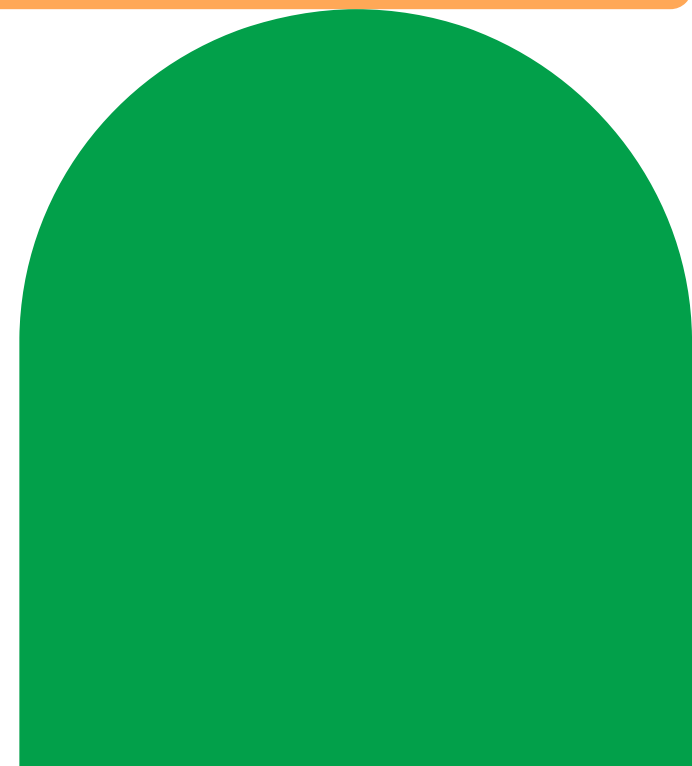


Discover Laos



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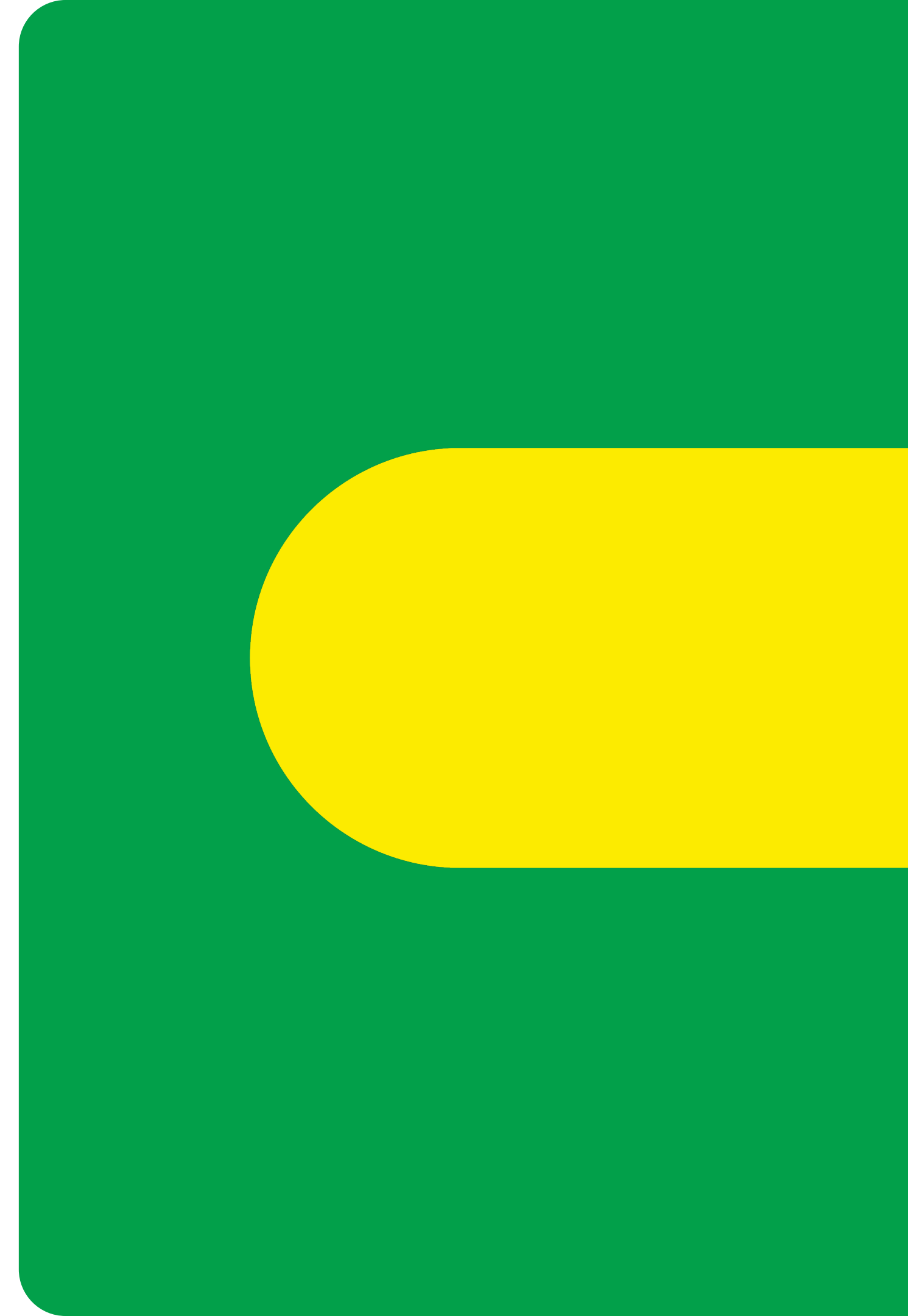
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# Discover Laos

WHEN WILL YOU BEGIN YOUR  
JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY?

From the rolling mountains of the north to the river islands of the south, ours is a land of untouched wonder and rare beauty. Rich in history, traditions, diverse landscapes and cultures, Laos is sure to captivate your inner explorer.





# Storied History

Spanning thousands of years, with archaeological finds, recent war ruins, and living heritage to show for it.

# Sense of Time

We focus on living in the moment, rather than the rush-rush-rush of hectic schedules.

