

LAOTIAN TOURISM - ANCIENT SIGHTS AND GUERILLA COMPLEX



Lao People's Democratic Republic is a communist country in southeastern Asia bordering on Burma, China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. This country is not very well off. The Gross Domestic Product per capita is US \$440, which makes the country one of the poorest states in the region. The vast majority of Laotian works in subsistence agriculture. Nevertheless, Laotian tourism industry grows as the country may offer various tourism attractions. For example the ancient capital city of the Lan Xang Kingdom - Luang Prabang, which is a UNESCO heritage site, lures many tourists. This boom in the tourism industry pours vital sources to the country's economy.

Nowadays, Laotian tourism officials open a new tourism attraction "the hidden city". It is an underground complex in limestone mountains of Vieng Xay province. Guerilla fighters lived and worked here during the war in the 1960s. Now, places where freedom fighters once planned attacks against Americans have become a tourism attraction visited even by Americans themselves. The communist party chief had his base in here. The complex was even equipped with airtight emergency shelter with an oxygen pump in case of American gas attacks. After the war the Laotian government kept these caves off limits. The biggest cave that is sometimes referred to as the "elephant" cave was a place where musicals and dance performances took place, also rallies and meetings were held here. The opening of the complex to the tourism industry is not only interesting for foreigners. Locals also appreciate that they can visit places from where their leaders planned the war.

However, the development in the industry has also its other side. Luang Prabang has become a crowded tourism center, which has made many old families to leave the city and to sell or lease their homes to rich outsiders. The tourism witnessed a 36.5 per cent growth in 2007, compared to 2006.

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