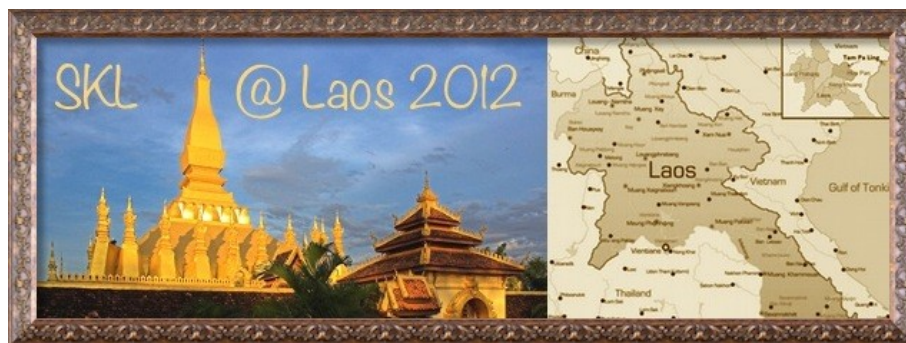


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**News:** Interested in helping? Join us! We're always looking for volunteers.

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Vientiane, Laos

We welcome your feedback and comments! [Please send us a message.](#)

## December 23, 24



*Last days in Laos*

*Sunday, December 23*

Sunday morning starts as usual with the roosters next door letting us know it is time to get busy! I cannot believe we have used up our four weeks and are leaving Laos tomorrow. Time to pack. Will everything fit? We have done a fair bit of shopping, so I expect we'll have more luggage than when we arrived.

After our baguettes and Lao coffee, we head to Talat Sao, the morning market in Vientiane, for the last few items we need. Of course, we end up purchasing some lovely souvenirs we don't really need, but do really like! For me, a beautiful embroidered piece made by a Hmong hill tribe craftswoman – I couldn't resist. Denis ended up with a fabulous paper parasol.

I spent the afternoon packing and then it was time to get ready for the party being held in our honour. This good-bye celebration started with a baci for us. We gathered in the living room with Ken's family and other local elders, kneeling on mats on the floor around the marigold pyramid centerpiece decorated with whisky, fruit, eggs, and other goodies. I felt very cared for as each elder and family member tied a string around my wrist while expressing wishes for happiness, health and a safe journey home. It is believed that if we want the wishes to come true, we must keep the strings tied around our wrists for three days. Then, the strings should be untied rather than cut as the good wishes might be severed.

The baci was followed by a fabulous feast. Needless to say, a few spirits were flowing as well! It was a great party, but part of me was sad

because tomorrow, we are leaving.

*Monday, December 24*

The last day in Laos is strange. I find it difficult to believe that a month has gone so quickly. It is Christmas Eve and we're leaving for Bangkok shortly.

I've learned so much about a country that really was unknown to me before this trip. I've taken 2900 pictures in an effort to capture the essence of my visit here. Without exception, the people have been warm and welcoming. The children are charming, the scenery is beautiful, and the food is marvellous.

SKL has changed my life and I want to thank Ken and Sengkeo and Francois for taking me under their wing and making my trip to Laos one of the most amazing adventures of my life. SKL is making a difference in the lives of hundreds of children. I am proud and privileged to be part of School for Kids in Laos, Inc.

Until next time...

-- Linda



## Saturday, December 22



Even though it is Saturday, we continue on with our work.

We began with purchasing school supplies and a soccer ball. It's for our next destination, the village of Ban Non Somboun. In 2010, we inaugurated our second school. It is situated about 40 minutes south of Vientiane. It was an opportunity to re-visit the structure, the toilettes and pump house two years later. The villagers have just finished repainting the school. It is

in good condition and the grounds were well maintained. The planted trees moved gently in the wind.

The village chief, Mr. Xay, was happy to receive us. He was interviewed by Denis Chamberland, video journalist at Radio Canada. We left him with the school supplies and soccer ball. Thanks to Bond PR Worldwide.

Back in the city, we decided to stop by a crafter of buddhist statues. He is himself also an entrepreneur of beautifully wooden-sculpted work. Some are utilitarian, others are decorative - small tables, etc. The murales' detail were impressive. Traditional country scenes were important to them.

We continued en route. Next objective: the night market. Along the Mekong river, vendors set up tables under tents. We saw clothing, jewelry, bags, paintings, CDs, souvenirs for all tastes. Bargaining is a good means of getting the best deal. We purchased some items that we'll be bringing back with us to Winnipeg for our next fundraising dinner. We've decided the theme for the dinner: Night Market.

We then stopped by the Si Hom quarter of Vientiane to buy chicken barbecue, fried dark rice in a tube of bamboo, some pork p te, balls of p te covered by grains of sesame, etc.

Finally in our lodging, we organized a charming picnic augmented with good wine. We laughed and had a good time. Thank you Laos and the Phanlouvong family.

Tomorrow, December 23, is our last full day in Laos. On the menu: visit the day market and celebrate our departure with family and friends. We leave on December 24. Happy Holidays!

-- Franois Tremblay







## Friday, December 21



It's the last day in Pakse. We had breakfast at the hotel before returning to visit Fater Dionne. Denis interviewed Father Veingta Vonghachak. We then returned to the hotel, paid for our stay and hit the road.

A brief stop at the village of Saphay gives us the chance to see the talent and good will of the weavers. Sengkeo, Linda and I purchased some of their work.

Then around 10am, we were rushed to Vientiane. Our driver focused on getting us back before sunset. Objective accomplished: we arrived around 9pm.

A small surprise: Ken received a special invitation. We went along with him. We were on our way to celebrate the birth of a newborn of the daughter of Ken's niece. We were welcomed like family with plenty of food and drinks.