# Cultural Diversity

49 ETHNICITIES AND 160 ETHNIC GROUPS

# Fascinating Nature

# Action & Adventure

Are you a lover of the outdoors? If your idea of a holiday is lots of action and activity, with or without high adrenalin or extreme adventure, we've got just the place for you.

Maybe you're a specific sports enthusiast, into cycling, running, trekking, rock climbing or kayaking. Or perhaps you relax and get away from your work stress and indoor lifestyle by being slightly active in the sunshine and fresh air?

Rather than exercise indoors in a gym as you might do in your home country, why not try aerobics on the [Mekong Riverfront](#) at sunset? Or drift lazily downriver on a tube in Vang Vieng, that action town hotspot just half a day's drive from either [Vientiane](#) or [Luang Prabang](#).

And it is not necessarily all outdoors. What about recreational activities like cooking classes, handicraft-making, photography, or meditation?

# Cycling

How about a casual hour-long cycle along [Vientiane's](#) Mekong Riverfront?

You like to go further? Why not try a serious four-day cycle on [The Loop](#) in the Central Provinces or head further south to ascend the [Bolavan Plateau](#) for loops usually taken on by the novice motorcycle set?





# Running



Laos is the latest big news in the running world: from extremely tough trail running events such as the [Vang Viel Trail](#) to a number of fast and flat half road races such as Vientiane's [half marathon](#) or [full marathon](#).

# Hiking & Trekking

In Laos, unlike Thailand or Vietnam, it is easy to get out into nature and away from people. Hiking and ziplining can take you deep into forests where you don't see other tourists or people at all, while cruising through rural villages and small towns on foot enables you to view Lao life up close but you're unlikely to be harassed by curio sellers or beggars.



# Rock climbing



Discover wonderful routes with tufas, sintering and face climbing.

Advance climbers can explore gigantic roofs with unique routes ranging from 6b+ to around 8c at [Green Climbers Home](#) in [Khammouane Province](#).

As a beginner, you will also find lots of challenge and amusement in [Vientiane Province's](#) adventure town of Vang Vieng.

# Kayaking, rafting & tubing



Enjoy crystal clear waters as you head downstream between limestone mountains and remote villages only accessible by the river.

Meet local fishermen and play with the splashing kids.

The rivers of Laos and associated [paddling](#) are very much determined by the season: what might be rapids and white water in the rainy season (June to October) is verdant forested banks, colorful water birds and the occasional troop of monkeys in the drier seasons.

Doesn't sound too bad, does it?

# Caves

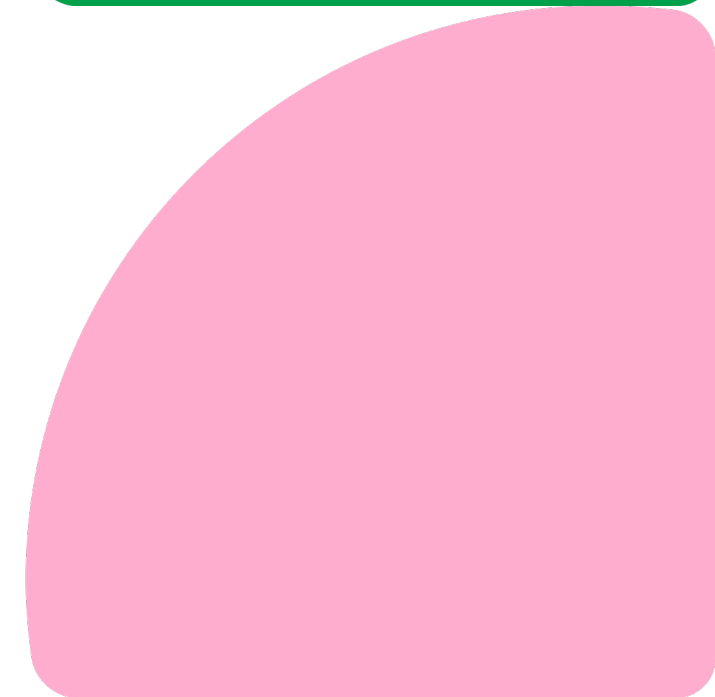


# Konglor

Khammouane

This amazing 7,5 kilometers-long limestone cave was formed by the Hinboun River which still flows through the cave year-round. You can take a boat ride right through the main cave, which is up to 90 meters wide and 100 meters high.

The Kong Lor Cave can be reached via a 40 kilometers overland trip from Ban Khounkham (the Gateway to Kong Lor) or by taking a slightly longer but more adventurous boat trip up the Hinboun River, beginning in Naphouak village. Homestays are available in Natan and Kong Lor villages.



Tham Pa Fa

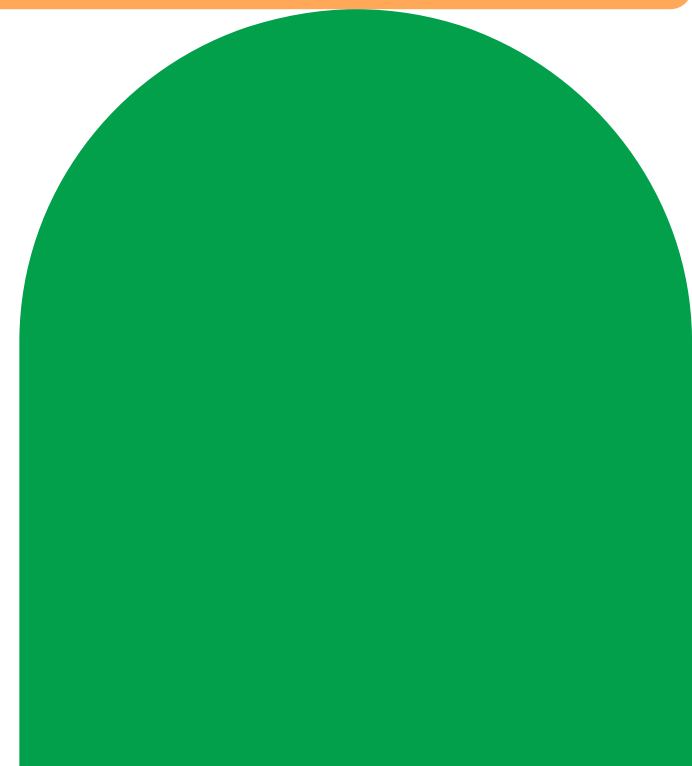
Tham Pa Fa Cave, located near Na Khang Xang Village in Thakhaek District, hit the news following the discovery of 229 Buddha statues in a previously unexplored cave. In April 2004, a local villager entered the small cave opening 15m from ground level while collecting bats (a local delicacy).



