

LAOS: THE INTRIGUING PLAINS OF JARS ATTRACTING TOURISTS



Around the Xieng Khouang plain in Laos, there are thousands of mysterious jars of diverse shapes and sizes. They present both, a great tourist attraction and a scientific enigma: as no one was yet able to explain their existence.

Laos is a not exactly the ultimate tourist hot-spot, yet many adventurers long to visit this charming country. It is a land of heart-stopping beauty and charm, with warm and welcoming people who are still very fond of their traditions. The Vietnam War unfortunately did not spare Laos and there are still many very dangerous areas with a lot of unexploded bombs which make any wilderness trips very difficult.

Archeologists have been for many decades exploring the Xieng Khouang plain, in attempts to finally explain the presence of the thousands of jars scattered around without any apparent reason or logic. This bizarre 'collection' dates back some 2000 years and features jars of diverse sizes, from 1 - 3 m high, made of sedimentary rock. Artistically speaking, they are not exceptionally decorated - in fact, only a few have some patters engraved on the surface.

Approximately 400 sites have been discovered where these unusual jars stand dispersed. However, due to safety constraints, only three are accessible to the public. The largest visitor-friendly one is located near the town of Phonsavan, and features 250 stone jars. Some archeologists believe the jars may have been used to store cremated human remains.

The local legends, however, offer a slightly more exciting twist. According to the local belief, this once was a land of giants. Thousands of years ago, an evil kind Chao Angka was defeated by Khun Jeum, a kind king who liberated Angka's oppressed nation and to celebrate, these giant jars were to store his lao-lao (a traditional alcoholic drink).

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