

Northern Laos

Laos's reputation as a land of mountains and rivers derives largely from the geography of its northern provinces, which contain the nation's highest peaks and lengthiest waterways.

This striking natural heritage has greatly influenced the region's human history. Because little arable land is available for agriculture, the north has attracted hill-tribe cultures adapted to small-scale farming and animal husbandry from the more rugged territories of Tibet and south-western China. At the same time, Northern Laos's natural barriers against the outside world allow for an isolation not easily maintained in the broad Mekong River valley plains and plateaus of Southern Laos. Thus cultural traditions of the northern tribal groups have remained relatively well preserved.

This ethnic diversity, along with the alluring natural scenery, means that tourism in the north has out-paced that in the south. Today the three most important tourist centres in Laos – Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng and the Plain of Jars – are all found in the north. Tourism is steadily spreading to other areas as well, particularly Luang Nam Tha Province.

Luang Prabang Province

According to the 1995 census the mountainous northern province of Luang Prabang had a total population of 365,000 (down from 434,000 in 1960 – mostly because of refugee emigration) divided among 12 ethnicities, of whom 46% are classified Lao Theung, 40% Lao Loum and 14% Lao Sung. Over 80% of the population are engaged in farming – mostly rice – and of the remaining 17%, who are involved in commerce, most live in the Luang Prabang capital district. For centuries cut off from major markets by a lack of reliable surface trans-

Highlights

- Luang Prabang, with its many historic temples, hill tribes and dramatic scenery
- Pak Ou Caves, filled with antique Buddha images
- Boat trips on the Mekong River and the Nam Ou
- The enigmatic Plain of Jars, littered with mysterious stone vessels
- Luang Nam Tha & Muang Sing, surrounded by hill-tribe villages
- Nam Ha NBCA, one of the country's premier new trekking areas



port (even the Mekong is not navigable year-round), the province has developed a small, fragile and largely insular economy of local production and services on a traditional subsistence foundation.

Now that Rte 13 from Vientiane is fully sealed and the province can be reached in a single day's drive, this will probably change quite quickly.

History

In the area that now encompasses Luang Prabang Province archaeologists have found

NORTHERN LAOS



large stone drum-shaped objects bearing engraved motifs that are very similar to those of north Vietnam's Dongson bronze drums. Conclusions as to whether they are related to the Dongson culture (generally considered to have thrived from 500 BC to AD 100) – and if so whether they are pre- or post-Dongson – have yet to be drawn. There is also the possibility of a prehistoric or proto-historic connection with the stone jars of Xieng Khuang Province's Plain of Jars.

What is certain is that early Thai-Lao *meuangs* established themselves in the high river valleys along the Mekong River and its

major tributaries, the Nam Khan (Khan River), the Nam Ou and the Nam Suang, sometime between the 8th and 13th centuries.

The first Lao kingdom, Lan Xang, was consolidated here in 1353 by the Khmer-supported conqueror Fa Ngum. At that time it was known as Muang Sawa (possibly named after Java, relating to the Javanese invasion of Chenla, centred in Southern Laos and northern Cambodia, between the 6th and 8th centuries).

In 1357 the name was changed to Muang Xieng Thong, but some time after King Fa Ngum accepted a Buddha image called Pha

베트남 국경 넘기: 나메우(Na maew)에서 남쏘이(Nam Xoi)로

멀고 험난하기까지 한 이 국경(개방시간 7.30am-11.30am & 1.30pm-4.30pm)은 모험가들의 기쁨이기도 하다. 썸노아에서 매일 썸배우(US\$2.30, 4시간 소요, 6.30am)가 있고, 비엠펜사이에서는 하루에 수차례 출발한다(US\$1.50, 2시간 소요, 8am-11am). 비자를 받으려면 국경에 도착한 후 조금 기다려야 한다. 베트남에서는 빈호이나 바투옥까지 오토바이를 흥정할 수 있다. 기사들은 종종 비가지를 씌우려 함 것이다. 베트남 쪽에 두세 군데의 게스트하우스가 있다. 반대 방향으로 이 국경을 넘는 방법은 p434를 참고할 것.

처에는 230kg짜리 폭탄에 맞아 움푹 팬 자국이 있는데 여기에 콘크리트를 발라 표시해 두었다. 전 대통령의 이름을 딴 **탐 탄 카이손(Tham Than Kaysone)**에 볼거리가 가장 많다. 당시 쓰이던 침대, 의류, 사무집기, 책을 비롯해 체계바라의 초상화, 공산당 회의실 등이 있다. **탐 탄 캄타이(Tham Than Khamtay)**는 많게는 3000명의 공산당 평당원들이 은신했던 가장 웅장한 동굴이다.

잠잘 곳 & 먹을 곳

Naxay Guest House(☎ 314336; r US\$2-4) 다섯 개의 예쁜 트윈룸이 있고, 거실과 화장실은 공동으로 쓴다. 욕실이 딸린 방갈로도 한 채 있다.

Thavisay Hotel(☎ 020-571 2392; r US\$4-6) 현재는 보수 중인 2층짜리 호텔. 마을에서 가장 괜찮은 곳으로 위치도 좋다. 온수가 나오는 욕실이 딸려 있고, 모기장이 쳐진 두 개의 더블룸이 있다. 인공 호수가 니다보이는 레스토랑(식사 US\$2-3, 아침, 점심, 저녁 식사)도 있다.

도착 & 출발

썸배우가 썸노아와 비엠펜사이 사이를 정기적으로 다닌다(US\$0.80, 50분 소요, 29km, 6.20am-5.20pm). 아침에 더 자주 출발한다.

우돔싸이 지방 Oudomxay Province

루앙프라방, 풍살리, 루앙남타, 보케오, 사인아블리 지방으로 둘러싸여 있고, 중국의 윈난성에도 국경을 맞대고 있다. 23개의 소수민족이 살고 있는데, 그 중에서도 건설현장과 농장에서 일하는 윈난성 출신의 노동자들이 가장 많다. 라오

스 북부로 이동하는 사람들은 대부분 우돔싸이를 거쳐가지만 잠시 거쳐가기에 여기보다 더 나은 곳들도 있다.

우돔싸이 Oudomxay

☎ 081 / 인구 80,000

제2차 인도차이나 전쟁 동안 지방의 주도(州府)였던 우돔싸이는 파땃라오를 지원하는 중공군대의 중요한 기지였다. 오늘날 루트 1, 2, 4가 교차하는 위치 덕택에 중국의 부를 유입하면서 라오스-중국의 교역 중심지가 되어가고 있다. 여안내소 직원의 열정적인 태도에도 불구하고 바깥엔 특별히 흥미로울 게 없다.

기본 여행정보

BCEL(☎ 211260; 루트 1) 미국 달러, 태국 바트, 중국 원 인화를 킵으로 바꿔준다.

Oudomxay Internet(루트 1: 시간당 US\$1.80; ☎ 8am-7pm) 속도가 빠른 인터넷.

우돔싸이 지역 여행안내소(☎ 211797; 루트 1: ☎ 8월-3월 8am-정오 & 1.30-4pm, 4월-9월 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-6pm) 다리 서쪽에 있으며, 숙박, 생태관광, 교통 보물을 제공한다.

잠잘 곳 & 먹을 곳

대부분 루트 1 도로를 따라 게스트하우스와 식당 점들이 있다. **Valving Guest House**(☎ 212503; r US\$4)는 저렴한 요금이 장점이고, 다리 동쪽에 있는 친절함 **Lithavixay Guest House**(☎ /팩스 212105; 루트 1: r \$7-15; ☎ ☎)은 온수가 나오는 개별 욕실과 딸린 방이 있다. 몇 달러만 더 내면 아침식사와

TV, 에어컨까지 누릴 수 있다.

어느 게스트하우스의 맨 아래층에 있는 **Sin Restaurant**(식사 US\$0.50-1.50; ☎) 아침, 점심 & 저녁 맛있는 중국-라오스 퓨전 요리와 몇 가지 한식구식 음식을 조리한다.

도착 & 출발

비엠펜공(☎ 312047; airport)이 매주 화, 목, 토요일 비엠펜타이를 오간다(편도 US\$75). 우돔싸이는 라오스 북부의 교통 요충지다. 우돔싸이에 서편이 나가는 아스팔트 도로들은 중국인이 건설한 것으로 사정이 좋은 편이다(파땃으로 가는 도로만 예외). 마을의 남서쪽 끝에 있는 **버스터미널**(☎ 212218)에서 **루앙프라방**(일반 US\$4, 5시간 소요, 하루 3회; VIP US\$5, 3시간 소요, 하루 1회), **농키아우**(US\$3.10, 3-5시간 소요, 하루 4회), **파땃**(US\$3.30, 5시간 소요, 하루 2회), **루앙남타**(US\$3.20, 4시간 소요, 하루 3회), **루앙쿠아**(US\$2.80, 4시간 소요, 하루 3회), **보텐**(US\$3.4시간 소요, 하루 2회), **풍살리**(US\$6, 8-12시간 소요, 하루 1회), 그리고 **비엠펜타이**(일반 US\$11, 16시간 소요, 하루 2회; VIP US\$12.10, 14시간 소요, 하루 2회)으로 가는 버스가 있다.

파땃 Pak Beng

비엠펜타이와 루앙프라방 사이를 물길로 여행할 때 뱃놀임 정도 머물게 되는, 메콩 강과 땃 강이 만나는 지점의 목가적인 마을이다. 파땃은 한 때 그랬던 것처럼 우중충하지는 않지만, 그렇다고 매력적이지도 않다. 짐꾼이 바가지를 씌우는 일이 아직도 흔한 헛간 같은 곳을 꿰찰은 솜소라고 소리는 등의 속임수가 흔하다. 대개 자가 발전으로 전기를 쓰며, 오후 6시부터 10시까지 전기가 들어온다.

할 만한 일이 거의 없는 곳이지만 다행히 **Boonmee Guest House** 근처에 있는 **Traditional Massage & Sauna**(사우나 US\$1, 마사지 US\$3; ☎) 사우나 4-10pm, 마사지 8am-정오 & 2.30-11.30pm)에서 시

간을 때울 수 있다.

강변도로에 몇 군데 게스트하우스가 있다. 작은 방에 딱딱한 매트리스, 모기장을 갖춘 곳이 대부분. 저렴한 숙소를 찾는다면 **Monsavan Guest House**(☎ 5771935; r US\$2-5)도 나쁘지 않지만 조금만 돈을 더 주고 **Villa Salika**(☎ 212306; r US\$5-7)로 가면 개인 욕실을 쓸 수 있다. 안락한 곳을 찾는다면 **Pak Beng Lodge**(r US\$30; ☎)와 생태친화적인 **Luang Say Lodge**(☎ 212296; www.mekongcruises.com; r US\$60부터)가 만족스러울 것이다.

파땃, 루앙프라방, 웨이사이 사이의 보트여행에 대한 자세한 정보는 p314를 참고하자. 우돔싸이(US\$3.30, 5시간 소요, 하루 2회)행 썸배우는 보트 선착장에서 1.5km 떨어진 버스터미널에서 출발해 울퉁불퉁한 루트 2를 따라 간다.

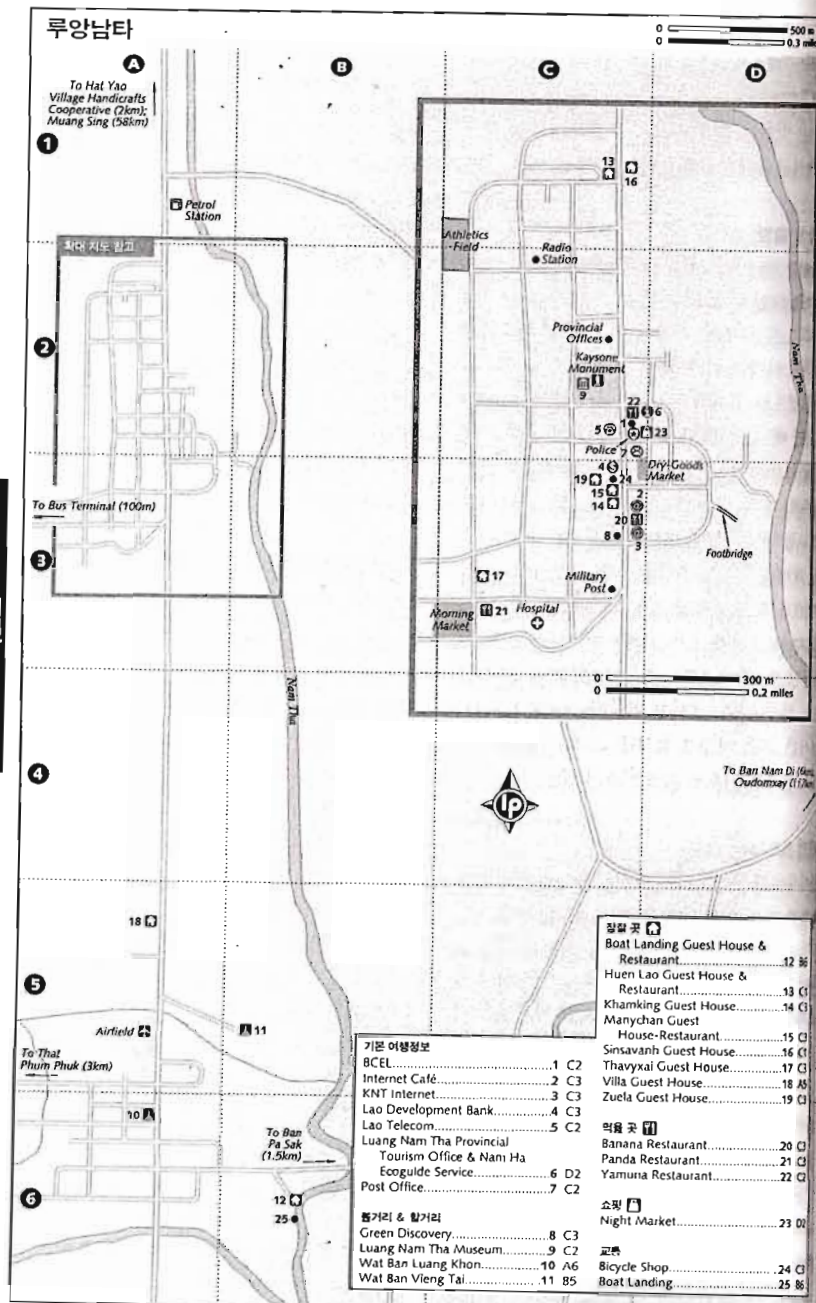
루앙남타 지방 Luang Nam Tha Province

루앙남타는 제2차 인도차이나 전쟁 때 거의 파괴되어 버렸지만 중국의 대규모 농장이 생겨나면서 태국, 중국, 라오스 간 교역 거점으로 떠오르고 있다. 또한 남하 생태관광 프로젝트의 성공에 힘입어 관광사업이 떠오르기 시작했다. 루앙남타나 므앙쎄에선 자신의 트레킹 경험에 대해 열변을 토하는 여행객을 한 명쯤 만나게 될 것이다. 라오스는 세계에서 가장 빨리 성장하고 있는 중국과 태국의 교차로로서 그 중요성을 키워가고 있는 나라다. 중국에서 태국으로 가는 루트 3도로가 놓이면서 이 일대 사람들의 삶도 달라지고 있다.