Passing through the small cave entrance he looked down into the cavern below and to his amazement saw a large Buddha statue. Proceeding down into the cave he realized that there were over 200 Buddha statues ranging in size from 15 centimeters to over 1 meter-tall. Word about the new discovery soon spread, and the cave has become one of Khammouane's most visited attractions. The villagers have since organized themselves to guard the cave and its sacred Buddha statues 24 hours a day.

The limestone formations within the cave are quite spectacular and add to the natural beauty of the cave. There is a small entrance fee for visitors.

Tham Kao  
Rao



Vieng Phoukha District is surrounded by karst Limestone Mountains that have many interesting and beautiful caves. Formed by centuries of weathering that has gradually carved huge caverns out of the porous limestone, Vieng Phoukha's caves have some of the most beautiful underground formations in northern Laos.

During prehistoric times many of the caves might have been inhabited by people, but today they primarily support nesting swifts and thousands of roosting bats of over a dozen species. Some of the most accessible are the caves near Nam Eng Village (Tham Kao Rao) and the network of caverns at the base of the Phou Prasat limestone formation near Tha Luang Village.

# Vieng Xay cave



Vieng Xay, located northeast of the provincial capital, boasts over 100 limestone caves, 10 of which have immense national and historical significance as the hidden headquarters of the former Pathet Lao from 1961-1975.

These limestone karst cave networks sheltered their headquarters during their struggle with the American-backed Royal Lao Government. In these caves the Pathet Lao established a “Hidden City” which supported around 20,000 people. During nine years of almost constant bombing, they sheltered in caves and surrounding jungle. Most of their daily lives were led under cover of darkness. Schools, hospitals and markets as well as government ministries, a radio station, a theatre and military barracks were all hidden in the caves.



See: Vieng Xay  
Caves – Life  
Underground

# Pak Ou & Tham Ting



Ever since Buddhism was introduced to the area, local people have been bringing statues and placing them inside this cave as a way of making merit. There are thousands of Buddha statues in this cave and they make for quite a spectacle.

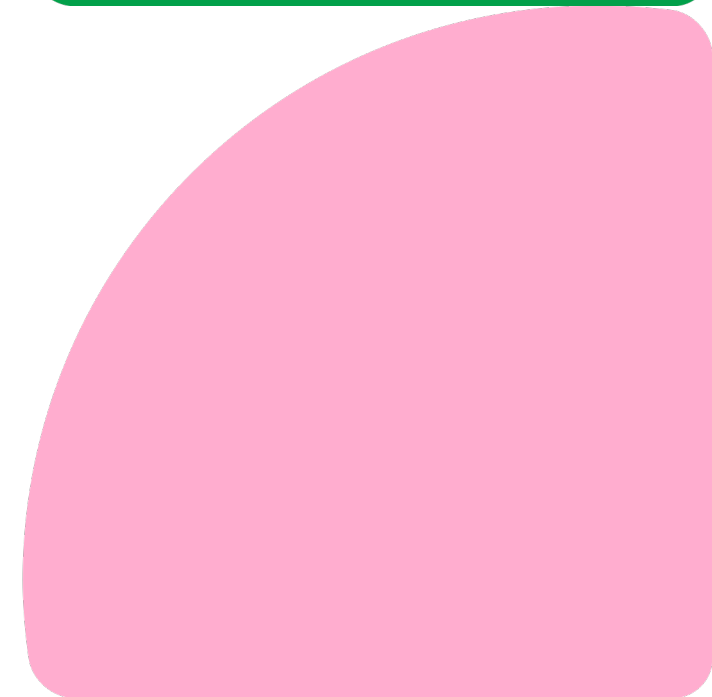
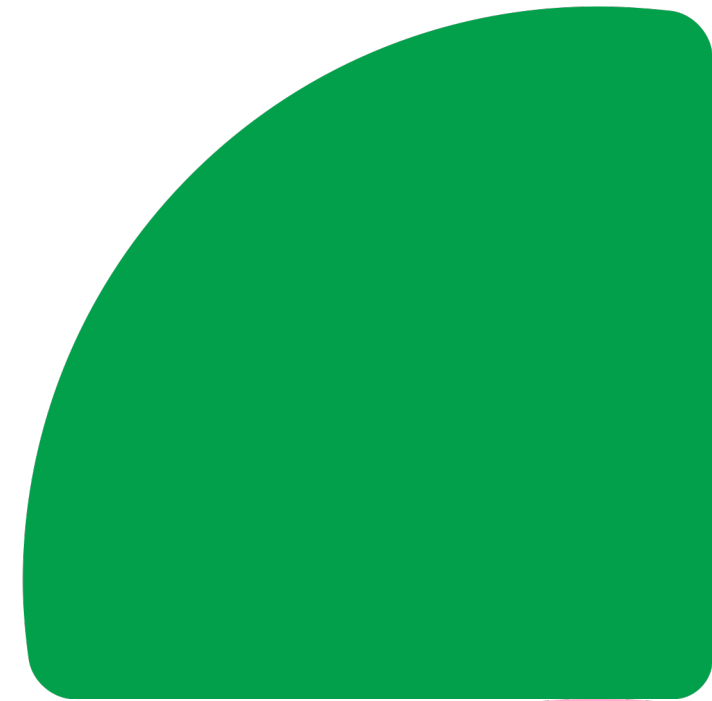
The staircase to the left of the lower cave leads you through the forest to the upper cave. During [Pii Mai](#) (Lao New Year) the Royal Family used to travel to the cave, along with many monks and local devotees, to pour water over a sacred Buddha statue as part of Pi Mai celebrations. There isn't much to see inside the cave but there is a stunning doorway with ornate metalwork that is well worth the walk.

# Xe Bang Fai/Khoun Xe Cave

Khammouane

Located in the south east of Khammouane, the Xe Bangfai Cave is one of the most impressive known cave systems in the world. The cave stretches for approximately 9,5 kilometers and is home to some beautiful scenery and also interesting features such as fireflies and 10-inch spiders.

