



## FAST FACTS

### Official Name

Lao People's  
Democratic  
Republic

### Capital City

Vientiane

### Currency

Lao Kip (US Dollar  
and Thai Baht  
accepted)

### Official Language

Lao

### Population

6,7 million

### Total Area

236,800 km<sup>2</sup>

### Boundaries:

Myanmar,  
Cambodia, China,  
Thailand and  
Vietnam

## LAOS DESTINATION INFORMATION

### *Sabaidee and welcome to Laos!*

Laos is an incredible destination with a myriad of sites of natural splendour. Described by the BBC as the amazon of Asia, this elongated country features waterfalls, dense forests, rivers, caves, mountains, plateaus, temples, elephants, the largest spider in the world, and much more. The people are genuine and welcoming, and although their levels of English aren't very strong, their continuous smiles are universally contagious. As the least visited country in Indochina, Laos offers a plethora of off-the-beaten-track adventures.

## GEOGRAPHY

Laos is a landlocked country and shares borders with Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and China. The majority of its western border is controlled by the Mekong river, that runs from the far north of the country, from China, along Myanmar and Thailand, and down into Cambodia. From the mountainous north, to the plains of the south, there are numerous sites of natural beauty, coupled with cultural heritage that dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. For travelers bound by time constraints, flights are available between all the main destinations. For those with a bit more time, driving through the country offers many scenic views, and a shift in landscape, as the Mekong River gets larger.

## PEOPLE

The ethnicities of Laos are split between the lowland, midland, and highland peoples. The Lao are some of the most genuine and authentic people one can meet in Asia. With an incredibly relaxed demeanour, they tend to take life as it comes, and enjoy discussing the culinary possibilities of the day. They also enjoy celebrating weddings and other festivals, and welcomingly invite any passers-by to join them with celebratory cheers of their local whiskey, Lao Lao. Traveling through Laos, you are guaranteed to meet unpretentious people who look at life and work from a very different perspective than we are used to in the west.

## LAOS DESTINATIONS

It would be our pleasure to provide you with information of the entire country, but that would make enough for a whole book. Therefore, we stuck to the most important and developed destinations in the country. If you wish to receive details on one of the other beautiful destinations in the country, please contact our office in Vientiane.

### Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang is located in northern Lao PDR and is quickly becoming a tourism and commercial center. Luang Prabang town is the ancient royal capital of Lao PDR and is a beautiful, quiet city bordered by green hills. The town is surrounded by the Mekong and Khan rivers, and the famous Phousi Mountain is located at its center, next to the old royal palace. Luang Prabang

**Laos shares  
borders**

with Thailand,  
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and China



has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the wats, streets, and historical buildings in the town have been preserved and carefully upgraded.

The first Lao kingdom, Lane Xang, was consolidated here in 1353 by the Khmer supported conqueror Fa Ngum. At that time it was known as Muang Sawa. In 1357 the name was changed to Muang Xieng Thong (Gold City District), but some time after King Fa Ngum accepted a Sinhalese Buddha image called Pha Bang (Large Holy Image) as a gift from the Khmer monarchy, the city-state became known as Luang (Great or Royal) Prabang. Luang Prabang remained the capital of Lane Xang until King Phothisarath moved the administrative seat to Vientiane in 1545. However, throughout the Lane Xang period, Luang Prabang was considered the main source of monarchical power. When Lane Xang broke up following the death of King Sulinyavongsa in 1694, one of Sulinya's grandsons set up an independent kingdom in Luang Prabang, which competed with kingdoms in Vientiane and Champassak. From then on, the Luang Prabang monarchy was so weak that it was forced to pay tribute at various times to the Siamese, Burmese and Vietnamese. After a particularly destructive attack by the Black Flag wing of the Chinese Haw in 1887, the Luang Prabang kingdom chose to accept French protection, and a French commissariat was established in the royal capital. The French allowed Lao PDR to retain the Luang Prabang monarchy, however, as did the fledgling independent governments that followed; it wasn't until the Pathet Lao took over in 1975 that the monarchy was finally dissolved.

The majority of the people living in the province are farmers, except for those involved in commercial activities in Luang Prabang town. Although the town had developed an insular, subsistence economy in the past, this has changed greatly with improved transportation and tourism growth in the area.

Since the tourism sector of Luang Prabang has grown a lot, there are now many hotels and guesthouses situated. Even more hotels and guesthouses are to find in Vientiane.