루앙남타 Luang Nam Tha

☎ 086 / 인구 35,400

루앙남타는 넓고 평평한 강 유역에 자리한 사실상 두 개의 마을로 나뉜 지방이다. 구식가치에서 7km 북쪽에 있는 신식가치에는 중앙 버스터미널, 게스트하우스와 레스토랑, 그 외 시설들이 밀집해 있다. 구식가치에는 공항과 타-강(Nam Tha) 보트 선착장이 있다. 특별히 시선을 끄는 것은 없는 마을이지만, 직물, 의류, 바구니, 종이, 기



지역 토산품을 파는 아시장이 마을에 생기를 더한다. 마을을 에워싸고 있는 산과 논에는 태담, 카무, 타이루 부족의 마을들이 있다. 자연도 박물관에 보자.

기존 여행정보

BCEL (월-금 8.30am-3.30pm) 여행자수표 교환, 현전류, 신용카드 현금 서비스도 가능하다.

Internet Cafe (시간당 US\$1.80)

KNT Internet (시간당 US\$1.80: 월-금 8am-10pm) 속도가 빠른 인터넷.

Lao Development Bank (월-금 8.30am-정오 & 2-10pm) 여행자수표 교환, 현전 업무.

Lao Telecom 장거리 전화를 걸 수 있다.

루앙남타 지역 여행안내소 (☎ 211534, 312047: 월-금 8am-5pm & 2-5pm) 영어를 하는 직원이 있다.

우체국 (월-금 8am-정오 & 1-4pm)

거리와 할거리

루앙남타 박물관(입장료 US\$0.50: 월-목 8.30-11.30am & 1.30-3.30pm, 금 8.30-11.30am)은 민족의식, 카무의 청동품, 불상 같은 이 지역의 인류학적 공예품을 소장하고 있는 박물관이다. 연대별로 혁명과정을 전시한다.

사람들은 대부분 남하 국가보호구역(Nam Ha NPA)에서 트레킹, 카약킹, 래프팅을 하기 위해 루앙남타에 온다. 마을에서 1박을 하는 투어와 트레킹 코스들이 많다. 남쪽으로는 주로 카무와 랜렌족 마을로 가고, 북, 서, 동쪽으로는 아카족 마을로 간다. 관광이 마을에 미치는 영향을 최소화하기 위해, 단체의 규모와 빈도에 대한 가이드라인이 엄격하다. 수익은 지역 경제로 돌아간다. 면허가 없는 가이드와 함께 남하 국가보호구역 내를 돌아다니는 것은 불법이다.

기간과 난이도 별로 다양한 트레킹 코스가 있다. 대부분의 코스가 숨막히는 자연풍광에 둘러싸인 등산로를 지난다. 취재 당시 여행안내소 부속 건물에 있던 Nam Ha Ecoguide Se-

rvise(☎ 211534: 월-금 8am-9pm)와 사설 업체인 Green Discovery(☎ 211484: www.greendiscoverylao.com: 월-금 8am-9pm)가 트레킹 투어를 운영하고 있었다. 여행안내소에서는 투어는 물론이고 지역의 동식물, 소수민족, 관습과 에티켓에 대한 정보를 얻을 수 있다. '책임 여행(관광객이 여행 국가의 경제, 환경, 문화를 존중하고 보호할 책임이 있다는 개념)'에 관한 사진이 담긴 안내책자, 지도도 제공한다. Green Discovery는 하 강(Nam Ha)에서 1-4일 코스의 카약킹과 래프팅 투어를 운영하고 있다. 요금은 하루에 약 US\$30이며 인원수에 따라 달라진다.

자전거나 오토바이로 쉽게 가볼 수 있는 볼거리들은 다음과 같다. 비행장 근처에 있는 50년 된 두 사원 왓 반비엠타이(Wat Ban Vieng Tai)와 왓 반루앙콘(Wat Ban Luang Khon), 비행장에서 서쪽으로 약 4km 거리에 있는 산 정상에 불탑 및 폭포(That Phum Phuk), 시내에서 북동쪽으로 약 3km 거리에 있는 반남디 마을, 그 마을을 지나면 나오는 작은 폭포, 카무, 랜렌, 타이담, 타이루족 마을들도 볼거리를 가로지르는 흙먼지 길 주변에 흩어져 있다. 출발하기 전에 여행안내소에서 지도와 안내책자를 챙기자.

Boat Landing Guest House (☎ 312398: www.theboatlanding.com)에서 가이드 동반 산악자전거 투어를 운영한다. 수익의 10%는 이 지역의 농민 발전 프로젝트에 돌아간다.

잠잘 곳 & 먹을 곳

대부분의 숙소는 북쪽의 신시가지에 몰려 있다. 성수기인 12월에서 3월까지는 방이 빨리 찬다. 아침에 도착하면 더 좋은 방을 구할 확률이 높다.

Khamking Guest House(r US\$5) 새로 생긴 게스트하우스. 아늑한 방에는 발이 처진 커다란 창문과 편안한 침대, 선풍기가 있다. 개인 욕실은 비좁긴 하지만 온수가 나오고 깨끗한 타일 바닥이다. 가격대비 좋은 곳.

Manychan Guest House-Restaurant (☎ 312209: r

US\$5) 매우 인기있는 곳으로 최근 새롭게 단장을 마쳤다. 방은 깔끔하고 선풍기와 온수가 나왔다 안 나왔다 하는 사위기가 있다. 외국인 관광객을 겨냥한 레스토랑(식사 US\$1.50-2.50) 역시 인기 최고.

Huen Lao Guest House & Restaurant(☎ 211111: r US\$6) 미적 감각이 돋보이는 방이 있다. 이층에 세련된 야외 레스토랑(식사 US\$1.50-US\$3, 점심 & 저녁 영업)이 있어 더욱 좋다. 말린 대나무 피클을 곁들인 돼지고기나 자극적인 닭고기 요리를 먹어보자.

Thavyxai Guest House(☎ 511 0292: r US\$6.50) 버스티미널과 가깝다. 호텔에 버금가는 수준의 깔끔한 방이 있다. 사교적인 가족이 운영하며 비교적 조용하다.

후천 Boat Landing Guest House & Restaurant(☎ 312398: www.theboatlanding.laopdr.com; r 아침 식사 포함 US\$32-42) 신시가지 남쪽으로 7km 거리에 있으며, 주요 도로에서 약 150m 떨어져 있다. 남타 보트 선착장 근처에 있는 조용한 생태친화 숙소. 전망 좋은 나무 방갈로에 태양열로 데운 물이 나오는 개인 욕실이 있다. 레스토랑(식사 US\$2-5)에선 다양한 채식 메뉴를 비롯해, 마을에서 가장 제대로 된 북부 라오스 음식을 선보인다(Green Discovery에서 오후 6시 30분에 출발해 8시 45분에 돌아오는 뚝딱이 있다. 요금은 US\$1). 영어나 불어 가이드를 동반한 래프팅, 튜빙, 낚시, 세관찰, 산악자전거, 트레킹 투어를 알선해 주기도 한다.

Panda Restaurant(☎ 566 3122: 식사 US\$1.50-2.50: ☎ 아침, 점심&저녁식사) 야외 레스토랑. 전화 번호부 두개의 메뉴에는 팬케이크부터 맛있는 두부 튀김과 과일 쥬스까지 없는 게 없다.

Yamuna Restaurant(식사 US\$1.50-2.50: ☎ 아침, 점심&저녁식사) 다양한 인도 카레가 있다.

그 외 잠잘 곳 또는 먹음 곳:
Sinsavanh Guest House(☎ 211141: r US\$2-4) 밝은 이층 목조 건물. 냉수만 나오는 공동욕실이 있다.

Zuela Guest House(☎ 312183: r US\$5) 새로 생긴 투숙처. 크고 깨끗한 방에 온수가 나오는 욕실이 있다.

Villa Guest House(☎ 312425: 아침식사 포함 r US\$2-4) 마을 남쪽에 있는 화사한 곳. 크고 밝은 방에 커다란 창문이 있다. 야외 레스토랑(식사 US\$2-4, 저녁식사만)이 있다.

Banana Restaurant(☎ 5718026: 식사 US\$1-1.50: ☎ 아침, 점심&저녁식사) 서양식 아침식사(심지어 콜라까지), 스타프라이(stir-fry: 중국식 볶음 요리), 카레를 외국인의 입맛에 맞춘 저렴하고 맛있는 음식 제공.

도착 & 출발

취재 당시 루앙남타 공항은 '국제' 공항으로 탈바꿈하기 위해 준비하고 있었다. 루앙남타 공항에 다시 문을 열 때는 **라오항공**(☎ 312180)이 루앙라방(편도 US\$45)과 비엔티안(US\$84)을 오갈 예정이라고 한다.

타 강(Nam Ta)을 따라 환상적인 보트 여행을 할 수 있다. 외진 시골을 지나 메콩 강의 폭포 또는 멀리 웨이씨까지도 간다. 배는 시내에서 7km 남쪽에 있는 하 강(Nam Ha) **보트선착장**에서 출발하며, 요금은 나래(Na Lae)까지 US\$100, 팍타까지 US\$170, 웨이씨까지는 US\$180에서 US\$200 정도다. 지붕이 없는 통털 보트를 타고 가는 2일 코스로, 출발 전에 예약을 하고 다 른 승객들과 요금을 나눠서 내면 된다. 승객인수에 따라 다르지만, 성수기에는 거의 매일 보트가 출발한다. US\$4 정도의 요금을 추가로 내면 나래 마을에서, 또는 선장의 가족들과 함께 식사를 해결할 수 있다. 자외선 차단제, 간식과 물을 넉넉히 가지고 가자.

버스티미널(☎ 312164)은 탈랏사오(아침 식사 포함)에 있다. 우뚝싸이(K26,000, 3-5시간 소요, 하루 4회)와 중국과 국경을 마추한 보텐(US\$2, 2시간 소요, 하루 4회)으로 가는 버스가 있다. **루앙프라방**(US\$7, 8시간 소요, 8:30am)을 거쳐 **비엔티안**(US\$14, 19시간 소요)으로 가는 버스도 한 대 있다. 당일에만 표를 살 수 있으므로 미리 일찍 찾아가자.

행배우 한 대가 매일 웨이씨(US\$6.50, 8시간 소요)로 가며, 도중에 비엠푸카(Vieng Phoukha: US\$2.50, 4시간 소요)에 선다. 이 노선의 도로 사정이 점점 나아지고 있어 루앙남타에서 웨이씨로 가는 소요 시간도 그만큼 짧아지고 있다. 매일 므앙싱(US\$2, 2시간 소요)으로 가는 버스가 6대 정도 있고, 무앙롱(US\$3.60, 5시간 소요)으로 가는 버스가 한 대 있다.

루앙남타 내 교통편

중심에서 7km 떨어진 공항으로 가는 정보 요금은 US\$4다. 픽업트럭은 1인당 US\$0.30, 타 강(Nam Ta) 보트 선착장이나 근처의 Boat Landing Guest House로 가려면 버스티미널에서 US\$5에 점보를 빌리거나, 1인당 US\$0.30 정도에 합승 점보에 탑승하면 된다.

산악자전거나 변속 장치가 없는 일반 자전거의 요금은 1시간/하루 US\$0.30/1이며, 중심가에 있는 자전거 가게(☎ 9am-6pm)에서 빌릴 수 있다. 이곳에서 오토바이도 빌릴 수 있다.