See: [Below the Surface of Laos](#)



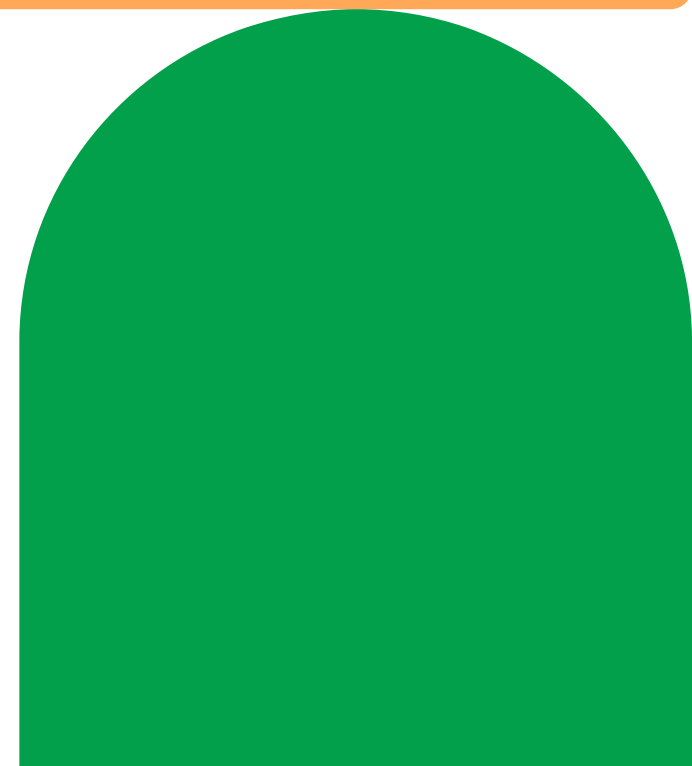
# Tham Xang (Elephant Cave)

Khammouane

This cave used to be feared by local people due to a limestone formation inside the cave that was shaped like an evil monster's head. It was even taboo to drink from the waters that flowed from the cave.

In 1956 when poor health engulfed the village, the villagers decided to destroy the "evil head" forever, and henceforth exploded it with dynamite. Soon after this, an elephant head miraculously formed in a different site in the cave, and the health of the villagers improved. Since then, the elephant head has been revered and the cave has become an important Buddhist shrine.

# Authentic Culture

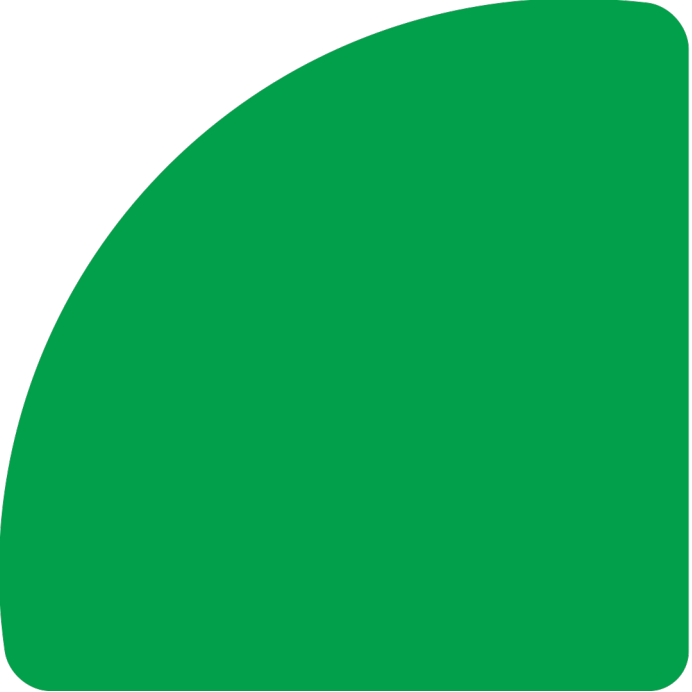




# Artisans & Handicrafts

Laos is admired for our authentic, in-the-moment lifestyle now so lacking in much of the rest of the world. While citizens of the fastest First World cities dream of easing the pace, and fashion and style tastes are now promoting a return to individually crafted, artisanal products, we never lost these.

The luxury of time is what Laos can still offer: sumptuous products made with time and local know-how. Once-off pieces. Unique. Crafted slowly.





# Silk

Women traditionally raise the silk worms on a constant diet of mulberry leaves. The silk is woven on hand looms in the north or (less commonly) on foot looms in the south.

Each region and ethnic group has their own traditional weaving techniques. In the south weaving is characterized by intricate patterns of elephants, temples, [khmer](#) influenced designs and features intricate beadwork. The northeast is known for using raw silk and cotton, and tie-dyeing raw silk known as matmii or [ikat](#). Central Laos runs along the Mekong River and is known for natural [indigo](#) dyes and diamond patterns which symbolize the protective scales of the mythical [naga](#). In the former royal city of [Luang Prabang](#) embroidery using delicate gold and silver threads is also preserved.

# Cotton

Cotton begins with cotton plants grown locally by Lao villagers. Cotton blooms are harvested and the white fluffy shroud is separated and stored in bamboo strip baskets, ready to be spun and turned first into long strands of fibre which can then be dyed into different colours, then woven into lengths of fabric.

These traditional designs and weaving skills are passed on from mothers to daughters.

The different ethnic groups in Laos, especially in the north of the country, provide a vast variety of patterns, colour schemes and designs. Garments like skirts will portray the wearer's identity as well as their social and marital status.

# Metal

Lao metalwork in gold and silver is experiencing a resurgence from its high point in the seventeenth century.

Silver work is especially prized and popular among ethnic minorities including the Hmong and Yao, and can be found as popular elements of traditional dress among married women.

The northern city of Luang Prabang was an important centre for silversmithing until the 1975 revolution. Although landlocked, the Kingdom of Laos was a busy thoroughfare between Burma, China, Cambodia and Thailand. Its arts show influence from all four. Silver was sourced from local silver bar-coins, French colonial coins and Chinese ingots.

# Baskets

Laos produces a number of handicrafts which use bamboo and other forms of basketry. Traditionally Lao use intricately woven bamboo mats in homes and temples, although much of the art form has been lost due to the availability and durability of plastic substitutes.