## KHIRI PREFERED HOTELS

1. Amantaka, Luang Prabang
2. Hotel de la Paix, Luang Prabang
3. Riverside Boutique Hotel, Vang Vieng
4. Green Park Boutique Hotel, Vientiane
5. La Folie Lodge, 4000 Islands

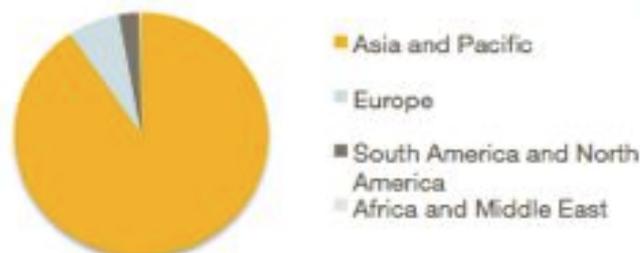
### *Number of Hotels, and Guesthouses per City*

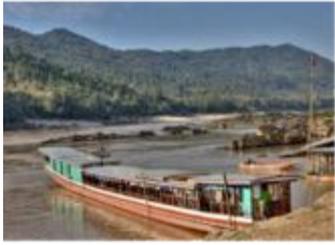
(By Tourism Laos, 2012)

City	No of accommodations
Vientiane	392
Luang Prabang	279
Champasak	203
Khammouane	85
Luang Namtha	77
Oudomxai	77
Saravane District	32
Xieng Khouang	29

These accommodations harbor many tourists that visit the beautiful country of Laos each year. Regarding the number of arriving tourists, Asia and the Pacific by far have the largest market share.

### Market Share of Tourist Arrivals by Region





## Transport

**Plane:** There are several daily flights between Vientiane and Luang Prabang. The ATR plane is used for at least two of these flights. The flight takes 35 minutes. Planes also fly from Luang Prabang to Luang Namtha and Houeixay, but these are not ATR flights.

Twice a week Lao Aviation flies from Luang Prabang to Chiang Mai, and there are also flights to Kunming, Nan and Dien Bien Phu. However, all plane schedules change regularly, and should always be checked in advance.

**Road:** traveling by road from Vientiane to Luang Prabang via Vieng takes about six to eight hours in a private car and from ten to fourteen hours by bus. There are also buses from Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang and Xam Neua via Nong Khiaw; to Luang Namtha, Muang Xai and Muong Ngoi via Pak Mong, and to Sayaboury.

**Boat:** while Luang Prabang used to be an important river transit point, boats are now more commonly used for leisure travel, or for local transportation. Travel by boat can be done from Muong Ngoi further north on the River Ou, as far as Hat Xa near Phongsaly. There is still regular transport between Houixay and Luang Prabang on the Mekong river by both slow boat and speedboat.

## Vientiane

Vientiane is one of the oldest Lao cities, and was settled almost a thousand years ago. Although at times it was an independent kingdom, Vientiane has also been controlled by the Vietnamese, Thai, Burmese and Khmer. The city became the capital of the Lane Xang Kingdom in the mid-16th century, and has remained the capital ever since.

For a capital city, Vientiane is remarkably quiet and laid-back. Compared to other southeast asian cities, it has virtually no traffic or pollution, and only becomes crowded during festivals. The city's downtown area is located near the Mekong river. The architecture in Vientiane is a mix of Lao, Chinese and western-style buildings, and there are many wats scattered throughout the town. The main streets in the downtown district are Samsenthai road, which is the prominent shopping area; Setthathirath road, where several of the most temples are located; and Fa Ngum road, which runs along the river and is lined with eucalyptus, pipal and teak trees. Branching off to the northeast, out of Muang Chanthabuli and into Muang Saisettha, is Lane Xang road, Vientiane's widest street. Thadeua road leads to the Friendship Bridge and the Thai border. Key landmarks in Vientiane are Paduxay, the triumphal arch, and That Luang, the golden stupa. Although there are no major parks in the city, there are several sports fields (including the national stadium) and many of the streets are lined with large trees. All government ministries are located in Vientiane, as are UN country offices, embassies, and over eighty international NGO offices.

A wide variety of services and amenities are available in Vientiane, including numerous restaurants, hotels and guesthouses, bars and discos. There are several large markets in town, including the Morning Market, Khua Din Market, Tong Khan Kham Market, and the That Luang Market.

