



East & Southeast Asia :: Laos

Introduction :: Laos

Background:

Modern-day Laos has its roots in the ancient Lao kingdom of Lan Xang, established in the 14th century under King FA NGUM. For 300 years Lan Xang had influence reaching into present-day Cambodia and Thailand, as well as over all of what is now Laos. After centuries of gradual decline, Laos came under the domination of Siam (Thailand) from the late 18th century until the late 19th century when it became part of French Indochina. The Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907 defined the current Lao border with Thailand. In 1975, the communist Pathet Lao took control of the government ending a six-century-old monarchy and instituting a strict socialist regime closely aligned to Vietnam. A gradual, limited return to private enterprise and the liberalization of foreign investment laws began in 1988. Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997 and the WTO in 2013.

Geography :: Laos

Location:

Southeastern Asia, northeast of Thailand, west of Vietnam

Geographic coordinates:

18 00 N, 105 00 E

Map references:

Southeast Asia

Area:

total: 236,800 sq km

country comparison to the world: 84

land: 230,800 sq km

water: 6,000 sq km

Area - comparative:

slightly larger than Utah

Land boundaries:

total: 5,083 km

border countries: Burma 235 km, Cambodia 541 km, China 423 km, Thailand 1,754 km, Vietnam 2,130 km

Coastline:

0 km (landlocked)

Maritime claims:

none (landlocked)

Climate:

tropical monsoon; rainy season (May to November); dry season (December to April)

Terrain:

mostly rugged mountains; some plains and plateaus

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Mekong River 70 m

highest point: Phu Bia 2,817 m

Natural resources:

timber, hydropower, gypsum, tin, gold, gemstones

Land use:

arable land: 5.91%

permanent crops: 0.42%

other: 93.67% (2011)

Irrigated land:

3,100 sq km (2005)

Total renewable water resources:

333.5 cu km (2011)

Freshwater withdrawal (domestic/industrial/agricultural):

total: 3.49 cu km/yr (4%/5%/91%)

per capita: 588.9 cu m/yr (2005)

Natural hazards:

floods, droughts

Environment - current issues:

unexploded ordnance; deforestation; soil erosion; most of the population does not have access to potable water

Environment - international agreements:

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection

signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements

Geography - note:

landlocked; most of the country is mountainous and thickly forested; the Mekong River forms a large part of the western boundary with Thailand

People and Society :: Laos

Nationality:

noun: Lao(s) or Laotian(s)

adjective: Lao or Laotian

Ethnic groups:

Lao 55%, Khmou 11%, Hmong 8%, other (over 100 minor ethnic groups) 26% (2005 census)

Languages:

Lao (official), French, English, various ethnic languages

Religions:

Buddhist 67%, Christian 1.5%, other and unspecified 31.5% (2005 census)

Population:

6,695,166 (July 2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 103

Age structure:

0-14 years: 35.5% (male 1,198,288/female 1,178,180)

15-24 years: 21.3% (male 706,679/female 716,368)

25-54 years: 34.6% (male 1,143,265/female 1,174,102)

55-64 years: 4.9% (male 160,650/female 166,605)

65 years and over: 3.7% (male 113,301/female 137,728) (2013 est.)

Dependency ratios:

total dependency ratio: 63.8 %

youth dependency ratio: 57.6 %

elderly dependency ratio: 6.2 %

potential support ratio: 16.1 (2013)

Median age:

total: 21.6 years

male: 21.4 years

female: 21.9 years (2013 est.)

Population growth rate:

1.63% (2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 75

Birth rate:

25.23 births/1,000 population (2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 58

Death rate:

7.86 deaths/1,000 population (2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 108

Net migration rate:

-1.12 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 149

Urbanization:

urban population: 34.3% of total population (2011)

rate of urbanization: 4.41% annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)

Major urban areas - population:

VIENTIANE (capital) 799,000 (2009)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.04 male(s)/female

0-14 years: 1.02 male(s)/female

15-24 years: 0.99 male(s)/female

25-54 years: 0.98 male(s)/female

55-64 years: 0.96 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.82 male(s)/female

total population: 0.99 male(s)/female (2013 est.)