므앙싱 Muang Sing

☎ 081 / 인구 29,307

전설적인 '골든 트라이앵글(태국, 라오스, 미얀마 국경의 삼각형을 이루는 지역으로 아편과 헤로인의 주요 생산지)' 깊숙한 곳에 자리잡은 므앙싱은 문화의 용광로다. 타이루와 타이느아 부족의 문화가 주를 이루는 가운데, 타이달, 아카, 호몽미엔, 톨로, 거기다 원단성 상인들의 문화까지 섞여 있다. 자원 보호를 목적으로 트레킹 산업을 규제하는 '가이드 서비스센터'가 문을 연 이후, 남미 국가보호구역으로의 여행도 실질적으로 개선되었다. 소수민족 부락을 방문하면서 사회적으로, 환경적으로도 책임감 있는 여행을 해보고 싶다면 이곳이야말로 동남아시아에서 최적의 장소일 것이다.

므앙싱은 바둑판 모양으로 되어 있다. 구 도시 위치도가 가이드 서비스센터에 걸려 있다. 편의

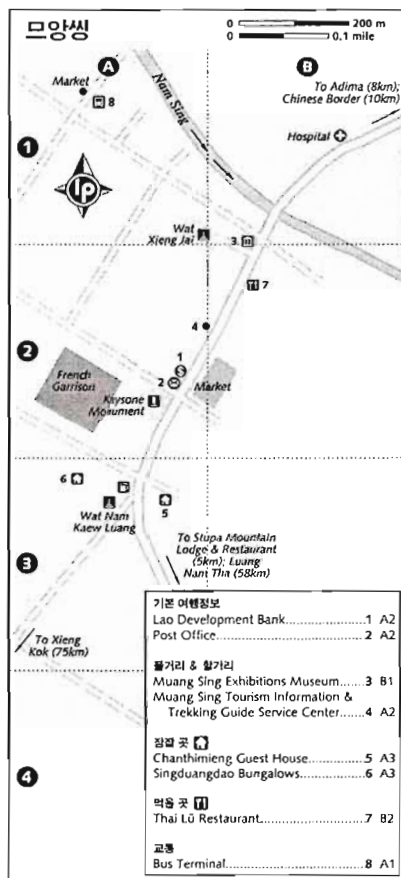
시설은 많지 않고, 우체국(☎ 9am-4pm)과 환전 업무만 하는 **Lao Development Bank**(☎ 월-금 8am-점오 & 2-3:30pm)가 있다

불거리 & 할거리

무너져가는 프랑스 식민지 시대의 유물들, 원색의 전통 복장을 입은 사람들이 므앙싱의 불거리라 할 수 있다. **므앙싱 전시 박물관**(Muang Sing Exhibitions Museum: 부족 박물관: 입장료 US\$0.50: ☎ 월-금 8:30am-4pm, 토 8-11am)은 아름답게 복원된 라오스-프랑스식 건물에 있다. 전통 직물과 손으로 짠 바구니, 수공예품, 부적, 전통 심벌즈 등이 전시되어 한 번 둘러볼 만하다. 토요일에는 개관 시간이 유동적이다. 대부분의 사람들은 남미 국가보호구역에서 트레킹을 하기 위해 므앙싱에 온다. 트레킹은 오로지 **므앙싱 여행정보 & 트레킹 가이드 서비스센터**(Muang Sing Tourism Information & Trekking Guide Service Center: ☎ 020-239 3534: ☎ 월-금 8-11am & 1:30-5pm, 토 & 일 8-10am & 3-5pm)를 통해서만 할 수 있다. 이 센터에는 외딴 산골 마을까지 가는 투어 등 일곱 개의 투어가 있다. 당일 코스도 있고 홈스테이를 포함해 사흘이 걸리는 코스도 있다. 요금은 혼자 갈 경우 하루 US\$35이며, 참가 인원이 늘어날수록 요금은 크게 내려간다(일곱 명일 경우 적게는 US\$10까지). 트레킹을 하는 동안 마약

중국 국경 넘기: 보텐(Boten)에서 모한(Móhàn)으로

중국 라오스 국경 중 유일하게 외국인에게 개방된 곳이 원단성의 모한과 루앙남타의 보텐 사이다. 라오스에서는 국경에서 30일 비자를 발급하지만, 중국에선 도착 비자를 발급하지 않는다. 국경은 라오스 쪽에서는 8am에서 4pm까지, 중국 쪽에서는 8am부터 5pm까지 개방된다. 교통편이 가장 많은 시간은 양쪽 모두 오전, 특히 오전 8시 직후다. 라오스 국경에서는 루앙남타와 우뚝싸이로 가는 교통편이 있다. 교통편을 놓쳐 보텐에서 머물러야 할 상황이 되면 저렴한 게스트하우스가 두어 곳 있다. 반대 방향으로 이 국경을 넘는 방법은 p562 참고.



은 금지된다. 가이드들은 농부, 교사, 경찰, 농장 인부 등 출신이 다양하다. 요금에 사용된 내역은 벽에 붙여 공지한다.

잠잘 곳 & 먹을 곳

므앙쌍에 있는 게스트하우스들은 평범하다. 규모는 크지만 별로 친절하지는 않은 게스트하우스들이 구시장 북쪽, 중심가에 여럿 있다. 시설이나 요금은 비슷비슷하다. 하룻밤만 자고 아침 일찍 트레킹을 떠날 거라면 이런 곳들도 괜찮다. 몇 군데를 돌아보고 가장 마음에 맞는 잠자리를 찾

아보자. 므앙쌍에서 며칠 머물 생각이라면 더 나은 곳들도 있으니 중심가 외에 다른 곳들도 찾아보자. 게스트하우스 아래층에는 보통 식사를 할 수 있는 조그만 식당이 있고, 중심 도로변에 멋있고 저렴한 음식을 파는 쌀국수 가게들이 있다. 버스터미널 옆에 있는 큰 시장에서 신선한 과일과 채소를 판다.

Chanthimieng Guest House (☎ 212351; r US\$4) 들어서서 순간 사장이 가족처럼 맞아준다. 침대는 별로지만, 위치가 좋고, 시원하게 펼쳐지는 들판의 전망이 좋다.

Singduangdao Bungalows (r US\$5) 통나무와 나무로 된 넓은 방갈로가 있다. 뜨거운 물에 샤워할 수 있어서 가격대비 괜찮은 편.

Adima (☎ 212372; r US\$5-6) 문을 연지 오래된 곳이다. 므앙쌍에서 북쪽으로 8km 떨어진 논밭 사이에 있어 미엔과 이카족 마을까지 걸어서 갈 수도 있다. 전화해서 숙소까지 가는 교통편을 부탁해 보자.

Stupa Mountain Lodge & Restaurant (☎ 020-6555; stupamtn@laot.com; r US\$10) 마을에서 남쪽으로 5km 떨어진 구릉 위에 있다. 예쁜 나무방갈로에는 온수가 나오는 욕실과 개인 베란다가 있다.

Thai Lu Restaurant (☎ 212375; 식사 US\$1-1.60) 아침, 점심 & 저녁 식사. 남픽웁(발효한 된장), 또는 지우(고추가루 액체 소스) 같은 진짜 타이루족을 식을 맛보기에는 므앙쌍에서 최고. 태국, 라오 음식과 서양 음식들도 있다. 야외 테이블이 좋다.

도착 & 므앙쌍 내 교통편

생떼우로 루앙네타를 오갈 수 있다(US\$2, 2시간 소요, 하루 약 6회). 미안나 국경의 시영곡(US\$3, 3-4시간 소요)으로 가는 생떼우도 하루에 약 6회 편 있으며, 여기서 스피드보트를 타고 웨이싸이까지 갈 수 있다. 대부분의 버스는 마을 북쪽 생강(Nam Sing) 근처에 있는 새로 생긴 버스터미널에서 출발한다. 자전거는 가거나 게스트하우스에서 빌릴 수 있다.

보케오 지방 Bokeo Province

리오스에서 가장 작은 지방. 태국과 국경을 이루는 메콩강과 루앙네타 사이에 있다. 태국에서 오는 여행객들은 주로 보케오 지방을 통해 라오스로 들어온다. 면적이 작고 인구도 적지만 34개나 되는 소수민족들이 살고 있다. 인종적 다양성 면에서 루앙네타 다음으로 두 번째다.

웨이싸이 Huay Xai

☎ 4 / 인구 15,500

웨이싸이는 수백 년 동안 태국과 중국 사이의 무역 거점 역할을 해 온 활기찬 강변 마을이다. 운송업은 여전히 활발하지만, 중심가를 따라 걷다 보면 관광이 또 하나의 주요 산업임을 알 수 있다. 랑프라방으로 가는 슬로보트(slow boat)를 타는 사람들, 육로나 강을 따라 북쪽으로 가려는 사람들, 또는 태국으로 건너가려는 사람들을 겨냥한 게스트하우스가 이곳저곳 생겨나고 있다. 강에서 메콩 강을 따라 페리 여객선, 화물선이 이곳까지 내려오는데, 배들은 태국 쪽에만 선다.

여행정보

Boenlao Tours (Th Saykhong) 보트 티켓을 팔고 보케오 여행을 운영한다.

Lao Development Bank (☎ 월-금 8am-3.30pm) 보트선에서 그리 멀지 않은 곳에 있다.

Boenlao Travel Co (Th Saykhong) 보트 티켓 및 린텐족, 카족 마을로 가는 투어.

Boenlao (Th Saykhong) 내부에 전화국도 있다(8am-10pm).

숙곳 & 먹을 곳

웨이싸이에 있는 대부분의 호텔과 게스트하우스들은 요금을 태국 바트화로 표시한다. Th Saykhong 거리를 따라 밥과 국수를 파는 야외 식당이 많다.

Chanormsub Guest House (☎ 211095; Th Saykhong; r US\$3) 마을에서 가격대비 가장 좋은 편. 단층짜리 게스트하우스로 방에 천장용 선풍기가 있고 온수

를 쓸 수 있다. 깔끔하며 친절하다.

Arimid Guest House (Alimit; ☎ 211040; Ban Huay Xai Neua; r US\$5.50-13; ☎) 슬로보트 부두에서 약 200m 떨어진 대나무 방갈로. 불어와 영어를 할 줄 아는 부부가 운영한다. 추천할 만한 곳.

BAP Guest House (☎ 211083; Th Saykhong; s/d US\$3/6) 부두에서 나와 왼쪽으로 돌아서 50m만 가면 있다. 모든 방에는 선풍기와 온수 샤워기가 있다. 직원에게 딱타나 씨양곡을 경유해 루앙네타까지 가는 보트 정보도 얻을 수 있다. 아래층에는 괜찮은 레스토랑이 있다.

Keoudomphone Hotel (☎ 211405; Th Saykhong; r US\$5-10; ☎) 마을에서 가장 좋은 호텔이다. 방이 크고 밝다. 중심가에서 15분 동안 걸어간 보람을 느낄 수 있다.

Latsuly Restaurant (식사 US\$1.50-2; ☎ 6.30am-9pm) 슬로보트 선착장 옆에 메콩 강을 향해 서 있다. 국수, 밥 종류, 물소 스테이크, 맛있는 바질(basil) 돼지고기와 배에 갖고 탈 수 있는 샌드위치 등을 판다.

Muang Neua (Th Saykhong; 식사 US\$1.50-3; ☎ 6.30am-9pm) 라오스 요리들이 많은 작은 식당. 생강과 마늘을 넣은 바삭바삭한 생선 튀김을 먹어보자.

도착 & 출발

비행기

웨이싸이의 공항은 마을 남쪽으로 몇 킬로미터 떨어져 있다. **리오스항공** (☎ 211026, 211494)이 비엔티안(편도 US\$84, 화, 목, 토요일)으로 오간다.

버스

버스와 대형 생떼우들이 웨이싸이에서 북쪽 방향의 비엠푸카(Vieng Phoukha; US\$4.50, 5시간 소요, 하루 3-4회), 루앙네타(US\$6.50, 8시간 소요, 하루 3회), 우똌사이(US\$10, 11시간 소요, 하루 1회)로 간다. 루앙프라방(US\$13, 8시간 소요)과 비엔티안(US\$17, 18시간 소요)으로 가는 버스도 매일 있다.

The city's mix of gleaming temple roofs, crumbling French provincial architecture and the multi-ethnic population (Hmong, Mien and Thai tribal people can often be seen walking around town on their way to and from the markets) tends to enthrall even the most jaded travellers. The availability of reasonably priced accommodation keeps many visitors staying on longer than they had planned.

Much of this may change now that Rte 13 has been paved all the way through to Luang Prabang from Vientiane, allowing same-day road travel between the two cities for the first time in Lao history. Another paved highway will eventually link Luang Prabang with the Chinese border, turning the city into a relay point for China-Laos-Thailand commerce. Luckily a road bypass system has been constructed so that the highway doesn't run straight through the city, and the old iron bridge straight into the heart of the city from the north has been closed to car and truck traffic. The city's 1995 ascension to Unesco World Heritage status may yet save the golden goose.

Orientation

When migrating Thai-Lao settled the peninsular junction between the Mekong River and the Nam Khan, they brought with them a new, and seemingly more democratic, form of social organisation than had until then been common in mainland South-East Asia. Instead of structuring a city in a radial plan at the disposal of an emperor who presided over the centre with his subjects and slaves at the perimeter (as at Chenla, Funan or Angkor), they organised their meuang by linking small communities of houses, each centred around a Buddhist temple. Rather than bending to a central municipal government, these *muu baan* (villages) within the meuang set their own rules of civil conduct. Only in times of crisis, eg, war or agricultural shortages, would the villages join together to act as a unit.

Luang Prabang is the most intact example remaining in South-East Asia of this once-common urban plan. The current village clusters are thought to date back to the

14th century, and many residents still identify more with their village neighbourhoods than with Luang Prabang as a city.