An hour later, we returned to our home base, the house of Ken's sister. Fatigued, we deserved a good reset. Who knows what tomorrow will bring.

-- François Tremblay



## Thursday, December 20



Following a good night's rest, as usual we enjoyed breakfast together. Linda and Ken later were interviewed by the video journalist, Denis Chamberland of Radio-Canada. Linda and Sengkeo then embarked on a brief excursion to one of the markets. At lunch, we all quickly had some soup.

Just before 1pm, Ken and his wife along with Denis and I went to visit Father Gérard Dionne at boarding school of Bang Yor. It was a nice reunion in Laos for Ken, Sengkeo and Father Dionne. He and the Manitoba french community have helped them both 33 years ago. Besides Winnipeg, they have never met each other in Laos.

We then met with the student residents. They come from various poor villages around Pakse. I've learned that their school fees and lodging among some of them were sponsored by Manitobans. An environment of camaraderie permeated the place. The children were full of smiles and energy. The nearby church is nice and welcoming. Even the dogs and their puppies pounced playfully in the cool shadow of the trees.

After a short while, we headed off to the village of Ponethong. Upon exiting the main route, the second route proved to be very rough. Our chauffeur Toue tried very hard to keep us on the path. When we arrived, the village men were very happy to see Father Dionne. For some, they've known him since 2010. One friend, Sombhone and his wife, were very excited to see him. Father Dionne and the Manitoba community have helped them very much. They have become very grateful to the Canadians and especially Manitoban. Later, the farewells were difficult but necessary.

At the end of the day around 6pm, traffic was unpredictable. The jumbos, motorcycles, tractors and trucks don't often have working headlights. We were relieved to get home safely. In the city at 9pm, we decided to have supper at a restaurant near the Mekong river with Linda and Sengkeo. We had a chance to rest and discuss our day. Tomorrow, we have more adventures in store.

-- François Tremblay





## December 18, 19



*Tuesday, December 18 2012*

Today, after our breakfast, we reserved online our hotel rooms for the next few days. From Savannakhet, we travelled to Pakse. The roads were fairly good. We often needed to slow down when crossing the small wooden bridges, passing by wandering dogs, or near farms where cows, lambs, chickens and pigs often take their time along the roads.

During the course of 4 hours, we stopped briefly for a break. We bought chicken barbecue from a merchant along the side of the road, much to the pleasure of our reporter, Denis. There were also other strange cooked creatures (frogs, fish, pork...). We also enjoyed a delicious mix of stuffed yellow beans, coconut juice, and panne - a dessert commonly found in the region.

We stayed at the comfortable Champasak Palace hotel where we saw coffee plants as well as a beautiful waterfall near Tad Fan and Tad Gneuang. A very real little paradise. We had a casual discussion with a french Laotian, Mr. Inpong Sananikone, responsible for a cafe shop nearby.

Upon returning to Pakse, we found a good restaurant that, like many others, situated along the Mekong. We treated ourselves to a traditional laotian feast - small bonus the lao lao, a strong laotian-style drink with a bitter-sweet taste.

*Wednesday, December 19 2012*

We appreciated the good night's rest. Awaiting news from Father Dionne, we decided to explore our surroundings. After several hours on the road, we found a market near Paksong. We savoured the odour of coffee grains and we observed the salong - skirts for men. But no purchases this time around.

After returning to Pakse, we went to the beautiful waterfall of Tad Pha Souam. We had a short lunch and visited a small ethnic village. The crafters of the tribe made baskets made of bone, small tables and magnificent woven dresses (3 days of work). Linda and Sengkeo gladly purchased a few.

Next stop, the village of Katu, a picturesque site, a young family-owned coffee and peanut plantation. We could help with all the stages of preparation of coffee made by hand, gathered, dried, grilled, ground.

At the hotel, we finally received a call from Father Dionne. He is in town. He met us at the terrace. We had a lively discussion and we expect to do some filming tomorrow. We set a rendez-vous.

Around 6:30pm, we continued our fun search for good restaurants. The Ketmany offered a nice variety, among others some spring rolls, vegetables, shrimp, fried fish, salad with beef and porc pâté.

Tomorrow, new adventures await us. Stay tuned!!!!

François Tremblay







## Monday, December 17



### *Ban Kava Elementary School Inauguration*

Today is the day we have been waiting for - the official opening of Ban Kava school. We left the guesthouse early - before 7 am and without breakfast - as we had a good 45 minute drive over bumpy dirt roads to get to Ban Kava school. We were all dressed in our best clothes for the inauguration. We wanted to get there early to record some of the children on their way to school. We just made it in time to capture the brief journey of some children leaving home and heading for their new school. The school has actually been ready for a month but the children have had to stay in their old building until today. I don't know whose more excited - them or us!

We were welcomed onto the school grounds by the students who were lined up, ready to present us with bouquets and a "Sabaidee" from each and every one. We felt very honoured. Then the kids just bolted for their classrooms - finally, they could use their new school. It was a heartwarming sight to see them running into their classrooms. The school is on quite a large piece of property with several large mature trees in front. There was a head table backed with a banner and many colourful balloons; about 100 chairs arranged for guests; canopies where lunch would be served; food preparation areas - activity everywhere. You couldn't escape the excitement and air of festivity.

We were invited into the Grade 5 classroom to accept drawings done by the students. These lovely pieces will be displayed at the next fundraising dinner. We set up our gifts (which were a surprise) and waited for the officials to arrive. It was nice to have a few minutes to gather our thoughts. The official program started around 10 am with greetings and thanks from the Chief of the village. He was followed by the district of Education officer who said this school was a legacy and gave hope for the future. He was most appreciative of SKL's contribution. Other officials said this was history and they pledged to take good care of the school and to enhance the landscaping. They referred to the school as the pride of the province.



