

Laos to submit two new UNESCO bids

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Government to seek protection for Plain of Jars and "stone forest"

Laos is planning to apply for UNESCO World Heritage status for two of its landmarks, according to local media reports.

Officials from the Lao government were reported saying that they would submit applications to UNESCO for the Plain of Jars in Xiangkhouang province and Phou Hin Nam Nor (or "Stone Pillar Mountains") in Khammouane province.

"We will soon finalise a report to the government for consideration and once the government approves it we can proceed to the next step, the submission of the proposal to UNESCO," Viengkeo Souksavady of the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture & Tourism was quoted saying by the *Vientiane Times*.



"We expect to submit the proposal to UNESCO to consider listing the Plain of Jars by early next year and then make a proposal for listing Phou Hin Nam Nor soon after."

The Plain of Jars features a collection of approximately 2,000 stone "jars", thought to be up to 3,000 years old. The exact purpose of the jars remains a mystery, with theories ranging from them being containers for rice wine, to being used to collect rainwater for long-distance trade caravans. Laos has long planned to attain UNESCO protection for the site, but the application process has stalled over the years.

Phou Hin Nam Nor meanwhile, covers a vast area of approximately 82,000 hectares in central Laos. Featuring a series of rocky outcrops, the landscape resembles a stone forest.

If the nominations succeed, these two areas will become Laos' third and fourth UNESCO World Heritage sites, following the historic town of Luang Prabang and the cultural site of Vat Phou, Champassak province.

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