Following this 14th-century structure, most of the longer roadways through town parallel the river, while shorter roads – once mere footpaths – bisect the larger roads and lead to the riverbanks, often serving as dividing lines between different villages. Each village is named for its local wat, eg, Ban Khili for Wat Khili, Ban Haw Siang for Wat Haw Siang.

A large hill called Phu Si (sometimes spelt Phousi or Phousy) dominates the town skyline towards the middle of the peninsula formed by the confluence of the two rivers. Most of the historic temples are located between Phu Si and the Mekong, while the trading district lies to the south of the hill. Virtually the whole town can be seen on foot in a day or two, though many visitors extend their stay here in order to soak up more atmosphere.

The official street names in Luang Prabang have changed at least three times over the last decade, so you'll find that naming varies widely on city maps and address cards. Until very recently, naming local streets for Lao royalty, particularly the penultimate king (Sisavang Vong) and his son (Sisavang Vatthana), was definitely out of government favour. All of that appears to have changed since the city was granted Unesco World Heritage status, and the city government now seems to acknowledge its royal patrimony.

Currently the main street heading north-east up the peninsula is called Thanon Phothisalat at its south-western end, Thanon Sisavangvong in its middle reach and Thanon Sakkalin towards the north-eastern end. Thanon Sakkalin is also sometimes known as Thanon Xieng Thong. If Unesco had its way it might restore the name to Avenue Auguste Pavie, the street's original French colonial name! The road that runs along the Mekong waterfront is variously known as Souvannakhamphong, Oun Kham and Suvannabanglang, although most locals call it Thanon Khem Khong. When giving directions, the locals fortunately almost never quote street names, using landmarks instead.

Easy-to-reach attractions outside of town include the Pak Ou caves to the north, which are usually reached by river, and the waterfalls of Kuang Si and Tat Sae to the south, reached by road.

Guides & Maps A particularly good French guidebook to the town, though very hard to find, is *Louang Prabang* by Thao Boun Souk (pen name for Pierre-Marie Gagneaux), which was published in 1974 by the now defunct Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao. Local tour guides rely heavily on this little book, though local historians question some of its dates in light of new research.

The National Tourism Authority of Laos (NTAL) and National Geographic Service released a good bilingual colour map of the city, *Louang Prabang Tourist Map No 2*, in 1994 – it's available at the main tourist hotels for around US\$2.

Information

Tourist Offices The tourist office (☎ 212019) is opposite Wat Wisunalat on Thanon Wisunalat, near the Lao Red Cross. The sign reads 'Department of Commerce and Tourists'. Opening hours are unposted and erratic, and the office is of very little use to most visitors.

Unesco World Heritage Information

The Unesco project maintains an office and information centre in the old customs house on Thanon Sakkalin at the north-eastern tip of the peninsula.

Immigration The main immigration office (☎ 212435) is on Thanon Pha Mahapatsaman, south-west of Lao Aviation.

Money Banque pour le Commerce Extérieur Lao (BCEL), just north of Lao Aviation, will exchange Thai baht, US, Australian and Canadian dollars, French and Swiss francs, German marks and UK pounds – cash or travellers cheques – for kip. The bank normally won't change in the other direction because of a claimed shortage of these currencies. They also take Visa

credit cards for kip only (same exchange rate as dollars) with a US\$100 minimum, charging a 3% commission fee for this service. The bank is open 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Saturday.

Lane Xang Bank, at 65 Thanon Sisavangvong near the New Luang Prabang Hotel, offers all the same services. It also has an exchange booth located inside the post office.

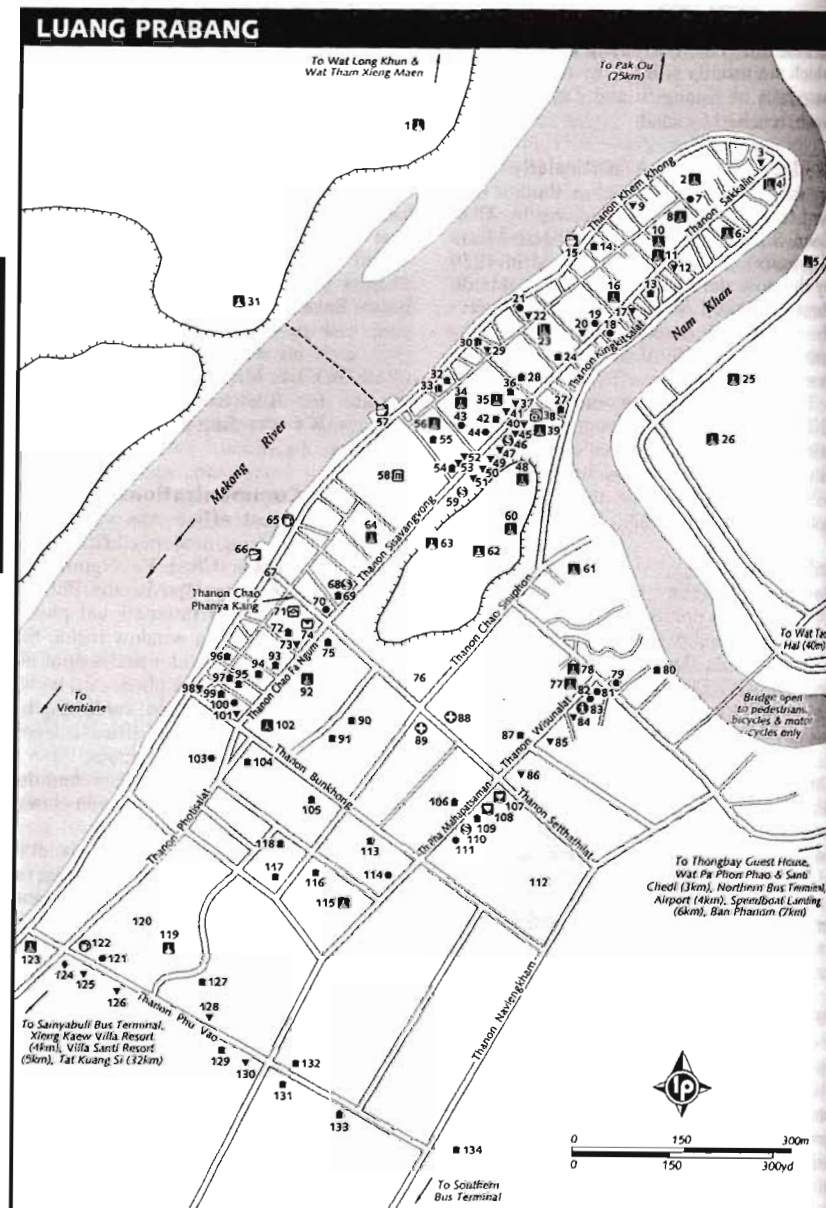
Lao May Bank has a small branch on Thanon Sisavangvong next to Healthy & Fresh Bakery. This bank will exchange your cash or travellers cheques and will give cash advances against Visa cards (3½% fee). Lao May doesn't charge a commission for American Express (AmEx) cheques. It's open 8am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday.

Post & Communications The old French-built post office was vacated in favour of a gleaming modern edifice on the corner of Thanon Chao Fa Ngum and Thanon Setthathilat, opposite the Phousy Hotel. Domestic and international phone calls can be made at a window inside the post office, down a corridor to the right inside the entrance, and at a phonecard booth at the front of the post office; cards may be purchased inside. The post office is open 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

The modern telephone office around the corner from the post office has been closed for well over a year.

PlaNNet Online (☎ 218972, @ planet@laonet.net) has a branch in Luang Prabang on the corner of Thanon Sisavangvong and Thanon Sisavang Vatthana. It offers Internet access in air-conditioned comfort; free coffee and satellite TV are available while you wait for a terminal. It's open 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday, 9am to 8pm Sunday. There are a couple of smaller Internet cafes nearby on Thanon Sisavangvong.

Travel Agencies Although the Luang Prabang Travel & Tour Company (☎ 212198, 212728), on Thanon Sisavangvong, would like you to think it still has a monopoly on tourism services in the



LUANG PRABANG

PLACES TO STAY

- 13 Senesouk Guest House
- 14 Auberge Le Calao
- 24 Villa Santi
- 27 Saynamkhan Hotel
- 28 Pa Phai Guest House
- 30 Mekong Guest House; Chaliny Guest House
- 32 Sayo Guest House
- 33 Xiang Mouane Guest House
- 36 Heritage House
- 42 Bou Pha Guest House
- 54 Phoun Sab Guest House
- 55 Phousi Guest House
- 69 New Luang Prabang Hotel
- 72 Souksavat Guest House
- 75 Phousy Hotel
- 80 Cold River Guest House
- 87 Rama Hotel (Under Renovation)
- 90 Phonethavy Guest House
- 91 Koun Savan Guest House
- 93 Suankeo Guest House No 2
- 94 Rattana Guest House
- 95 Viradessa Guest House
- 96 Viradessa 1 Guest House
- 97 Wat That Guest House; Chantry Banchit Guest House
- 99 Vanisa Guest House
- 104 Hotel Souvannaphoum
- 105 Souan Savan Guest House
- 106 Jaliya Guest House; Mysay Guest House
- 109 Thavisouk Guest House
- 113 Mouang Luang Hotel
- 116 Ban Lao Guest House
- 117 Somchith Guest House
- 118 Boun Gning Guest House
- 127 Le Parasol Blanc Hotel
- 129 Keopathoum Guest House
- 131 Muangsua Hotel
- 132 Maniphong Guest House
- 133 Manoluck Hotel
- 134 Pansea Phou Vao Hotel

PLACES TO EAT

- 3 Tum Tum Cheng Cafe
- 9 Louis
- 12 Bo Ben Nyang; Baan Khily
- 17 Le Café Ban Vat Sene

- 20 Lao Food Vegetarian
- 22 L'Elephant
- 29 Pak Huay Mixai Restaurant
- 37 Tamnak Lao (Three Elephants)
- 40 Le Poliron
- 41 Scandinavian Bakery
- 45 Le Saladier
- 47 Healthy & Fresh Bakery
- 49 Luang Prabang Bakery
- 50 Nisha Restaurant
- 51 Cafe des Artes
- 52 Luang Prabang Bakery
- 53 Restaurant Indochine
- 67 Night Market
- 73 Soukanna Restaurant
- 84 Nazim Indian Food
- 85 Visoun Restaurant
- 86 Yoongkhun Restaurant
- 98 Somchai Restaurant
- 101 Indochina Spirit
- 125 Ban Pha Baht Tai
- 126 Omelette Foodstall
- 128 Villa Sinxay
- 130 Malee Lao Food

TEMPLES

- 1 Wat Chom Phet
- 2 Wat Xieng Thong
- 4 Wat Pakkhan
- 5 Wat Sa-at
- 6 Wat Khili
- 8 Wat Si Bun Heuang
- 10 Wat Sirimungkhun
- 11 Wat Sop
- 16 Wat Saen
- 23 Wat Nong Sikhunmeuang
- 25 Wat Pa Khao
- 26 Wat Phon Song
- 31 Wat Xieng Maen
- 34 Wat Xieng Muan
- 35 Wat Pa Phai
- 39 Wat Pha Phutthaht
- 48 Wat Thammothayalan
- 56 Wat Chum Khong
- 60 Wat Tham Phu Si
- 61 Wat Apha
- 62 That Chomsi
- 63 Wat Pa Huak
- 64 Wat Mai Suwannaphumham

- 77 Wat Wisunalat
- 78 Wat Aham
- 92 Wat Ho Siang
- 102 Wat Pha Mahathat (Wat That)
- 115 Wat Manolom
- 119 Wat That Luang
- 123 Wat Pha Baht Tai

OTHER

- 7 Old Customs House (UNESCO)
- 15 Boats to Pak Ou
- 18 Boua Phan Pharmacie
- 19 School
- 21 OckPopTok
- 38 PlaNet Online
- 43 Heritage House
- 44 Luang Prabang OA Kodak Express
- 46 Lao May Bank
- 57 Ferry Pier
- 58 Royal Palace Museum
- 59 Lane Xang Bank Exchange
- 65 Petrol Station
- 66 Long-Distance Ferries
- 68 Lane Xang Bank
- 70 Luang-Prabang Travel & Tour Company
- 71 Telephone Office
- 74 Post Office
- 76 Talat Dala
- 79 Pathana Bouphe Antique House
- 81 Lane Xang Travel
- 82 Lao Red Cross
- 83 Tourist Office
- 88 Chinese Clinic
- 89 Provincial Hospital
- 100 Thiltpeng Maniphong
- 103 Provincial Office
- 107 Mayleak Pub
- 108 Hong's Coffee Shop
- 110 BCEL
- 111 Lao Aviation
- 112 Talat Naviengkham
- 114 Immigration Office
- 120 Sports Field
- 121 Finance Department
- 122 Petrol Station
- 124 Provincial Treasury

city (as in the pre-privatisation days), it's just one of several tour agencies in town. Others include Diethelm (☎ 212277, fax 212032) on Thanon Sakkalin, Inter-Lao Tourism (☎/fax 212034) on Thanon Setthathilat and Lao Travel Service (☎ 212725, fax 212252) on Thanon Sakkalin.

All basically offer the same sorts of one-to-three-day tours around the province, including visits to hill-tribe villages (though none is permitted to provide overnight village treks). Lane Xang Travel (☎ 212793) seems to be the most receptive to individual travellers looking for different kinds of itineraries.