Maternal mortality rate:

470 deaths/100,000 live births (2010)

country comparison to the world: 21

Infant mortality rate:

total: 56.13 deaths/1,000 live births

country comparison to the world: 34

male: 61.91 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 50.11 deaths/1,000 live births (2013 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 63.14 years

country comparison to the world: 182

male: 61.2 years

female: 65.17 years (2013 est.)

Total fertility rate:

2.98 children born/woman (2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 60

Contraceptive prevalence rate:

38.4% (2005)

Health expenditures:

2.8% of GDP (2011)

country comparison to the world: 180

Physicians density:

0.19 physicians/1,000 population (2009)

Hospital bed density:

0.7 beds/1,000 population (2010)

Drinking water source:

improved:

urban: 77% of population

rural: 62% of population

total: 67% of population

unimproved:

urban: 23% of population

rural: 38% of population

total: 33% of population (2010 est.)

Sanitation facility access:

improved:

urban: 89% of population

rural: 50% of population

total: 63% of population

unimproved:

urban: 11% of population

rural: 50% of population

total: 37% of population (2010 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

0.2% (2009 est.)

country comparison to the world: 102

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

8,500 (2009 est.)

country comparison to the world: 106

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

fewer than 200 (2009 est.)

country comparison to the world: 101

Major infectious diseases:

degree of risk: very high

food or waterborne diseases: bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever

vectorborne diseases: dengue fever and malaria

note: highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza has been identified in this country; it poses a negligible risk with extremely rare cases possible among US citizens who have close contact with birds (2013)

Obesity - adult prevalence rate:

2.6% (2008)

country comparison to the world: 179

Children under the age of 5 years underweight:

31.6% (2006)

country comparison to the world: 13

Education expenditures:

3.3% of GDP (2010)

country comparison to the world: 135

Literacy:

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 72.7%

male: 82.5%

female: 63.2% (2005 est.)

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):

total: 10 years

male: 11 years

female: 10 years (2011)

Child labor - children ages 5-14:

total number: 175,138

percentage: 11 % (2006 est.)

Government :: Laos

Country name:

conventional long form: Lao People's Democratic Republic

conventional short form: Laos

local long form: Sathalanalat Paxathipatai Paxaxon Lao

local short form: Pathet Lao (unofficial)

Government type:

Communist state

Capital:

name: Vientiane (Viangchan)

geographic coordinates: 17 58 N, 102 36 E

time difference: UTC+7 (12 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)

Administrative divisions:

16 provinces (khoueng, singular and plural) and 1 capital city* (nakhon luang, singular and plural); Attapu, Bokeo, Bolikhamxai, Champasak, Houaphan, Khammouan, Louangnamtha, Louangphabang, Oudomxai, Phongsali, Salavan, Savannakhet, Viangchan (Vientiane)*, Viangchan, Xaignabouli, Xekong, Xiangkhouang

Independence:

19 July 1949 (from France)

National holiday:

Republic Day, 2 December (1975)

Constitution:

previous 1947 (preindependence); latest promulgated 13-15 August 1991; amended 2003

Legal system:

civil law system similar in form to the French system

International law organization participation:

has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration; non-party state to the ICCt

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

chief of state: President Lt. Gen. CHOUMMALI Saignason (since 8 June 2006); Vice President BOUN-GNANG Volachit (since 8 June 2006)

head of government: Prime Minister THONGSING Thammavong (since 24 December 2010); First Deputy Prime Minister Maj. Gen. ASANG Laoli (since May 2002), Deputy Prime Ministers Maj. Gen. DOUANGCHAI Phichit (since 8 June 2006), SOMSAVAT Lengsavat (since 26 February 1998), and THONGLOUN Sisoulit (since 27 March 2001)

cabinet: Ministers appointed by president, approved by National Assembly
(For more information visit the [World Leaders website](#) 🌐)

elections: president and vice president elected by National Assembly for five-year terms; election last held on 30 April 2011 (next to be held in 2016); prime minister nominated by the president and elected by the National Assembly for five-year term

election results: CHOUMMALI Saignason elected president; BOUN-GNANG Volachit elected vice president; percent of National Assembly vote - NA; THONGSING Thammavong elected prime minister; percent of National Assembly vote - NA

