



THE KRONG YONG STORY TRAILS TRILOGY

THE FOREST CHAPTER

INDIGENOUS

STORIES



CULTURE



NATURE



WILDLIFE



**TRAVEL
GUIDE
BOOK 3**

WHERE THE BROTHERS FOUND THE PEOPLE AND THE CULTURE



The CPAs (Community Protected Area) keep forest culture, high forest density, and important cultural assets (village gates, rituals, river corridors, forest gathering, etc.) are:

[O'Kampha CPA](#)

[O'Tung CPA](#)

[Mondul Yorn CPA](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Forest Chapter. This chapter brings you into the forest landscapes managed by O’Kampha CPA, Mondul Yorn CPA, and the forest portions of O’Tung CPA.

These areas contain dense forests, ancestral trees, ritual sites, river corridors, and villages where cultural knowledge is tightly woven into daily life.

These forests are living archives of ancestral memory. Every path, tree, and river carries a story about how people have survived, gathered food, raised families, and honored the spirits that watch over the land.

This booklet shares the final chapter of the Two Brothers’ journey, where they learned about belonging, culture, and the responsibilities people carry when living closely with nature.



FUN FACT

“Samlor masau” is a thick, creamy vegetable soup made by mashing leafy greens with rice. The greens are traditionally gathered along streams. said to be the favorite dish of the Two Brothers and still eaten today in their memory.



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

The communities of the Brao and the Kavet areas live between riverbanks, forest clearings, and long trails that connect households and clans. Families practice rotational farming, forage seasonal plants, cook with bamboo, prepare traditional foods like Samlor Masau, and maintain rituals tied to the forest and the spirits believed to inhabit it.



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Cambodia is home to 24 ethnic groups, many of them indigenous to the land. The Brao live on both sides of the Cambodia Laos border, with around 60,000 people mainly in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng. The Brao include several sub groups such as Kreung, Kavet, Brao and Lun. Their cultural knowledge, forest practices and spiritual traditions shape much of the daily life in these community protected areas.

FUN FACT

Villages and nature mark boundaries between human life and unseen beings, and elders guide ceremonies that strengthen harmony between people and land.



TRAVEL WITH RESPECT

Forest paths pass through places of cultural and spiritual importance. Travelers are encouraged to move with awareness and care.

01. Respect Forest Gates

Do not enter forest gates without permission. These gates mark protected areas and signal places watched over by ancestral and forest spirits.

02. Stay Close to Your Guide

Follow your guide carefully, especially on small or hidden paths. Local knowledge helps ensure safe passage through dense forest terrain.

03. Keep Voices Low

Lower your voice when walking near large trees and forest interiors. Quiet movement shows respect for the forest and the life it shelters.

04. Ask to go Into Sacred Areas

Always ask before entering a spirit grove or resting beneath ancestral trees. These places carry deep cultural meaning and require careful behavior.

05. Do Not Take Forest Resources

Do not remove vines, seeds, or forest fruits without guidance. Harvesting is done selectively and with permission to maintain balance.

06. Respect Community Spaces

Move respectfully around traditional houses and communal areas. These spaces are part of daily life and are shared with care and responsibility.



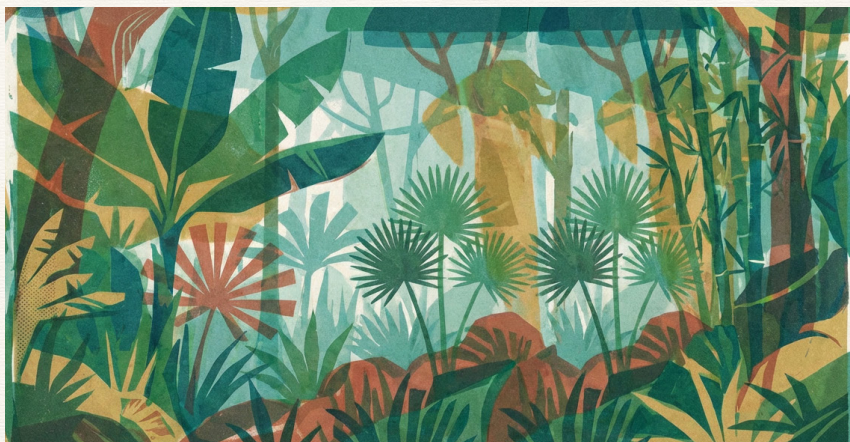
WHY THESE TRAILS EXIST

These trails were created together with forest communities to protect cultural identity, support eco-tourism led by locals, and share ancestral knowledge with visitors in a respectful way.



