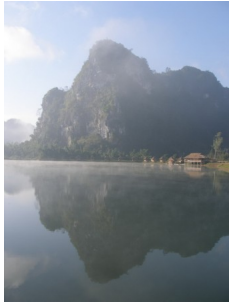


# UNIQUE ATTRACTION: VIENGXAY CAVES IN LAOS OPENED TO THE PUBLIC



Laos has opened a network of caves in Viengxay which were used as a shelter during the time when Americans planned to bomb the communist troops. Laotians now hope to lure international tourists to the intricate cave system.

Laos hopes to bring international tourists to Viengxay in Houaphanh Province. The location is sometimes considered the birthplace of the modern Laos state. **The country's officials were among the 23,000 people who were hiding in the network of caves in local limestone mountains for nine years during the 1960s and 1970s.**

During the long and unsuccessful US war with communists in this part of developing world more bombs were dropped on Laos than on Europe during World War II. Locals had to farm at night to avoid the airstrikes. They virtually had to move under ground to survive the extensive bombing.

**The underground complex composed of some 200 caves. People lived, worked and studied here. There were offices but also a hospital and even a theatre.** The Laotians enlarged the natural caves to provide them a home where they could live for nine long years. The caves were even equipped with airtight evacuation chambers that should protect the people from the American chemical weapons. The site was arguably visited by Fidel Castro himself as a gesture of support to the Laos people.

The caves were just recently opened to the public. They are not only a reminder of the brutal American aggression (many people still get killed every year by unexploded bombs from the US campaign) but also a possible source of income. Prior the opening of the caves the country asked the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as well as other organizations to help develop the site for international visitors.

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