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Laos

THE BOOK

Author	Joe Cummings
Publisher	Lonely Planet
Published	2002
Format	Paperback, 5" x 7.25"
ISBN-10	1-86450-373-4
Price	$16.99

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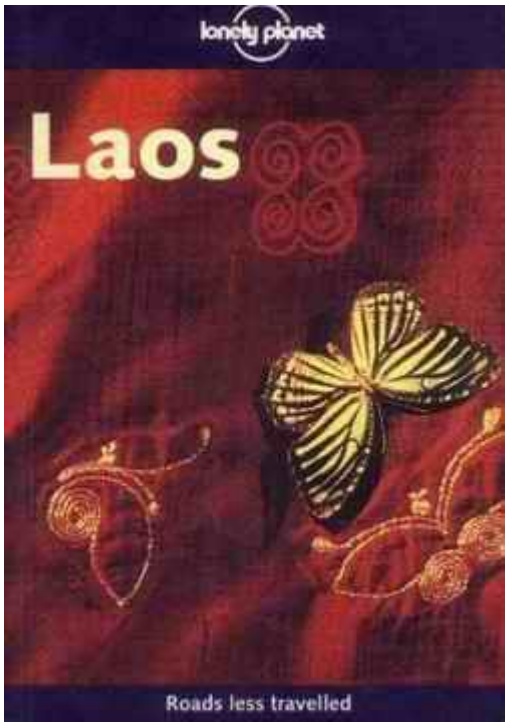
> *...A MUST FOR EVERY TRAVELER ... Lonely Planet has given adequate information about the Capital Vientiane Northern Laos which has provinces like Luang Prabang province, Xieng Khuang province and Hua phan province to name a few. Southern Laos which has Tha Khaek, Savannakhet province and Champa Sak province. Information like how to get there, where to eat, places to stay and visit is clearly given...*

Editor's recommendation — this book carries the editor's "must buy" recommendation.

Laos (40 easy-to-read maps, including a color country map), 4thEdition, *by* Joe Cummings, Paperback, 5" x 7.25"

Lonely Planet,, 90 Maribrynong Street, Footscray, Victoria 3011, AUSTRALIA. Email: annab@lonelyplanet.com.au, Publication Date - January 2002. 351 pp, ISBN 1-86450-373-4. Price US $16.99, UK £10.99

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The French gave the country its modern name Laos. The nation's present boundary took shape in 1896-97 with Burma and Thailand on the west Vietnam in the east and Cambodia in the Deep South. This was considered the least developed but most enigmatic of former French colonies. This has proved to be more a blessing than a curse. Laos now offers travelers an unparalleled glimpse of old South -East Asia with its exotic landscape and laid-back charm. It's temples, mountains and natural wonders are now more accessible than ever. About half the population is ethnic Laos. Of the rest are tribal Thai and Malay. So Laos is aptly described as less a nation state than a conglomeration of tribes.

Joe Cummings



Joe Cummings, the author of this book, became involved in South-East Asian studies while a political science student at Guilford College, a Quaker school in North Carolina, and then later as a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand. Since then he has worked as a translator/interpreter of Thai, finished a master's degree in Thai language and Asian art history at the University of California, served as a Lao bilingual studies consultant in Oakland, and led one of the first American group tours to Laos after the 1975 Revolution.

Joe is the author of Lonely Planet's Thailand guidebook and the Thai and Lao phrasebooks, as well as Lonely Planet's new pictorial Buddhist Stupas of Asia: The Shape of Perfection. He also occasionally writes for Asian Wall Street Journal, Geographical, International Herald Tribune, Outside, South China Morning Post, Thailand & Indochina Traveler and other periodicals.

More information about him is available at http://www.bajaquest.com/joecummings/. A list of his books can be seen at http://books.bankhacker.com/Joe+Cummings/

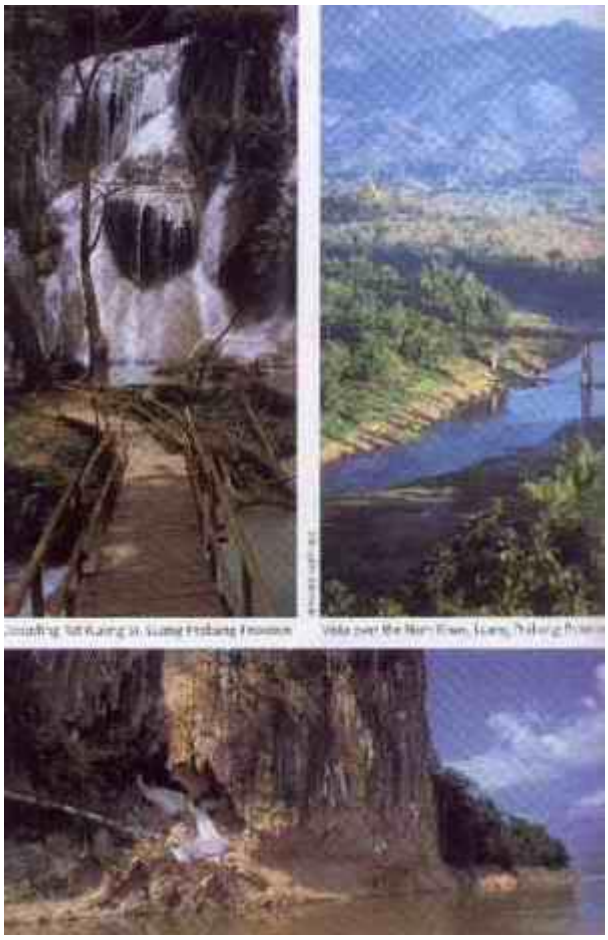
The *Lonely planet* guidebook about Laos under review gives precise and explicit information ranging from history to weather. These facts give the visitor the practical information on issues like visa, getting there and starting point for travel.

