

Magnifique Stay at Sofitel Luang Prabang

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Highly exclusive and private, Sofitel Luang Prabang is one of Accor Hotel's oldest hotels within the Sofitel collection, being over a century old and characterised by high fortified walls and watchtowers because the property was originally intended as the Governor's Residence during the period when Laos was a French protectorate in early 1900s. It is one of the best examples of French colonial Indochinese architecture, providing an excellent study on symmetry, balance and proportion. Classy and internationally acclaimed, the property is intended for those who prefer to be surrounded by magnificence.

Located in a peaceful residential area called Ban Mano, guests could easily hear roosters crowing from the surrounding houses, quickly reminding them that they are somewhere bucolic, though Luang Prabang town centre is only a five-minute ride and the international airport is a mere 20 minutes' drive away.

These days, the hotel still makes guests feel like staying in a low-slung luxurious mini-fort made current by well manicured gardens; amethyst mosaic-tiled swimming pool; highly recommended spa that dispenses efficacious local organic products via rejuvenating treatments; 24-hour fitness centre; the handsome-looking all-day dining outlet called Governor's Grill with its evocative tented al fresco seating serving delectable fusion of traditional Lao cuisine and cutting edge western gastronomy; and the cosy lounge and bar called the Library that serves the much-anticipated post-prandial beverages. Smart, stoic and solid, the property's colonial architecture is made subtle by sleek, contemporary Indochinese sophistication.

Sofitel Luang Prabang evokes French Indochine chic by optimising the architecture's colonial Eu-

ropean tropical vernacular and practicality as its foundation, and then embellished using Laotian accents to give it a unique identity and strong sense of place. Throughout the entire property, time-honoured local crafts such as handwoven textiles, delicate pottery and Indochinese antiques grace the obliging walls and niches. The property enjoys such a look and feel because it received the touch by the celebrated Thai architect Duangrit Bunnag, who is an expert in melding eastern and western elements in design and architecture.

Without doubt, the hotel epitomises Sofitel's desire in making statements. The Sofitel brand allows guests the chance to live it up in a sumptuous fashion. If Sofitel Luang Prabang were a person, it would be likened to a suave, well travelled, seasoned and wise French gentleman who remains youthful and abreast with the times. He might also be romantic, especially at night when the hotel's atmosphere is bathed in soft illumination and becomes intimate. The property's staff members also embody Sofitel's finesse that can be detected from their professional, deferential, attentive and accommodating disposition. The standards of service demonstrated by the staff elevate guests' experience similar to staying in a palace.



There are only 25 spacious clay-roofed suites within Sofitel Luang Prabang. These suites range from 46 square metres up to the agoraphobia-inducing 120 square metres, making it arguably the largest guestroom dimensions in Luang Prabang, alongside nostalgic shutter windows and soaring five-metre high ceiling. Each of these suites also has its own private garden and patio that make the space feels even larger, allowing guests to unwind in further seclusion. Wi-Fi connectivity, state-of-the-art amenities and unobtrusive turn-down service are also provided to meet the demands of the well heeled and the discerning.



To me, the heart of the suite is indeed the luxuriously inviting and magnificent four-column hand-carved poster bed with super comfortable perfectly-supporting mattress and pillows, which I find difficult to peel myself from in the morning, testifying to Sofitel's signature pampering and indulgence.

No stay at Sofitel Luang Prabang is complete without savouring the menu at Governor's Grill, especially buffalo meat, which is the specialty of Luang Prabang. Gastronomes and culinary aficionados should opt for the 'Buffalo Tasting Menu', an exquisite array of buffalo meat prepared in different styles. Buffalo meat is generally flavourful with strong beefy taste and chewy, tasting zestier when dipped in tamarind sauce. Among the types of buffalo dishes offered on the menu are the thinly sliced buffalo carpaccio, which has



the texture of salmon but gamey; local buffalo meat salad called *laap*; and the satiating French-inspired *bourguignon* (stew). It is strongly recommended that guests end their meal at Governor's Grill perfectly with Sofitel's gratifying coconut ice cream.

To further live out the privileged French colonial lifestyle, guests should also take the opportunity to be chauffeur-driven in the hotel's cream-coloured 1956 Mercedes-Benz or dark crimson 1952 Citroen when heading out towards Luang Prabang's city centre to take in the heritage town's timeless wistful charm, as well as dropping by Sofitel Luang Prabang's sister property called 3 Nagas, located right in the centre, which also offers titillating home-made ice cream.

In conclusion, Sofitel Luang Prabang boldly carries the hallmark of Sofitel, which I interpret as 'magnificent design meets excellent service'. The fact that the property was originally constructed by the French and rich in history makes it contextually appropriate for Sofitel (a well-established and reputable French hospitality brand) to manage it with flair. If one needs to be confined in a fortified structure, it might as well be at Sofitel Luang Prabang, which is an excellent fusion of colonial French splendour and Far East exoticism, cocooning guests in exclusive serenity.

Browse www.sofitel.com/gb/hotel-9669-sofitel-luang-prabang/index.shtml for more info and booking.

