



Luang Prabang

 Luang Prabang Province • Laos

TRAVEL GUIDE



Overview

Luang Prabang sits on a narrow peninsula where the Nam Khan River meets the Mekong, its streets lined with gilded temples and weathered French colonial shophouses. UNESCO listed the old town in 1995 for this rare mix of traditional Lao architecture and 19th- and 20th-century European buildings, kept almost untouched since. The town was the royal capital of the Lan Xang kingdom and later of the Kingdom of Laos, until the monarchy ended in 1975. It still moves at a slower pace: monks in saffron robes cross quiet streets at dawn, and the main road turns into a night market every evening.

Luang Prabang suits travelers who want a few unhurried days of temples, river views and good food, rather than a fast-paced city stop. Most of the old town is walkable, so a short stay covers the highlights, while a longer one leaves room for a boat trip or a day in the surrounding hills.

When to visit

Laos has three seasons: a cool dry season from November to February, a hot dry season from March to May, and a rainy season from June to October. Late November through February is the most comfortable time to visit, with mild days and cool nights.

Plan around **Pi Mai** (Lao New Year) in mid-April if possible: for several days, residents douse each other and any passerby with water, which is festive but also falls in the hottest, driest stretch of the year.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	● Great Great for sightseeing	29° / 33°	16° / 11°	Calm winds
February	● Fair Fair for sightseeing	32° / 37°	18° / 13°	Calm winds · Up to 6 days above 35°
March	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	35° / 39°	21° / 17°	Humid air · Calm winds · Up to 16 days above 35°
April	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	36° / 41° Feels like 39°	23° / 20°	Muggy, humid air · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high) · Up to 19 days above 35°
May	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	35° / 40° Feels like 40°	24° / 22°	☔ 19 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high) · Up to 16 days above 35°
June	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	34° / 38° Feels like 39°	25° / 24°	☔ 20 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high) · Up to 10 days above 35°
July	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	32° / 37° Feels like 38°	24° / 23°	☔ 24 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high) · Up to 5 days above 35°
August	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	32° / 36° Feels like 37°	24° / 23°	☔ 24 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high)
September	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	32° / 36° Feels like 37°	24° / 21°	☔ 19 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high)
October	● Poor Poor for sightseeing	32° / 36° Feels like 36°	22° / 18°	Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · Up to 5 days above 35°
November	● Good Good for sightseeing	31° / 35°	19° / 13°	Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
December	● Great Great for sightseeing	28° / 33°	16° / 10°	Calm winds

