



RANKING	%
1 Luang Prabang, Laos	96.36
2 Varanasi, India	96.00
3 Córdoba, Spain	92.73
4 Siena, Italy	91.58
5 San Francisco, USA	91.27
6 Lucca, Italy	90.91
7 Sydney, Australia	90.69
8 Seville, Spain	90.57
9 Siem Reap, Cambodia	90.00
10 New York, USA	89.91

TOP CITY

LUANG PRABANG

This laid-back Laos town has topped your list for the second time. Nick Ray isn't surprised, and shares his favourite spots for an even better city stay

1 LA RÉSIDENCE PHOU VAO

Hill-top serenity

There is no better view to wake up to in Luang Prabang. An ethereal mist blankets the town, the golden spires of That Chomi, resting on the summit of Phu Si, barely visible on the horizon. This hotel is simply gorgeous: a serene, civilised retreat and a certain sign of changes to come in this magical town.

Sitting on the crest of Phu Vao (Kite Hill), the rooms here are wonderfully spacious and open plan, featuring vast bathtubs and big balconies with day beds – just the thing when the mist burns off and the view unfurls.

The enchanting entrance sets the tone. Subtle but striking, it has the calm of a temple. The lush gardens stretch

towards a perfect panorama of the city and countryside beyond. Try a Lao herbal steam bath and you will feel reborn. Buddhists are right – there is a better life waiting, and it's right here.

Rates: Rooms from US\$200-290 (£100-150).

Contact: +856 71 212194, www.pansea.com

2 APSARA Arty decadence

This hotel draws on all the elements that have influenced Laos down the centuries. Set in a funky 50s French property dating from the tail end of the colonial era, the name is a tribute to the heavenly maidens of Cambodian mythology whose images adorn the walls. Once inside, the furnishings are

a bold blend of striking Laotian textiles and crafted Chinese furniture.

Dapper British owner Ivan Scholte oversees the hotel. A wine-dealer in an earlier life, he cooks in the kitchen and holds court in the cocktail bar – his spirit ensures the Apsara remains one of the darlings of the dining scene in Luang Prabang. The hotel has two Lao colombage villas known collectively as Villa Savanh; rustic on the outside, completely refurbished inside.

In keeping with the personal touches exhibited throughout, Ivan also rustles up picnics amid abandoned ▶