Tat Kuang Si

ນ້ຳຕົກຕາວາງສີ

This beautiful spot 32km south of town has a wide, many-tiered waterfall tumbling over limestone formations into a series of cool, turquoise pools. The lower level of the falls has been turned into a well-maintained public park (parking US\$0.22, admission US\$0.90) with shelters and picnic tables; some of the trees near the waterfall have been labelled. Vendors sell drinks and snacks. As you pass the entrance you'll notice a tall fence being erected to enclose part of the forest for a tiger confiscated from a poacher while still a cub.

A trail ascends through the forest along the left side of the falls to a second tier that is more private (most visitors stay below) and has a pool large enough for swimming and splashing around. A cave behind the falls here goes back 10m. You can continue along a more slippery extension of the trail to the top of the falls for a view of the stream that feeds into it. The best time to visit the falls is between the end of the monsoon in November and the peak of the dry season in April.

On the way to Kuang Si you'll pass Ban Tat Paen, a scenic Khamu village with a cool stream, rustic dam and several miniature waterfalls. **Vanvisa 2 Guest House** is a simple Lao-style guesthouse in this village operated by the owners of the Vanvisa Guest House in Luang Prabang.

Getting There & Away Freelance guides in Luang Prabang offer trips by jumbo for US\$9 for one to two persons, US\$11 for three to five persons, or US\$13.50 for six to eight. An alternative to going by jumbo all the way would be to take a boat an hour (25km) down the Mekong and do a shorter jumbo ride over to the falls. Freelancers can arrange the latter trip for about the same cost as a straight jumbo trip.

Tat Sae

ນ້ຳຕົກຕາວາງສະ

A conjunction of the Huay Sae and the Nam Khan, the falls at Tat Sae feature multilevel

limestone formations similar to those at Kuang Si except that the resulting pools are more numerous, the falls are shorter in height, and the site is much closer to Luang Prabang. Popular with local picnickers on weekends, this place is almost empty during the week.

A 35-minute jumbo ride south of town will take you to the turn-off from Rte 13, then to the pristine Lao village of Ban Aen on the Nam Khan. Jumbo drivers will travel to Ban Aen for US\$6.75 for one to two persons, US\$8 for three to four, or US\$9 for up to eight persons, including waiting time in the village while you visit the falls for a few hours. You could also easily reach Ban Aen by bicycle – there's a sign reading 'Tat Se' at the Rte 13 turn-off.

From the riverbanks at Ban Aen you can hire a boat to the falls – only five minutes upstream – for about US\$0.80 each way.

The falls are best visited from August to November when there is still an abundance of water in the pools.

NONG KHIAW

ໜອງຂົວ (ເມືອງອ່ອຍ)

☛ 071

Anyone going by road or river between Luang Prabang, Udomxai, Xieng Khuang, Phongsali or Hua Phan Provinces stands a good chance of spending some time in Nong Khiaw, a village on the west bank of the Nam Ou in northern Luang Prabang Province. Rte 1, which extends west to east from Boten to Nam Noen (at the junction with Rte 6 in Hua Phan Province), crosses the river here via a steel bridge. Rte 13 north from Luang Prabang meets Rte 1 about 33km west of town at Pak Mong.

As travel along these roads has improved over the last few years, the village of Nong Khiaw has grown considerably, with an increasing number of guesthouses. The village now has electricity from 6pm to 10pm.

Sometimes Nong Khiaw is referred to as Muang Ngoi, which is actually the group of houses on the eastern bank, and sometimes it's called Nam Bak, which is actually 23km west of Nong Khiaw by road. Many

people confuse this Muang Ngoi with the Muang Ngoi Neua about an hour north of Nong Khiaw by boat.

In addition to Tham Pha Thok, described following, there are other caves in the vicinity of Nong Khiaw, and a few Hmong villages within easy trekking distance as well.

Tham Pha Thok

ຖ້ຳຟາຟັກ

As a few intrepid travellers have found, the wooded karst around Nong Khiaw means there's more to do in the area than just waiting for the next boat or bus out of town. A 40-minute walk will take you to Tham Pha Thok, a limestone cave where villagers lived during the Indochina War, and to a nearby waterfall. To find the cave, walk 2.5km east of the bridge along Rte 1, then look for a clearly visible cave mouth in a limestone cliff to your right, about 100m from the road. Descend along a path from the road to reach the cave.

Places to Stay & Eat

Near the bridge and river landing are a number of rustic but charming and cheap guesthouses. Most of them are strung out along a short road that parallels the west riverbank.

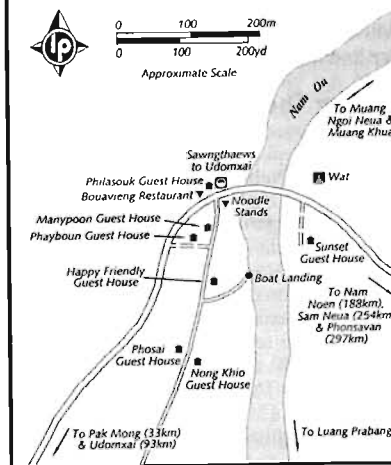
Phayboun Guest House Rooms US\$1.50. Phayboun Guest House consists of a few rooms in a two-storey wooden house in better condition than most of the others in town, at least so far. Each room has two beds, mosquito nets and fans. Toilet and cold shower facilities are shared.

Manypoan Guest House Rooms US\$1.65. The friendly Manypoan offers rooms with mosquito net and shared bath downstairs. Its restaurant boasts one of the better local guesthouse kitchens.

Happy Friendly Guest House Rooms US\$1.40. Basic rooms with shared bath are housed in this one-storey building just past the turn-off for the boat landing.

Sunset Guest House Small/larger rooms US\$1.15/2.30. This simple Lao-style wooden house on stilts stands on the east bank, a short walk from the bridge. After

NONG KHIAW



crossing the bridge, walk about 30m and then make a right. The guesthouse is another 70m or so down a dirt path. Simple rooms come with mattresses on the floor, mosquito nets and shared outside bath. There's a nice common sitting area with floor cushions where you can watch the sunset. Good Lao and Thai food is available.

Nong Khio Guest House Rooms US\$1.15. Rooms in a two-storey wood and cement house are very basic – mattresses, mosquito nets and shared facilities. There's a restaurant on the premises.

Phosai Guest House Rooms US\$1.15. The Phosai is very similar to the Nong Khio, except it has no restaurant. These two are about the cheapest places to stay in the village.

Philasouk Guest House Rates US\$1.40 per person. Crossing the bridge on Rte 1 coming from Xieng Khuang or Hua Phan Provinces, the first place you'll come to on your right is the Philasouk, a two-storey wooden house. Simple clean rooms have mosquito nets and two beds with hard mattresses. Clean bucket baths and toilets are at the back of the house. By all accounts the staff are not very friendly.

alternative in the cold season. Farther down the same road the visitor can find a few Lao Sung villages between the Nam Et and Phu Loei NBCAs.

The road ends after 64km at **Ban San Tai**, a village that brings together lowland Lao, Thai tribals and Hmong-Mien groups. Several *sāwngthāew* ply this route daily from Vieng Thong.

Places to Stay & Eat *Souksavan Guest House* and a *no-name guesthouse* supply basic rooms with two beds and mosquito nets for about US\$0.90 a night. Bathing and toilet facilities are shared.

Three modest, friendly restaurants in the centre of village offer basic Lao fare: *Boua Dom*, *Khamsouk* and *Phu That*.

Getting There & Away Long-distance public transport is a little erratic but the general rule is that large, locally based trucks alternate routes between Luang Prabang and Sam Neua every other day. You will also see buses and trucks that originated elsewhere passing through Vieng Thong, and can flag these down anywhere on the road.

Phongsali Province

Enclosed on three sides by China and Vietnam, Phongsali is Northern Laos' most inaccessible province. Twenty-two ethnicities make up the province's population of approximately 152,000, among them Kheu, Sila, Lolo, Hanyi, Hmong, Pala, Oma, Eupa, Loma, Pusang, Mien, Akha, Haw, Thai Dam, Thai Khao, Thai Lü, Phuan, Khamu, Phai, Vietnamese and Yunnanese. The Phu Noi (recognisable by their white leggings) are the most numerous ethnicity, followed by the Thai Lü, Haw, Akha and Khamu. Prior to the Sino-French Treaty of 1895, Phongsali was an independent Thai Lü principality attached to Xishuangbanna in southern Yunnan.

Phongsali's population density is 9.4 per square kilometre, the lowest in the country after Sekong and Attapeu Provinces. Opium poppy cultivation is widespread among the

Hmong, Mien and Lolo in this province. As in Udomxai and Luang Nam Tha, the Chinese presence has increased steeply with recent road and construction development. Chinese-style tea is cultivated in some parts of the province.

Phu Den Din NBCA covers 1310 sq km in the north-eastern corner of the province along the Lao-Vietnamese border, adjacent to Vietnam's Muong Nhe Nature Reserve. Mountains in this area reach up to 1948m and bear 77% primary forest cover. Many threatened or endangered mammals live in the area, including elephant, tiger, clouded leopard, banteng, gaur and Asiatic black bear.

PHONGSALI

ພົງສາລີ

☎ 088 • pop 25,000 • elevation 1400m
Built on the steep slopes of Phu Fa (1625m), Phongsali possesses a year-round cool climate that comes as a welcome relief during the hotter (March to May) season. In fact the climate is closer to what you would find in northern Vietnam than much of Laos. It can be quite cold during the cool season, with temperatures as low as 5°C at night, 10°C during the day. Fog and low clouds are common in the morning at any time of year. Rainfall can be intense and cold. Be sure to bring a pullover, jacket and waterproofs, even in March, April and May, just in case.

The capital district is surrounded by rolling, deforested hills. If you've come expecting to see lots of colourfully garbed minorities in the market or around town, you'll be disappointed unless you arrive during a major holiday like Lao New Year in April, when residents from all around the province visit the capital. The best areas for hill-tribe village exploration are found in the extreme north-west corner of the province, where there are no roads. Reaching this area involves walking two or more days.

Phongsali does boast some colonial architecture, and wandering about the town's back streets and alleys can be interesting.

The staff at the Phoufa Hotel can help arrange village trekking outside of town.

Information

Electric power is available from 6pm to 9pm only. There is a post office 200m south-west of the Phongsali Hotel and across the street from the card phone.

Money A branch of Lane Xang Bank next to the post office, south-west of the Phongsali Hotel, can change US dollars, Thai baht or Chinese yuan (but no travellers cheques) for kip.

Places to Stay

Phongsali has three places to stay now.

Phongsali Hotel (☎ 412042) Dorm beds US\$1.15, rooms with cold-water bath US\$3.40, with hot-water bath US\$4.50-5.65. The Chinese-built Phongsali, in a centrally located four-storey building, is said to be the highest structure in the province. The hotel offers 28 plain rooms, most with three beds and good mattresses. The staff speak Lao, Phu Noi and Chinese.

Laksun Hotel Rooms US\$1.70. Opposite the Phongsali Hotel, the rustic Laksun is a two-storey, metal-roofed wooden structure with a few basic rooms with mosquito nets. There's a cosy restaurant downstairs.

Phoufa Hotel (☎ 412057) Rooms US\$5.65. The wooden Phoufa, on the hill of the same name (Phu Fa), was a walled-in Chinese consulate and military base in the 1960s. Secret tunnels crisscrossing the hill can still be seen. Recently upgraded, the Phoufa is now the best place to stay and eat in Phongsali. The hotel commands a good view of the area from the pleasant terrace, complete with a beer garden. Downstairs is an attractive restaurant with an open fireplace (see the following Places to Eat section).

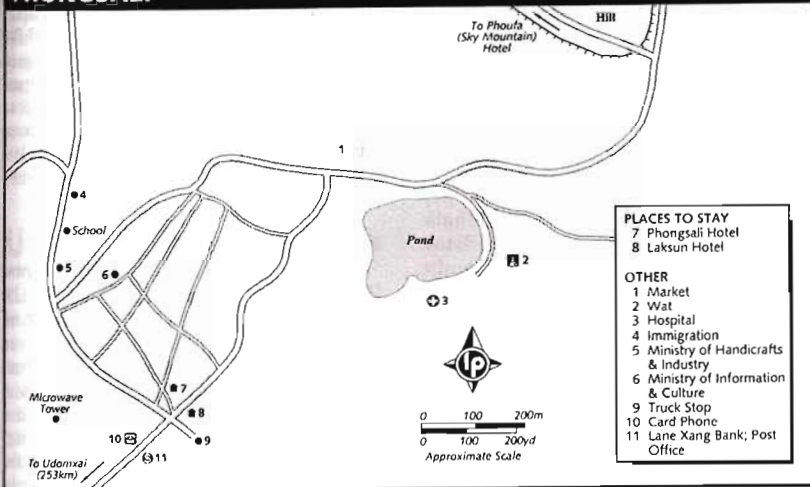
Hat Sa Hat Sa, a stopover for visitors heading for Phongsali via boat, has a *guesthouse* with multi-bed rooms for US\$0.90 per person.

Places to Eat

Phongsali Hotel (☎ 412042) Dishes \$1-3. Phongsali offers the largest menu, mostly Chinese food plus a few Lao dishes.

Phoufa Hotel (☎ 412057) Dishes \$0.90-3. The hotel serves surprisingly good central Lao food, a relief from standard Chinese-influenced Phongsali fare and its obsession with pork fat.

PHONGSALI



There are several *noodle shops* on the main street through town towards the market; bowls of fôe are among the cheapest in the country. Chinese beer is cheap all over town, while Beerlao is relatively expensive. The local lăo-lăo is tinted green with herbs and is quite a smooth tippie. Good Chinese-style tea is also available.