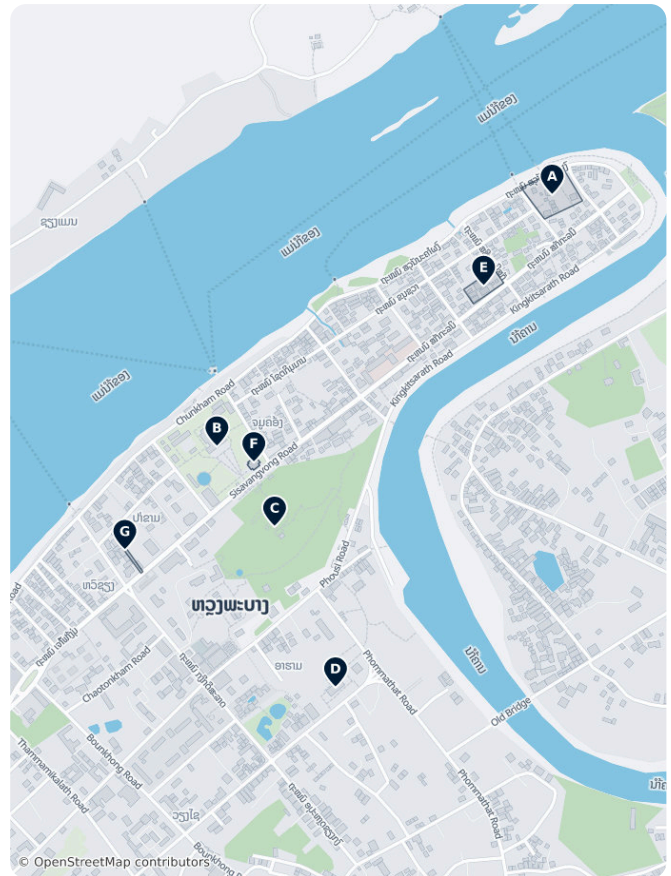
Best months: January, December

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

- A** **Wat Xieng Thong** is Luang Prabang's finest temple, built in the 16th century and covered in gilded reliefs depicting Buddhist and local legends. Its sweeping, low roofline is the classic image of Luang Prabang temple architecture.
- B** **Royal Palace (Haw Kham)** was built in 1904 for the royal family and now houses the former throne room, royal regalia and gifts from foreign governments; it was converted into a museum after the monarchy ended in 1975.
- C** **Phou Si** is a steep hill in the middle of the old town, reached by a stairway of around 300 steps. The gilded stupa at the summit gives the best sunset view over the town and the two rivers.
- D** **Wat Wisunalat** is the town's oldest surviving temple, easy to recognize by its stupa shaped like a watermelon.
- E** **Wat Sene Souk Haram** is an 18th-century monastery known for its maroon-and-gold decoration and richly carved windows.
- F** **Haw Pha Bang** stands inside the former palace grounds and holds the Pha Bang, the gold Buddha image the town is named after; it is brought out and paraded through the streets during Pi Mai.

Every evening, vendors set up stalls the length of Sisavangvong Road for the **G** **Night Food Market**, selling textiles, crafts and street food; it is one of the best places to shop and eat after dark.



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What to experience

- **Watch the Tak Bat**, the dawn alms-giving procession, when monks walk in silent lines along the main streets to collect food from kneeling residents. Keep a respectful distance if you are only observing, and skip vendors who pressure tourists into buying overpriced sticky rice to hand out.
- **Climb Phou Si for sunset**, when the golden light over the Mekong and Nam Khan draws a small crowd to the summit stupa.
- **Take a Lao cooking class**, most of which start with a walk through a local market to pick ingredients before cooking dishes like laap and jeow.
- **Join an evening boat trip on the Mekong**, watching the riverbanks and temples from the water as the sun goes down.
- **Sit in on a Big Brother Mouse reading session**, a local literacy project where visitors have informal English conversations with Lao students and young monks.

Day trips

Luang Prabang's countryside is easily worth a day (or more), and most sights are close enough to combine into a half- or full-day trip.

- **Kuang Si Large Waterfall** – ≈45–60 min by road. Turquoise, tiered pools below a 60-meter waterfall; several pools are open for swimming, and a rescue center for Asiatic black bears sits at the entrance.
- **Tad Sae Waterfall** – ≈45 min by road. A quieter, less crowded alternative to Kuang Si, though its flow drops sharply in the dry season.
- **Pak Ou Cave** and **Ban Xang Hai** – ≈1–1.5 hours by boat up the Mekong. The caves hold thousands of small Buddha statues left by pilgrims over centuries; most trips stop at the whiskey-making village on the way.
- An elephant sanctuary – ≈30–45 min by road. Several camps around the town focus on observing and bathing rescued elephants rather than riding them; choose one with a no-riding policy.
- **A Vang Vieng** – ≈1 hour by the Laos–China Railway, or ≈4–6 hours by road. Known for its limestone karst scenery, caves and the Nam Song river; the fast train makes it a realistic, if long, day trip.



Getting there

- **By air:** Luang Prabang International Airport (airport code LPQ) is about 4 km from the old town. Flights connect from Vientiane, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Siem Reap and, seasonally, several Chinese cities. A tuk-tuk into town takes about 10–15 minutes; agree the fare before you get in, as there are no meters.
- **By train:** the Laos–China Railway station serves Luang Prabang with express trains to [Vientiane](#) in about 2 hours and north toward the Chinese border. It is the fastest and most comfortable way to reach the town from the capital.
- **By road:** buses and minivans run to [Vientiane](#) along Route 13, a winding mountain road that takes 8–9 hours; most travelers now prefer the train.

