



Laos

📍 856 / POP 6.7 MILLION

Includes →

Vientiane.....	276
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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Tamarind (p302)
- ➔ Lao Kitchen (p283)
- ➔ Le Silapa (p283)
- ➔ L'Elephant (p302)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Auberge les 3 Nagas (p301)
- ➔ Apsara (p301)
- ➔ Inthira Hotel Sikotabang (p329)
- ➔ Mandala Boutique Hotel (p282)

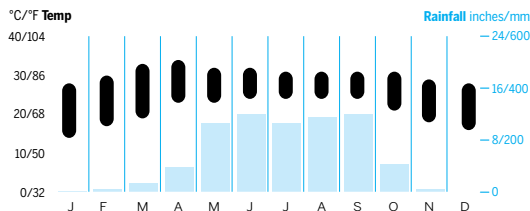
Why Go?

The 'Land of a Million Elephants' oozes magic the moment you spot a Hmong tribeswoman looming from the mist, trek through a glimmering rice paddy, or hear the sonorous call of one of the country's endangered gibbons. It's a place where it's easy to make a quick detour and find yourself well and truly off the traveller circuit: the snaking Mekong River runs through it all, alongside jagged limestone cliffs and brooding jungle. But it's also a place to luxuriate, pampering yourself like a French colonial in a spa, or chilling under a wood-blade fan in a top-notch Gallic restaurant. Old-world refinement is found in pockets right across the country, especially in languid Vientiane and legendary Luang Prabang.

Laos has also acquitted itself well to green tourism, harnessing forests with excellent treks and tribal homestays. Be it flying along mountain zip-lines, elephant riding, exploring subterranean caves or traversing the jungle via dirt-bike, Laos will indelibly burn itself into your memory.

When to Go

Vientiane



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

Oct Mercifully cool weather. Bun Awk Phansa sees candle-bearing boats floated down rivers.

Nov-Dec Bun That Luang celebrations in Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Cool weather.

Connections

Well-placed Laos is sandwiched between Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma) and China. Roads have improved over recent years thanks to the creation of Chinese trade routes, and many ailing public buses have also been updated. Air travel has progressed, with the national carrier, Lao Airlines, enjoying a fleet of nine new planes, better safety records and regular flights to Bangkok, Hanoi, Singapore and Siem Reap; its routes cover the entire country, making it easier than ever to see more in less time.

ITINERARIES

One Week

After spending a few days sampling the Soviet-Franco architecture, sophisticated bars and Asian-fusion cuisine of riverside **Vientiane**, travel north to the unforgettable ancient city of **Luang Prabang** to experience its temples, crumbling villas, pampering spas, myriad monks and Gallic cuisine.

Two Weeks

Fly to **Vientiane**, imbibe its fine accommodation and cuisine for a few days then head north to **Vang Vieng** for climbing, kayaking and tubing in serene karst scenery. Leisurely move on to **Luang Prabang**, the jewel of Southeast Asia and a place so bedecked with charming bakeries, temples, boutiques and restaurants you may not want to leave. After a few days here take a two-day slow boat up the Mekong River to **Huay Xai**, having already booked yourself in for the memorable Gibbon Experience (p323) and an overnight stay in a jungle tree house. If you've got time, head up to **Luang Namtha** for an ecoconscious trek in the wild **Nam Ha National Protected Area** (NPA). From here you can fly back to Vientiane to catch your flight out.

Internet Resources

- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/laos) Head to the Thorntree forum for the latest news from the road.
- ➔ **Ecotourism Laos** (www.ecotourismlaos.com) Focusing on trekking, the environment and eco-activities.
- ➔ **Lao Bumpkin** (www.laobumpkin.blogspot.com) Travel, food and all things Lao.
- ➔ **Lao National Tourism Authority** (www.tourismlaos.gov.la) Mostly up-to-date travel information from the government.

NEED TO KNOW

- ➔ **Currency** Kip (K)
- ➔ **Language** Lao
- ➔ **Money** Plenty of ATMs in every major town and city
- ➔ **Visas** 30-day visa available upon arrival
- ➔ **Mobile phones** Prepay SIM cards available across Laos for as little as 10,000K

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 236,000 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Vientiane
- ➔ **Emergency** Police ☎191

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	7250K
Cambodia	1000r	2020K
Euro Zone	€1	11,020k
Thailand	10B	2470K
UK	£1	13,365K
USA	US\$1	8025K
Vietnam	10,000d	3810K

Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Midrange hotel room** US\$20
- ➔ **Evening meal** US\$5–10
- ➔ **Museum admission** US\$1
- ➔ **Beer** US\$1–3 for a big bottle