Legislative branch:

unicameral National Assembly (132 seats; members elected by popular vote from a list of candidates selected by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party to serve five-year terms)

elections: last held on 30 April 2011 (next to be held in 2016)

election results: percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - LPRP 128, independents 4

Judicial branch:

highest court(s): People's Supreme Court (consists of NA judges)

judge selection and term of office: president of People's Supreme Court elected by National Assembly on recommendation of National Assembly Standing Committee; vice president of People's Supreme Court and judges appointed by National Assembly Standing Committee; term of office NA

subordinate courts: provincial, municipal, district, and military courts

Political parties and leaders:

Lao People's Revolutionary Party or LPRP [CHOUMMALI Saignason]; other parties proscribed

Political pressure groups and leaders:

NA

International organization participation:

ADB, ARF, ASEAN, CP, EAS, FAO, G-77, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, Interpol, IOC, IPU, ISO (subscriber), ITU, MIGA, NAM, OIF, OPCW, PCA, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNWTO, UPU, WCO, WFTU (NGOs), WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Diplomatic representation in the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador SENG Soukhathivong (since 4 June 2010)

chancery: 2222 S Street NW, Washington, DC 20008

telephone: [1] (202) 332-6416

FAX: [1] (202) 332-4923

Diplomatic representation from the US:

chief of mission: Ambassador David A. CLUNE (since 16 September 2013)

embassy: 19 Rue Bartholonie, That Dam, Vientiane

mailing address: American Embassy Vientiane, APO AP 96546

telephone: [856] 21-26-7000

FAX: [856] 21-26-7190

Flag description:

three horizontal bands of red (top), blue (double width), and red with a large white disk centered in the blue band; the red bands recall the blood shed for liberation; the blue band represents the Mekong River and prosperity; the white disk symbolizes the full moon against the Mekong River, but also signifies the unity of the people under the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, as well as the country's bright future

National symbol(s):

elephant

National anthem:

name: "Pheng Xat Lao" (Hymn of the Lao People)

► [PLAY ANTHEM](#)

lyrics/music: SISANA Sisane/THONGDY Sounthonevichit

note: music adopted 1945, lyrics adopted 1975; the anthem's lyrics were changed following the 1975 Communist revolution that overthrew the monarchy

Economy :: Laos

Economy - overview:

The government of Laos, one of the few remaining one-party communist states, began decentralizing control and encouraging private enterprise in 1986. The results, starting from an extremely low base, were striking - growth averaged 6% per year from 1988-2008 except during the short-lived drop caused by the Asian financial crisis that began in 1997. Laos' growth exceeded 7% per year during 2008-12. Despite this high growth rate, Laos remains a country with an underdeveloped infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. It has a basic, but improving, road system, and limited external and internal land-line telecommunications. Electricity is available 75% of the country. Laos' economy is heavily dependent on capital-intensive natural resource exports. The labor force, however, still relies on agriculture, dominated by rice cultivation in lowland areas, which accounts for about 30% of GDP and 75% of total employment. Economic growth has reduced official poverty rates from 46% in 1992 to 26% in 2010. The economy also has benefited from high-profile foreign direct investment in hydropower, copper and gold mining, logging, and construction though some projects in these industries have drawn criticism for their environmental impacts. Laos gained Normal Trade Relations status with the US in 2004. On the fiscal side, Laos initiated a VAT tax system in 2010. Simplified investment procedures and expanded bank credits for small farmers and small entrepreneurs will improve Laos' economic prospects. The government appears committed to raising the country's profile among investors, opening the country's first stock exchange in 2011 and participating in regional economic cooperation initiatives. Laos was admitted to the WTO in 2012. The World Bank has declared that Laos' goal of graduating from the UN Development Program's list of least-developed countries by 2020 is achievable.

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$18.92 billion (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 134

\$17.54 billion (2011 est.)

\$16.23 billion (2010 est.)

note: data are in 2012 US dollars

GDP (official exchange rate):

\$9.047 billion (2012 est.)

GDP - real growth rate:

7.9% (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 22

8% (2011 est.)

8.1% (2010 est.)

GDP - per capita (PPP):

\$2,800 (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 177

\$2,700 (2011 est.)

\$2,500 (2010 est.)

note: data are in 2012 US dollars

Gross national saving:

26.2% of GDP (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 42

25.2% of GDP (2011 est.)

