



# Laos

## Includes »

Vientiane .....	282
Vang Vieng.....	294
Luang Prabang.....	298
Xieng Khuang Province.....	314
Luang Nam Tha Province.....	322
Bokeo Province .....	326
Savannakhet Province.....	335
Champasak Province .....	338
Understand Laos.....	351
Directory A-Z .....	357
Getting There & Away .....	362
Getting Around.....	363

## Best Places to Eat

- » Tamarind (p306)
- » L'Elephant Restaurant (p306)
- » La Terrasse (p288)
- » Jasmine Restaurant (p341)
- » Le Camargue (p288)

## Best Places to Stay

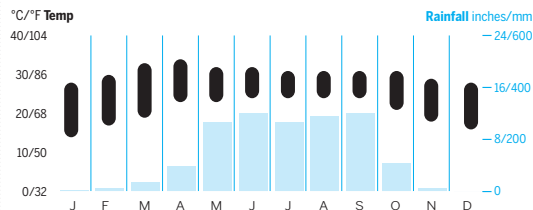
- » Auberge Les 3 Nagas (p304)
- » Apsara (p305)
- » Boat Landing Guest House & Restaurant (p323)
- » Auberge Sala Don Khone (p348)

## Why Go?

Imagine a country where your pulse relaxes, smiles are genuine and locals are still curious about you. A place where it's easy to make a quick detour and find yourself well and truly off the traveller circuit, in a landscape straight out of a daydream: jagged limestone cliffs, brooding jungle and the snaking Mekong River. Welcome to Laos, home to as many as 132 ethnic groups and a history steeped in war, imperialism and mysticism. Paddy fields glimmering in the post-monsoon light, Buddhist temples winking through morning mist as monks file past French colonial villas... Laos deserves all the hyperbole thrown at it, and more. Adrenaline junkies can lose themselves in underground river-caves, white-water rapids or jungle ziplines; wildlife nuts can trek through Southeast Asia's most pristine forests, still home to tigers and leopards. From hedonist to gourmand, every type of traveller seems to find what they're looking for here.

## When to Go

### Vientiane



**Jan** Cool-season breezes; even the infernal south is pleasant.

**Oct** Mercifully cool weather. Bun Awk Phansa sees the floating of candle-bearing boats down rivers.

**Nov-Dec** Bun That Luang sees 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 recently progressed, with the national carrier, Lao Airlines, enjoying a new fleet of planes, better safety records and daily flights to Bangkok, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur 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 in riverside **Vientiane** sampling its Soviet-Franco architecture, sophisticated bars and Asian-fusion cuisine, 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 up 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** and an overnight stay in a jungle tree house. If you've got time, head up to **Luang Nam Tha** 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

- » **Ecotourism Laos** ([www.ecotourismlaos.com](http://www.ecotourismlaos.com)) Focusing on trekking, the environment and eco-activities.
- » **Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Head to the Thorntree forum for the latest news from the road.
- » **Lao Bumpkin** ([www.laobumpkin.blogspot.com](http://www.laobumpkin.blogspot.com)) Travel, food and all things Lao.
- » **Lao National Tourism Authority** ([www.tourismlaos.gov.la](http://www.tourismlaos.gov.la)) Mostly up-to-date travel information from the government.
- » **Vientiane Times** ([www.vientianetimes.org.la](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la)) Website of the country's only English-language newspaper. Operated by 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
- » **Country Code** 856
- » **Population** 6.1 million

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	8600K
Canada	C\$1	8300K
Europe	€1	11,000k
Japan	¥100	10,000K
New Zealand	NZ\$1	6500K
UK	£1	13,100K
USA	US\$1	8000K

## Set Your Budget

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