We were asked to speak and I felt very privileged to represent the Friends of SKL(myself, Craig Jackson, Val McPherson, Charles Hebert, Terry and Francine Collyer, Heather Johnson and Madeleine LePine, and Lori Hunter). Together we sponsored the deep water well system at Ban Kava School and I was so very proud of our involvement. Francois and Ken did a fine job of officially handing over the school. Then we surprised them with our gifts. From Bond PR Worldwide, we presented 125 brand new school uniforms and school supplies for every child. From my mother, Peggy Lindsay, and a special group of friends (Carol-Ann Borody-Siemens,Joan McAdam, Karen Horne and Liz Findlay), we presented soccer balls and badminton racquets.

We were then presented with gifts from the village. It was like Christmas! We also had the opportunity to participate in a tree planting ceremony. We planted ten fruit trees (mango, papaya, longan,etc.) along the perimeter of the school. How beautiful they will look as they grow.

Our next honour was the baci ceremony. This is a Lao ritual in which guardian spirits are bound to the guests of honour by white or orange strings tied around the wrists. The ceremony is performed seated around a conical shaped arrangement (Pha Khwan) of banana leaves, flowers and fruit, from which hang cotton threads. The village elder lit the candles and then called in the wandering spirits while chanting a Buddhist mantra while we all leaned in to touch the pha khwan. When the chanting was finished,the villagers took the threads and moved around the room, tying them to our wrists while wishing us health, happiness and all good things. it was unlike anything I've ever experienced before and I loved it! There was real sense of community and caring.

Our next treat was a Laotian feast - lunch outside with everyone participating in a fantastic meal. There was soup, grilled fish, fabulous vegetables, beef, rice, tamarinds and oranges - a veritable bounty of gourmet food.

Our last activity at the inauguration was a dance. We were invited by our hosts to dance a traditional Lao dance in the school yard! Fortunately, I was able to catch on quickly (the movements are slow and rhythmic) - thank goodness - I didn't want my final act at the inauguration to be an embarrassment to my colleagues!

Our leaving was emotional - the teachers and principal and district education representative followed us to the van - still offering refreshments as if to entice us to stay. There were some final pictures, heartfelt goodbyes and maybe even a tear or two. Goodbye Ban Kava. I hope to see you again.

-- Linda Lindsay







## Sunday, December 16



Another beautiful sunny Vientiane morning! We loaded the van with uniforms, soccer balls and luggage and headed south. Our first job was to revisit Pakxoun, site of a potential candidate for project #4. We still had a couple of matters to resolve before we signed an agreement. Pakxoun is about 3 hours south of Vientiane. We arrived at noon and were met by village officials, the teachers and the most senior District Education representative. There was a good discussion and we made it very clear about SKL's expectations regarding their participation in the construction of the school, the anticipated growth in attendance and future maintenance of the building.

Agreement was reached and a memo of understanding drawn up and signed. One of the villagers' contributions is sand. We walked to the river to see the source of the sand - it was an idyllic spot and we imagined building cottages on the shore of the river! And so we left Pakxoun knowing it was to be School #4 for SKL!

We reached Ban Kava at dusk. Several members of Ken's family had travelled down for the inauguration in another van and we all stayed at the same guesthouse that evening. We enjoyed a meal together in a local (very small) roadside restaurant - I think they were a tad overwhelmed when 12 of us showed up for dinner!

Only a few hours now until the official opening of Ban Kava school - we are all very excited!

-- Linda Lindsay



## December 13, 14, 15



Thursday, December 13



Today, we met with the management of Pak Pasak Technical School. We discussed the possibility of starting a bursary program for students of rural villages. We made sure to capture in detail all information on this subject so that we can present a portfolio to the SKL committee and its potential partners.

We later went to the Centre of rehabilitation (Cope) to prepare for an interview, possibly directed by the Radio-Canada journalist, Denis Chamberland, who will be arriving tomorrow evening.

We visited paint artist Chen Lin, who resides in the area. His work impressed us very much. Linda and I decided to purchase some of his creations. We then stopped by the Victory Arch, equivalent to the french Arc de Triomphe, located in the Champs Élysées of Vientiane. A nice supper awaited us afterwards.

*Friday, December 14*

Our next activity included a stop at Buddha Park, founded in 1958 by a legendary devout monk. Numerous statues stand ready to intrigue and fascinate tourists and Laotians alike. We then went to retrieve the traditional laotian dress custom-tailored for Linda. Hello to Linda's mother and to all our readers!

Also on our agenda is a short reunion with one of the representatives of Mines Advisory Group (MAG). This meeting allows journalist Denis Chamberland to obtain contacts for one of his interviews. In the evening, we made our way to the airport to welcome Denis from Radio-Canada. We greeted him enthusiastically to Laos.

*Saturday, December 15*

We spent the day with Denis Chamberland, journalist of Radio-Canada. We accompanied him on his tour of Laos, including to temples like Wat Phra Keo and Sisaket, the stupa of That Luang as well as laotian market of Nong Niao (see photos). The day ended with a supper that is, as always, delicious cuisine served by the nieces of the Phanlouvong family.

-- François Tremblay





## December 9 - 12



### *Luang Prabang*

The flight to Luang Prabang took only 45 minutes and we were in another world. Luang Prabang, situated at the confluence of Nam Khan and Mekong rivers, is a Unesco World Heritage site. This means buses and trucks are not allowed in the old centre. It is an enchanting place with colonial buildings, temples galore and saffron-clad monks at every turn. After checking into our hotel, the Ban Lao, we headed out to explore Luang Prabang. We visited many temples, starting with one right next to the hotel. Wat Manom is thought to be the oldest temple site in the area. It was my first close-up look at a temple and the 6 metre tall bronze Buddha. The grounds were quiet - monks were working around us. The frangipani trees were fragrant. I felt transported to another time and place.