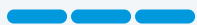
Getting around

- **On foot:** the old town peninsula is small and flat. Most temples, the museum and the night market are within a 15–20 minute walk of each other.
- **Bicycle:** a popular and easy way to cover more ground; bikes are widely available to rent by the day.
- **Tuk-tuk:** the standard option for reaching the airport, the bus station or nearby waterfalls. Fares are negotiated up front rather than metered.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

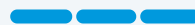
High



The old town peninsula is flat and compact, and almost every temple, the museum and the night market are within a 15-20 minute walk of each other.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

High



Bicycles are widely available to rent and are a popular, easy way to get around the flat old town and nearby villages.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?:** not for the old town itself, which is compact and best explored on foot or by bicycle. A car or hired driver is useful for reaching Kuang Si Falls or the whiskey village independently, though boats and shared minivans cover most day trips.
- **Parking:** most guesthouses have space for a car or motorbike; parking on the street is informal.
- **Restrictions:** Sisavangvong Road, the old town's main street, closes to vehicle traffic every evening for the night market.

Food & drink

Luang Prabang has its own take on Lao cooking, distinct from the food in Vientiane or further south. Look for khao soi Luang Prabang, a tomato-based noodle soup unrelated to the Thai dish of the same name, sai oua (herb-packed grilled sausage), and kaipen, a dried and fried Mekong riverweed snack served with a spicy dip.

For breakfast, the [Morning Food Market](#) is where locals shop for produce, sticky rice and snacks. In the evening, the food stalls that set up alongside the [Night Food Market](#) are the easiest way to try a wide range of dishes cheaply in one place.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Khao piak sen

Thick rice noodle soup, often eaten in the morning from street stalls.

DRINKS

Beerlao

The standard Lao lager, found everywhere from street stalls to restaurants.

Lao-lao

Strong rice whiskey, often distilled locally and shared at gatherings.

Bolaven coffee

Coffee grown on the Bolaven Plateau, usually served strong and sweet with condensed milk.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Laap · ລາບ

Minced meat or fish tossed with herbs, lime, and toasted rice powder; widely considered Laos's national dish.

Tam mak hoong · ຕຳໝາກຫຸ່ງ

Spicy shredded green papaya salad with lime, chili, and fermented fish sauce.

Sticky rice · ເຂົ້າໝູ່ວ

Steamed glutinous rice eaten by hand from a small woven basket; the base of most Lao meals.



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Safety & health

Luang Prabang is one of the safer, more relaxed towns to visit in Southeast Asia; violent crime against tourists is rare. Keep an eye on bags on overnight buses and boats, where opportunistic theft occasionally happens.

The main road risk is Route 13 to Vientiane, a narrow mountain road with sharp curves; if you are traveling by road rather than train, a bus or hired driver is safer than a self-driven motorbike, especially

after dark. Use mosquito repellent in the evenings, particularly during the rainy season, when dengue fever cases rise.

History

Luang Prabang was founded as Muang Sua and became the first capital of the Lan Xang kingdom after King Fa Ngum unified the Lao principalities in 1353. It took its current name from the Pha Bang, a gold Buddha image gifted by the Khmer court and now kept at [Haw Pha Bang](#). The royal court later moved to Vientiane, but Luang Prabang remained a royal seat and, after 1893, the capital of a separate kingdom under French protection.

