Objectives

To enhance students’ awareness of the value of heritage sites and the importance of protecting them, and to introduce students to the issues surrounding tourism at heritage sites and in heritage management.

Activities

1. Warm-up question and answer session

In order to enable the students to understand what spiritual meaning Vat Phou had for people in the past (and continues to have today), the teacher should relate the topic to the student’s daily lives. The teacher should ask the students a number of questions about temples that they have been to and the rules surrounding visiting temples.

For example:

• Which temple do you (or your family) visit most regularly?
• What do you like about the temple?
• What are some of the things you see at the temple?
• Is your temple crowded?
• Do you kneel down in the temple? (Why/Why not?)

By drawing on the students’ existing knowledge, these questions will spark interest in the topic and will help the students to see their everyday temple activities from an outsider’s perspective.

2. Pictures and examples

If the class is unable to visit Champasak/Vat Phou, the teacher should show the students photographs and drawings of Vat Phou (and a DVD or video, if available). The teacher should divide the class into groups and give them written information about Vat Phou to read (such as that provided in this activity sheet) and discuss in
groups why Vat Phou is a heritage site. The groups should all report their findings back to the rest of the class. The teacher should also give the class examples of cases in which tourists have behaved correctly and incorrectly when visiting heritage sites, explanations of why tourists sometimes behave incorrectly, and describe the potential consequences of incorrect behaviour for the heritage site. For example, the teacher could explain that some visitors climb on the ruins because they do not know that it is disrespectful and harmful to the buildings. The teacher could explain that further damage to the site would mean that future visitors would then be unable to see these historic buildings. The class should then discuss the kinds of behaviour that are acceptable and unacceptable at Vat Phou and similar sites in the region.

3. Role-plays

The teacher should ask each group to make up a story and characters. The story should be about visiting Vat Phou and should include local characters (such as a guesthouse owner) and visitors (tourists: who behave both correctly and incorrectly). Each group should then acts-out their skit for the rest of the class.

Note: The students should be encouraged to make the skits funny and enjoyable (both for the performers and for the audience).

Synthesis

After each group has performed their skit, the class should discuss what the theme of each performance was and what they learned. The class should then discuss what can be done to make sure visitors behave appropriately at heritage sites such as Vat Phou.

The benefits of using drama as a teaching tool

Drama and role-plays assist students to:
• Gain insight into history and heritage and gain a new perspective of the world around them.
• Understand themselves and others better: as a means of exploring moral dilemmas and challenging stereotypes.
• Develop verbal and communication skills.
• Learn to work in teams.
• Solve problems and make decisions.
• Build their self-confidence.
Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape: World Heritage Site

Located in southwestern Lao PDR, the Champasak plain is a living cultural landscape. Designed to express the Hindu vision of accord between nature and humanity, it has remained essentially unchanged for over one thousand years. The Vat Phou Temple Complex is located within this cultural landscape. The complex dates from the 7th century AD but the buildings still in existence date mostly from the 11th and 12th centuries. The complex was converted from Hinduism to Buddhism in the 13th Century AD. Although in ruins, Vat Phou still plays an important role in religious life today.

Of all the Khmer temples, Vat Phou is considered to be the most attractive because of its setting. It is built at the foot of a mountain on six different levels connected by steps and a central walkway.

Inscribed on the World Heritage list in 2001, the site bears exceptional testimony to the cultures of South-east Asia and is an outstanding example of the integration of a symbolic structure of great spiritual significance within its natural surroundings.

Tourism at World Heritage Sites

Benefits
- An alternative source (to traditional forms of employment) of livelihoods and income.
- A source of funding for the restoration and maintenance of World Heritage sites.

Threats
- Tourists put physical pressure on sites by walking on them or touching them.
- Cultures are affected by tourists (for example, festivals and crafts are modified to suit the tastes and schedules of tourists).
- Tourists who are not aware of cultural norms may dress or act inappropriately - causing offence and gradually wearing away traditional modes of conduct.
- Foreign ownership of tourism businesses takes the benefits of tourism from local communities.
- Local resources (such as water, land and food) are dedicated to the tourism industry instead of directly towards meeting the needs of the local community.
For further information about Vat Phou and the impact of tourism on World Heritage see the following:

Publications:
IMPACT: Tourism and Heritage Site Management in Luang Prabang Lao PDR, Office of the UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 2004

Websites:
- http://www.oas.org/TOURISM/docnet/Iatc3en.htm
- http://whc.unesco.org/sites/481.htm

World Heritage in Young
Southeast Asian Hands
Second Sub-Regional Workshop: Introducing the Arts for Teaching on the Historic Environment
Heritage Education art Activity Sheets

Office of the UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok, Thailand
2004