ORIGIN STORY

Returning Through the Forest



After learning from the mountains, the Two Brothers descended together into the forest. They remembered their grandmother's third teaching:

“The forest is where people become who they are. Listen to those who live with the trees.”

The forest was dense, alive with animals and layered sounds. Rivers threaded through the landscape, linking small settlements hidden beneath tall trees. Here, the brothers learned not only from the land, but from the people who lived with it. They observed how life follows the seasons, and how trees such as samrong feed families and must be carefully protected. As one village chief said, “Nature needs protection from us, and we need protection from nature.” Where others seek quick results, this culture treats fish and trees as family, a lesson passed from parents to children, generation after generation.

When the brothers reached a village, they were welcomed with warmth and stories. Forest gifts were shared among all, and jar wine was prepared in gratitude to nature. They cooked together, learning that what is gathered from the forest belongs to the whole community. As jar wine flowed, people spoke

Ask a Local (non verbal)

Point to the photo of the vong, the cross-shaped decoration once placed on top of houses. Locals may explain its meaning and invite you to ask more about traditional architecture, especially old community halls. You can even try sketching the different styles of vong you see.



ORIGIN STORY

of bamboo, a gift of the earth that provides food, tools, medicine, transport, and shelter. Its many forms carry many names: lao, small and bearing mushrooms; bó, tall and strong; rechhar, thorned and growing by rivers; and anglais, used to guide bamboo rafts across long distances. Like bamboo, the Brao and Kavet are flexible yet strong, resilient through change, shaped by the land that sustains them.

The brothers spent time with families who taught them how to walk softly, how to greet elders, and how to make offerings before entering important forest areas. They were shown face tattoos once worn by grandmothers, and elephant tusks used as earrings. In return, the brothers shared their own skills, teaching how to make a sna, a traditional bow and arrow shaped from wood and buffalo horn. Together, they carved gourd bottles inspired by the halem of the Haleung tree. These designs, first created by Krong and Yong, are still carved today, passed down through generations as a sign of devotion to this sacred tree.

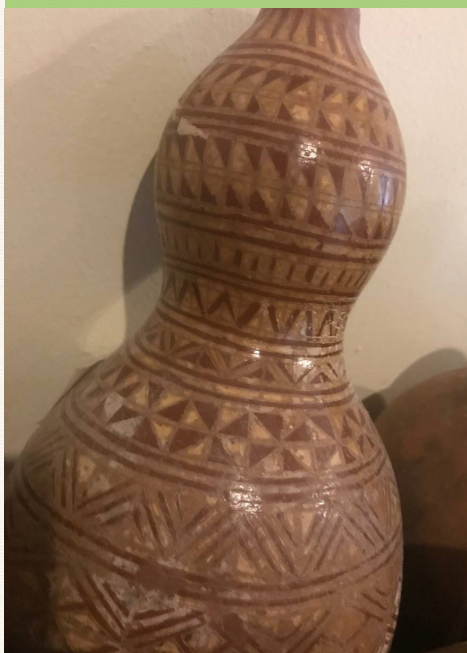
They learned how to prepare bamboo food, how to gather safely, and how to read signs in plants and animal behavior. Together, they discovered that food tastes fresher in nature, and richer when cooked and shared in community.

Through these moments, the forest revealed the meaning of community. The brothers carried these teachings forward and shared them with others: sharing, patience, interdependence, and memory. These experiences shaped their journey, showing them how people and land belong to one another.

Curious to continue the story? Follow the paths of Krong and Yong. With respect, locals may guide you to elders and to the stones that still mark their presence across Virachey.

Small Activity

Sit beneath a tree and listen. Local families listen to the forest to understand what is happening around them. The wind in the leaves, the calls of animals, and the quiet in between carry signs of time and change, linking the world of the Two Brothers to life today.



A DAY IN THE FOREST COMMUNITIES

Forest life moves with the cycle of plants, rivers, and daily gathering.

EVERYDAY PRACTICES

01. Preparing Rice Wine

“Kavay chhoy” is the preparation of rice wine for ceremonies and gatherings. It is used to welcome newcomers and to ask permission from arak dei and arak teuk for staying on the land.



