

## Laos: Country Facts



### General:

Laos was under the control 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. In 1975, the Communist Pathet Lao took control of the government, ending a six-century-old monarchy. Initial closer ties to Vietnam and socialization were replaced with a gradual return to private enterprise, a liberalization of foreign investment laws, and the admission into ASEAN in 1997.

### Capital: Vientiane

The government of Laos - one of the few remaining official Communist states - began decentralizing control and encouraging private enterprise in 1986. The results, starting from an extremely low base, were striking - growth averaged 6% in 1988-2004 except during the short-lived drop caused by the Asian financial crisis beginning in 1997.

### 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)

### Population:

6,217,141 (July 2005 est.)

### Religions:

Buddhist 60%, animist and other 40% (including various Christian denominations 1.5%)

### Languages:

Lao (official), French, English, and various ethnic languages

