cocktail and a chat with your friends after work; Tuesday night at the café-terrasse is contract bridge night; and the café-concert is the place to relax at the week-end, to a spot of live or mixed rock, funk, jazz or electro. So there’s an atmosphere to suit your every mood at L’Atmosphère-café!

See the dish of the day, price 40,000 to 50,000 kips, on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/latmosphere or ask to be sent a free text (Tel: 020 77 15 88 13).
News in Brief

The French Embassy in Laos in your own home or wherever you happen to be!

Access all our services as and when you need them – you can find out all you need to know about the French Embassy in Laos via our three communication media.

**The embassy’s quarterly magazine, La France au Laos, is available in French and English free-of-charge in Vientiane and some towns outside the capital!**

Keep up with embassy news and consulate information on the embassy website [www.ambafrance-laos.org](http://www.ambafrance-laos.org)

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Arrivals and Departures

- Mr Emilien Roulot has replaced Mr Pierrick Martin as Head of the local section of the economic mission.

- Mrs Nathalie Soulabaille has succeeded Mr Jean-François Benza in the Embassy’s protocol department.

- Mr Said El-Moutaouki has replaced Mr Phetsanga Yongvixay as administrative officer in the Embassy’s financial and administration department (Service Commun de Gestion).

- Mr Charles-Antoine Schwerer has replaced Mr Michele Ferrari as an internee in the Embassy’s press department.

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**May 8th 2012**

As always, there will be a commemoration ceremony at the French cemetery in Vientiane, Km 8, Luang Prabang Road.

This year it takes place on Tuesday May 8th, at 5pm.

Members of the French community in Vientiane are all invited to attend.

*Dress code smart-casual*

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**USEFUL CONTACTS**

**French embassy** (+856) 021 26 74 00
In case of emergency only (+856) 020 555 14 751

**Police Emergency 191**
Vientiane Police station (+856) 021 21 27 06
Fire Department (+856) 021 21 27 07

**Embassy medical center** (+856) 021 21 41 50
Emergency only (+856) 020 56 55 47 94

**Mahosot Hospital - International Clinic** (+856) 021 21 40 22
Friendship Hospital (emergencies) (+856) 021 42 33 00
Vientiane Ambulance Station 195 ou 21 26 11

**Thai hospitals**
- Wattana Nong Khai (+66) 42 46 52 01
International contact : M. Paul, (+66) 8 18 33 42 62
Laos contact : M. Assanai, (+856) 021 24 00 97
- Wattana Udon Thani (+66) 42 24 19 56
- AEK Clinic (Udon) (+66) 42 34 25 55

**Alarm Center in Bangkok**: (+66) 22 56 71 46
Friendship Bridge Immigration Centre (+856) 021 81 20 40 / 81 20 37

**Local branch of the UFE** : ufelaos@gmail.com
Local ADFE representative : adfe.laos@laposte.net

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