



The Lao People's Democratic Republic
(Lao PDR)



(That Luang Stupa)

The Embassy of the Lao People's
Democratic Republic to the United
States of America

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Map of the Lao PDR

Lao PDR: a quick look at the country

Location: landlocked country bordered by China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar.
Area: 236,800 square Kilometers.
Climate : Tropical with rainy season from May to October.
Population: 5.9 million.
Density: 25 people per square kilometer.
Religion: Buddhism (Theravada Buddhism).
Language: Lao (English is widely understood in the cities)
Capital: Vientiane
Major cities: Vientiane
Savannakhet
Pakse
Luang Prabang

Main touristic sites:

Luangphabang, the charm and the serenity of the world heritage “an alive museum of the past ”.
Plain of Jars (Xiengkhouang) the 3,000 years stone jars.
That Luang Stupa and Patouxay (triumphal arch) Vientiane City.
Ruins of Wat Phu Champassak temple built from 6th to 8th centuries placed under the UNESCO’s list of the world heritage conservation and Khonephapheng Waterfall, the biggest waterfall of the Mekong river in Champassak province.

National currency: Kip

Time : GMT+7

5.9 million

IDD: Country code: 856

Area code: 21 Vientiane
41 Savannakhet city
31 Pakse city
71 Luang Prabang city

Lao PDR: People and Culture

People and Culture

The Lao PDR is a home of multiethnic people and multicultural society. It has long history of rich variety of cultures and customs.

1. People

The Lao PDR is composed of 49 ethnic groups.



The 49 ethnic groups speak different dialects which consist of 4 main linguistic families:

- Lao Tai family.
- Mone Khmer family.
- Tibeto Chinese family.
- Hmong Loumien family.

2. Culture

The Lao multiethnic people have their own civilization since the beginning of their existence with regards to their mode of practice of the agriculture, their lifestyle, their art and their dialects. The Lao multi ethnic groups practice different customs which coexist and complete with each other.

Religion: The original belief of the Lao multiethnic people was animism which was later influenced by Indian culture. The Brahmanism came next and followed by the Buddhism. Today about 65% of the Lao people are Hinayana Buddhists, though animism continues to coexist with Buddhism.

Language: Lao language is the national language. Except for those influenced by Pali or Sanskrit (Indian origin), the Lao national language is a monosyllable based dialect and the Lao letters are derived from Pali characters.

Lao PDR: History

History

1. A very long existence of human civilization.

The stone tools and other human traces discovered in many parts of the country, especially in Houaphan and Luang Prabang provinces are evidence of the presence of prehistoric man in the Lao territory at least 40,000 years ago. The Lao civilization is characterized by the influence of the Chinese and Indian cultures.

2. A long history of scattering independent princedoms and principalities:

At the beginning of its history, the Lao PDR had no central power to make it a single country. The Lao land was composed of many independent small states scattered in different parts of the valleys of the Mekong river, Southern China, North Eastern Thailand and some other parts of Indochina. The famous principality was Xiengthong which later became the capital of the Lao unified Lane Xang Kingdom.



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Plain of jars, Xiengkouang.
Photo: Toukham INTHAVONG

The word “Lane Xang” means a million elephants. The word “ Lane Xang” with another intonation means a grazingground for elephants. The kingdom of Lane Xang for many people can be interpreted as a land of a million elephants; for some historical study, it can be interpreted as a grazing ground for wild elephants because the capital of the Kingdom Luang Prabang was surrounded by fields for the pasture of wild elephants. The word “LAOS” has no meaning, it was used by mistake by the French during the colonial time. The exact word is “LAO”.



Wat Xiengthong (Luang Prabang) Ho Phakeo (Vientiane City)



That Luang in 1896 (Vientiane City) That Luang (present)

The That Luang Stupa is a Buddhist symbol. It is one of the greatest arts of the country. The Stupa is 45 m high and 49 m wide at its base. It is surrounded by 30 little stupas. The That Luang Stupa was constructed in 1566 over a little stupa previously existing in the place by the skilled technicians of the ancient Lane Xang Kingdom during the rule of the King Saya Sethathirath. It is believed that the little stupa previously existing is the symbol of the founding of Vientiane, “ the city of Sandal wood”, one of the Lao principalities existing before the unified Lane Xang Kingdom

3. A unified kingdom of “Lane Xang” 1353-1705

Fa Ngum (1316-1357) was the first King, who fought and succeeded in unifying the Lao small independent states into a single Kingdom called “Lane Xang” the land of a million elephants.

The successors of the king Fa Ngum consolidated the territory and built many temples, monasteries and developed Lane Xang into an important trading and cultural center. In 1560, King Soma Setthathirath moved the capital to Vientiane and constructed Ho Phakeo temple and That Luang stupa. During the 16th century, the country was torn by warring factions until in 1638, King Souriyavongsa took control. His 57 years reign was considered the nation's golden age when its influence expanded as far as Yunnan (Southern China), the Shan states, Northeastern Thailand and some areas of Vietnam and Cambodia. After his death there was a dynastic struggle that led to the breakup of the Lane Xang kingdom into three independent states: Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champassak.



4. A divided nation conquered by foreigners

Vientiane and Champassak kingdoms were conquered by Siam. Luang Prabang was too weak and was unable to fight against the Siam for the reunification of the country. When the French came and established a colony in Indochina, Luang Prabang kingdom asked for French protection in 1893. Facing with the French threat, the Siam withdrew from the kingdoms of Vientiane and Champassak. Then all of three Kingdoms Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champassak were placed under the oppression of the French protectorate. The Lao heroic people continued to fight against the French. Like the rest of Southeast Asia, the country was shortly occupied by the Japanese during the World War II. The French came back after the Japanese defeat and they were faced with the Lao people's resistance.

In 1945, the Lao people proclaimed its independence from France. Some years later, this proclamation of independence was recognized by the United Nations. The end of the French colonial rule did not bring peace to the Lao people. The US bombing campaign over the portion of the Ho Chi Minh trail crossing the Lao PDR during the “Vietnam War” obliged the Lao patriotic people to fight against the US and their local followers to protect the Lao Independence.

5. A heavily U.S bombing campaign during the “Secret war”

The Lao territory was heavily bombed by the US air force during the Indochina War (Vietnam War) and received more than two million tons of bombs including the cluster bombs or bombsies.

Today the International teams are still clearing the terrain of unexploded ordinances (UXO) particularly in the region of the province of Houaphan and Xiengkhuang and the Lao people continue to suffer from the consequences of this bombing campaign.

6. The rebirth of a nation

The end of the Indochina War (Vietnam War) in 1975 has conducted to the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). December 2nd 1975 marked the complete victory of the Lao people in their struggle against the external aggression and a rebirth of the Lao unified nation.

Basic economic indicators: (National fiscal year 20062007)

- 1 –annual growth rate: Total GDP: 8.0% -
Agriculture: 2.8% Industry: 15.7% Services: 7.4%
- 2 Central Government Finance Overall deficit (%
of GDP): 5.2%
- 3 Trade balance: +61 million US\$ Exports: 977
million US\$ Main export products:

Electricity Gold Garments -
Coffee Timber and forest
products Agricultural
products Handicrafts

Imports: 916 million US\$

Population indicators (National fiscal year 20062007)

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