02. Bamboo Cooking

Sticky rice and vegetables are cooked inside bamboo, knowing how to control fire and timing to prepare food safely and with care.



03. Gathering Forest Foods

Forest vegetables and edible leaves are collected for traditional dishes such as Cha Nang made with black bean leaves, animal skin, and bamboo shoots, Samlor Doch with gourd, cucumber, and eggplant tips, and Lap, a dish made with blackened rice also common in Lao PDR.



04. Making Natural Tools

Pipes, baskets, and everyday tools are made from bamboo and forest vines using skills passed down through generations.



05. Walking Forest Trails

Daily life includes walking forest paths to neighboring villages, maintaining social ties and shared responsibilities.



06. Gathering Medicinal Plants

Leaves and bark are collected for traditional healing, following knowledge of seasons and plant health.

07. Harvesting Black Mushrooms

Black mushrooms growing on bamboo, known as “Cobra” or “Lyng zhy” in Chinese medicine, are gathered and sold to middlemen, forming an important source of livelihood.



08. Reading Gate Carvings

Village gate carvings are observed and understood as markers of protection, identity, and community boundaries.

09. Rotational Forest Farming

Small forest plots are farmed in rotation, allowing the land to regenerate while growing mixed crops such as sesame, luffa, gourd, rice, chili, and lemongrass.



Cultural Note

Brao communities are highly egalitarian. Rituals can be led by any community member, young or old, male or female. Teenagers from Brao, Lun and Kreung communities (not kavet) often build their own small houses nearby around the age of fourteen, learning responsibility and independence early.



Tip: Becoming Part of the Community

The first day is for arrival and listening as a guest. The second day is for joining in and supporting the community through small acts of help.

FOREST CULTURE

Forests are more than resources. They are living spaces shared between people, ancestors, and spirits.

For forest communities, the forest is not just a place to pass through, but a living world full of relationships and memory. Certain trees are protected as ancestral trees, believed to watch over families and carry the presence of those who came before. Rivers wind through the forest, linking villages, family lines, and clan histories, while paths and clearings hold stories that have been told and retold over generations.

The forest also shapes everyday life in practical and meaningful ways. Village gates mark the threshold between worlds and are believed to offer spiritual protection to those who pass beneath them. Bamboo appears everywhere, providing food, tools, shelter, and instruments, while the forest itself offers both nourishment and healing through its plants, animals, and waters. Stories are tied to specific trees, stones, and paths, turning the landscape into a shared storybook that teaches care, respect, and belonging.



“Walk with respect, for the forest remembers.”

RESPECT IN FOREST AREAS

Forest etiquette is shaped by centuries of cultural practice.



