



Nandin Hall dates back to the mid-11th century AD. Photo by © Global Heritage Fund

Wat Phu, Laos

Sacred Temple Complex of Khmer Kings

Site Significance

Wat Phu Monumental Complex is the largest archaeological site in Laos and was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2000 – one of two sites with such status in the entire country. The foundation of the site is dated to the mid-5th century AD when the Chenla kingdom (5th-7th c. AD), started its expansion towards northern Cambodia. The monument, dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, is one of the most important examples of Khmer architecture because of its plan, its historic and religious significance and for the value of its sculptures.

Project Goals

Global Heritage Fund is supporting emergency stabilization and a sustained conservation and training program to save the last remaining temples of Wat Phu in Champasak. The site is highly endangered and located in one of the poorest regions of southern Laos and has great long-term potential for international and domestic tourism and community development.

GHF's conservation efforts at Wat Phu are focused on the scientific conservation of the most endangered monuments, as well as providing an intensive training program for on-site Laotian conservators and archaeologists.

Preservation by Design®

Planning

While a Site Management Plan has been prepared already by the Lao Government in collaboration with UNESCO, conservation plans for specific structures. As such, before any physical work on the structures can begin, a comprehensive study will be completed to identify the most appropriate approach to monument preservation.



Threats
Neglect
Environmental Threats

Start Date
2006

Project Partnerships

- The Leric Institute
- Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Information and Culture
- Department of Culture, Champasak Province Office
- Department of Structural Engineering, University Polytechnic of Milan
- Faculty of Architecture, University Polytechnic of Milan

Conservation Science

Conservation efforts at Wat Phu are concentrated on Nandin Hall, one of the most significant architectural remains in the park. Due to settling and uncontrolled vegetation growth, the structure has been weakened and faces collapse, so a program of stabilization

and anastylosis is underway. This will employ the original building materials recovered at the site or newly quarried stones from the same quarries exploited in ancient times during the original construction.

Community

The project team has instituted a program of training in field and conservation techniques for the local community members directly involved in the project, and the team is also collaborating with the local communities to devise culturally sensitive means to responsibly cope with the expected increasing numbers of visitors to the site.

Recent Accomplishments

- Concerted anastylosis of Nandin Hall: partial dismantling, consolidation and restoration.
- Installation of drainage system under Nandin Hall porch floor.
- Installation of a temporary roof over Nandin Hall to minimize damage during rainy season.
- Repairing a number of the original laterite construction blocks with appropriate materials.
- Quarrying a number of new laterite blocks to replace those missing.
- Creation of a new mortar based on chemical analyses of original mortar used.



Restoration and stabilization efforts on Nandin Hall.
Photo by © Leric Institute



Vegetation overgrowth, one of the threats affecting various structures in the Sacred Temple Complex of Wat Phu, Laos.
Photo by © Global Heritage Fund

Wat Phu is the most important monumental complex inside the Champasak Archaeological Park, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003 and covering an area of 400 square kilometers.



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