

# Luang Prabang café serves up new dining option

Ounkham Pimmata

Pilgrim's Café at the Rama Hotel in Luang Prabang recently opened its doors to offer European and Asian inspired dishes in a casual, relaxing atmosphere.

Built over five months from March to July, construction of the new eatery cost about US\$25,000.

The result is a laid-back restaurant where customers are encouraged to unwind by reading, listening to music and watching live music performances while enjoying their breakfast, lunch or dinner.

"The café is a comfortable place to meet up with friends or just relax by yourself and take advantage of the variety of activities we offer," General Manager Mr Daniel Longkumer told *Vientiane Times* at the opening ceremony.

This café is different from similar dining options in Luang Prabang, he said. "While serving food, baked goods, coffee and other soft drinks, we also provide a small library for people who enjoy reading while having breakfast or lunch, free WiFi and a playroom for children while families are waiting for a meal."

Every evening the café features live international and Lao music with an experienced band, and customers are invited to join in and sing if they wish.

"We offer various, reasonably priced dishes, including coffee, drinks, cakes, pastries, bread, cookies, sandwiches, fast-food and full meals," Mr Longkumer



Mr Daniel Longkumer explains the café's style, which is designed to offer customers a new experience.



The decor at the entrance to Pilgrim's Café is simple and modern.

added.

Diners can choose from European, Asian, Indian or Lao cuisine and dishes can be changed based on the customer's preferences.

"We have a chef from India who trained in the UK, so diners can be assured of hygienic and delicious food," Mr Longkumer said.

"The interior design was very important for attracting customers, so I discussed it with friends and looked for ideas in magazines and

blended them to design a contemporary Lao style."

"Luang Prabang already has a wide range of cafes and restaurants, so it was a challenge to develop my business plan. I had to figure out how best to compete, so I decided to use the Internet to promote the business. I just hope that the style of the restaurant will give me an edge in the market," he said.

The café is open from 7am-9pm and will begin offering a breakfast buffet next week.

# Rainy season halts production at sugar factory

Phonsavanh Vongsay

Savannakhet sugar producer Mitr Lao Sugar Co Ltd has temporarily halted production and supply to the EU due to a sugarcane shortage.

The factory, in the province's Xayboury district, ceased production after being unable to source raw materials during the wet season, provincial Industry and Commerce Department official Mr Thonekeo Phouthaxayalath said yesterday.

A Mitr Lao Sugar representative said "It's currently planting time for sugarcane farmers, and the crop is too young to harvest. We will resume production in November."

The factory normally operates six months a year, from November to April, during the dry season.

Other sugar factories in Laos and neighbouring countries have also stopped production due to the sugarcane shortage and will instead "use the time

to check machinery and equipment ready for when production resumes," the company official added.

Although Mitr Lao Sugar has stopped exports to the EU market, it will continue exporting to Vietnam because "we still have several tonnes of sugar in the warehouse," the company representative added.

"Exports to the EU will resume at the same time as production," he said. Most of the sugar produced in Laos is exported to the European Union.

Rice and other crops in Savannakhet province have been flooded because of the rain, but sugarcane farms have not been so badly affected "because most are on high ground," Mr Thonekeo said.

He was unaware of any sugarcane growers in Savannakhet being affected by the recent floods, saying rice farmers appear to have taken the brunt of the disaster.

Many other factories in the province are operating

normally despite the floods, including garment factories, vehicle assembly plants, furniture makers, and two other sugar processors.

Mitr Lao Sugar is a subsidiary of the Mitr Phol Group, which operates sugarcane businesses in Thailand.

The company uses the same advanced production technology as many of the world's leading sugar producers and currently produces 310,000 tonnes of sugarcane and about 36,500 tonnes of refined sugar each year.

Mitr Phol broadened its production base to include Laos with an initial investment of 598 billion kip (2.3 billion baht), according to the group's website.

The group was awarded a 40-year concession for a sugarcane plantation and the construction of a sugar mill in March 2006 under the name of Mitr Lao. The concession can be extended for an additional 20 years.

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## Stocks remain in tight trading band

The LSX has firmed right up in a very tight trading band in the past two weeks with stocks hard to come by at current low prices.

BCEL's stocks failed to emerge in the opening session at 7,200 kip and on very low volumes.

In the closing session (500 shares), the price edged to 7,300 kip per share.

EDL-Gen was unchanged in the first session at 4,750 kip and was the only stock traded in the first session on 12,000 shares at US\$7,135.