We visited other temples that afternoon, including the Wat Xien Thong, Luang Prabang's best known and most visited monastery. It is quite stunning with roofs that sweep low to the ground. In our travels, we "discovered" an artist selling his work on the street. We bought a couple of his paintings and continued on our way. As we headed back to the hotel, we ended up on the street where hundreds of vendors were setting up for the night market. For several blocks, the street turns into a pedestrian-only market jammed with canopied stalls where you can buy almost anything! We planned to return after dinner to explore it thoroughly.

Early the next morning, we headed out to the Elephant Village and Sanctuary. The trip took almost an hour, winding up the mountain side where major road construction is taking place. Apparently, they are building a bypass around Luang Prabang to reduce the amount of traffic in the town. We thought that was a great idea. It is a major project and will take 4 years to complete. When we got to the Village, our guide laid out the program for us. First an elephant ride, then a trip up the river to visit Tad Se Waterfalls, then back to the Village for lunch before we returned to town. We climbed several stairs into a platform and mounted our elephant from there. Francois was off on his own while Ken and I shared an elephant. The mahouts really know how to handle the elephants - thank heavens as I was more than a little anxious about being perched on this giant animal not quite knowing how this ride was going to be. Our elephant turned out to be quite slow-moving and more than a little reluctant to keep up with the others. However, we did get going and the mahout took us into the river. Elephants love water and ours took big drinks as they walked. When we reached an island in the river, the mahout dismounted and I had a chance to sit on the elephant's neck while he guided her from the ground. It was an amazing experience. Laos is known as the land of a million elephants but unfortunately, today there are only 1600 left. Sanctuaries such as this one help to rescue elephants from the logging trade but even so, it is difficult to increase their numbers.

We then ventured up the river in a very narrow, tippy boat to visit the Tad Se waterfalls. The falls are lovely and as we enjoyed the scenery, Ken suddenly recognized a school friend whom he hadn't seen in over 30 years! What a coincidence. They were happy to see each other and arranged to get together back in Luang Prabang. When we returned to town, we visited the Handicrafts Festival on the Mekong river. What a treasure trove of locally produced clothing, art, weaving, toys, bags, jewellery. We all helped the economy by making purchases! Another busy day in Luang Prabang. Off to dinner at a great restaurant across the river and then back to the hotel for an early night.

We rose at 5 am the next morning because we wanted to see the monks' procession, Tak Bat, which happens daily and only in Laos. Monks from the temples gather and walk in single file along a specific route, demonstrating their vows of poverty and humility while collecting food from the townspeople as they go. It is a quiet, meditative ceremony and I felt privileged to observe it as the sun rose over Luang Prabang. After breakfast at the hotel, we took a trip to the Artisan's village close by. Here master crafts people work and sell their goods. There were incredibly beautiful woven textiles - shawls, robes, scarves, blankets, wall hangings. The paper makers made exquisite paper, much of it impressed with flowers and leaves. Again, we tried to help the economy by purchasing a few items! Back into town for a meeting with a well-known artist and scholar, Nithakong Somsanith who welcomed us into his home. We had a wonderful visit and enjoyed seeing some of his work.

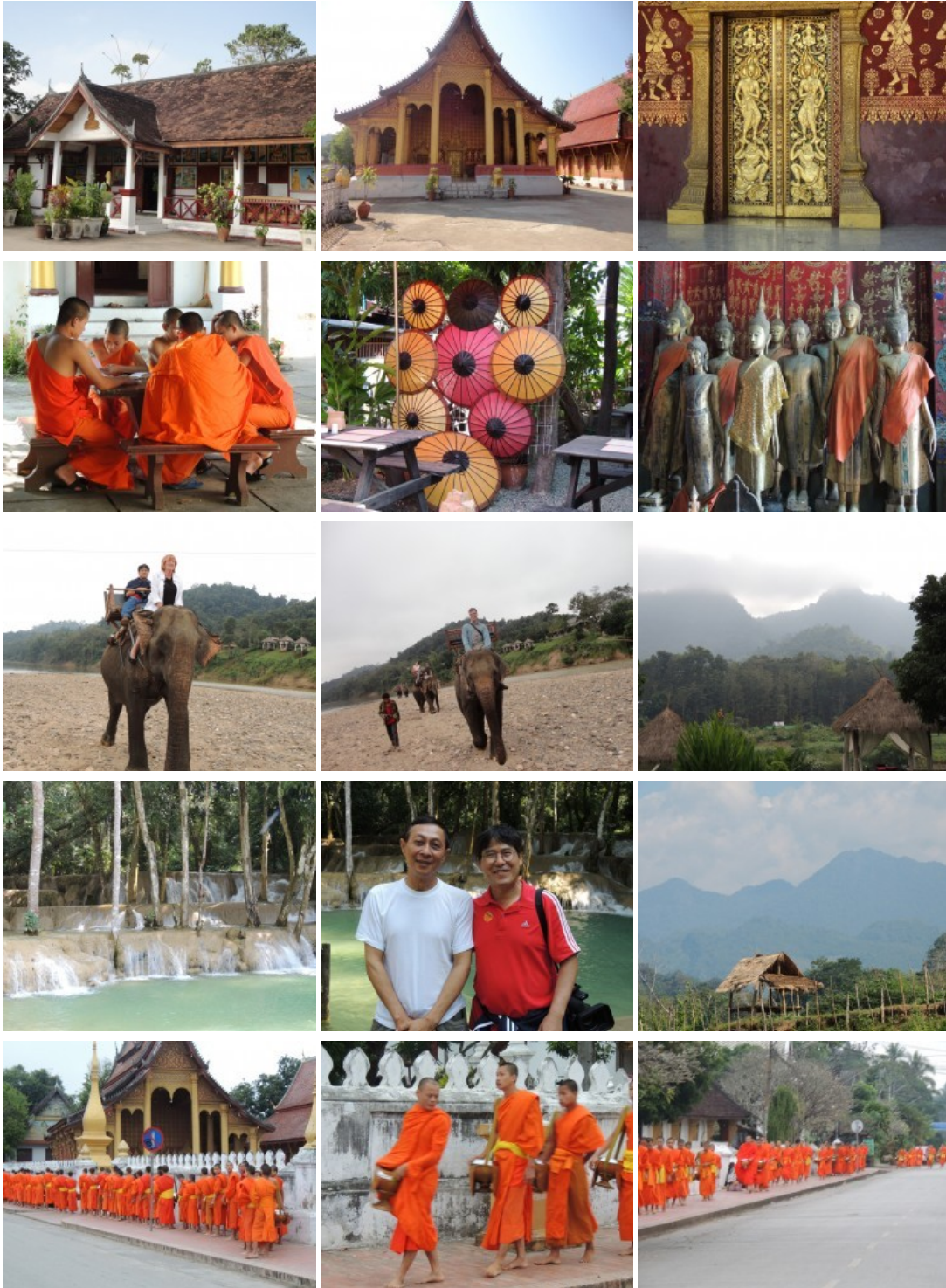
Our days in Luang Prabang had gone so quickly. Here it was our last night. We celebrated with a delicious dinner at Villa Santi - again authentic Laotian dishes. The next morning, we visited the Royal Palace National Museum, once the residence of the royal family. Then we had time to visit one more art gallery before leaving for the airport. We had the pleasure of meeting Thap Thavonsouk who spends half the