## Transport

For traveling around Vientiane residents generally use their own bicycle, motorbike or car. Tuk tuks are widely available, and there are a growing number of public transit buses. Motorists should drive carefully and be alert at all times to poor road conditions and reckless drivers. Vehicles should be insured. In case of an accident, call the insurance company. Do not move the car or vehicle until the police have visited the site. Bicycles and motorbikes can be rented at many guesthouses. Cars can be rented from Vientiane Car Rental Co. Ltd, and Vientiane Motors International Center. Good general car servicing and repairs can

It's rumoured  
that Lao P.D.R.  
actually stands for  
Please Don't Rush





be done in Vientiane and a number of major manufacturers have dealerships in the border area with Thailand that are both affordable and accessible.

### Champassack

Champassack Province is one of the main political, cultural and economic centres of southern Lao PDR. This province boasts many historical sites, some from the pre-Angkor period. The capital of this province is Pakse, located at the confluence of the Mekong and Xe Don rivers. Pakse is developing fast economically, thanks to a certain extent to close connections and trade with Thailand and Vietnam. There are beautiful mountains, forests and waterfalls in Champassack, some of which are fairly easy to access. Boat trips, trekking, bicycling and fishing are common leisure activities.

### Transport

**Plane:** there is a daily ATR flight from Vientiane to Pakse.

**Road:** the journey from Vientiane to Pakse is 720 km by road and ten to twelve hours by car under very good conditions. There are daily buses to and from Vientiane that take between fourteen and twenty four hours. Ubon Ratchathani in Thailand is accessible by road and is an hour from Pakse. There are taxis that travel from Pakse to the Thai border.

**Boat:** it is possible to travel by boat from Pakse to Champassack town or to Don Khong. Boat travel has become less common as new roads and the bridge have been built.

### Saravane District

Saravane is located in southern Lao PDR and is home to part of the fertile Bolavens Plateau. The area has a strong agricultural base, supporting coffee, tea, cardamom, and rubber plantations. The Xe Xet river features several waterfalls that are popular leisure destinations. Several Mon-Khmer groups live in Saravane, including the Tahoy, Lavai, Katang, Alak, Laven, Ngai, Tong, Pako, Kanay, Katu and Kado. Saravane boasts 51% natural forest cover and the Phu Xieng Thong National Biodiversity Conservation Area covers 995 sq km adjacent to the Mekong River in the western part of the province. The opposite

bank is protected by Thailand's Pha Taem National Park; both sides are characterised by exposed sandstone ridges and outcroppings, some of which contain rock shelters with prehistoric paintings, interspersed with scrub and mixed monsoon deciduous forest. Rare animals thought to inhabit this area include elephant, gaur, banteng, douc langur, gibbon, Asiatic black bear, clouded leopard, tiger and Siamese crocodile.

## INSIDER'S PICK

*"In Laos, clients can travel around in comfortable and luxury tuk tuks that were designed by Khiri. The tuk tuks are being used for city tours and airport transfers in Luang Prabang, and for city tours to Angkor Wat and around Siem Reap town. Small lanes in town in and around temples can be traveled, and clients can quickly get off and on the tuk tuks to snap pictures or take part in any event along the way. Riding a well-appointed tuk tuk through exotic surroundings is one of the simple pleasures of a holiday in the Mekong area. It's not just about getting from 'A' to 'B', it's about enjoying your holiday in vintage style!"*



### Transport

**Plane:** there is a daily ATR flight from Vientiane to Pakse. Travelers must then continue their journey by road to reach Saravane.

**Road:** the 115 km road between Pakse and Saravane is in good condition and the trip 7-39 Provincial Profiles takes about one and a half hours. During the dry season it is also possible to travel from Vientiane to Saravane without passing through Pakse; after reaching the town of Napong, a short-cut can be taken to Saravane which will take 120 km off the total distance of the journey. (Vientiane to Saravane via Pakse is about an 800 km trip; via Napong it is about 680 km).

Buses travel frequently between Vientiane and Pakse; from Pakse buses to Saravane leave several times a day and the trip takes about two and a half hours. Buses also travel from Saravane to Sekong and Khong Xedon.

It is also possible to reach Saravane from Thailand via Ubon Ratchathani and then Pakse. Ubon Ratchathani has a domestic airport and there are daily flights to and from Bangkok.



### Khammouane

Khammouane Province is located in central Lao PDR, in an area of moderately high mountains sloping down to the Mekong valley. The fertile land here is well suited to plantations of rice, cabbage, sugar cane, and bananas. The population consists of Lao, Chinese, Vietnamese, Phuan, Tahoy, Kri, Katang, Maling and Hmong people.

