



Luang Prabang & Around

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Best Places to Eat

- Dyen Sabai (p57)
- Le Banneton (p56)
- Tamarind (p57)
- Apsara (p57)
- Le Patio (p58)

Best Places to Stay

- La Résidence Phou Vao (p55)
- Le Sen Boutique Hotel (p54)
- Muang Lao Riverside Villa (p53)
- Apsara (p52)
- Xayana Guesthouse (p54)

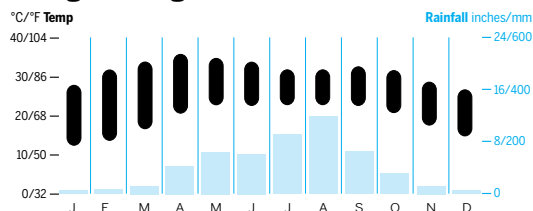
Why Go?

Languid and lovely Luang Prabang (ຫລວງພະບາງ) is one of the most alluring places in Southeast Asia. Nowhere else can lay claim to the city's old-world romance of 33 gilded wats, saffron-clad monks, faded Indochinese villas and exquisite Gallic cuisine. It's a unique place where time seems to stand still amid the breakneck pace of the surrounding region.

This Unesco-protected gem, which sits at the sacred confluence of the Mekong River and the Nam Khan (Khan River), has rightfully gained mythical status as a travellers' Shangri La, and since its airport opened a decade ago the town has seen a flood of investment, with once-leoprous French villas being revived as fabulous – though affordable – boutique hotels.

Beyond the evident history and heritage of the old town are aquamarine waterfalls, top trekking opportunities, meandering mountain bike trails, elephant camps, kayaking trips, river cruises and outstanding natural beauty – the whole ensemble encircled by hazy green mountains.

When to Go Luang Prabang



Nov–Feb The ideal season to visit weather-wise, but as this is no secret it's also peak tourist season.

Mar–May Hot season with hazy skies from slash and burn; some like to join in Pi Mai celebrations.

Jun–Oct The Wet season sees numbers and prices, plummet – great if you don't mind the odd downpour.

LUANG PRABANG

071 / POP 70,000

History

Legend has it that Luang Prabang's founder was Phunheu Nhanheu, a sexually ambiguous character with a bright red face and a stringy body. His/her ceremonial effigies are kept hidden within Wat Wisunarat, only appearing during Pi Mai (Lao New Year), but models are widely sold as souvenirs.

Known as Muang Sawa (Muang Sua) from 698, then Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (City of Gold) from the 11th century, a city-state here passed between the Nanzhao (Yunnanese), Khmer and greater Mongol empires over several centuries. It flourished at the heart of Lan Xang, following that kingdom's creation in 1353 by Khmer-supported conqueror Fa Ngum. In 1512, Lan Xang's King Visoun accepted the Pha Bang, a celebrated Buddha image, as a gift from the Khmer monarchy.



Luang Prabang & Around Highlights

- 1 Join the dawn call to alms that is the **tak bat** (p45) as locals give their daily offering to the monks of Luang Prabang
- 2 Cruise up the Mekong River to the **Pak Ou Caves**

(p63), a holy sight brimming with Buddha images

- 3 Plunge into the menthol-blue waters of the falls at **Tat Kuang Si** (p63), some of the most beautiful in all of Laos
- 4 Marvel at the sweeping

roof of **Wat Xieng Thong** (p42), the oldest and most beautiful temple in town

- 5 Go local on the banks of the Mekong or go gourmet in the old town: **Luang Prabang** is an epicurian delight (p55)