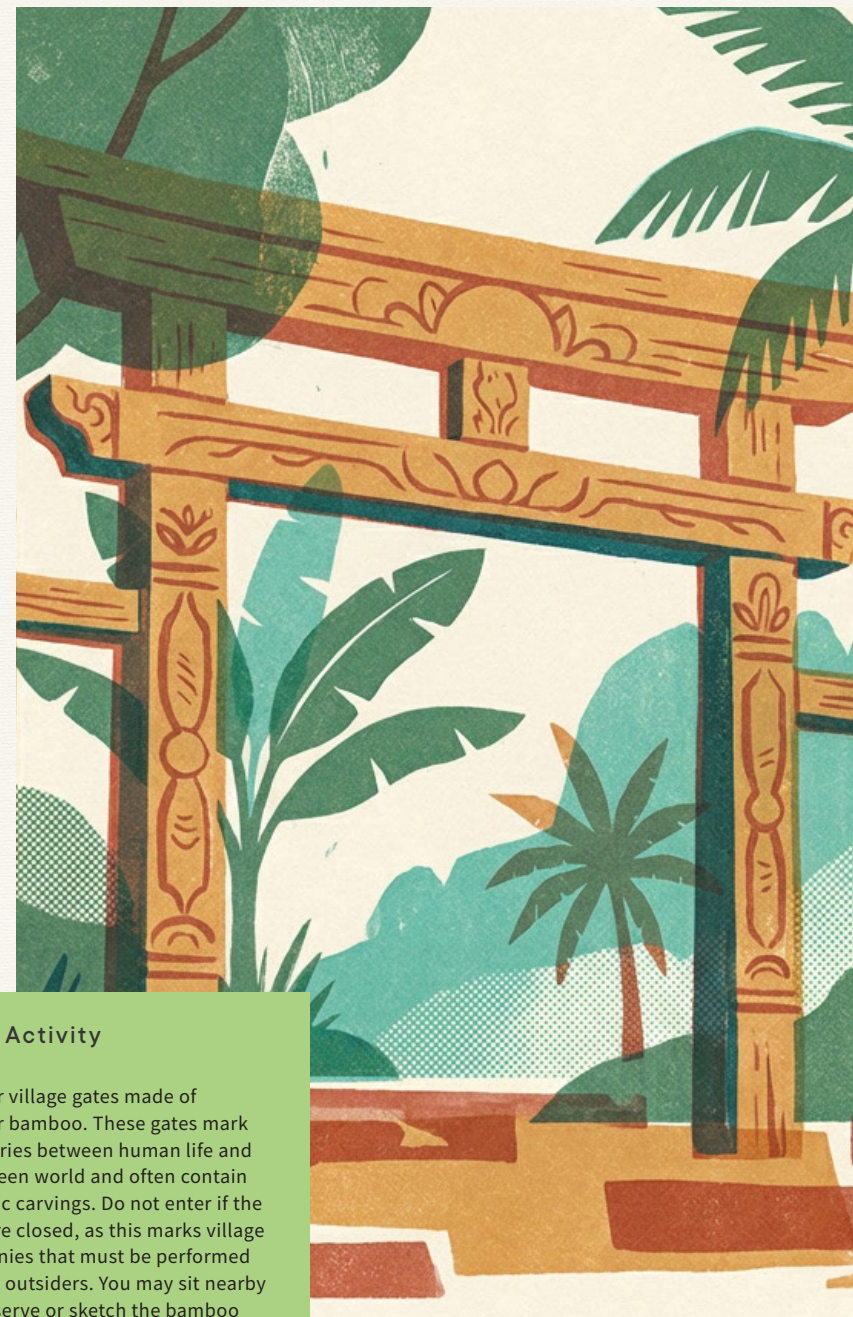
Do

- Walk quietly under large or different-looking trees to not upset their spirits
- Ask before entering ritual areas or groves
- Follow the lead of elders when moving through dense areas
- Observe offerings without touching them



Do Not

- Cross village gates without guidance. During ceremonies such as Saen Phum, outsiders are not permitted to enter
- Touch carved tree logs or banana trunks as they are spiritual offerings
- Take forest fruits without permission
- Cut down trees for any reason
- Pass nearby unusually long types of bamboo, as they are believed to pass bad luck
- Take photos of big stones or trees which might contain powerful spirits (in doubt, always ask first)



Small Activity

Look for village gates made of wood or bamboo. These gates mark boundaries between human life and the unseen world and often contain symbolic carvings. Do not enter if the gates are closed, as this marks village ceremonies that must be performed without outsiders. You may sit nearby and observe or sketch the bamboo patterns woven into the gates.



FIELD GUIDE: WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Landscape Features

- Dense evergreen forest with layered canopies
- Rivers cutting through forest villages
- Ancestral trees with cultural significance
- Village gates marking the boundary between human life and spirit territory
- Shaded forest paths used for gathering and ritual movement

Wildlife: Primates

- Yellow cheeked crested gibbon (*Nomascus gabriellae*) calling from tall trees
- Long tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*) near fruiting trees

Birds

- Great hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) gliding across forest canopy
- Asian barred owlet (*Glaucidium cuculoides*) calling at dusk
- Green imperial pigeon (*Ducula aenea*) feeding in high branches
- Kingfisher species along forest rivers

Mammals

- Black giant squirrel (*Ratufa bicolor*) leaping between branches
- Sambar deer (*Rusa unicolor*) in forest clearings
- Asian palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) searching for fruit at night

Reptiles and Amphibians

- Tokay gecko (*Gekko gekko*) on tree trunks
- Tree frogs near moist areas
- Water snakes in shallower river sections

Plants

- Bark and roots used for traditional healing
- Old growth hardwood trees important for ceremonies, especially Chrey, or Banyan trees, which are believed to house very powerful spirits
- Bamboo varieties used for cooking, carrying and musical instruments

BAMBOO, FOOD, AND FOREST TRADITIONS

Bamboo has a central role in forest communities.