year in Laos and the other half in Calgary! His work is internationally known and owned by many museums, galleries and private collectors. It was wonderful to meet him but the clock was ticking and we had to leave for the airport.

Goodbye Luang Prabang. Thank you for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The official opening date of Ban Kava school approaches. Check back to see how our plans are progressing!

-- Linda Lindsay







## Saturday, December 8



After a good breakfast (a baguette and eggs), we considered touring Vientiane. But our plans changed when we received a phone call. Ken had the opportunity to speak with an important business man from Laos, a meeting that could prove very useful.

Mr. Vilath Lavanphone is responsible for a transport company. As it happens, he found us while showing us one of his properties. When we met him, we were talking not 2 feet from a construction site. Ken asked him, on behalf of a woman in Canada, the approximate costs of transporting clothing from Bangkok to Luang Prabang. Mr. Vilath seemed interested by this type of contract.

We took the opportunity to introduce Mr. Vilath and his colleagues to SKL's activities in Laos. He appreciated our work and showed interest. Mr. Vilath even suggested he'd be interested in a collaboration with us in the future. Everything was noted. We thanked him for his friendly hospitality.

We then went to the airport after purchasing a flight to Luang Prabang. We quickly savoured some soup and left to do some shopping. We purchased some school supplies for Ban Kava school, on behalf of Bond PR. We gathered some notebooks, pencils, pencil sharpeners and erasers. Thank you Bond PR for your generosity!

We also went shopping for clothing for the inauguration (December 17th). I easily found a nice shirt with help from the Phanlouvong family. It was a bit more complicated for Linda. The fabric was more expensive and the variety of motifs was vast. Linda was very happy with her choice.

Meanwhile, we negotiated a price for six pairs of badminton rackets. The purchase was made possible by donations from Winnipeg. A big

thanks goes to them. The rackets will be given to young girls of Ban Kava school.

Back at our home base in Ken's sister's home, we observed the chefs of the family at work. An excellent supper would be served. All that's left is to prepare our supplies before retiring for the day.

Tomorrow, we will spend a few days at Luang Prabang, a small vacation well deserved. Stay tuned, we will have more for you soon.

-- François Tremblay



## December 6 and 7



*Thursday, December 6, 2012*

As we approached the site of the new school at Ban Kava, I grew more excited. It was hard to believe that I was going to see the school in person! There it was - bright white in the morning sun. There are beautiful large trees shading the school from the sun. The pump house, which we donated to, is off to the left and as I walked up to it, I was filled with so much emotion. I could see the difference we can make in the lives of these children. I felt proud and grateful at the same

time. We met the principal and two of the teachers and toured the new classrooms. There is electricity in this school which is a new feature. Thanks to a special donation made by an employee of CBC - Radio-Canada Manitoba. It means the school can be used for village meetings and events in the evenings. We discussed the details of the official opening (December 17) with the principal, then headed north to visit Pakxoun, which is another potential SKL project.

Pakxoun is a small village about 100 km south of Vientiane. Our job was to ascertain that student numbers met SKL's criteria. We met with some local representatives to discuss attendance and student projections for the future. We plan to return on our way to Ban Kava for the opening to meet with higher officials and hopefully, sign the final agreement.

*Friday, December 7, 2012*

A new opportunity has presented itself to us - a badly overcrowded school in Ban Viengkham, a village about 95 km north of Vientiane. The trip took 2 hours! We were warmly welcomed and impressed by the fact that high level local officials were at the school with the principal and teachers. Their problem is lack of space for the 215 grade 6-8 students. They are currently housed in temporary structures built by the villagers. After an informative discussion and tour, we felt this school qualified for consideration as an SKL project. To that end, we videotaped the principal and the chief of the village who made a strong plea for support. We were then treated to an authentic Lao lunch made completely with local produce. We all felt very welcome.