Getting There & Away

Bus & 4WD From Udomxai in Udomxai Province it is now possible to travel by road along Rte 4 north-east to a junction about 30km west of Muang Khua in southern Phongsali, and then head north on a relatively new graded, unsealed road all the way to Phongsali. Buses (US\$4, eight hours, 253km) leave once a day (early morning) from either end as long as there are enough passengers. The new road north (as yet unnumbered) is in relatively good condition despite its lack of sealing.

Hat Sa From the boat landing at the small town of Hat Sa, passengers can share a 4WD vehicle for the 20km journey to Phongsali. Originally built by the French, this once rutted and rough dirt track is locally known as the 'buffalo road' since it seemed more fit for beast than vehicle. Now that's it's been improved, the trip only takes half an hour and costs US\$0.25 per person.

Mengla (China) Another way to reach Phongsali is from Luang Nam Tha Province via Yunnan. If the Yunnan-Phongsali border should open to foreign travellers in the near future (it is currently open to Chinese and Lao nationals), it will be easier to reach Phongsali from Mengla, Yunnan, than from most points in Laos. Rumours say negotiations between the provincial governments of Yunnan and Luang Nam Tha will eventually allow foreigners to travel across this stretch of China. The road from the Lao settlement of Ban Pakha (a village of Akha refugees who fled the communist takeover of China in the 1940s) near the Chinese border to Phongsali is relatively good; local buses cost around US\$0.60 per person and take

about two hours to reach Bun Neua, where you must change to another bus (another two hours, US\$0.60) for the final leg to Phongsali. There is a guesthouse in Bun Neua should you get stranded.

Boat Phongsali can also be reached via the Nam Ou from Muang Khua. From Muang Khua you can hop on a boat to Hat Sa, a short distance by road from Phongsali. When the level of the river is low, however, the boat service may be cancelled; lately this doesn't seem to happen until March or April, though in previous years it has stopped much earlier – much depends on the annual monsoon.

From Muang Khua slow boats (US\$3.75, five to six hours) and speedboats (US\$6.25, 1½ to two hours) leave irregularly (in the mornings only) for Hat Sa.

Muang Khua and Hat Sa can also be reached by river from Luang Prabang along the Nam Ou (except when the river is low). See the Luang Prabang Getting There & Away section for further details.

MUANG KHUA

ເມືອງຂວາ

This small town sits at the junction of the Nam Ou – the major north-south transport artery in and out of the province – and Rte 4, which connects Udomxai and Phongsali Provinces with Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam.

The Lane Xang Bank in Muang Khua can change US dollars, Thai baht and Chinese yuan – cash only – for kip. There's no electricity in town but individual generators power the town's hotels at night.

Places to Stay & Eat

Nam Ou Guest House & Restaurant Rooms without/bath US\$1.70/2.25. Formerly just a restaurant, the owner recently added a few rooms. All rooms are clean, but the small rooms without bath aren't very good value. Two big rooms with private bath are excellent though, and one has a river view. The bamboo restaurant here also has a good view overlooking the river, and a basic menu. The owner speaks

French and is learning English; the whole family is very friendly. Large yellow signs show the way from the bus stop.

Muang Khua Guesthouse Beds in 3- & 4-bed dorms US\$1. The four-storey Muang Khua, without an English sign (look for '1989' incorporated into the 3rd-floor balcony), is a friendly spot.

Nang Aen Kaew Hotel Rooms US\$1.15. Nang Aen Kaew, named for the friendly Lao woman who runs the place, offers five dark but relatively clean rooms. The shared bathing facilities aren't so clean. It's opposite the bus stop and there is no sign in English.

Muang Khoua Hotel Rooms US\$1.70. A single-storey white building has fair lodgings and a parking area for the self-propelled.

The Muang Khoua has its own *Chinese restaurant*. There's one other *restaurant* in town near the Muang Khua Guesthouse, but *Nam Ou Guest House restaurant* has the best setting and food.

Getting There & Away

When available (when the river is high enough), speedboats from Luang Prabang to Muang Khua cost US\$22.75 per person, and take four to five hours. However most travellers wishing to reach Muang Khua via boat take a slow boat from Nong Khiaw. These generally depart once or twice in the morning, take all day and cost US\$5 per person.

See the earlier Getting There & Away sections for Phongsali, Udomxai and Nong Khiaw for further details on transport to Muang Khua.

Udomxai Province

This rugged province is wedged between Luang Prabang to the east, Phongsali to the north-east, Luang Nam Tha to the north-west and Sainyabuli to the south, with a small northern section that shares a border with China's Yunnan Province (less than 60km from Mengla in Yunnan's Xishuangbanna District). Most of the provincial population of 211,000 is a mixture of some

23 ethnic minorities, mostly Hmong, Akha, Mien, Phu Thai, Thai Dam, Thai Khao, Thai Lii, Thai Neua, Phuan, Khamu, Lamet, Lao Huay and Yunnanese Chinese (Haw).

The Yunnanese presence has intensified recently with the influx of Chinese skilled labourers working in construction, as well as tradespeople from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan. In the 1960s and early 1970s the Chinese were appreciated in Udomxai because they donated a network of two-lane paved roads radiating throughout the far north, using Udomxai as the hub. These roads were very important in moving Pathet Lao and NVA troops and supplies around the north during the war. Following the 1979 ideological split over Cambodia (China sided with the Khmer Rouge, Laos with Vietnam), the Chinese withdrew all support until the early 1990s.

The new Chinese influx is regarded by many Udomxai inhabitants as economic infiltration, since the construction and road building is no longer foreign aid but paid work for hire, using plenty of imported Chinese materials and labour.

Because Udomxai has a road system of sorts (it has deteriorated considerably since the 1970s but is still the best in the north), this province is the most accessible of the country's far northern provinces.

UDOMXAI (MUANG XAI)

ອຸດົມໄຊ (ເມືອງໄຊ)

☎ 081 • ພຣ໌ 80,000

The capital of Udomxai is often simply called Muang Xai, which is also how the city is marked on most Lao maps. Before the Indochina War there wasn't much here but the district became a centre for Chinese troops during the war and today it's a boom town riding on imported Chinese wealth.

After roughing it through some beautiful countryside along the Mekong River and along Rte 2 from Pakbeng (or from the east via Nong Khiaw and the Nam Ou) to get here, the town can be something of a disappointment. Basically Udomxai consists of two long strips of asphalt and dirt where Rtes 1 and 2 intersect, flanked

by wooden shacks, cement boxes and construction sites, set in the middle of a deforested valley.

More traditional thatched houses spread across the rim of the valley towards the base of the surrounding mountain range. If you get off the main street you can find some very picturesque village-like sections.

The town is roughly 60% Lao Theung and Lao Sung, 25% Chinese and 15% Lao Loum. Over 4000 Chinese workers may be in the area at any one time, and the Yunnanese dialect is often heard more than Lao in the cafes and hotels. Most of the vehicles in town bear Vietnamese or Chinese licence plates.

About the only sight of interest is the large day market in the centre of town. A polyglot mix of people from around the province – including many Hmong and tribal Thai – come to buy and sell; the bulk of the products on sale are Chinese or Vietnamese. The most interesting part of the market is at the rear

where fresh produce and herbs – brought to market by small farmers – are sold.

Udomxai now has electricity 24 hours.

Information

Money In town you can spend yuan, US dollars, Thai baht or kip. Lane Xang Bank, on the edge of town on the road to Phongsali, can give you kip for US dollars, Thai baht or Chinese yuan but not vice versa. Travellers cheques are not accepted, so bring cash.

Post & Communications The post office, a large white- and mustard-coloured building with a telecom tower about 400m west of the bus terminal, is open 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday, 8am to noon Saturday. A telephone office in the same building is open 8am to 11.30am, 2pm to 4.30pm and 6.30pm to 9pm daily. Phone cards are available there for use in the international and domestic phone booth out the front.

Places to Stay

The number of places to stay in Udomxai has expanded rapidly over the last several years. Most places in town cost US\$2.25 or less. Nearly all of the hotels and guesthouses are owned and operated by Chinese immigrants. Several are operating mainly as brothels for Chinese workers.

Perhaps the best places to stay, at least for those who would like to get off the noisy, dusty main streets, are three places at the end of a dirt road towards the eastern edge of town – the street entrance can be found about 400m east of the bus terminal.

Phouxay Hotel (Phuxai; ☎ 312140) Fan rooms without/with bath US\$1.70/2.25, with sitting room US\$2.80. The Lao Petroleum-owned Phouxay, in the former Chinese consulate compound off the main street near the southern end of town, offers two- and three-bed rooms with mosquito nets and ceiling fans. The rooms are set around a courtyard; there is a dining room that seems to open only for groups.

Si Van Kham Guest House (☎ 312253) Fan singles & doubles without/with bath US\$1.70/2.25, larger rooms US\$2.80. Near the Phouxay, the friendly, family-run Si Van Kham has simple rooms in a two-storey house. There's a sitting area upstairs, a yard at the back where you can wash and dry clothes, and a restaurant. It's not as well maintained as in the past. Only the word 'guesthouse' is signed in English.

Phu That Guest House Rooms with 2 beds & cold shower US\$2.80. Opposite the Si Van Kham, the newer one-storey Phu That has only six small ordinary rooms. Bargaining is possible.

Just east of and opposite the road that leads to the Phouxay Hotel and Si Van Kham Guest House are a string of four inexpensive guesthouses in a row of shop-houses, with restaurants downstairs. From the west, the first is the Dong Sanguane Hotel, a few doors east is Seunnalat Guest House, then Linda Guest House, and even farther east is the Dokbouadeng Hotel & Restaurant.

Dong Sanguane Hotel Beds in 2-bed dorms US\$1.15, in 3-bed dorms with bath

& sitting room US\$2. Dong Sanguane has very basic rooms.

Seunnalat Guest House (☎ 312384) Dorm beds US\$1, rooms with 2 beds & cold shower US\$1.70, with 2/3 beds & ceiling fan, hot shower & mosquito net US\$4/5. The Seunnalat has a variety of rooms in two side-by-side buildings.

Linda Guest House (☎ 312147) Rooms US\$3. Linda Guest House has 14 fan rooms in a three-storey, ornate building. It might be necessary to request clean sheets. There's another branch, **Linda 2**, right behind the Kaysone Monument, with the same price and amenities.

Dokbouadeng Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 312142) Rooms US\$3.40. East of the river, this hotel has a little Internet cafe. All rooms have attached hot-water bath.

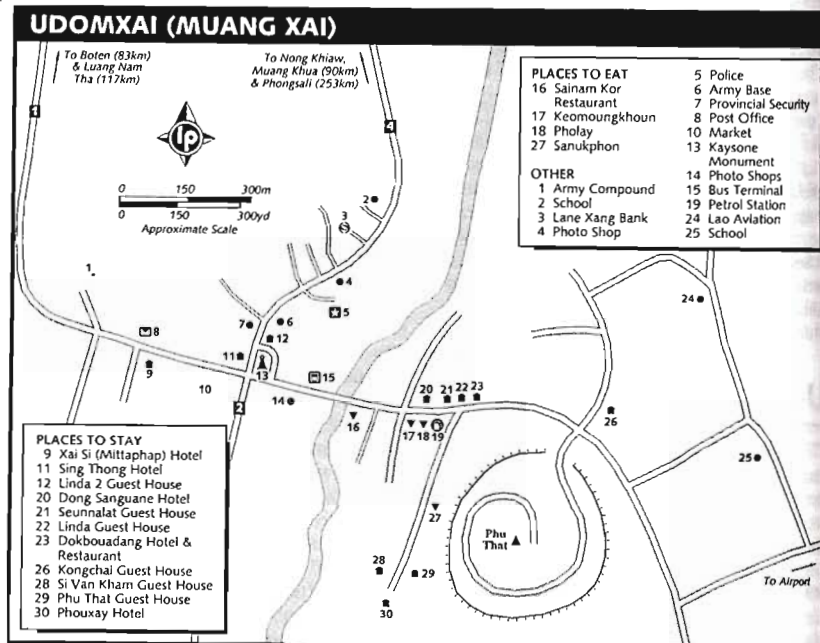
Kongchai Guest House (☎ 312141) Rooms US\$2.80. In a two-storey building 50m off the main road east of Dokbouadeng, this newer guesthouse offers basic rooms with shared facilities.

Sing Thong Hotel (☎ 312061) Rooms with cold bath US\$5-10. At the north-western corner of the main intersection of Rte 1 and Rte 2/4 (Rte 2 changes to Rte 4 north of Rte 1), the Chinese-owned and operated Sing Thong has very plain rooms in a three-storey, L-shaped building attached to a nightclub. A bit overpriced for rooms with cold water.

Xai Si Hotel (Mittaphap Hotel; ☎ 312459) Dorm beds US\$1, rooms with 2 beds, fan, TV & hot shower US\$4 (air-con extra). Opposite the post office is the Xai Si, a four-storey place. The US\$4 rooms have comfortable mattresses. A 4th-floor patio offers good views of town; downstairs are a restaurant and snooker hall. Very little English or Lao is spoken. Choose a room that doesn't face the noisy main street, although things do quieten down between 10pm and 5.30am.

Places to Eat

Most eateries are strung out along the main east-west roadway through town. The Lao food on local menus often tastes more Chinese than Lao, so you're usually better off ordering Chinese. Forget about getting good



service anywhere in town. The restaurants at the *guesthouses* are often better but you generally need to order in advance.

Sanukphon US\$1-3. On the same street as Phu That Guest House, but closer to the petrol station, this little restaurant is easily the cleanest and friendliest place in town. It has a couple of vegetarian dishes on the menu, but otherwise it's the standard Chinese and Lao-Chinese.