Basketry is quite common and is traditionally seen in various forms of domestic kitchen equipment, or even in the house where bamboo thatching is still commonly used.

# Clay

The people of Laos have been using traditional methods to make pottery from the local mud and clay for centuries.

The story goes that the first king of Laos, back in the 16th century, held a big celebration after winning a battle. He asked different villages to bring different things to the party. He requested the people of Ban Chan village, near the royal capital of Luang Prabang, to bring clay pots. Now, many, many generations later, the families of Ban Chan still carry on this tradition – pulling the clay from the earth on site and using their hands to create beautiful vessels.

# Ethnic diversity



Laos has a rich diversity of cultures, lifestyles and arts. The country's 17 provinces stretch 1,162 kilometres from the north to the south, with 6.8 million inhabitants representing 49 officially recognised ethnic groups in four main language families. The majority Tai Lao people, from where the country gets its name, only make up about 53% of the population. Almost half the population comprises numerous ethnic minority groups.

These different ethnic groups have different customs, religions and lifestyles. For example, the Tai Lao traditionally lived in wood houses on stilts along riverbanks, practicing a blend of Buddhism and spirit worship, and farming paddy rice fields. However, the Hmong traditionally lived in wood houses with thatched roofs on the ground, practicing spirit and ancestor worship, and planting dry upland rice.

Even with the many differences between the ethnic groups, trade and interaction between communities has always been common. For example, the Kmhmu have often lived close to Tai Lue communities, bartering their basketry and metal tools for cloth.

The 50 ethnic groups practice a variety of traditional arts, including silk and cotton weaving, dyeing, embroidery, applique, basket weaving, carving and music. One of the best ways to appreciate Laos' cultural diversity is to observe these handicrafts and arts.





# #authenticasia

Visit the [Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre \(TAEC\)](#) in Luang Prabang to explore the diverse ethnic cultures through exhibitions, events, and craft workshops.

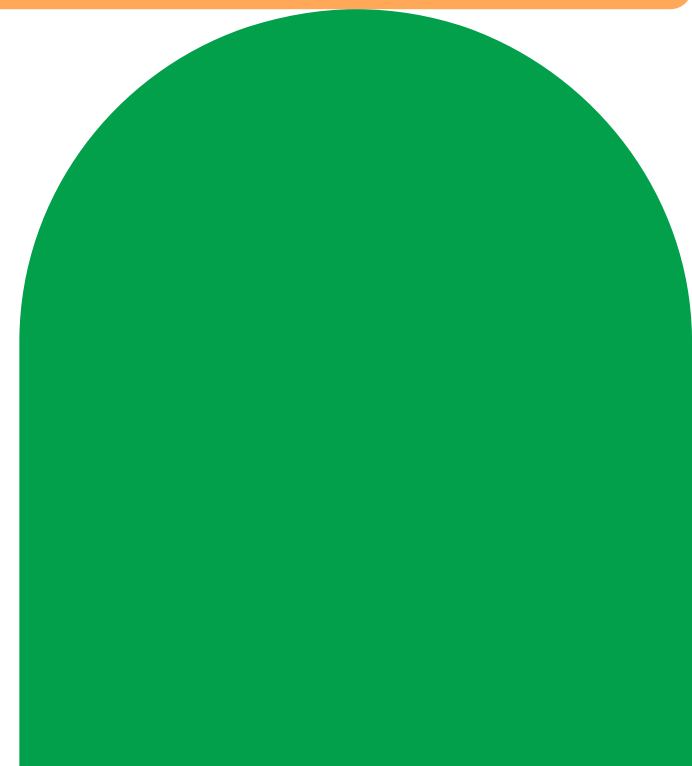
# Akha

The Akha migrated from China into Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam within the past 200 years. They still inhabit only the far north of Laos, primarily [Phongsaly](#) and [Luang Namtha](#) provinces. The Akha is a name given to a group of many different sub-groups and clans, which have maintained a strong identity and lifestyle. In the past they were known as the Ko or Iko, but this name is now considered impolite. Traditionally living in more upland areas, some Akha communities can be very remote.

Akha villages can be easily recognized by their village gates and large village swings. The gate is considered a marker between the human and spirit worlds, and is believed to protect the village from outlaws, wild animals and disease. Visitors should never touch it. The village swing is used during the harvest festival in August or September, a time of fun and celebration.

Akha women are famous for their silver headdresses of different shapes and designs, depending on the Akha group. The Akha Djepia wear a cone-shaped headdress, while the Akha Pouly headdress is more rounded, with a flat disc at the back. The Akha also wear indigo-dyed cotton clothing, decorated with embroidery, applique-work and beads.

Brao/Lavae



The Brao are a people living in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Many now living in Laos moved here from Vietnam during the war.

As in the past, the Brao are primarily an agricultural society. Their villages are built along the roads that traverse the eastern side of Attapeu Province. Behind the houses, extensive farm land is cultivated, and some of the Brao traditions are still practiced there.

The Brao believe in spirits that inhabit the land around them. The Forest Spirit and Mountain and River Spirit are invoked for protection and good harvests. At ceremonies such as Paman and Kamao, animal sacrifices are made for the spirits and food is shared with everyone in the village. At these times, music is played and songs are sung.

Hmong



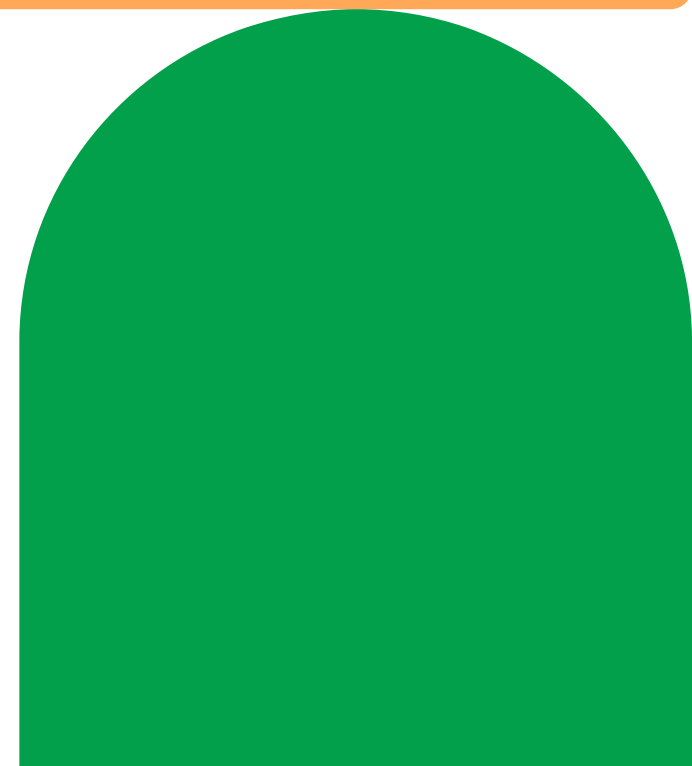
Hmong began migrating from the central and southern part of China into Laos in 19th century, and inhabit the northern and central parts of Laos. They have their own spoken and written language, and are also the third largest ethnic group in Laos, about 8% of the population.