[Royal Palace \(Haw Kham\)](#) was built in 1904 for King Sisavang Vong, whose descendants remained on the throne until the Pathet Lao ended the monarchy in 1975 and turned the palace into a museum. The old town's temples, among them [Wat Xieng Thong](#), survived largely intact through the turbulence of the 20th century, which is part of why UNESCO recognized the whole peninsula as a World Heritage Site in 1995.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Laos at a glance:

 CURRENCY LAK	 ELECTRICITY      Type A / Type B / Type C / Type E / Type F 230 V · 50 Hz	 LANGUAGES Lao	 TAP WATER Not safe to drink
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Luang Prabang Essentials

Luang Prabang's UNESCO-listed core showcases a fusion of 16th-century Lao architecture, like Wat Xieng Thong, and early 20th-century French colonial structures such as the Royal Palace. This list includes the city's oldest temple, Wat Visoun, and the 100-meter climb up Mount Phousi for views over the Mekong. Beyond the center, the three-tiered Kuang Si Falls and its adjacent Bear Rescue Centre provide natural landmarks. Daily life centers around the morning food market and the evening handicraft market, reflecting the town's spiritual and culinary traditions.



A Wat Xieng Thong

Dating back to the 16th century, this is one of the most cherished temple complexes in the region.

Souvanhnakhamphong Road, 06000 Luang Prabang
(19.89744, 102.14316)



B Kuang Si Large Waterfall

The Kuang Si Falls or Kuang Xi Falls, alternatively known as the Tat Kuang Si Waterfalls, is a three-tiered waterfall about 29 kilometers...

Laos (19.74880, 101.99133)





C Royal Palace

The Royal Palace in Luang Prabang, Laos, was built in 1904 during the French colonial era for King Sisavang Vong and his family.

Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89210, 102.13560)



D Mount Phousi

Mount Phou Si, also written Mount Phu Si, is a 100 m high hill in the centre of the old town of Luang Prabang in Laos.

Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89040, 102.13690)



E Night Market

A must while in Luang Prabang. Unique atmosphere and the selection of handicrafts is huge - perfect for souvenir-hunting.

Th Sisavangvong & Th Kitsarat, Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89210, 102.13788)



F Haw Pha Bang

The Royal Palace in Luang Prabang, Laos, was built in 1904 during the French colonial era for King Sisavang Vong and his family.

Ounheuan Road, Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89177, 102.13643)





G Wat Visoun

The oldest temple in the city takes its name after Visoun, the king of Lan Xang from 1500 until 1520, who had it built.

Thanon Sisavangvong, Luang Prabang, Laos
(19.88699, 102.13827)



H Wat Sene Souk Haram

This 18th-century monastery is beautifully decorated in typical Thai style - note its maroon walls with gold decorations, richly...

(Unnamed Road), Luang Prabang, Laos
(19.89551, 102.14161)



I Kuang Si Bear Rescue Centre

Devoted to rescuing Laos' black bears - feel free to come and meet them. A heart-warming sight and a fantastic day out.

Laos (19.75113, 101.99581)

freethebears.org/pages/laos-sanctuaries



J Morning Food Market

Traditional local market featuring fresh produce, spices, and traditional Lao snacks. It serves as a source for sticky rice used in the morning alms ceremony and provides insight into daily culinary culture.