Because we were so close to the first dam built in Laos, we took a side trip to see : Nam Ngeum. The resulting reservoir offers both recreational and economical opportunities. We took a boat cruise and enjoyed lovely scenery and the interesting history of some of the islands.

Another full day ending with a supper at the King View restaurant on the banks of the Mekong!

Every day brings new surprises and opportunities - I hope you check back to see the latest developments!



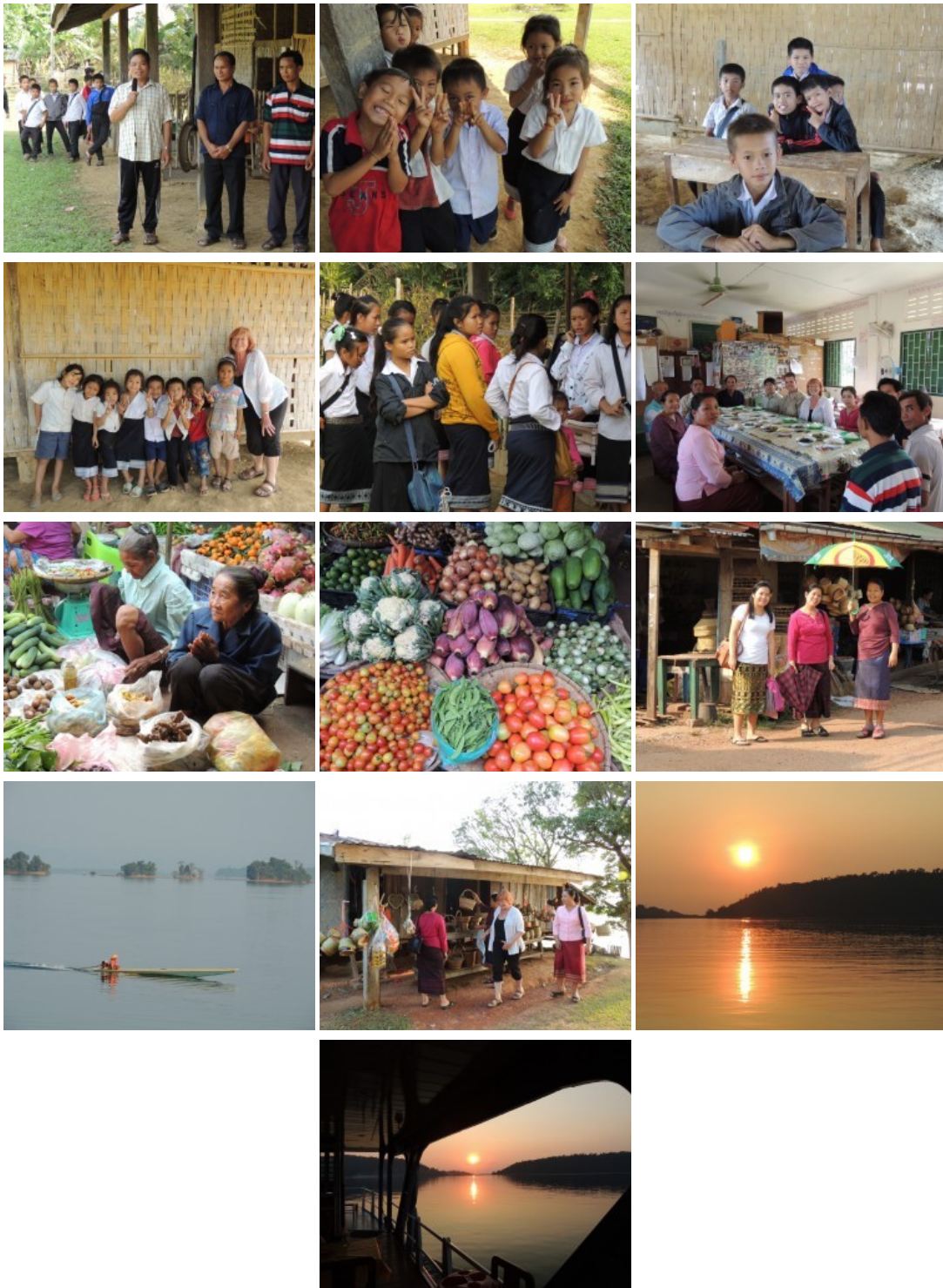
-- Linda Lindsay











## Wednesday, December 5



Another beautiful morning in Vientiane! We had breakfast in the open-air kitchen and prepared for the day ahead - an unannounced trip to Ban Khok Meud to visit a school that is a potential candidate for SKL support. Our van and driver arrived at 7:45. Toui, our builder, was meeting us en route and after picking him up, we were on our way. The first hour of driving was fairly uneventful as we headed north along the Mekong. The second hour was an unexpected challenge - miles of road construction Lao-style! Our driver, Touay, did a wonderful job, negotiating holes, ridges, washboard, tree roots,

while trying to ensure our comfort.

Ban Khok Meuad is a small village on the Mekong about 75 km (it felt like 1000) north of Vientiane. The village is poor but has a school. Our job was to investigate and determine if this school met the criteria for SKL support. The children were playing in the yard when we arrived as classes was in recess. The boys were kicking a ragged soccer ball around; some of the girls were playing a skipping game of some sort. We were warmly greeted by the teachers and I was lucky because one of the three spoke English! He showed me the classrooms - three in all - home to grades 1-5. The children were curious about us, some a little shy, but quite willing to pose for the pictures you see attached. I fell in love with them!

The village chief and his councilmen, including the man responsible for education, came to speak with us. Ken and Francois did a video interview to record the information so important to our decision-making. After a tour of the village, we headed south to Thakhek, to stay the night before our visit to Ban Kava, school #3. This school will be opening officially in 12 days and I will be there! I am so excited about being part of this inauguration. Visit our blog tomorrow to see the first pictures of the new school.

