



Hand-colored Lithograph from "Voyage of Exploration" by Francis Garnier, 1873

GEOGRAPHY — As the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, Laos shares its borders with China and Myanmar to the north, Vietnam to the east, Thailand to the west and Cambodia to the south, with the majestic Mekong River forming a sizeable part of the western border. While Vientiane is the national capital of the country, Luang Prabang, 425 kilometres to the north, is the cultural heart of this intriguing country as well as the provincial capital of Luang Prabang Province. It lies 320 metres above sea level in the green heart of the steep mountainous country of north-central Laos, perched on a narrow peninsula of rock at the confluence of the Khan and Mekong Rivers.

The centrepiece of the town is Mount Phousi (Sacred Mountain), crowned by the spectacular golden spire of Wat Chomsi. This idyllic setting affords views in all directions of stately whitewashed colonial villas, jumbled village houses nestled among rice fields and banana trees, swooping roofs of venerable temples and the glinting surface of winding rivers disappearing among steep green hills slashed with dramatic ochre cliffs.

LUANG PRABANG, the former royal capital of Laos, is an enchanting city that is small enough to explore on foot. A seductive pace of life from a bygone era mingles with a graciousness all its own. The entire city was declared a United Nations World Heritage Site in 1995 in order to protect its 32 precious temples, the former royal palace and classic French colonial buildings. The town is surrounded by extraordinary natural beauty including spectacular waterfalls, sheer amber-coloured cliffs, and ancient cave complexes.

Buddhism is an intrinsic and powerful part of life here and groups of orange-robed monks and novices from age eight to 80 are a spiritual part of everyday life in town. Colourful local markets display an eclectic collection of richly-coloured textiles, home wares and jewellery alongside all kinds of fresh fruits, local foods and crafts from sturdy iron work to delicate paper lanterns. Riverside cafes under vast trees cling to riverbanks offering a peaceful vantage point from which to watch the Mekong, and the world, pass by. The gentle spirit of Laos thrives in Luang Prabang.

LOCATION — Amantaka derives its name from the word *aman*, meaning 'peace' in Sanskrit and *taka*, from Tipitaka, meaning 'the teaching of the Buddha' in Theravada scholastic literature. It is located just south of Phousi Mountain. The resort is within walking distance of boutiques, bakeries and restaurants along the main street as well as close to the banks of the Mekong and Luang Prabang's fabled night market. The hotel also provides access to the town's many historic sites including picturesque temples and the former Royal Palace, a fusion of Beaux Arts and traditional Lao architecture.



HISTORY — Once the home of the 14th century Kingdom of Lang Xan (The Million Elephant Kingdom), Laos became a French protectorate in 1893. Independence was gained in 1953 and from 1964 onwards, the strategically-positioned country was fought over by royalists, communists and conservatives. In 1975 the kingdom came under the control of the communist party, Pathet Lao, who established a one-party state. A new constitution consolidated the government of the Lao People's Revolutionary party and the country opened to tourism.

The graceful French-colonial buildings which now house Amantaka have rich history. They were once the old provincial hospital of Luang Prabang. Although no documents have been found regarding the original construction of the buildings, it has been estimated that the first phase of construction was completed during the first decade of the 20th century. In 2005, a new hospital was built on the outskirts of town and all facilities were moved from the original site by the end of the same year. Shortly thereafter, Amanresorts took possession of the site with its 15 buildings, nine of which are protected under UNESCO's World Heritage regulations. Careful restoration work was carried out and additional buildings have been constructed in accordance with UNESCO stipulations.

ACCOMMODATION — The entrance to Amantaka takes you through an open-air French colonial building with high ceilings surrounded by shady verandas. The reception area comprises a bar, restaurant and foyer leading to a spacious library overlooking the broad expanse of the main pool and leafy central courtyard. Alongside the main pool is access to the gymnasium, yoga studio and the Amantaka spa. Past the pool to the south, surrounding a spacious courtyard, are 24 Suites varying in size from 70 to 120 square metres each. These include eight Suites, four Pool Suites, eight Khan Suites, two Mekong Suites and two Amantaka Suites, all with spacious interior and exterior living areas.

The Suites are entered through louvered doors from the courtyard that lead to light, airy living and sleeping areas. The king-sized bed is positioned in the centre of the suite beneath a traditional high ceiling. Facilities include a writing desk, table and chairs, chaise lounge, safe deposit box and cabinet containing a private bar. The bathroom has twin vanities, a dressing area, shower, toilet, and separate bath. The living and bedroom open onto an outdoor area shaded by mango trees with lounges and large umbrellas. For Pool Suites, the pool is just beyond the Lounge. The two stand-alone Amantaka Suites are surrounded by large verandas with private treatment rooms, spacious outside entertaining, a pool and separate living/dining areas.