Thakhek, the capital city, is a well-preserved small town, and Nakhon Phanom in Thailand is just across the Mekong from Thakhek.

The province is home to Khammouane Limestone National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NBCA), a huge wilderness area (1580 km<sup>2</sup>) of turquoise streams, monsoon forests and striking karst topography. Although much of the NBCA is inaccessible by road, the local people have nonetheless managed to reduce key forest-dependent species to very small numbers through hunting, mining and logging. The area is home to the endangered douc langur, François's langur and several other primate species. Forest - including extensive stands of wet and dry evergreen, old growth pine, cypress and riverside forest - covers an estimated 93% of the area, making it an incredibly important habitat for the country's wildlife heritage. Over a dozen threatened species live in the area, including elephants (one of the country's largest herds), giant muntjacs, gaurs, bantengs, Asiatic black bears, Malayan sun bears, clouded leopards, tigers and the saola (Vu Quang ox), a horned animal unknown to scientists before its discovery in 1992 in Vietnam's neighbouring Vu Quang Nature Reserve. The saola has since also been sighted on Lao PDR's Nakai plateau.



### Transport

**Plane:** there are no flights to Khammouane Province.

**Road:** there are frequent buses from Vientiane to Thakhek, and the journey takes about six to seven hours. Buses also travel up from the south frequently; it takes about two hours from Savannakhet to reach Thakhek. There are also daily buses from Thakhek to the Vietnamese border at Lak Sao.

**Boat:** ferries cross from Thakhek to the Thai side (Nakhon Phanom) of the Mekong frequently.

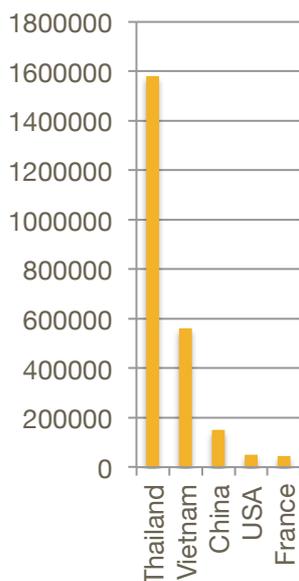
### Luang Namtha

Luang Namtha is located in northern Lao PDR and is bordered by Myanmar to the northwest, China to the north, Oudomxay to the south and east and Bokeo to the southwest. Luang Namtha is a mountainous province, with quite a substantial number of Lao Sung and other minorities. The provincial population is made up of thirty-nine ethnic groups (the largest number in the nation), including Hmong, Akha, Mien, Samtao, Thai Daeng, Thai Lu, Thai Neua, Thai Khao, Thai Kalom, Khamu, Lamet, Lao Loum, Shan and Yunnanese. As in Oudomxay Province, the





## Top 5 Source Markets in 2011



Chinese presence is increasing rapidly with the arrival of skilled laborers from Yunnan to work in construction and road building. The Chinese and Lao governments opened the border crossing at Boten to foreign travelers, making Luang Namtha a new gateway into the country and ushering in a new era of overland travel between China, Lao PDR and Thailand.

Luang Namtha's equally named capital is expanding rapidly as a center for commerce between China, Thailand and Laos. There are two town centers, one in the older, southern section of the district near the airfield and boat landing, and the second seven kilometers to the north where the highways come in from Muang Sing, Boten and Muang Xai. The province is home to the Nam Ha National Biodiversity Conservation Area, and is becoming well known as an eco-tourism destination.

### Transport

**Plane:** there are five flights a week from Vientiane to Luang Namtha. However, as these are not ATR flights, UNVs are not allowed to make use of this service.

**Road:** there are several daily buses from Luang Prabang to Luang Namtha via Oudomxay; the full journey takes about fifteen hours. There are also daily buses or 7-24 passenger trucks from Luang Namtha to Houixay, Boten (at the Chinese border), Muang Sing, and Xiengkong (at the Myanmar border).

### Oudomxai

This rugged province is wedged between Luang Prabang to the east, Phongsaly to the northeast, Luang Namtha to the northwest and Sayaboury to the south, with a small northern section that shares a border with China's Yunnan Province. Most of the provincial population of 211,000 is a mixture of some twentythree ethnic minorities, mainly Hmong, Akha, Mien, Phu Thai, Thai Dam, Thai Khao, Thai Lu, Thai Neua, Phuan, Khamu, Lamet, Lao Huay and Yunnanese Chinese (Haw). The Yunnanese presence has intensified with the influx of Chinese skilled laborers working in construction, as well as trades people from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan.

