

Vientiane City: Temples and Museums

Vientiane City was founded during the late 13th century, and in the mid-16th century the capital of the Lao kingdom (a state known as Lane Xang) was moved to Vientiane from its previous traditional location at Luang Prabang. In 1778 Vientiane came under Siamese control; in 1828 it was sacked and destroyed when the subject Laotian king revolted against Siamese hegemony. From 1899 to 1953, with the exception of the Japanese occupation in 1945, Vientiane was in succession the seat of the French governor and the French administrative capital.



Vientiane still has some of its older wooden structures, despite its government offices, foreign embassies, and schools. Its modern industries include brewing, lumber processing, and the manufacture of brick, tile, textiles, cigarettes, matches, detergents, plastic bags, rubber sandals, and iron and steel. The Lao farmers of the surrounding area tend rice, corn, and livestock in some of the best alluvial lowlands of Laos. Before 1975 the city was the principal stock shipping and slaughtering centre of the country.

Since the shift in the country's import trade from Vietnam to Thailand, Vientiane has replaced Pakse to the southeast as Laos's principal port of entry. Nowadays, Vientiane with a population of 464,000 and an area of 180 square kilometers, is the center of culture, commerce and administration in Laos. Street signs are mostly written in Lao script only. The main streets in the central district are: Th Samsenthai, which is the main shopping area, Th Setthathirat, where several of the most famous temples are located

and Th Fa Ngunn, which runs along the river . To the southeast is the mostly local residential district of Sisattanak and to the west is the similarly residential Sikhottabong. Among the landmarks are:

That Luang Stupa (Great Sacred Stupa)

Originally built in 1566 by King Saysethathirath, That Luang Stupa was rebuilt in 1953. The golden stupa stands 45 meters tall and is believed to contain a relic of Lord Buddha. Today it is the nation's most important cultural monument. Symbolizing the coming together of all Lao people it holds a special place in the national psyche. The gold colored centerpiece of this stupa echoes the curve of an elongated Lotus bud. The shrine is the focus for the annual That Luang Festival. The festival is celebrated for 7 days and nights during the twelfth full moon of the Buddhist lunar calendar where monks are presented with flower offerings and residents enjoy traditional cultural performances



Ho Pra Keo Museum

Previously the ancient temple, it was built in 1565 by King Saysethathirath to house the Emerald Buddha (lost to the Siamese in 1828) as his personal place of worship. For this reason and unlike other temples in Laos, monks have not taken up residence here. During the 1970's the temple was converted from a place of worship into a museum and it now houses nation's finest collection of Buddhist sculpture and artifacts

Wat Sisaket Temple

This temple is located in the center of the old city and was built in 1818 by King Anouvong and is Vientiane's oldest remaining temple having survived the destruction of the city by the Siamese in 1828. The oldest monastery stands intact in its original form and certainly is one of the most interesting in the country. Inside the main hall, the courtyard walls house hundreds of little niches and shelves containing a total of 6,840 Buddha images. Ho Trai is a hall containing many Buddhist manuscripts, which were published in the 18th century.

Patuxay Monument

The memorial monument of Patuxay is perhaps the most prominent landmark in the city. It was constructed in its prominent position on Lanexang Avenue in 1958. While the architecture was inspired by the Arc de Triomphe in Paris the design incorporates typical Lao motifs including "Kinnari", a mythical birdwoman. Energetic visitors can climb to the top of the monument, which reveals an excellent panoramic view of the city.

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