Food Traditions

Food in the forest is closely tied to place, season, and shared moments. Vegetables are often cooked inside bamboo tubes, creating dishes such as the much-loved “prong”, where flavors deepen slowly over fire. River vegetables become nourishing soups, enriched with forest herbs and sun-dried flowers gathered along familiar paths. Rice wine is prepared for gatherings and rituals, marking moments of welcome, gratitude, and connection.

One important forest ingredient is “slak chanang”, the leaves used to make traditional chanang soup. This dish carries cultural meaning and is prepared during gatherings and special occasions, bringing families together around food that reflects both the forest and the stories tied to it.



Cultural Uses of Bamboo

Bamboo holds both practical and symbolic meaning in daily life. It is used to build houses, weave baskets, carve pipes, shape tools, and cook meals, while its young shoots remain an important seasonal food. Bamboo is also transformed into musical instruments, known as chingrin in Kavet and kongtong in Brao, filling gatherings with sound and rhythm.

Bamboo basket backpacks, called “réu”, have become a strong symbol of Indigenous culture. In earlier generations, communities moved every two years, and bamboo houses allowed them to rebuild quickly while carrying their cultural practices with them. Through bamboo, food traditions, rituals, and ways of living continue to be passed down, flexible yet enduring, much like the forest itself.



Traditional Tobacco and Local Expertise:

Visitors may notice elders preparing or smoking traditional tobacco, a practice deeply rooted in forest culture. Leaves are dried for four nights, chopped, then dried for one day in the sun. Bamboo collected in the forest is roasted until fully dry, then used to store the tobacco for up to a year.

One of the respected figures who shared this knowledge is Táí kálem, an elder known for her hand rolled tobacco pipe and her deep understanding of forest traditions.



Ask a Local (non verbal)

Point to the hornbill illustration and make a gentle flying gesture. Locals may point toward areas where hornbills are often seen.



SPIRITS, TREES, AND CULTURAL SITES

Traditional Cultural Knowledge



Ritual Practices

Rituals in the forest may include drinking jar wine, burning incense, lighting small candles, offering traditional tobacco, and speaking specific chants to ask for permission or protection. These practices can be performed by anyone, as Brao communities are highly egalitarian. Rituals are also carried out to call the spirits of crops back to the farm, with a chicken offered in return for their help and guidance.

Tree Spirits

Some large trees are believed to shelter ancestral presence. Travelers approach these trees in silence, showing respect for the spirits said to dwell within them.



Water Spirits

Rivers and small waterfalls within the forest are often associated with protective spirits. These spirits are believed to maintain balance, health, and harmony between people and the natural world.

Village Gates

Village gates made of wood or bamboo symbolically protect the community. They mark the transition between the human world and the world of spirits, reminding those who pass through to move with care and respect.



Cultural Sites

The forest holds many important cultural sites. These include traditional forest cemeteries, where loved ones are buried with cherished belongings to accompany them into the next life; stones used for offerings; trees linked to stories of powerful spirits; meeting houses where elders gather and ceremonies take place; and gongs used during celebrations and funerals. Celebrations may require at least five gongs, while funerals can involve up to thirteen.

Visitors are welcome to observe with guidance, but should never enter ritual areas without permission.



Gongs

Tay gongs are believed to be possessed by powerful spirits and are cared for by families in rotation. Some gongs were once buried because their power was considered too strong. During colonial times, attempts to remove them were said to fail, as vehicles repeatedly broke down and the gongs always returned. If someone becomes ill due to a gong's power, a buffalo may be offered to restore balance.

Selling a tay gong is taboo. When sales did occur, the money had to be shared equally among the village, or misfortune was believed to follow. For this reason, the gongs have never traveled far.