A further 10,000 crossed the floor down 50 kip for a daily turnover of US\$13,547.

The LSX index was unchanged in the first off market trading session at 987.28 points on just 12,000 shares for 57m kip.

By the close the index lost some ground to 981.53 points or -0.58 pct.

Only a modest 23,384 shares traded yesterday for 111.8m kip.

The inaugural LSX "Symposium on Investment Opportunities in Lao PDR 2011" begins today and continues through tomorrow (Sept 15-16) at the Lao Plaza Hotel in Vientiane, featuring key ministers, government officials, and representatives from the local business community.

## Twists and turns in Europe's sovereign debt crisis

US stocks rose Tuesday after a volatile day of trading driven by more twists and turns in Europe's sovereign debt crisis, but advancing for how long?

Europe's benchmark equity index temporarily rebounded from a two-year low as the BRIC nations seem to indicate an assistance package to Europe. Gold may advance more by the week's close as Europe's sovereign-debt crisis boosts demand for the metal as a haven investment.

French banks dismissed concerns over their access to funds and investors watched for signs of progress in efforts to tame the euro region's debt crisis.

Time will tell as news emerges that Greece should halt payments on its debt to stop a deterioration of the economy that threatens the European Union. Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner has stepped in, urging European governments to step up their crisis-fighting efforts all amid Obama administration concerns that deteriorating conditions in the region may hurt the already wobbly US economy.

NWT Newsat EGM on October 17 is set to approve a share consolidation of 50:1 on yesterday's trade at AU\$0.012 that will value the new stock price at 60 cents. Ballieu stock brokers have a 12 month target of AU\$3-00. Revenues for 2011 are set to jump from AU\$29M to "current" estimations of AU\$170M by 2015. Stock turnover was AU\$11m per month but is getting close to AU\$1M per day - a 200 pct gain. NWT is expected by brokers to double in price by the end of October.

### Vientiane Times Intraday Market Indices Opening Sep 14

Index	Value	Change
ASX SPI 200	4,105.00	24
All Ordinaries	4,186.60	28.2
Dow Jones	11,105.85	44.73
FTSE-100	5,174.25	44.63
Hang Seng	19,030.54	0
NASDAQ	2,532.15	37.06
Nikkei 225	8,649.74	33.19
S & P 500	1,172.87	10.6
Charts Sep 14 Dr Darrell Walker		

# Vietnamese rubber growers want more foreign workers

Times Reporters

A group of Vietnamese rubber growers has urged the Lao government to allow it to hire more foreign technicians, because Laos cannot supply sufficient skilled workers.

Vietnam Rubber Group Ltd Director General Mr Tran Ngoc Thuan raised the topic at the Lao-Vietnamese investment cooperation conference, held at the International Cooperation and Training Centre in Vientiane last week.

Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong and his Vietnamese counterpart Mr Nguyen Tan Dung attended the conference to learn about the business and investment barriers faced by the private sector, so they can identify appropriate solutions.

Top government leaders have not responded to the specific request from Vietnamese rubber growers, but have made political commitments that will facilitate investment by Lao and Vietnamese businesses in each country.

The assurances are part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the countries' special relationship and comprehensive cooperation.

Mr Tran Ngoc Thuan said the Vietnamese investment group was facing a shortage of skilled workers to meet growing business needs. However, rubber companies could not hire additional foreign nationals because Laos allows foreigners to comprise only 10 percent of the total workforce.

The companies also have to pay high tax rates on overseas workers, which drives up production costs. In addition, the fact that foreign workers have to have their visas renewed each month results in a loss of time and money, he noted.

"With support from the Lao and Vietnamese governments, the Vietnam Rubber Group Ltd decided to invest in growing rubber trees and a processing plant in Laos. The group has received permission to grow trees on 56,167 hectares," Mr Thuan said.

After seven years of operation in Laos, the group

has invested about 2.263 billion Vietnamese dong in rubber trees on 26,807 hectares, or 47 percent of the approved land concession. The group plans to plant about 1,160 hectares of rubber trees this year.

Mr Thuan said his company's investment had helped 55,000 local people to get jobs and to end slash and burn farming, in line with government policy.

The company also helped local communities to build schools, health centres and other public facilities.

Lao officials said the government made the decision to allow overseas companies to invest in rubber plantations as one way to convert land into capital, which creates jobs and helps Lao people to rise above poverty.

They also said one of the government's goals in allowing foreign firms to invest in agriculture was for Lao people to learn from other countries about modern farming methods and technology to boost crop yields.