



Laos

856 / POP 6.9 MILLION

Includes ➔

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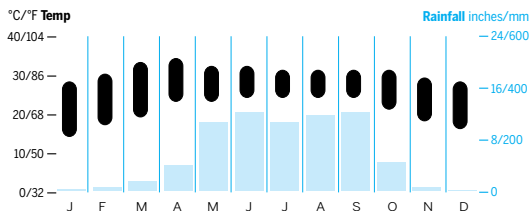
Why Go?

It's no accident that Laos appears as a favourite in many Southeast Asian odysseys, for this landlocked country lays claim to incredibly genuine people and the chance for your inner adventurer to let rip. The 'Land of a Million Elephants' oozes magic from the moment you spot a Hmong tribeswoman looming through the mist; trek through a glimmering rice paddy; or hear the dawn call of the endangered gibbon. But it's also a place to pamper yourself in a spa like a French colonial, or chill under a wood-blade fan in a delicious Gallic restaurant. 'Old World' affordable refinement is found in pockets across the country, especially in languid Vientiane and Unesco superstar Luang Prabang.

The country offers green tourism with excellent forest treks and tribal homestays operated by eco-responsible outfits. Be it flying along forest ziplines, exploring creepy subterranean river caves or tackling the jungle on motocross adventures, Laos will burn herself into your memory.

When to Go

Vientiane



Jan Cool-season breezes; even the normally sweltering south is pleasantly bearable.

Oct Cooling weather; locals celebrate the full moon and boat-racing festivals.

Nov & Dec Celebrations for Bun Pha That in November. Cool weather but peak prices in December.

Don't Miss

There's no better way to discover the real Laos than by trying a homestay. Beyond the cities, 80% of the population lives in rural villages and, with minimal impact on the community and the environment, you can experience an evening with them. Given Laos' rich ethnicity and varied geography no two homestays will be the same, but you can rely on a few commonalities: you'll be woken by children and the local rooster, communally bathe and eat by the fire, and be guaranteed one of your most memorable nights in this country.

ITINERARIES

One Week

After spending a few days in riverside Vientiane sampling its Soviet-Franco architecture, sophisticated bars and Asian-fusion cuisine, travel north three hours to the beautiful karst country of Vang Vieng, a former party town turned outdoor activity haven for cycling, climbing, trekking and ziplining. From here catch a bus to unforgettable Luang Prabang to experience its temples, crumbling villas, pampering spas, bike rides and Gallic cuisine.

Two Weeks

Follow the one-week itinerary, then take a two-day slow boat up the Mekong River to Huay Xai, having already booked yourself in for the memorable Gibbon Experience and its overnight stays in jungle treehouses. If you've got time head up to Luang Namtha for a trek in the wild Nam Ha National Protected Area, where you can also kayak and take a homestay with a number of great tour providers. From here you can fly back to Vientiane to catch your flight out.

Essential Outdoor Activities

National Protected Areas Trek the dense forests of 20 national protected areas spread across Laos.

Vang Vieng Go ape with the latest craze of ziplines.

The Loop This two-day adventure by motorbike through jungle and karst, frontier town and dam country, gets under Laos' skin.

Tha Khaek One of the most beautiful places in the country to climb limestone karsts.

Gibbon Experience Zipline through the jungle canopy with the Gibbon Experience.

AT A GLANCE

Currency Kip (K)

Language Lao

Money ATMs in major centres. Credit cards accepted in Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

Visas On arrival (valid for 30 days; US\$30 to US\$42 depending on which passport you hold).

Mobile phones Prepaid SIMs available for as little as 10,000K. Decent connections.

Fast Facts

Area 236,000 sq km

Capital Vientiane

Emergency Police ☎191

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	5730K
Cambodia	1000r	1192K
Euro	€1	8600K
Thailand	10B	2240K
UK	UK£1	12,250K
USA	US\$1	8025K

Daily Costs

Budget hotel room US\$10

Evening meal US\$5

Beer US\$1

Museum entrance US\$2

Entering the Country

There are more than a dozen border crossings into Laos from Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam. Frequent flights also connect Laos with neighbouring countries.