Hmong are a proud ethnic group, maintaining their culture and traditions. Hmong people cannot marry within their clan or the same family name. This means that men and women often have to find a spouse from outside of their village. Traditionally after marriage, a woman will follow her husband and cut relations with her parents.

Hmong celebrate their New Year, called Nor Pe Chao, in December or January, following the lunar calendar. Celebrations take about 10 days. There are many activities during this event, such as top-spinning games, arrow shooting contests, singing and dancing, and courtship games. Young men and women will wear colourful traditional clothing, in the hopes of attracting a life partner.

Hmong women are well known for their embroidery skills and batik cloth textiles. In Hmong batik, hemp cloth is painted with beeswax, then dyed with indigo. The beeswax is then boiled off revealing a pattern in white. This cloth would be used to make skirts of the Mong Njua sub-group. Each group has their own traditional costume. Nowadays, the traditional clothing is worn only on special occasions like wedding ceremonies and New Year.

Katu



The Katu are swidden cultivators and skilled hunters living in the Annam Mountains in southern Laos and central Vietnam. The total population, which amounts to approximately 300,000 peoples, is roughly evenly divided between the two countries.

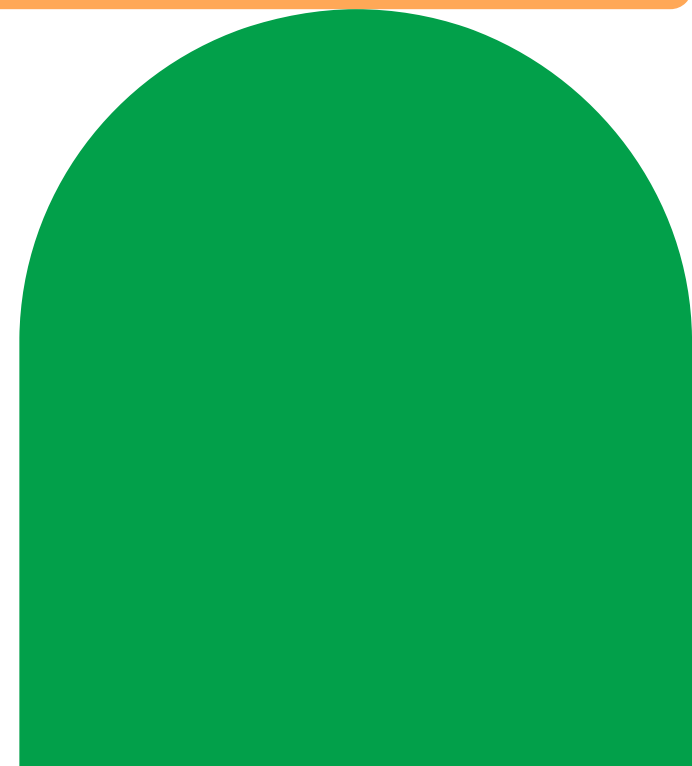
Due to their remote and inaccessible habitat, the Katu have kept many of their cultural traditions. They believe in nature spirits, and they also have a concept of a powerful (female) Creator Spirit inhabiting the Sky. Katu communities feature a community house (rong) that symbolizes the unity and identity of the village and the guardian spirit of the village.

However, these rich cultural practices and rituals of the Katu are not widely known, and as a people practicing a more traditional, subsistence agricultural life, are generally depicted as being very poor and even primitive. Contributing to that assumption is that the largest numbers of Katu live in Xekong province, Laos' newest and poorest province.

Katu women weave textiles on a backstrap loom – an ancient technique for creating cloth. Cloth is often decorated with beads, and will be sewn into simple skirts and tunics for wear.



Lanten

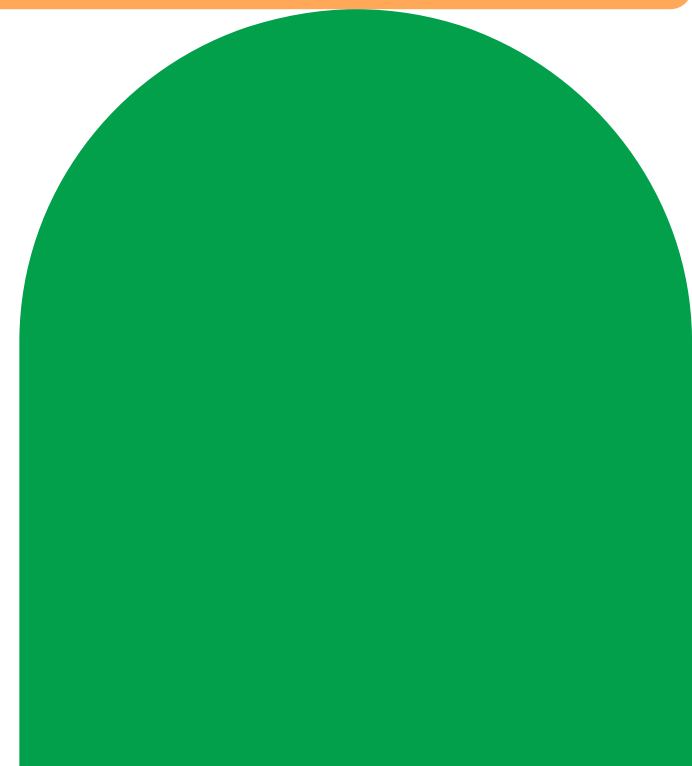


The Lanten are the indigo masters of Laos; in fact their name Lanten means 'those that dye cloth' in Chinese. They migrated from China around one hundred years ago. There are only eleven Lanten villages in Laos. With a population of around 6,500, they are one of the smallest of all the ethnic groups in the country.