06000 Luang Prabang (19.89084, 102.13380)

Mo-Su

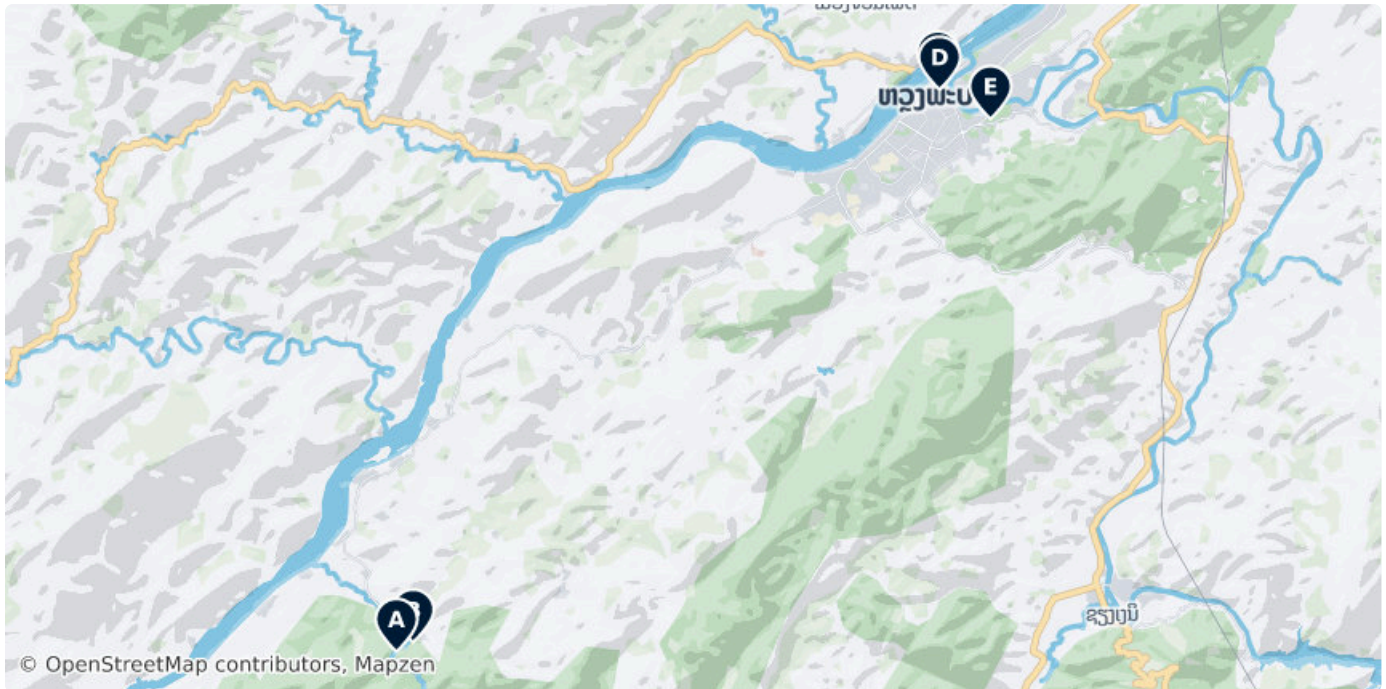
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+856 71 212 487



Editor's Choice

Explore the cultural and natural landmarks of Luang Prabang. The multi-tiered Kuang Si Falls offers turquoise swimming pools and sits adjacent to a sanctuary for rescued Asiatic black bears. In the historic center, Haw Pha Bang stands as a testament to early 20th-century architecture within the Royal Palace grounds. For panoramic views, Mount Phou Si provides a vantage point over the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, while the golden stupa of Wat Pa Phon Phao offers a quiet retreat on the city's outskirts.



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Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89040, 102.13690)



