



Laos

Status: Unitary Single-Party People's Republic
Area: 91,429 sq. miles
Population: 6,911,544 (2015 estimate)
Currency: U.S. \$1 = 8115 Laotian Kip



A landlocked nation in the mountains of Indochina, Laos traces its origin to the 14th-century Kingdom of Lan Xang. In the early 18th century, the kingdom split into competing regional states, including Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Wars between the Thais and the Burmese left the Lao states weakened. Within a century, the Thais controlled Vientiane, and Luang Prabang was reduced to a vassal state. All of Laos was subject to systematic slaving raids by its powerful neighbors.

By the 1880s, the French were consolidating their control of Vietnam and Cambodia and were turning their eyes toward Laos, most of which by that time had been incorporated into Thailand. In 1887, the French sent an agent to Luang Prabang

to counter expanding British influence in Burma and Thailand. The Thais misread their support from the British and attacked a French military mission in Laos resulting in the Franco-Siamese War of 1893. As part of the settlement, Laos became a French protectorate, administratively under the governor general of Indochina. The Anglo-French Entente Cordiale of 1904 brought British recognition of French control. Laos remained a part of French Indochina until 1945. During World War II, the Vichy government of France was forced to accept Japanese troops in Indochina. The French retained nominal control until March 9, 1945, when the Japanese seized the colony. Under Japanese pressure the Lao king declared independence the following month. When the French returned in late 1945, they granted Laos considerable autonomy. But



The first 17 stamps from Laos in 1951 are considered a complete set. The designs include a side portrait of a Laotian woman, which appears on five of the stamps, Scott 10.

the seeds of nationalism had been sown throughout Indochina and were being encouraged by a communist rebellion. On July 15, 1949, Laos became an associated state within the short-lived *Union Française*.

Laotian communists set up a Pathet Lao state in the northeast in 1953. Thereafter Laos' fate was intricately tied to that of Vietnam. Saigon fell in April 1975. The Pathet Lao took over Laos in August. In December, the monarchy was abolished and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was proclaimed. Near economic collapse forced the government to retreat from communist orthodoxy in 1979. The loss of its Soviet patron and the booming Thai economy forced the Laotian leadership to realign its economy — a process that is continuing today.



A 1976 Coat of Arms, the low denomination in a set, Scott 272.

The first public post office in Laos was opened by the French on July 20, 1893, in Khone, a village in the south that connected to the postal routes down the Mekong to Cambodia. After that, the French opened 75 post offices across the country. Stamps of Indochina were used in Laos even during the Japanese occupation. In 1950, the Indochinese states were given responsibility for their own mail services. Its first postage stamps appeared on November 13, 1951 — a set of 12 inscribed "Kingdom of Laos."

The kingdom's stamps bore the additional inscription, "Union Française" or "UF" until 1956. Following the abdication of the king, the reference to the Kingdom of Laos, with stamps starting in 1976, was dropped in favor of Lao Post. In 1988, the inscription "Lao Popular Democratic Republic" began to appear occasionally on Lao stamps. After 2000, the abbreviated version, Lao PDR, seems to have become standard.

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A 1958 set of seven line-engraved stamps depicts elephants. The set's admirers consider it one of the finest to ever depict animals, Scott 42.



A 1999 stamp marking the 50th anniversary of the people's army shows young soldiers and a jungle cave, Scott 1404.



A stamp issued during the rule of Pathet Lao, which established a state in 1953 and took over the rule of the entire country in 1975. The 1961 stamp cannot be found in the Scott catalog, but is listed in the German Michel catalog.