-- Linda Lindsay







## Tuesday, December 4



We successfully moved from our hotel to Ken's sister's house in the northwest sector of Vientiane. It is nice to have a base where we can function in a home-like environment.

Our first order of business was to pick up the uniforms for the children at Ban Kava. The factory was in the north-east sector of the city, located in the middle of a residential area.

We were greeted warmly by Lair, managing partner of Ali Garments. Our 125 uniforms were ready to go! They look fabulous. Thanks to our sponsor BondPR Worldwide. I can't wait to see the children's faces when they receive these new outfits.

Our next stop was to visit a temple revered by people from Laos, Thailand and beyond. That Luang Stupa was built during the reign of King Xaysethathirath. It is breathtakingly beautiful and we enjoyed our visit to such an amazing landmark. We also visited the translation centre where monks translate the ancient scripts.

As we headed home, we passed an open-air market specializing in "carry-out" foods – there were many interesting options, but we passed them by as we knew we had a special dinner waiting for us when we got home (see pictures)! We did stop for a drink of fresh coconut milk though – really refreshing.

Walking along a busy thoroughfare at rush hour, I was struck by both the similarities of and differences between Vientiane and Winnipeg. Lottery vendors set up along the sidewalk – we'd never see this at home. But the traffic and the desire of everyone to get home at the end of a busy day certainly was the same. It was a full day and I too was looking forward to getting home.

-- Linda Lindsay







## Monday, December 3



We started this beautiful day with breakfast on the balcony on the fifth floor of the hotel - said to be the best views of the Mekong in all of Vientiane. There was a soft, cooling breeze and a bit of a haze on the river. I was still feeling like this some kind of incredible dream!

Phaly (Ken's niece) picked us up and we drove about 10 km to Ken's sister's home in the northwest part of the city. Our purpose was to determine if we could stay at the house and use it as our base for the duration of our stay in Laos. Ken's sisters and nieces met us and welcomed us into their spacious, modern home. It was perfect for us keeping in mind we were expecting to welcome Denis Chamberland from CBC Radio-Canada and l'abbé Gérard Dionne to the house too. It will be a great base, especially as Ken's niece will be our "chef", preparing authentic Laotian food for us during our stay.

After confirming arrangement, we visited the local food market where most of our raw ingredients for our meals will be purchased. There were hundreds of vendors under a huge corrugated iron roof. We saw everything from ginger and lemongrass to special limes used to make shampoo. We tried exotic fruits including locally grown tiny sweet bananas. There were cabbages, watermelon, fresh fish and meats, and many other things, some familiar, some unknown. It was a sensory adventure.

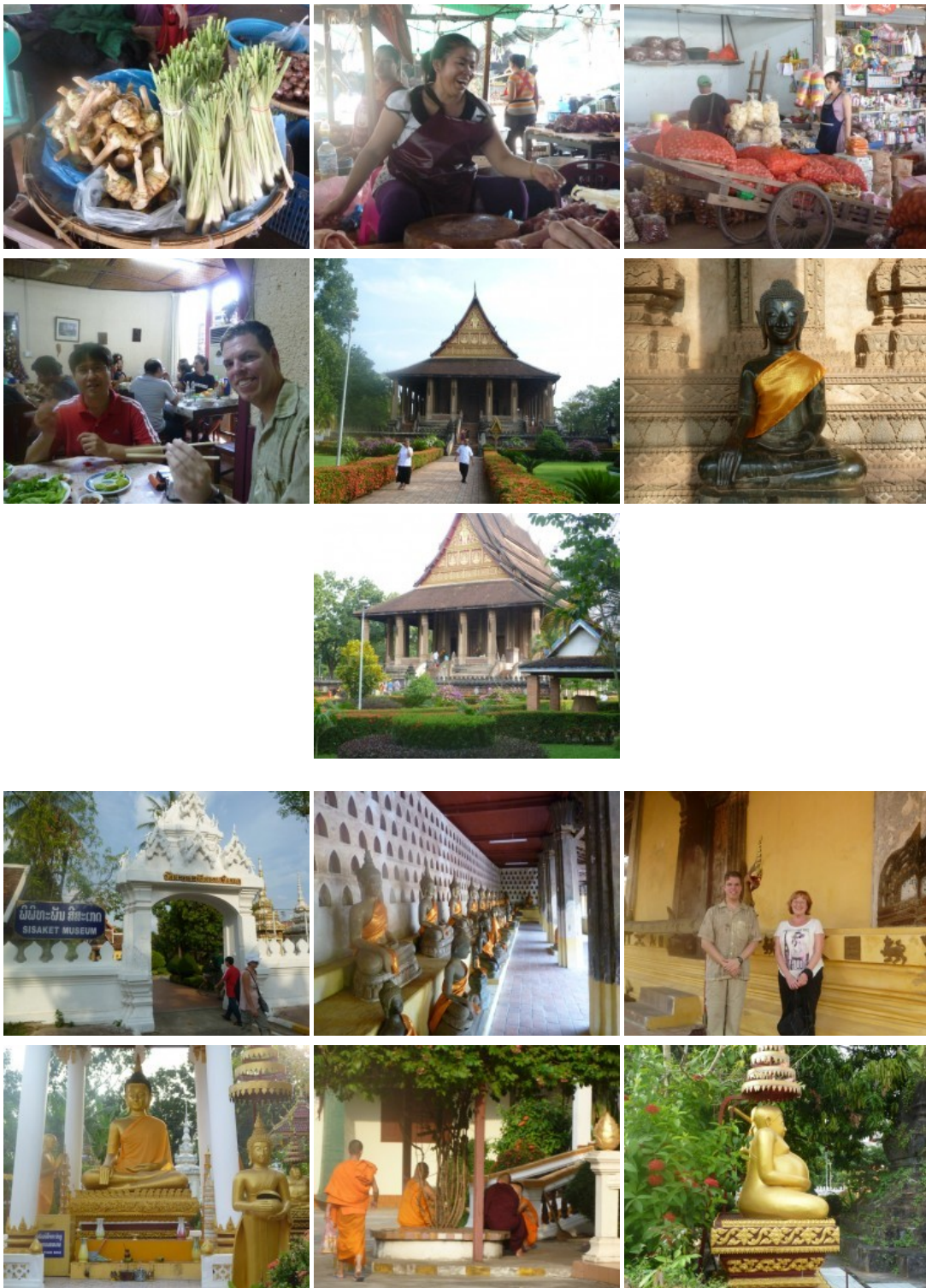
Onwards! Off for lunch at the local "fast-food" noodle house. We enjoyed a big bowl of savoury broth filled with thin noodles and chunks of beef, flavoured with herbs. Then we added a variety of things like pickled vegetables and spicy sauces. Yum. It was quick - 20 minutes later, we were on the road again.