FOREST SIGNS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

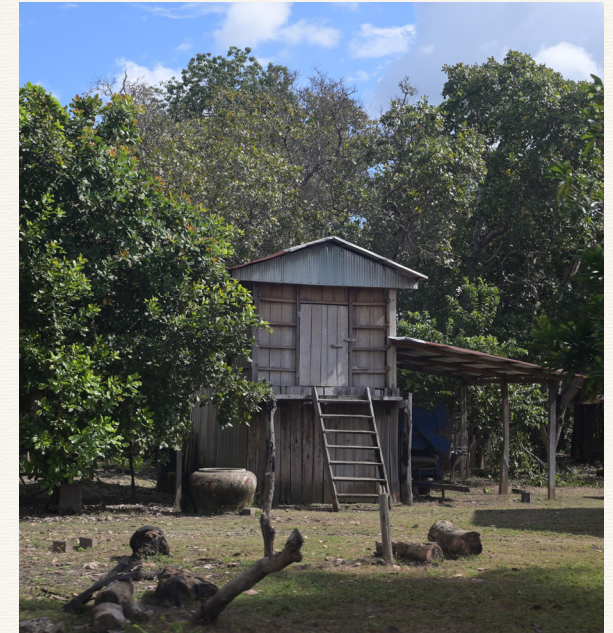
Forest families use subtle signs to understand the land, reading changes in sound, movement, and growth as part of everyday life. This knowledge helps guide travel, gathering, and care for the forest across seasons.

FOREST INDICATORS

The forest speaks through many signals. The calls of Chem Kalong birds grow more frequent as rain approaches, while gibbons singing from lower trees during cool mornings often signal stable weather outside the monsoon season. Cicada activity increases with seasonal change, and certain mushrooms appear only during the rainy months on rocks, tree bark, and bamboo. Leaves may curl slightly before strong sun, and when birds suddenly fall quiet, it can indicate a predator nearby. These signs are carefully observed and shared, helping families move safely and attentively through the forest.

COMMUNITY PRACTICES

Daily practices are shaped by this close reading of nature. Gathering sites are rotated to give plants time to recover, ensuring long-term balance. Roots and bark are collected only by trained elders who understand how to harvest without harming the forest. Ritual sites are entered only with permission, reinforcing respect for places that hold spiritual and cultural significance.



TRADITIONAL HOUSES

Traditional forest houses are built for living, resting, and protection, not for showing wealth or status. Their simple organization supports calm daily life and helps prevent harm to people and animals.

Inside, space is clearly defined. Sleeping areas are respected, the hearth sits at the center for cooking and gathering, and storage is limited to essential items. Certain actions and spaces follow spiritual and social rules, guiding how the house is used.

The house follows a rhythm shaped by nature rather than fixed schedules. Closely linked to nearby farms, fields are worked and then left to rest and regenerate, reflecting a way of living that respects the land and its cycles.



MAP OF VIRACHEY

The map on the next page shows the Community Protected Areas in and around Virachey National Park that form the Krong Yong Story Trails. Rivers, waterfalls, forests, and villages mark places of cultural, spiritual, and ecological importance. These landscapes are protected and cared for by Indigenous communities who act as guardians of the land. The map and booklets together guide you through these living stories.

In the forest regions on the map, are where the Two Brothers learned from families who live with the forest. They discovered how community, food, ritual, and land shape identity. This chapter marks not the end of the journey, but a passage from ancient time into living legend, still shaping Brao and Kavet culture and daily life. It speaks of a shared responsibility between people and nature, a close and reciprocal bond, and a harmony shaped by the land and its stories.

The Community Protected Areas in this region form part of the Western

connection to Virachey National Park and play an important role in protecting forest biodiversity and cultural knowledge. For travelers, this forest chapter offers understanding, belonging, and a deeper appreciation of the cultural richness of these communities.

This completes the Krong Yong Story Trails, yet the path continues beyond the page, inviting you to keep exploring with curiosity, respect, and care for the living forest around you.