Their handicraft is characterized by finely spun and tightly woven organic cotton, expertly dyed with indigo. The Lanten traditional dress features dark blue almost black trousers and long tunics. This outfit is highly distinctive and is accented by long pink silk yarns that drape from the collar.

Credit: [Ock Pop Tok – Discover Laos through Textiles](#)

Tai Lao



The Lao are the majority ethnic group in Laos, comprising about 55% of the population, and from where the country derives its name. They Lao primarily live in lowland areas and along riverbanks, farming paddy rice. They eat sticky rice (khao niaow) which is distinctive to the country. The Lao language is the official language of Lao PDR.

The Lao practice Theravada Buddhism and combine it with animism, a strong belief in spirits. A common ceremony is the baci ceremony, led by a village elder, to bestow blessings on a person or people. Another name for this ceremony, soukhwan, means “calling of the souls” referencing the belief that people are made of 32 spirits or vital forces, that must be gathered for optimum health and harmony. Every Lao village has a temple, which acts as the centre of education, accommodation, meetings, and religious rituals. Traditionally, every man of 12 years or older has to enter a monkhood at a temple for a period of time.

Traditional Lao homes are built 2.5m to 3m above the ground with a big balcony where people can rest or meet visitors. Underneath the houses, families usually set up a loom, or keep farming equipment or livestock.

Tai Lao are well known for their skilled silk and cotton weaving, which can be seen in markets and the traditional clothing worn by locals. The women wear a tube skirt called a sin and a blouse with a shoulder scarf, and traditionally men would wear a sarong and jacket. However, western clothing is the norm for everyday wear nowadays.

Yao Mien

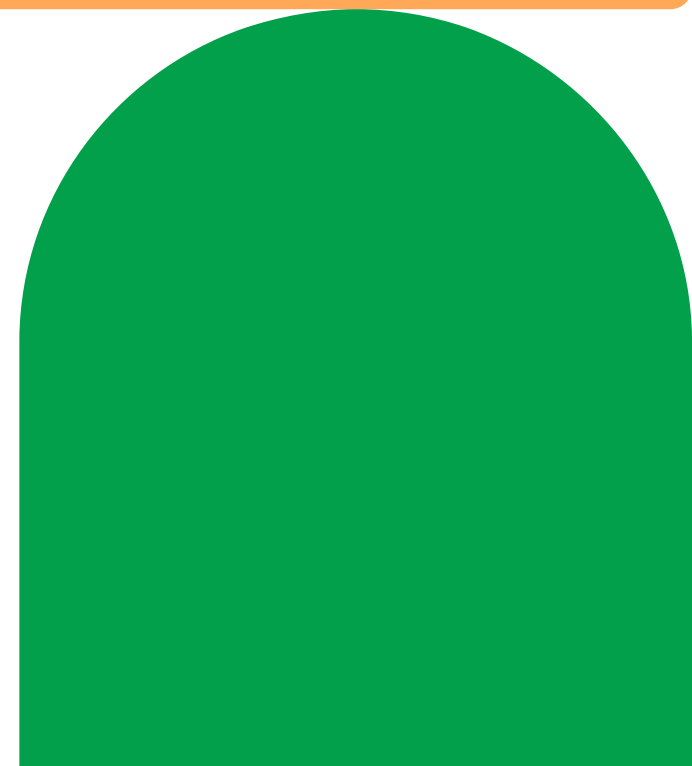
The Yao Mien have roots in China, and migrated from Hunan province to northern Vietnam, Thailand, and northern Laos starting in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Yao Mien also have a large diaspora overseas, particularly in the United States. The Yao Mien are also known as the Lu Mien, Mien, or Yao.

The Mien practice Taoism, a philosophy and religion they adopted in China and brought with them when they migrated southward. Traditionally, all men should be ordained as a Taoist priest to be recognized as part of his family's ancestors and by the spirits. This would require learning the Chinese script, the basic tenets of Taoism, and undergoing an intensive three-day, three-night ceremony.

Yao Mien women are expert embroiderers, spending many hours from the time they are young to learn the three different stitching techniques and create colourful and complex combinations of motifs. The Mien say that a woman's abilities as a wife and mother can be judged by her embroidery – a dexterous, patient embroider will make a hardworking, dedicated woman. Mien women wear trousers full of this embroidery, and a black jacket with a red ruff around the collar.

Read the personal account of a visit to a Yao community and the good news story of the crippled boy who has become an international success story – [here](#).

# Food & Flavours



Lao cuisine reflects the ethnic diversity of the country and its surrounding neighbors. Laos has strong regional variations even among common dishes, with sticky rice being the staple of most meals.

A common Lao meal would consist of a richly spiced minced fish or chicken salad or larb, served with sticky rice; a jaew or paste made of chili peppers for dipping; tam mak hung – a fiery and sour fresh green papaya salad, a broth based soup like kaeng no mai (bamboo soup); fresh herbs and vegetables served raw; tropical fruit as a dessert; and is served with the local beer or lao-lao rice liquor.

Lao cuisine is similar to Thai, but more bitter, sour and spicy. Wild game and insects known commonly as “jungle food” are also enjoyed.

Vietnamese dishes like pho and spring rolls are extremely popular throughout the country. Ethnic Yunnanese Chinese food is common in [Vientiane](#), and is reflected in the fried dough dishes which are commonly sold as street snacks.

The years of French colonialism have also given Laos a number of food items including the baguette, omelets, pâté and croissants – and coffee.

See [Laos Food – 12 of the best Laotian dishes you need to eat](#) and [Eat bugs like a local](#).





# Waterfalls

Laos high annual rainfall, mountainous terrain and extensive river systems create some of the most impressive waterfalls in the world.

Laos' Khone Phapheng Falls is the largest waterfall by volume in Southeast Asia.



# Kuang Si Falls



The Kuang Si Falls, sometimes spelled Kuang Xi, is a three levelled waterfall about 29 kilometres (18 mi) south of Luang Prabang. These waterfalls are a favourite trip for tourists in [Luang Prabang](#). The falls begin in shallow pools atop a steep hillside. These lead to the main fall with a 60 metres (200 ft) drop.