24.7% of GDP (2010 est.)

GDP - composition, by end use:

household consumption: 69%
government consumption: 9.9%
investment in fixed capital: 29.6%
investment in inventories: -1.3%
exports of goods and services: 39.6%
imports of goods and services: -46.8%
(2012 est.)

GDP - composition, by sector of origin:

agriculture: 26%
industry: 34%
services: 40% (2012 est.)

Agriculture - products:

sweet potatoes, vegetables, corn, coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, cotton, tea, peanuts, rice; cassava (manioc), water buffalo, pigs, cattle, poultry

Industries:

mining (copper, tin, gold, and gypsum); timber, electric power, agricultural processing, rubber, construction, garments, cement, tourism

Industrial production growth rate:

11.4% (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 11

Labor force:

3.308 million (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 101

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 75.1%
industry and services: NA (2010 est.)

Unemployment rate:

2.5% (2009 est.)

country comparison to the world: 19

2.4% (2005 est.)

Population below poverty line:

26% (2010 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: 3.3%
highest 10%: 30.3% (2008)

Distribution of family income - Gini index:

36.7 (2008)

country comparison to the world: 81

34.6 (2002)

Budget:

revenues: \$2.122 billion
expenditures: \$2.25 billion (2012 est.)

Taxes and other revenues:

23.5% of GDP (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 138

Budget surplus (+) or deficit (-):

-1.4% of GDP (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 70

Public debt:

49.1% of GDP (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 67

49.5% of GDP (2011 est.)

Fiscal year:

1 October - 30 September

Inflation rate (consumer prices):

4.3% (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 131

7.6% (2011 est.)

Central bank discount rate:

4.3% (31 December 2010)

country comparison to the world: 92

4% (31 December 2009)

Commercial bank prime lending rate:

22.3% (31 December 2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 14

21.9% (31 December 2011 est.)

Stock of narrow money:

\$1.154 billion (31 December 2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 145

\$971.9 million (31 December 2011 est.)

Stock of broad money:

\$3.556 billion (31 December 2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 137

\$3.155 billion (31 December 2011 est.)

Stock of domestic credit:

\$4.034 billion (31 December 2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 119

\$2.653 billion (31 December 2011 est.)

Current account balance:

\$-315.5 million (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 95

\$-206.3 million (2011 est.)

Exports:

\$1.984 billion (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 140

\$1.854 billion (2011 est.)

Exports - commodities:

wood products, coffee, electricity, tin, copper, gold, cassava

Exports - partners:

Thailand 34%, China 21.5%, Vietnam 12.2% (2012)

Imports:

\$2.744 billion (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 149

\$2.423 billion (2011 est.)

Imports - commodities:

machinery and equipment, vehicles, fuel, consumer goods

Imports - partners:

Thailand 62.1%, China 16.2%, Vietnam 7.3% (2012)

Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:

\$796.9 million (31 December 2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 141

\$757.2 million (31 December 2011 est.)

Debt - external:

\$6.288 billion (31 December 2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 111

\$6.158 billion (31 December 2011 est.)

Exchange rates:

kips (LAK) per US dollar -

8,007.3 (2012 est.)

8,030.1 (2011 est.)

8,258.8 (2010 est.)

8,516.04 (2009)

8,760.69 (2008)

Electricity - production:

3.629 billion kWh (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 127

Electricity - consumption:

2.355 billion kWh (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 137

Electricity - exports:

2.02 billion kWh (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 41

Electricity - imports:

1 billion kWh (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 64

Electricity - installed generating capacity:

1.895 million kW (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 106

Electricity - from fossil fuels:

2.6% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 200

Electricity - from nuclear fuels:

0% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 121

Electricity - from hydroelectric plants:

97.4% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 9

Electricity - from other renewable sources:

0% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 191

Crude oil - production:

0 bbl/day (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 183

Crude oil - exports:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 141

Crude oil - imports:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 206

Crude oil - proved reserves:

0 bbl (1 January 2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 150

Refined petroleum products - production:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 193

Refined petroleum products - consumption:

3,391 bbl/day (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 177

Refined petroleum products - exports:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 189

Refined petroleum products - imports:

3,160 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 171

Natural gas - production:

0 cu m (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 151

Natural gas - consumption:

0 cu m (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 162

Natural gas - exports:

0 cu m (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 131

Natural gas - imports:

0 cu m (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 86

Natural gas - proved reserves:

0 cu m (1 January 2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 156

Carbon dioxide emissions from consumption of energy:

1.404 million Mt (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 159

Communications :: Laos

Telephones - main lines in use:

112,000 (2012)

country comparison to the world: 143

Telephones - mobile cellular:

6.492 million (2012)

country comparison to the world: 99

Telephone system:

general assessment: service to general public is improving; the government relies on a radiotelephone network to communicate with remote areas

domestic: 4 service providers with mobile cellular usage growing very rapidly

international: country code - 856; satellite earth station - 1 Intersputnik (Indian Ocean region) and a second to be developed by China (2012)

Broadcast media:

6 TV stations operating out of Vientiane - 3 government-operated and the others commercial; 17 provincial stations operating with nearly all programming relayed via satellite from the government-operated stations in Vientiane; Chinese and Vietnamese programming relayed via satellite from Lao National TV; broadcasts available from stations in Thailand and Vietnam in border areas; multi-channel satellite and cable TV systems provide access to a wide range of foreign stations; state-controlled radio with state-operated Lao National Radio (LNR) broadcasting on 5 frequencies - 1 AM, 1 SW, and 3 FM; LNR's AM and FM programs are relayed via satellite constituting a large part of the programming schedules of the provincial radio stations; Thai radio broadcasts available in border areas and transmissions of multiple international broadcasters are also accessible (2012)

Internet country code:

.la

Internet hosts:

1,532 (2012)

country comparison to the world: 166

Internet users:

300,000 (2009)

country comparison to the world: 130

Transportation :: Laos

Airports:

41 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 103

Airports - with paved runways:

total: 8

2,438 to 3,047 m: 3

1,524 to 2,437 m: 4

914 to 1,523 m: 1 (2013)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 33

1,524 to 2,437 m: 2

914 to 1,523 m: 9

under 914 m:

22 (2013)

Pipelines:

refined products 540 km (2013)

Roadways:

total: 39,568 km

country comparison to the world: 89

paved: 530 km

unpaved: 39,038 km (2007)

Waterways:

4,600 km (primarily on the Mekong River and its tributaries; 2,900 additional km are intermittently navigable by craft drawing less than 0.5 m) (2012)

country comparison to the world: 24

Military :: Laos

Military branches:

Lao People's Armed Forces (LPAF): Lao People's Army (LPA; includes Riverine Force), Air Force (2011)

Military service age and obligation:

18 years of age for compulsory or voluntary military service; conscript service obligation - minimum 18-months (2012)

Manpower available for military service:

males age 16-49: 1,574,362

females age 16-49: 1,607,856 (2010 est.)

Manpower fit for military service:

males age 16-49: 1,111,629

females age 16-49: 1,190,035 (2010 est.)

Manpower reaching militarily significant age annually:

male: 71,400

female: 73,038 (2010 est.)

Military expenditures:

0.2% of GDP (2012)

country comparison to the world: 168

Military - note:

serving one of the world's least developed countries, the Lao People's Armed Forces (LPAF) is small, poorly funded, and ineffectively resourced; its mission focus is border and internal security, primarily in countering ethnic Hmong insurgent groups; together with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the government, the Lao People's Army (LPA) is the third pillar of state machinery, and as such is expected to suppress political and civil unrest and similar national emergencies, but the LPA also has upgraded skills to respond to avian influenza outbreaks; there is no perceived external threat to the state and the LPA maintains strong ties with the neighboring Vietnamese military (2008)

Transnational Issues :: Laos

Disputes - international:

southeast Asian states have enhanced border surveillance to check the spread of avian flu; talks continue on completion of demarcation with Thailand but disputes remain over islands in the Mekong River; concern among Mekong River Commission members that China's construction of dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries will affect water levels; Cambodia and Vietnam are concerned about Laos' extensive upstream dam construction

Illicit drugs:

estimated opium poppy cultivation in 2008 was 1,900 hectares, about a 73% increase from 2007; estimated potential opium production in 2008 more than tripled to 17 metric tons; unsubstantiated reports of domestic methamphetamine production; growing domestic methamphetamine problem (2007)