Pholay Dishes US\$1-3. Just west of the petrol station on the same side of the street, this restaurant, like every other eating place in town, is a collection of plastic chairs and tables with table cloths. Next door, the similar *Keomoungkoun* serves dishes for US\$1 to US\$2.40.

Sainam Kor Restaurant At the south-east corner of the bridge, this place distinguishes itself from the others only because it has an eating area that's under a thatched roof overlooking a stream.

There are six or seven other ramshackle wooden *noodles shops* along the main road in the vicinity of the market.

Getting There & Away

Lao Aviation flies between Vientiane and Udomxai daily except Wednesday (US\$71, one hour and 20 minutes). There are also flights to/from Huay Xai (US\$37, 50 minutes, twice weekly).

The Lao Aviation office (☎ 312130) is in a small wooden building on the road to the airfield.

Săwngthăew & Pick-up The Chinese-built bitumen roads that radiate from Udomxai are still in fair condition, except for the road to Pakbeng on the Mekong River. Japanese pick-ups handle most of the public interprovincial transport; they park at a dirt area about 250m east of the main crossroad in the centre of town. Each truck parks at its own signed (Lao only) stand and waits for a full load of passengers before leaving. The best time to catch a pick-up out of town is between 7am and 8am.

Pakbeng & Luang Nam Tha The 144km along Rte 2 between Pakbeng and Udomxai

takes seven hours to travel by public transport. See the Pakbeng section later in this chapter for details.

Luang Nam Tha is 117km north-west of Udomxai via the all-weather Rte 1, a four-to five-hour truck ride for US\$1.60 (US\$26 charter).

Luang Prabang It's possible to go on by road to Luang Prabang from Udomxai via Pak Mong. Săwngthăew to Pak Mong cost US\$1.25 per person, leave around six times a day and only take around two hours (as always, this depends on road conditions). From Pak Mong it's relatively easy to connect with a săwngthăew heading south to Luang Prabang (US\$1.25, two hours). Direct săwngthăew to Luang Prabang from Udomxai are also available three times a day (US\$2.15, five hours).

Muang Khua & Phongsali Another road, Rte 4, heads north-east from Udomxai to Muang Khua in southern Phongsali Province, then continues eastward to the Vietnamese border. Passenger trucks to Muang Khua cost US\$1.70 per person and take two hours. From Muang Khua you can reach Hat Sa near Phongsali by boat along the Nam Ou. See the Phongsali section earlier in this chapter for more details. Another way to reach Phongsali is on a direct săwngthăew from Udomxai (US\$4, eight hours).

Boten This border crossing between Laos and China can be reached in four hours by pick-up for US\$1.70. There are usually three or four departures daily from the Udomxai bus stop.

AROUND UDOMXAI

North and south of town are a string of Hmong villages where the tribespeople have come down from higher elevations – either because of mountaintop deforestation due to swidden agriculture, or because they have been pressured by the government to integrate into lowland society.

East of town off Rte 1 at Km 11 is *Tat Lak Sip-Et* (Km 11 Waterfall), a slender cataract that cascades over a limestone cliff into a

Nam Beng tributary. Look for a small blue and white sign (in Lao only) on the northern side of the road. *Baw nām hāwn*, hot springs, can be found 28km from Udomxai near Muang La, off the road to Phongsali near the banks of the Nam Pak.

TO UDOMXAI VIA PAKBENG

The river-and-road trip from Huay Xai or Luang Prabang to Udomxai is an experience in itself. Three hours by speedboat, or a day's travel by river ferry, the Mekong River journey to Pakbeng (jumping-off point for the road to Udomxai) passes craggy stone cliffs, sandy shores, undulating mountains, fishing villages, and expanses of both primary and secondary forest.

Pakbeng itself is worth an overnight stay if time allows (see the Pakbeng section following), then it's on to Udomxai via Rte 2, an old Chinese-built road that runs parallel to the Nam Beng most of the way. The mostly sealed road is very rough in spots but is supposed to be resealed in the next few years. Along the way you'll pass Phu Thai, Thai Lü, Hmong, Thai Dam, Lao and Khamu villages, plus primary monsoon forest alternating with secondary growth and slash-and-burn plots.

At Km 90 (about one third of the way to Udomxai) is *Muang Houn*, the largest village between Pakbeng and Udomxai and a convenient rest stop. Muang Houn has a few basic *guesthouses* with rooms in the US\$0.60 to US\$1.15 range, plus a few places to eat or stock up on food supplies. Around Km 18 to Km 21 (counting south from Udomxai) are at least a dozen Hmong villages. From Muang Houn to Pakbeng is 52km.

There are a couple of scenic waterfalls not far from the main road. *Tat Yong* is said to be the largest and is a 12km hike from Km 87. There are plans for a road to the falls.

PAKBENG

ປາກແບງ

This rustic town-village at the junction of the Mekong River and the smaller Nam Beng (Pakbeng means Mouth of the Beng) lies about halfway between Luang Prabang and

Huay Xai (Bokeo Province). The Mekong here forms the border between Udomxai and Sainyabuli provinces; Pakbeng is on the northern bank and so belongs to the former.

Basically a market town and transit point for travel to Udomxai, Huay Xai and Luang Nam Tha, Pakbeng's mostly wooden houses sit along a steep hillside. Close to the ferry and speedboat piers is a collection of makeshift shops and cafes that get more interesting the farther away from the river you go. Hmong and tribal Thais are frequently seen on the main street. A few vendors along the street sell local textiles and handicrafts.

Two wats of mild interest can be visited in town, both of which are off the left side of the road north, overlooking the Nam Beng. *Wat Khok Kho* is the newer of the two, with a sfm of rather recent construction and a wooden monks quarters.

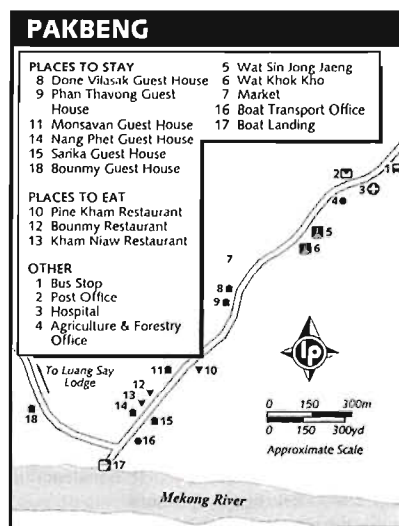
Farther up the road, a series of stairs on the right-hand side lead past a small school to *Wat Sin Jong Jaeng*, an older temple that dates to the early French colonial period or possibly earlier. On the front exterior wall of the small but classic Lao sfm is a mural that includes figures with moustaches and big noses – presumably early Dutch or French visitors. Inside there are a number of Buddha images of varying ages. A new Lao-style thaat on the premises was constructed in 1991; it's gilded at the top, and the base is said to contain a cache of *saksit* (sacred) material (probably small Buddha images of crystal or silver, prayer cloths and rosaries from revered monks).

Nearby villages might be worth visiting if you can find a guide – ask at any of the *guesthouses*.

Electricity in Pakbeng generally runs from 6pm until 6am.

Places to Stay

Sarika Guest House Rooms US\$3.40. The first lodging to open in Pakbeng and the first place you come to from the boat landing was once the atmospheric all-wood Soukchareun Sarika Hotel overlooking the river. After it burned down a few years ago, it was replaced by a characterless concrete



building, although the views from parts of the guesthouse are still wonderful. All rooms have attached toilet and cold shower.

Continuing up the main sloped street leading away from the boat landing, you'll come to a long string of small, inexpensive wooden guesthouses. Most offer small rooms with one or two beds with hard mattresses and mosquito nets, and shared facilities around the back or downstairs.

Nang Phet Guest House Rooms US\$1.70. First on the left coming from the landing, the row of bamboo-thatch cubicles has nothing much to recommend it except that it's easy to find and is fronted by a pleasant terrace restaurant.

Monsavan Guest House Rooms US\$1.70. Next on the left is still the nicest guesthouse in town, a two-storey place with bamboo walls, friendly proprietors and a very clean toilet and bathing area.

Phanh Thavong Guest House Rooms US\$2.25. The rooms in this tin-roofed, two-storey wooden building are OK, but the shared bathroom facilities look like they haven't been cleaned in ages. An upstairs terrace is a nice spot for viewing passing road life while nursing a Beerlao.

Done Vilasak Guest House Rooms US\$1.70. This is another two-storey wooden place with typical two-bed rooms and shared bucket bath facilities.

Bounmy Guest House Rooms US\$1.70. To find this one, walk a short distance down a road that branches off the main street not far from the boat landing. Since it's off the main drag, Bounmy offers a slightly quieter alternative, although the bamboo-and-wood rooms are very similar to those at most other guesthouses.

Luang Say Lodge (in Luang Prabang ☎ 071-7252400, @ luangsaysay@mekongcruises.com) Rooms US\$40. If you continue along the road past Bounmy Guest House, you'll come to this eco-lodge built mainly for the use of passengers cruising between Huay Xai and Luang Prabang aboard the *Pak Ou*. Built in traditional Lao style of solid wood, this new lodge features 13 pavilions with a total of 15 rooms, all with fan and private hot-water shower. A terrace restaurant overlooks the Mekong.

Places to Eat

There are several simple restaurants along the street leading from the pier, most serving fœe and a few basic Chinese dishes.

Bounmy Restaurant Dishes US\$1-2. Open 7am-10pm daily. This terrace restaurant overlooking the street near Nang Phet Guest House features a large English-language menu and fairly good food.

Kham Niaw Restaurant US\$1-2. Open 7am-10pm daily. Very similar to Bounmy in scope. Locals often buy takeaway food here, which is usually a good sign.

Pine Kham Restaurant Dishes US\$1-2. Open 7am-10pm daily. The kitchen does justice to a wide range of Thai, Chinese and Lao dishes, plus Western breakfasts.

A day **market** in the centre of town has a few vendors with prepared Lao food. It's usually open from 6.30am until around 4pm or 5pm.

Getting There & Away

Bus & Săwnghăew The bus/săwnghăew station (the signs reads 'taxi service') is 1.5km from the boat landing. If you don't

want to walk, you may be able to hire a jumbo from near the landing for US\$0.35 to US\$0.50 depending on how you bargain.

Two săwnghăew a day ply Rte 2 between Pakbeng and Udomxai for US\$2.50 per person – around 8am and 9am are the most sure departure times in either direction. The trip takes seven hours by public transport. You can usually charter a truck for around US\$25 – with no stops along the way a light vehicle can cover the distance in about five hours. Some travellers have chartered jumbos along this road, but because of the lack of any decent suspension or shock absorbers on these machines, doing it by jumbo is only for masochists.

If you miss one of the direct săwnghăew to Pakbeng from Udomxai you can catch one of the more frequent săwnghăew to Muang Houn, 92km south-west of Udomxai on the way to Pakbeng. These leave about 10 times a day between dawn and dusk, cost US\$1.50 and take about four hours. In Muang Houn it's easy to pick up another săwnghăew on to Pakbeng, two hours away, for about US\$1. The same is true in reverse; you can take a bus from Pakbeng to Muang Houn, then pick up a Udomxai-bound vehicle fairly easily. There are two or three basic guesthouses in Muang Houn if you get stuck.

At the moment Rte 2 is in deplorable condition – more pothole than road – but a World Bank-funded road upgrading project claims it will reseal the entire road.

Boat The slow boat from either Luang Prabang or Huay Xai costs around US\$5.50 per person. The trip takes eight to 10 hours downriver, 11 to 14 hours upriver.

Speedboats from Luang Prabang or Huay Xai take around three hours upriver, 2½ hours downriver and cost US\$13.80 per person to either Huay Xai or Luang Prabang. These powerful craft can take up to six passengers; if you want to share one you'll have to wait at the pier until five other passengers turn up. Sometimes when only five passengers show up one of the more affluent passengers will chip in an extra fare – which should buy a little extra sitting space.

Or you can charter a speedboat for the Luang Prabang to Pakbeng or Huay Xai to Pakbeng routes for four to six times the per-person fare. For all fares, kip, Thai baht or US dollars are acceptable.

Depending on your perspective, the speedboat ride can be either thrilling or frightening as the shallow craft skip along sections of rapids at 80km/h or more. There have been an uncounted number of injuries and deaths caused by speedboat crashes along the Mekong; see Dangers & Annoyances in the Facts for the Visitor chapter for warnings on speedboat travel.

Luang Nam Tha Province

Bordered by Myanmar to the north-west, China to the north, Udomxai to the south and east, and Bokeo to the south-west, Luang Nam Tha (Nam Tha for short) is a mountainous province, with a high number of Lao Sung and other minorities. The provincial population is 114,500, made up of 39 classified ethnicities (the largest number in the nation), including Hmong, Akha, Mien, Samtao, Thai Daeng, Thai Lü, Thai Neua, Thai Khao, Thai Kalom, Khamu, Lamet, Lao Loum, Shan and Yunnanese. As in Udomxai Province, the Chinese presence is increasing rapidly with the arrival of skilled labourers from Yunnan.

In the early 1960s the western half of the province became a hotbed of CIA activity; the infamous William Young, a missionary's son raised in Lahu and Shan villages in northern Myanmar and northern Thailand, built a small CIA-financed, pan-tribal anti-communist army in Ban Thuy, Nam Yu and Vieng Phukha (Lima Sites 118A, 118 and 109). Much of the opium and heroin transported by the CIA's Air America and other air services either originated in or came through Luang Nam Tha. Westerners still seem to carry a romance for Nam Tha and there is a higher than average number of World Bank, UN, NGO and commercial projects under way in the province.