They are accessed via a trail to a left of the falls. The water flows in to a turquoise blue pool before continuing downstream and include many cascades.

The locals charge a nominal admission fee to visit the site, but it is well maintained with walkways and bridges to guide the visitor. Most of the pools are open for swimming.

# Tad Yuang Falls

Champasak

Tad Yuang is impressive, with its twin torrents falling about 40 meters and flowing into lush jungle. It's hugely popular with day-trippers from Pakse and Thailand who like to picnic at the top, so getting there early or lingering until dusk after the crowds have cleared out is a good idea. Swimming at the bottom is permitted.

# Tad Fane

## Champasak

This natural tourism site is located within the Dong Houa Sao National Protected Area at Ban Lak 38 Village (Km 38) along Route 23 heading towards Paksong. The Champi and Pak Koot rivers flow off the plateau and come together here to create the Tad Fane Waterfall, which falls an impressive 120 metres.

The real beauty of this waterfall stems from its two branches of water, which divide as they spill over the steep cliffs. A seemingly endless flow of water is created and if windy, the mist sprays create spectacular rainbows.

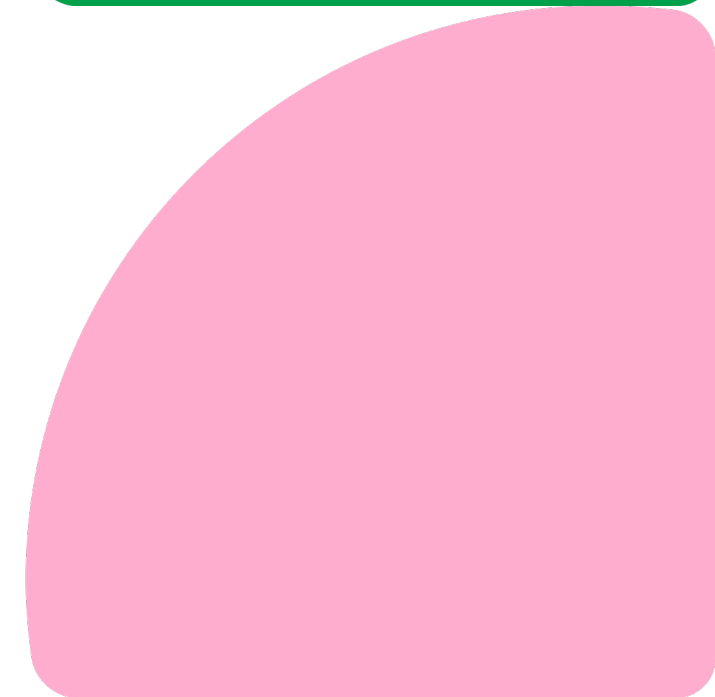
Ziplining is available for the more adventurous.

# Tad Sae

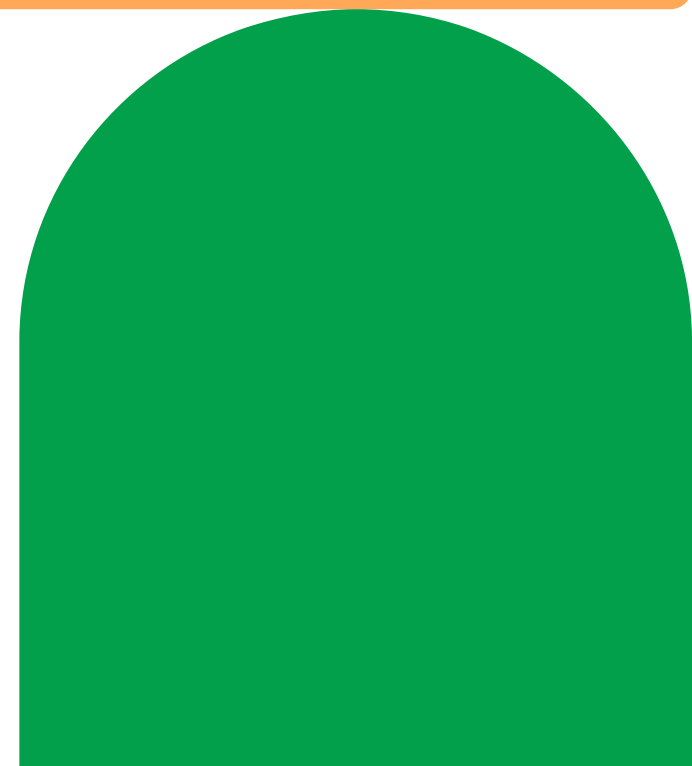
Luang Prabang

The Tat Sae Waterfalls are located along a tributary of the Nam Khan River in [Luang Prabang Province](#). They are located about 18 kilometres (11 mi) southeast of Luang Prabang and about 2 kilometres (1.2 mi) from the village of Bak En. The falls flow over limestone formations amongst trees.

Adventurers can zipline across the falls.



# Khone Phapheng Falls



The Khone Phapheng Falls is a series of cascading waterfalls located in [Champasak Province](#) on the Mekong River in southern Laos, near the border with Cambodia. They are the largest in southeast Asia and they are the main reason that the Mekong River is not fully navigable into China. The falls are characterised by thousands of islands and countless waterways, giving the area its name Si Phan Don or 'The 4,000 islands'.

The highest falls reach to 21 metres (69 ft); the succession of rapids stretch 9.7 km (6.0 mi) of the river's length. The average discharge of the cataract is nearly 11,000 m<sup>3</sup>/s (390,000 cu ft/s), with the highest flow on record at over 49,000 m<sup>3</sup>/s (1,700,000 cu ft/s).

The falls are home to the plabuck, an endangered species of catfish said to be the largest freshwater fish in the world. The plabuck is alleged to reach lengths of 3 m (10 ft) and weights of up to 646 pounds (293 kilograms).



More info visit link

- <https://www.tourismlaos.org/welcome/active/>
- <https://www.tourismlaos.org/caves/>
- <https://www.tourismlaos.org/welcome/authentic-culture/>
- <https://www.tourismlaos.org/welcome/authentic-culture/artisans-handicrafts/>
- <https://www.tourismlaos.org/welcome/food-flavours/>
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