E Wat Pa Phon Phao

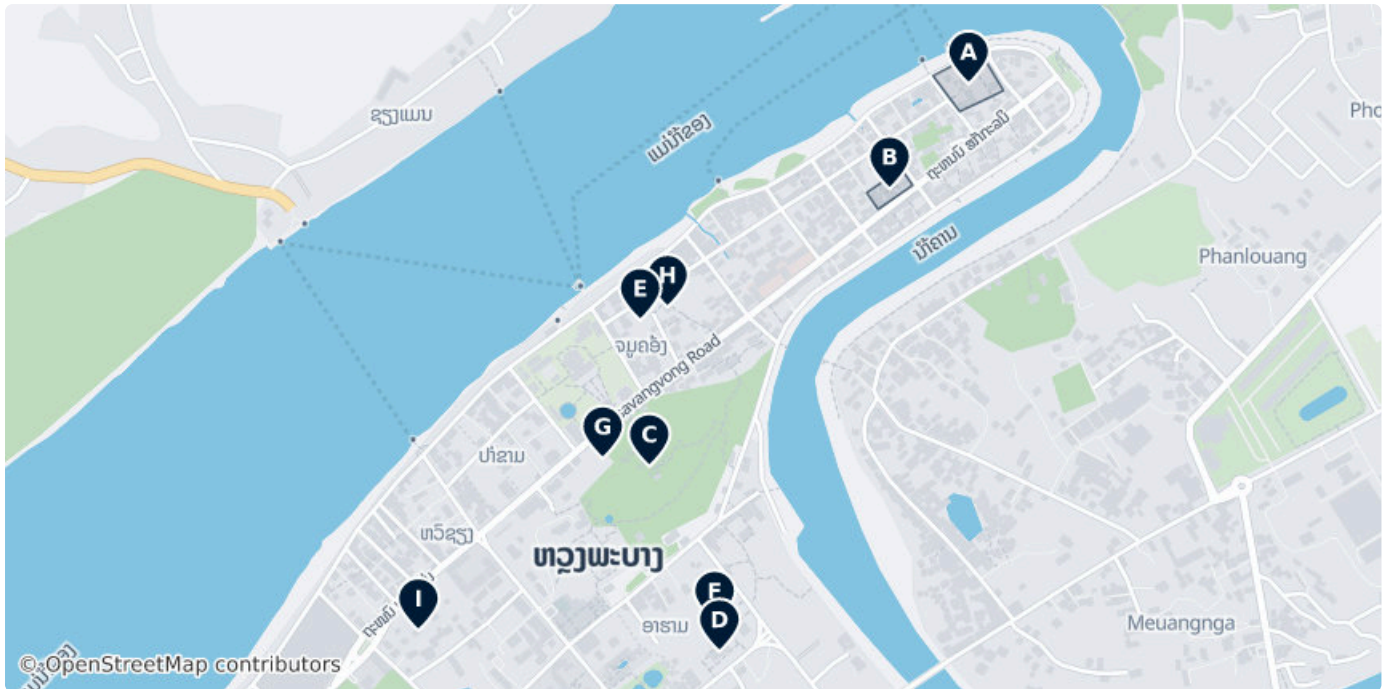
Wat Pa Phon Phao, also Wat Phon Phao, Wat Phonphao, or Wat Phol Phao, meaning "Peacefulness Temple", is a Buddhist temple situated on a...

Luang Prabang, Laos (19.88301, 102.15059)



Buddhist Temples

Luang Prabang's spiritual landscape is defined by its collection of centuries-old wats, characterized by the distinct Luang Prabang architectural style of low-sweeping roofs and intricate gold stenciling. This selection features Wat Xieng Thong, a 16th-century royal temple, and Wat Visoun, the city's oldest religious site. Highlights include the vibrant murals of Wat Pa Huak, the maroon and gold facade of Wat Sene Souk Haram, and the hilltop shrines of Mount Phousi. These sites offer insight into the region's Lan Xang heritage and ongoing Buddhist traditions.



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Thanon Sisavangvong, Luang Prabang, Laos (19.88699, 102.13827)



E Wat Choum Khong

A smaller temple that has its own special charm. Its gardens are especially beautiful, no matter the season.

Xotikhoumman Road, Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89309, 102.13672)



F Wat Aham

A beautiful ornamental temple - even the roof is marvellously decorated. The colours here make it a memorable sight.

Luang Prabang, Laos (19.88751, 102.13818)



G Wat Pa Huak

The 19th century temple is slowly decaying, but still preserves most of its beauty - just look at the murals.

Sisavangvong Road, Luang Prabang, Laos
(19.89054, 102.13599)



H Wat Xieng Muan

Wat Xieng Thong is a Buddhist temple on the northern tip of the peninsula of Luang Prabang, Laos.:264 Built between 1559 and 1560 by King...



Xieng Mouane, Luang Prabang, Laos (19.89333, 102.13726)



I Wat Pha Mahathat

One of the city's more important wats. Large, marvellously decorated and not to be missed.

(Unnamed Road), Luang Prabang, Laos
(19.88738, 102.13238)



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