DINING — Amantaka will offer several dining options from authentic Lao and French-influenced cuisine to the finest international fare. The dining room captures an airy colonial ambience while the Lounge Bar is the perfect

spot for relaxing with a pre-dinner *aperitif* or enjoying a snifter and cigar. The breezy Pool Terrace is a casual dining spot and serves light meals all day. Private dining can be arranged in a choice of secluded locations around the property as well as en-suite.

THE SPA has four self-contained treatment rooms and steam and sauna facilities with hot and cold plunge pools. Treatments including massages, facials, scrubs and wraps incorporate the best of Southeast Asian technique with Aman Spa's own range of organic products.

FITNESS FACILITIES include an inviting swimming pool, tennis centre and gymnasium. Amantaka also features a yoga studio with private classes available on request.

THE LIBRARY offers a wide range of reading materials in several languages and includes reference works on many subjects. Wireless internet access is available.

THE BOUTIQUE AND ART GALLERY offer a variety of unique Lao handicrafts and artwork.

ACTIVITIES & CULTURAL EXPERIENCES — Amantaka will customize guided excursions to the many scenic and cultural attractions in Luang Prabang and the surrounding region. These include day trips to the Kuang Xi waterfall, elephant rides, visits to local tribal villages in the nearby mountains, sunset climbs up Mount Phousi, jungle tours and treks, Mekong River trips to Pak Ou Caves and river villages, kayaking on the Khan River, antique shopping, cooking classes and bespoke tours of the city's galleries, museums and private collections.

GETTING THERE — Amantaka is little more than a ten minute drive from Luang Prabang International Airport which is serviced by scheduled flights from the primary international gateways of Bangkok (2 hours), Hanoi, Siem Reap, Chiang Mai and Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Domestic flying time between Vientiane and Luang Prabang is 40 minutes. Complimentary airport transfers are provided to and from the hotel.

IMMIGRATION — Visas are required to enter, exit or transit through Laos. Visas on arrival are available at the airport and are payable in US dollars with the price based on nationality and subject to change without notice. For example, French citizens pay US\$30, American and British citizens pay US\$35 and Canadians pay US\$42. A passport photo is required and can be arranged at immigration on arrival for an additional fee of US\$1. Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of entry.

CLIMATE — Situated 20 degrees north of the equator, Laos enjoys a warm, tropical climate year-round. The cooler, drier months of the year are from November to March and in the evening, temperatures can drop to 10°C but rarely drop below 22°C during the day. Humidity is highest during the wetter months from May to September, when sunbursts follow tropical downpours and temperatures can climb to 35°C. However, the average year-round temperature is a pleasant 25°C.

LANGUAGE — The official language of Laos is Lao, which is similar to the northeastern dialect of Thai. The Lao language has no final 's' sound so Lao people do not pronounce the name of their country 'Laos'. French is still spoken by many of the older generation, while English is commonly spoken around commercial centres.

CURRENCY — The national currency is the *kip*. Major credit cards are accepted in hotels and larger establishments. Most currencies and traveller's cheques are easy to cash but the recommended currency for the most favourable exchange rate is the US dollar. Thai Baht and Euros can also be used. Only a few ATM machines are available in town.

HEALTH — A doctor can be arranged 24 hours a day in case of emergencies. There are no particular immunisations required for entry into Laos unless the traveller is coming from a yellow fever-infected area. No vaccinations are required either, but it is advisable to check with your doctor for current information.

TRAVEL TIPS — Electricity is 220 volts/50 cycles. Laos is seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). During the cooler months of December and January, guests should pack warm clothes for early mornings and evenings, with lighter clothing for the rest of the day. During the summer months it is recommended that guests wear light yet conservative attire, especially on temple visits. Guests should, at all times, travel with comfortable walking shoes and a wide-brimmed hat. •

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AMANTAKA

55/3 Kingkitsarath Road, Ban Thongchaleun
Luang Prabang, Lao PDR
Tel: (856) 71 860 333 Fax: (856) 71 860 335
E-mail: amantaka@amanresorts.com

RATES

	1 June to 31 October, 2009	1 November, 2009 to 31 October, 2010
Suite	US\$ 400*	US\$ 600*
Pool Suite	US\$ 500*	US\$ 700*
Khan Suite	US\$ 600*	US\$ 800*
Mekong Suite	US\$ 700*	US\$ 1,000*
Amantaka Suite	US\$ 800*	US\$ 1,200*

*Rates are subject to 10% government tax and 10% service charge.

*Rates and government tax are subject to change without prior notice.

*Complimentary return airport transfers are included.



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