According to the guidebook, one cannot plan too much in advance in Laos since things are not in the control of tourist because of lack of infrastructure. Most of the visitors begin their journey from the Capital Vientiane. but make sure that you have enough time to travel upcountry to get the real taste of Laos. For mainstream Laos culture the guidebook suggests the visit to towns and villages on or near the mighty river Mekong.

According to the guidebook there are no restrictions for the foreigners to travel anywhere in the country. Generally a tourist visa allows for only 15 days travel, although this can be extended for another 15 days. As to be comfortable it is better to dress up in pleated skirts below the knees for women and pants for men shorter than these are not preferred by locals. Whenever things go bad don't lose temper in Laos. a smile and sabai- dil (the local greeting) goes a long way to help sort out the issue. However the guidebook cautions against traveling to remote province such as Sekong, Attapeu which are run like independent fiefdoms by the locals where there is little law and order.

The guidebook quite happily tells us that there is an oversupply of rooms. As a result the rates of more expensive places have also come down. Nowadays even in Vientiane one can find rooms starting at US $ 2. 5 a night. Outside the capital the rates are even cheaper. Tourist hotels with reservation services range from around US $ 15 a night to high of US $ 60 or more.

The guide is full of color pictures such as these. This one facing page 257 shows Cascading Tat Kuang Si, Luang Prabang Province (top left); Vista over the Nam Khan, Luang Prabang Province (top right); and The entrance to the Pak Ou caves at the mouth of the Nam Ou, Luang Prabang Province



Food according to the guidebook is very reasonable too. An average meal may cost less than US $2 per person. A huge bowl of *foe* (rice noodles) around US $0. 40 only. Pictures on page 112 gives colourful display of culinary delicacies of Laos.

Lonely Planet has given adequate information about the Capital Vientiane Northern Laos which has provinces like Luang Prabang province, Xieng Khuang province and Hua phan province to name a few. Southern Laos which has Tha Khaek, Savannakhet province and Champa Sak province. Information like how to get there, where to eat, places to stay and visit is clearly given.

Colorful pictures from these provinces given in the guide book can easily convince a tourist to decide where he would like to go. Pictures of the temple architecture (page 192-193) are ornate and very beautiful. Different styles of temple architecture like Vientiane style, Luang prabang style and xien khuay style are graphically depicted in the book.

For shopping, Lonely Planet has categorically praised the items which are unique to Laos. Fabrics like silk and cotton are found in different styles according to the geographic provinence and ethnicity of the weavers. Beautiful carvings in wood, bone and stone are also available. Most of them depict Hindu or Buddhist mythology. However one should avoid buying ivory items since poaching is banned in Laos. Authentic opium pipes seem to be plentiful in Laos. Gold and silver jewellery are also good buys.

This Lonely Planet guide is a must for anyone traveling to Laos. It gives comprehensive information about the what's and how of travel. At some point it gives such intimate details (Laos people love children! And if you have children traveling with you, you'll be given a special smile and warmer hospitality; talking loudly is considered rude in Laos.) This is the only book which equips you well

as a traveler, with local words, greetings and everyday sentences in its language section. A must for every traveler.

-Ameeta Gupta and Rohit Raghav Gupta



Ameeta Gupta, is a Post-graduate teacher for past 25 years, and has taught in multi-cultural environment too. She received her Master's degree in Social Science, M.Sc (Child Development) from Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, India. She is an avid reader and reads across literature in Enlish and in Hindi languages. She loves travelling, having been to many places in and outside India. She spent six years in the Gulf, and interacted a lot with multiracial and multicultural society. She is into trekking as well, and has accomplished several of National Himalayan Trekking Expeditions. She can be contacted at doctornaresh@vsnl.com. During her spare time, she enjoys meeting friends and traveling. (Click picture to enlarge).



Rohit Raghav Gupta is a brilliant budding doctor at Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, India. He has a multi-hued personality. He is fond of music, an able Clarinet player, also a voracious reader with a discerning mind. He is a nature lover who has ventured into the deep jungles and Himalayas for his trek and travel. He was traveling in the Andamans when the earthquake and Tsunami struck. A sensitive human being with a scientific bent of mind. He can be contacted at doctornaresh@vsnl.com. During his spare time, he enjoys meeting friends and traveling. He is seen here in the Andaman Islands holding his favourite Lonely Planet book on India (Click picture to enlarge).

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-Editor-in-Chief