South of the provincial capital, a 2224-sq-km area of monsoon forest wedged between the Nam Ha and Nam Tha rivers was declared the Nam Ha NBCA in 1993. Containing some of the most densely forested regions (96% primary forest cover) in Laos, the Nam Ha NBCA protects a number of rare mammal species. A second, larger piece of land to the west of the Nam Ha is under consideration for similar status.

The Chinese and Lao governments recently opened the border crossing at Boten (pronounced Baw Ten) to foreign travellers, making Luang Nam Tha a new gateway into Laos and ushering in a new era of overland travel between China, Laos and Thailand.

LUANG NAM THA

ຫລວງນ້ຳທາ

☎ 086 • pop 35,400

Rising from the ashes of war, Luang Nam Tha's capital is expanding rapidly in its role as entrepot for commerce between China, Thailand and Laos. During French colonial administration the town was centred at Ban Luang Kon, now the southern section of the district near the airfield and boat landing. Since the original town was virtually destroyed during the Indochina War, and since this area had always been prone to flooding, the Pathet Lao moved the main market and administrative centre 7km north in 1976. The newer town centre is on higher ground, and is close to where the highways come in from Muang Sing, Boten and Udomxai. Aside from the airfield and boat landing, the older southern district is mostly residential and is, in general, much more interesting than the newer centre. Locals often refer to the southern centre as *méuang* (city) and to the northern centre as *khvāng* (province).

Many visitors breeze through Luang Nam Tha on the way to Muang Sing and other destinations, thinking there's nothing to see or do here. However those who take the time to investigate beyond the bland new centre of town will find there's a lot more to the town than first meets the eye.

Like Udomxai, Nam Tha is best appreciated by walking or pedalling well away from the recently designed main streets.

Information

Money Lane Xang Bank, north of the Lao Aviation office, is open 8am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday, 8am to 11.30pm Saturday. Travellers cheques (US dollars only) can be exchanged for kip. Cash US dollars, Thai baht and Chinese yuan are also accepted. For both travellers cheques and cash, the rates here are a little lower than in Vientiane. Lane Xang also has an exchange booth in the dry goods market, open 8.30am to 3.30pm daily. Almost directly opposite the telephone office is a BCEL branch where you can get a cash advance using your Visa card. It's open 8am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday.

Post & Communications The post office is on the main north-south street through the new town centre.

Long-distance phone services are available at the Lao Telecom office just south of Saikhonglongsack Guest House & Restaurant.

Things to See & Do

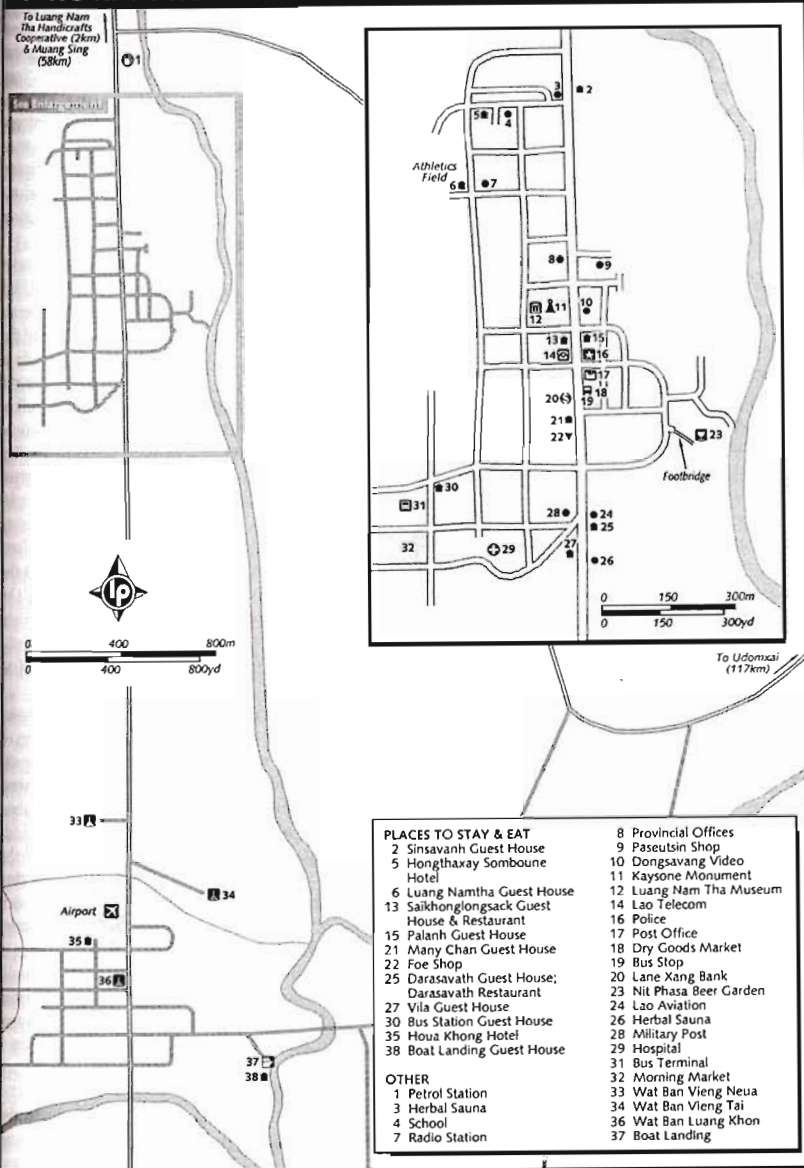
The **Luang Nam Tha Museum** (admission US\$0.25; open 8.30am-noon & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Fri) contains a collection of local anthropological artefacts, such as ethnic clothing and Khamu bronze drums, along with the usual display chronicling the revolution.

There's a Lao herbal sauna (*sauna* US\$0.70, 1hr massage US\$1.70) just south of Darasavath Guest House. Look for a bamboo bridge, which leads to a small hut on stilts next to a pond. There's another herbal sauna across from the Sinsavanh Guest House.

Near the airfield are two 50-year-old wats, **Wat Ban Vieng Neua** and **Wat Ban Luang Khon**, both of mild interest. Ban Luang Khon itself is largely a Thai Kalam neighbourhood.

East across the Nam Tha from the boat landing are four or five Thai Dam villages; at **Ban Pa Sak** you can observe Thai Dam silk weaving in action.

LUANG NAM THA



Lao Huay

Also known as Lene Tene, Lenten or Laen Taen (Dressed in Blue), the Lao Huay or 'Stream Lao' are classified by the government as Lao Sung despite the fact they do not – and never have – lived anywhere other than lower river valleys. Ethnolinguistically they fall within the Hmong-Mien family, most of whom live at higher elevations.

The Lao Huay build their homes – multi-family longhouses of palm and bamboo thatch – alongside rivers or streams from which they irrigate rice fields using simple wooden hydraulic pumps. Unlike the closely related Mien, they do not cultivate opium poppy for trade, only for smoking. Lao Huay women can be identified by the single large coin (usually an old Indochina piastre, sometimes accompanied by several smaller coins) suspended over the part in their long, straight hair and by their lack of eyebrows, which are completely depilated at age 15 according to custom. Both sexes favour dark blue or black clothes – baggy shirts and trousers – trimmed in red.

The Lao Huay use Chinese characters to write their language, often on handmade bamboo paper. Their belief system encompasses a mix of Taoism, ancestor worship and animism, with spirits attached to the family, house, village, sky, forest, earth, water and birds. Around 5000 Lao Huay live in Laos; in Bokeo Province they're mostly concentrated in Nam Nyun district. This ethnolinguistic group isn't found in Myanmar or Thailand, though there are some Lao Huay villages in Yunnan (China) and northern Vietnam.

Three kilometres west of the airfield atop a hill surrounded by rice fields stands **That Phum Phuk**, an impressively large stupa that shares stylistic similarities with That Ing Hang and other stupas more customarily found in Southern Laos. The brick-and-stucco stupa is said to have been erected in 1628, although it's likely that its current form dates to a more recent – possibly 19th century – renovation.

During the Indochina War a bomb explosion knocked the chedi on its side, where it remains undisturbed. Despite its semi-ruined state – a large fig tree is now growing out of the base, lending a 'lost-in-the-jungle' atmosphere – the stupa is well worth visiting if you have any interest in Lao religious architecture, as it's a masterful piece of work. Much of the original stucco ornamentation is still in place; not far from the base stands a *sīlāa jāleuk* (stele) inscribed in old Lao script.

You can hire a jumbo from the market out to That Phum Phuk for US\$4 to US\$5 return, including waiting time. If you decide to walk or pedal a bike, take the graded dirt road that runs west along the south side of the airport. After 700m this road ends at a T-junction. Make a right here and follow this road as it bends around to the north-west and passes rice fields. About 2.3km farther on (3km total from the main paved road) you should see a hill to your right. Turn right on another dirt road just before the hill. After 100m on this road, look for a steep road on your left; this leads to the stupa at the top of the hill. Jumbos won't be able to climb this steep road, and you might not be able to pedal it either, especially when it's wet. On foot the climb takes 10 to 15 minutes.

About 6km north-east of the new town centre, off Rte 1, the Lao Huay (Lenten or Laen Taen) village of **Ban Nam Di** is a good place to observe the process of bamboo papermaking. The villagers turn bamboo into pulp along the banks of the Nam Di adjacent to the village, and then spread the pulp into thin sheets over square cotton screens to fashion a rustic paper on which they record religious literature in a script based on Chinese characters. The paper is also much prized nowadays by the handicraft industry. Less than 1km away from Ban Nam Di is a **waterfall** which villagers will be glad to take you to for a small tip.

Places to Stay

Most lodging in Luang Nam Tha is in the newer, northern part of town. Rooms fill up fast during the December to March high sea-

son, so if you schedule a morning arrival you'll stand a better chance of getting a room.

Besides the places described in this entry, there are a few less desirable Chinese guesthouses in town with overpriced rooms for around US\$3 and up. We don't list them because we don't recommend them, but in a pinch they'll do until you can find something better. Often these guesthouses won't accept non-Chinese guests, and when they do they may ask double the posted tariff.

Luang Namtha Guest House (☎ 312087) Rooms US\$2-3.40. In a fairly new white three-storey building three blocks north of the bus terminal, this is a nice family-run guesthouse with very clean rooms with attached bath and a good restaurant. The most expensive room has a huge sunny terrace and Western-style bathroom. Water is only available when the town provides electricity for a few hours each evening.

Bus Station Guest House Singles/doubles US\$1.70-2.25. A block north of the bus terminal, this aptly named spot offers basic but clean rooms with fan and bath.

Many Chan Guest House (☎ 312209) Singles/doubles US\$1.15/2.30, with 3 beds & wash basin US\$3.45. Many Chan, a two-storey wooden place with simple, well-kept rooms, continues to be a top budget choice for Luang Nam Tha. A good downstairs restaurant has been added since our last visit.

Darasavath Guest House (☎ 312384) Doubles without bath US\$1.60, bungalows with bath US\$2.80. Opposite the road leading to the provincial hospital, the Darasavath offers OK rooms with bamboo-thatch walls behind a very nice outdoor restaurant, with shared facilities out the back.

Vila Guest House (☎ 312425) Rooms US\$1.70. South of Lao Aviation on the opposite side of the road, this guesthouse offers spacious rooms with hot-water attached bath in a large two-storey building – one of the best-value options in town at this price.

Saikhonglongsack Guest House & Restaurant (☎ 312257) Singles/doubles US\$2/3. The Saikhonglongsack has basic clean rooms and the best coffee in town. At three stories, this is Luang Nam Tha's tallest building.

Palanh Guest House (☎ 312439) Rooms without/with bath US\$2.80/4.50. The reliable Palanh is a friendly two-storey place on the main drag with decent rooms and hot-water showers.

Sinsavanh Guest House (☎ 312328) Rooms with 2 beds & mosquito nets US\$2-3. Farther north up the road, Sinsavanh occupies a brightly painted two-storey wooden house. The family proprietors are friendly, the shared bathroom facilities are large and clean, and there's a pleasant sitting area on the upper terrace.

Hongthaxay Somboune Hotel (☎ 312 079, fax 312078) Rooms with 2 beds, air-con & cold-water bath US\$3.40-4.50, with hot water US\$5.60. The 28-room Hongthaxay Somboune offers OK rooms with air-con and hot water (though both amenities function only when the town electricity is turned on for a few hours in the morning and evening). There is a nicely landscaped garden area and a small shop selling handwoven Luang Nam Tha fabrics and garments made of silk and cotton. A karaoke/disco in the compound, which is especially popular on weekends, stops by 11.30pm, after which it's a reasonably quiet place.

Houa Khong Hotel Houa Khong, right across from the airfield, was closed for renovation when we last visited.

The Boat Landing Guest House & Restaurant (☎ 312398, ☎ www.theboatlanding.laopdr.com) Small/large doubles US\$6.32/7.60. Located 6km south of the new town and about 150m off the main road, this quiet lodge close to the Nam Tha boat landing offers easy access to the Nam Tha river and several Thai Dam villages. Spacious, nicely designed wooden bungalows feature verandas overlooking the river and private bathrooms with solar-heated showers. There's a good restaurant on the premises (see the following Places to Eat section). The staff can arrange rafting or tubing excursions on the Nam Tha, fishing trips, birding and trekking to nearby villages or to the Nam Ha NBCA with English- and French-speaking guides. Bicycles are available for rent.