Because Oudomxay has a reasonably good road system, and because there is a constant flow of tourists traveling from Yunnan through Oudomxay to Thailand and Lao PDR, the province has been opening up and developing rapidly. However, some rural villages are extremely remote and remain inaccessible by road. The capital of Oudomxay is most commonly called Muang Xai, though some maps label it Oudomxay. Located in a valley at the base of the surrounding mountain range, Muang Xai has been growing steadily, and modern guesthouses now dot the main street. The large market in the center of town attracts people from all around the province; a wide variety of Chinese and Vietnamese products are sold at the market.

### Transport

**Plane:** there are five weekly flights between Vientiane and Oudomxay. The ATR plane is supposed to fly this route twice a week, but the schedule is not consistent and depends on the number of passengers. If the ATR is not being used, UNVs must travel to Luang Prabang and then to Oudomxay by road.

**Road:** travelers going to Oudomxay from Vientiane generally stop in Luang Prabang, then continue on the four to five hour journey from Luang Prabang to Oudomxay. The road from Luang Prabang is quite good and other roads are being upgraded. Buses and passenger trucks travel regularly from Oudomxay to Pakbeng; to Luang Namtha via Na Toei; to Muang Ngoi, Muang Khua, and Phongsaly. The road from Oudomxay to Beng has been repaired and the 60 km route can now be travelled much more quickly.

### Xieng Khouang

Xieng Khouang is situated in northeastern Lao PDR, bordered by Houaphanh to the north, Bolikhamsay to the south, Vietnam to the east and Luang Prabang to



the west. The province features high, green mountains, rugged karst formations, and fertile valleys. However, Xieng Khouang is one of the northern provinces that was most devastated by the war. Virtually every town and village in the province was bombed at some point between 1964 and 1973. It has also been the site of numerous ground battles fought over the last 150 years.

The province's population is mostly comprised of lowland Lao, Vietnamese, Thai Dam, Hmong and Phuan. The original capital, Xieng Khouang, was almost totally bombed, so the capital was moved to Phonsavanh after 1975. Near Phonsavanh is the Plain of Jars. The high altitude in central Xieng Khouang, including Phonsavanh and the Plain of Jars, means the province has a temperate climate - not too hot in the hot season, not too cold in the cool season and not too wet in the rainy season. Phonsavanh, Xieng Khouang's new capital, grew tremendously in the 1990s - there are now several paved streets lined with shops, a sprinkling of new concrete structures, two markets, a few government buildings, a bank and several modest hotels and guesthouses.

Traditionally, the area surrounding Phonsavanh and the former capital of Xieng Khouang has been a center of Phuan language and culture (part of the Thai-Kadai family, like Lao, Siamese and Thai tribals). The local Vietnamese (and to a lesser extent, Chinese) presence continues to increase.

### Transport

**Plane:** flights travel four times weekly from Vientiane to Xieng Khouang. However, these routes do not normally use the ATR plane and are therefore not open to UNVs.

**Road:** there are road links between Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Xam Neua, and the northern provinces of Lao PDR, but the roads are in poor condition, the traveling time is long, and some routes (to Luang Prabang and Vientiane) are unadvisable because of security considerations or impassable due to weather and road construction. UNVs must seek UN approval before traveling by road to Xieng Khouang; the journey takes about two days from Vientiane. Foreigners cannot enter Xieng Khouang from Vietnam unless a special permit is granted. From the Vietnamese border near Nonghet, it is about a four-hour drive to Phonsavanh. Travel time between provincial capital Phonsavanh and the district capitals varies between one hour for the closest, to four hours for the most distant. Buses or passenger trucks travel daily from Phonsavanh to the district capitals, although service to Muang Mokmay and Muang Nonghet may be limited.

### 4000 Islands / Si Phan Don

The Si Phan Don is a serene river archipelago in the south of Laos. An estimated 4000 islands protrude from the Mekong river before rainy season, about half of which submerge over the course of the summer months, while the river is in flood. Don Khong, Don Det, and Don Khon are the main islands to visit. One can travel by boat to the mighty Liphi waterfalls, which is also known as the Devil's Corridor. One can also kayak down to the border of Cambodia and if you're lucky, spot the endangered Irrawaddy freshwater dolphins. There are numerous French colonial sights to behold, such as the railway, as well as ancient Khmer ruins. For a local experience, the villagers are very accommodating and enjoy sharing a good drink and food.

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