A special visit today to the most revered of all 300 temples in Laos - Ho Phra Keo - I was amazed by the beauty of the statues, hundred of Buddha images surrounded the main temple. Inside, where no photos are allowed, we saw precious antiquities. It was a place of serenity. Across the road, we visited the 2nd most revered temple, Sisaket Museum. The architecture and the statues of Buddha were breathtaking.

It was interesting to see the monks who live on the grounds in their bright saffron robes. Another oasis of calm in the middle of a busy city.

Back to the hotel before we head of to the night market! Tune in tomorrow to see what adventures we find!

-- Linda Lindsay







## Sunday, December 2



The temple bells woke us early - 6 am on our second morning in Vientiane.

After breakfast, we sent you the first blog then ventured out to the downtown morning market. We found a cellular phone for the CBC Radio-Canada reporter who will be joining us in mid-December. The market is a labyrinth of stalls, jammed with goods. I was still trying to acclimatize - it was still unseasonably hot - and sought out infrequent oases of cool air emanating from ceiling fans. Our next task was to find soccer balls and after two or three spirited negotiating sessions with the assistance of Ken's niece Phaly, we acquired 20 soccer balls for the kids. Hard work but definitely worth the effort!

Phaly dropped us back at our hotel where we met with Steve Rutledge, Founder of [AdoptAVillageInLaos.wordpress.com](http://AdoptAVillageInLaos.wordpress.com). We had a good conversation, exchanging ideas and experiences for 2 1/2 hours. Steve's main focus is providing water and water filters to rural villages, but he has also built 6 schools in Laos. We plan to continue to explore possible collaborations in the future.

All this business was followed by a fabulous dinner at Kua Lao - Lao Kitchen - housed in a spacious Colonial-style mansion. Ken and Sengkeo selected a variety of traditional Lao dishes, all of which were delicious. Needless to say, there wasn't much left on the plates at the end of the meal. We enjoyed the entertainment which featured a Lao folk ensemble with traditional dancers in colourful costumes. We returned to the hotel using a "jumbo", the ubiquitous transportation option in Vientiane (see picture).

What a wonderful day in Laos. I can't wait for tomorrow!

-- Linda Lindsay







## Saturday, December 1



Our flight was at 9 in the morning; only an hour separated us from Vientiane. Upon leaving the plane, we were struck by the brilliant sun and hit by the high humidity, abnormal at this time of year. It is 32 celsius!

After leaving the airport and completing the visa forms, we were warmly welcomed by the Phanlouvang family.

Arriving at Seng Tawan Riverside Hotel, we made ourselves at home in our large and comfortable rooms. We relaxed a bit before planning our day. We ate a bit before visiting the Phanlouvang family.

We also had a discussion with the man responsible for the school construction, Toui. We worked together on a brief assessment of his work on the third school for the village of Kava. We took note of the recommendations submitted by the administrative council. Toui is interested in continuing his work with us. We are very happy to work with him.

We returned to the hotel, took a shower before retiring to our rooms. We felt the effects of jet lag. We needed a good night's rest to recuperate.

Greetings to our family, friends and readers of this blog. We will continue to write more soon. We remind you that there is 13 hours of difference between Vientiane and Winnipeg. We are a bit ahead of you there.

François Tremblay





## Thursday, November 29



### Hello!

Welcome to the SKL Inc. blog for our visit to Laos in 2012. Here you will find all the updates about our activities during our stay in Laos. The SKL Team on this journey consists of Ken Phanlouvong, Sengkeo Phanlouvong, François Tremblay and Linda Lindsay. We are in Laos from December 1 to 24, 2012.

Travel itinerary: Winnipeg, Chicago, Tokyo, Bangkok, Vientiane - close to 24 hours of flight, plus time between connecting flights.

Days 1 and 2: We left early in the morning. It was -22 celsius outside. We arrived at Winnipeg's airport - after registering our luggages, passing security and customs, we were ready to depart. We are connecting from one city to another. Everything is going well despite arriving an hour late to Chicago. We then arrived in Bangkok near midnight (on Friday November 30). We stayed a night at the charming little Phoenix Hotel.



## Departure - November 29, 2012



The SKL Team has embarked on their personal trip to Vientiane Laos for the inauguration of the new Ban Kava Primary School. The team also plans to survey for a new location for the fifth school project and to gather important statistics on the upcoming Ban Pakxoun project.

The real work begins on December 1 upon arrival from their long journey from Bangkok Thailand. This blog will keep you updated on the daily activities of the team with lots of photos, videos and messages. Don't forget to check back often!