



Laos



Background Modern-day Laos has its roots in the ancient Lao kingdom of Lan Xang, established in the 14th century under King FA NGUM. For 300 years, Lan Xang had influence reaching into present-day Cambodia and Thailand, as well as over all of what is now Laos. After centuries of gradual decline, Laos came under the domination of Siam (Thailand) from the late 18th century until the late 19th century, when it became part of French Indochina. The Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907 defined the current Lao border with Thailand. Following more than 15 years of civil war, the communist Pathet Lao took control of the government in 1975, ending a six-century-old monarchy and instituting a one party--the Lao People's Revolutionary Party--communist state. A gradual, limited return to private enterprise and the liberalization of foreign investment laws began in the late 1980s. Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997 and the WTO in 2013.

In the 2010s, the country benefited from direct foreign investment, particularly in the natural resource and industry sectors. Construction of a number of large hydropower dams and expanding mining activities have also boosted the economy. Laos has retained its official commitment to communism and maintains close ties with its two communist neighbors, Vietnam and China, both of which continue to exert substantial political and economic influence on the country. China, for example, provided 70% of the funding for a \$5.9 billion, 400-km railway line between the Chinese border and the capital Vientiane, which opened for operations in 2021. Laos financed the remaining 30% with loans from China. At the same time, Laos has expanded its economic reliance on the West and other Asian countries, such as Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand. Nevertheless, despite steady economic growth for more than a decade, it remains one of Asia's poorest countries.

Capital	name: Vientiane (Viangchan)
Government type	communist party-led state
Area	total : 236,800 sq km land: 230,800 sq km water: 6,000 sq km
Climate	tropical monsoon; rainy season (May to November); dry season (December to April)
Natural resources	timber, hydropower, gypsum, tin, gold, gemstones
Population	total: 7,953,556 (2024 est.)
Population growth rate	1.26% (2024 est.)
Ethnic groups	Lao 53.2%, Khmou 11%, Hmong 9.2%, Phouthay 3.4%, Tai 3.1%, Makong 2.5%, Katong 2.2%, Lue 2%, Akha 1.8%, other 11.6% (2015 est.)
Religions	Buddhist 64.7%, Christian 1.7%, none 31.4%, other/not stated 2.1% (2015 est.)
Languages	Lao (official), French, English, various ethnic languages

Executive branch	chief of state: President THONGLOUN Sisoulith (since 22 March 2021) head of government: Prime Minister SONEXAY (also spelled SONXAI) Siphandon (since 30 December 2022)
Legislative branch	legislature name: National Assembly (Sapha Heng Xat)
Diplomatic representation in the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Sisavath INPHACHANH (since 7 June 2022)
Diplomatic representation from the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Heather VARIAVA (since 5 February 2024)
Economic overview	lower middle-income, socialist Southeast Asian economy; one of the fastest growing economies; declining but still high poverty; natural resource rich; new anticorruption efforts; already high and growing public debt; service sector hit hard by COVID-19
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$66.905 billion (2024 est.) \$64.173 billion (2023 est.) \$61.856 billion (2022 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$8,600 (2024 est.) \$8,400 (2023 est.) \$8,200 (2022 est.)
Exports	\$9.698 billion (2023 est.) \$8.604 billion (2022 est.) \$7.82 billion (2021 est.)
Exports - partners	China 39%, Thailand 34%, Australia 4%, USA 4%, Cambodia 2% (2023)
Exports - commodities	electricity, fertilizers, gold, garments, paper (2023)
Imports	\$8.596 billion (2023 est.) \$7.983 billion (2022 est.) \$6.527 billion (2021 est.)
Imports - partners	Thailand 58%, China 36%, Japan 1%, Singapore 1%, Germany 1% (2023)
Imports - commodities	refined petroleum, cars, raw sugar, plastic products, trucks (2023)

Population Pyramid