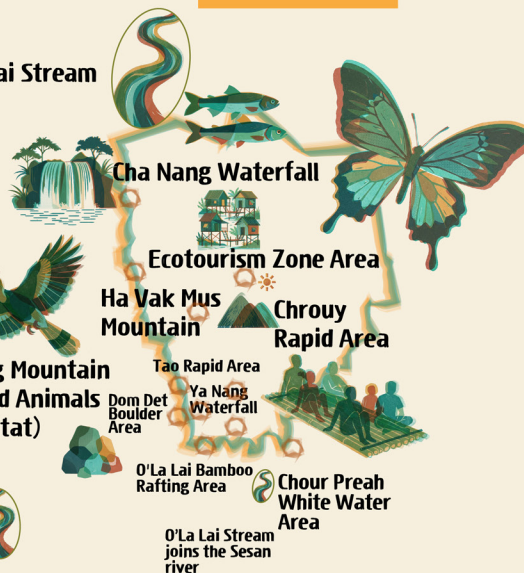
1 O'CHAY

Birding area along O'Chay Stream



2 O'TUNG

O'La Lai Stream



3 O'KAMPHA

O'Katrem Stream

Rolork Mountain

Krang Mountain



Veal Leang Oung Grasslands & Boulder Area

MONDULYORN

O'TABOK

KRONG YONG MAP



Map of Cambodia



Map of Virachey National Park with Community protected areas

4 MONDULYORN

Meay Mountain

O'Tabouk Stream

Yak krong

Prao Mountain Sacred Place

Mondulyorn Village

5 O'TABOK

Mondulyorn Village

Pok Leang Ghaio Mountain

Veal Veul Savanna grassland

Pan Dai Sacred Place

BRAO AND KAVET WORDS TO LEARN



Useful Expressions

- Tree - “Term long”
- River - “Tanei”
- Bamboo - “Bor”
- Rice - “Ork”
- Food - “Chana”
- Hungry - “Pangout”
- Rice wine - “Torvae term”
- Love - “Mert”
- Delicious - “Nheum”
- Cheer - “Kanté” (in Brao) and “Katrouk” (in Kavet)



EXPERIENCES YOU CAN ENJOY IN THE FOREST REGION

Activities available in O’Kampha CPA, Mondul Yorn CPA, and O’Tung CPA:



Activities Around the Forests

The forest region offers opportunities to explore daily life, ritual, and the deep relationship between people and the land. Guided **spiritual forest walks** invite visitors to move slowly through protected areas, learning how trees, paths, and waterways are understood and respected by local communities. Visits to **village gates** reveal their symbolic meanings, while time spent under ancestral trees offers moments of quiet listening and reflection guided by local knowledge.

Hands-on experiences introduce forest-based skills and traditions. Visitors may join **bamboo cooking workshops**, learn about **bamboo gathering and craft**, and observe demonstrations of forest food gathering using leaves, roots, and fruits. **Rice wine blessing** ceremonies offer a chance to share stories while drinking collectively, and when invited, guests may participate in seasonal **ceremonies** accompanied by the iconic five gongs playing. Other experiences include visits to community **cemeteries** with explanations of customs, traditional **music**

demonstrations featuring instruments such as the “Agrrr”, a drum made from anaconda skin, and gentle river activities like **kayaking** or **swimming** in safe forest corridors.

Visit the home of expert bamboo weavers Chheourh T’leuk and Ron Phan in Mondulryon for a demonstration of traditional bamboo basket-backpack weaving. Continue with a scenic walk past cashew fields and a sunrise viewpoint to the master weavers’ house of Mao Chhroeuch and her daughter Doro, overlooking the river and reed fields. Doro’s husband is a traditional blacksmith making knives.



Additional experiences may be available across other Community Protected Areas in the region.

To experience all activities in the region, collect all three booklets. Each chapter offers unique cultural and nature-based experiences.



YOUR SPACE

SKETCH OR WRITE YOUR TRAVEL PLANS, THOUGHTS OR MEMORIES



CONNECTION TO VIRACHEY NATIONAL PARK

These CPAs safeguard some of the forest areas located along the western and southern edges of Virachey National Park.

They help protect spiritual forests, regulate gathering pressure, preserve old-growth trees, and maintain biodiversity corridors essential for wildlife movement between the CPAs and the national park.

These communities play a key role in conservation by managing forests sustainably and sharing cultural teachings with visitors.

Conservation in These Communities

Local families protect their forests through:

- rotational gathering that allows plants to regrow
- careful bamboo harvesting
- protecting key wildlife habitats
- maintaining spiritual groves and ancestral trees
- keeping rivers clean
- teaching younger generations about the land
- hosting visitors respectfully, so tourism supports conservation instead of harming it

Your visit contributes to these efforts and supports community-led eco-tourism in one of Cambodia's last great wilderness areas.



You now hold the Forest Chapter of the Krong Yong Story Trails.

Thank you for traveling with respect, curiosity, and care for the land and its people.

Credits

Created with guidance from elders, cultural knowledge keepers, and leaders from the forest communities, in collaboration with IUCN, CPA communities, and Itonami.

All content in this booklet reflects traditional knowledge, ancestral wisdom, and local storytelling that belongs to the Indigenous communities themselves.

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AN INITIATIVE OF IUCN IN COLLABORATION WITH INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES IN VIRACHEY

<https://iucn.org/>