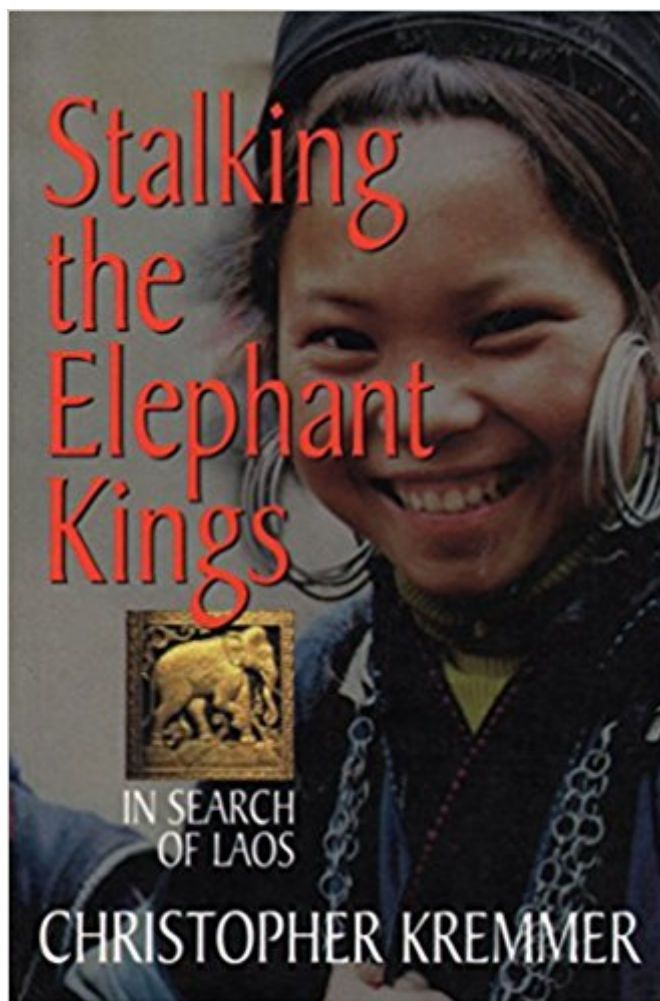




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# Stalking The Elephant Kings: In Search Of Laos



## Synopsis

Twenty years after the Indochina wars, Christopher Kremmer visited Laos--at the crossroads of change in Southeast Asia. He started his journey in the tranquility of Luang Prabang, once the royal capital. But despite its ancient culture and stately airs, the town--like Laos itself--is a place of secrets, mysteries and nagging questions. Setting off in search of the lost royal family, a 600-year-old dynasty consumed by the violent troubles of the 1960s and 1970s, the author reveals a small land-locked corner of Asia struggling to come to terms with the legacies of the American war and Asian communism. This is travel with a mission and it takes the author deep into Laos--to the bomb craters and enigmatic stone containers of the Plain of Jars, the brooding caves and limestone peaks of Houaphan near the Lao border with Vietnam, and the southern provinces bordering Cambodia. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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## Customer Reviews

When the Pathet Lao forced the last king of Laos, Savang Vathana, to abdicate, they snuffed out a 600-year-old monarchy. Twenty years later, Kremmer, an Australian foreign correspondent then based in Hanoi, tried unsuccessfully to crack the mystery behind the fate of the royals. In this first-rate travelog we see a Laos on the cusp of change, its charm lying in the absence of commercialism. Kremmer appears unimpressed by the Lao revolution of 1975 and its aftermath when he presents the historical and political underpinnings of that period. We see the Laotian face of communism through meetings with government and Communist party functionaries, ex-royals, and businessmen; and the region's culture is captured through accounts of festivals and visits to wats. Considering the paucity of recent travel narratives about Laos, readers will be well served by

this engaging book. Stan Sesser's *The Lands of Charm and Cruelty* (LJ 5/1/93) has a chapter on Laos. Recommended for both academic and public libraries. Ravi Shenoy, Hinsdale P.L., Naperville, IL Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Christopher Kremmer is a writer and journalist of twenty years' experience, who in 1993 became the first Western radio and television correspondent since the Vietnam War to establish a bureau in Hanoi. He now writes for the *Sydney Morning Herald* from his base in New Delhi, where he lives with his wife Janaki. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read Christopher Kremmer's book after our first trip to Laos and before a recent return. As a journalist with a mission to uncover information, he had the determination to meet people and ask questions the average tourist would never encounter. His book made our recent returning to Laos an even richer experience. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to gain further insight into the recent history of Laos.

Who cares if the king of Laos died 23 years ago or 21 years ago? I was hoping to learn more about the country, history, and people, but this was the wrong book. This guy goes on a crusade that never gripped me; the minor details he mentions in passing were much more interesting than his quest. There must be more interesting books about Laos than this.

My review title says it all. ... A Christmas present for a wonderful, wonderful person and I'm SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO happy!!!

An eye-opening journey through Laos -- is probably the best way to describe this book. My boyfriend loves Laos and we had to buy the book when he saw the review in *Asiaweek*. I have never been to Laos, but my boyfriend's fascination and love have driven my curiosity of this small land-locked country. Books on Laos are hard to come by, so I was thrilled finally to be able to read something other than war stories about Laos -- particularly about the people. Kremmer goes to Laos with a "semi" mission: to find out what happened to the royal family of Laos. It seems that nobody really seems to know or those that know aren't talking or are simply dead. Kremmer has done some preliminary research into the topic and the press, foreign as well as local (i.e. Vietnamese or Thai) carry conflicting stories, if any. The government officials are obviously tight-lipped, but why the folk?

Are they still afraid of backlashes from the government? Or are the memories just too painful? The book gives a wonderful insight into Laos, the down to earth kind. Kremmer could have been a little more diligent in explaining some of the Lao terms he inserts, but that is only a minor criticism. I may be more sensitive because of my interest in Laos. With and without official permission, Kremmer travels throughout Laos, taking in many sights and interviewing people. At times, I can imagine what the scene must be like and at times I can't - like when Kremmer goes to the plain of jars. It is a well written, pseudo travel log -- he does include quite a lot of historical background. Kremmer tries to answer questions, but leaves just as many unanswered. Most of these will have to be answered by time; like will the exiled royal family members ever return to Laos? Will the government ever come clean and explain to the folk what happened? Do people care? Kremmer doesn't paint a picture, he leaves the reader to make up their own mind and that makes this book very appealing. For anyone interested in Laos, this is a wonderful introduction to the land of the elephants and white parasol.

Upon reading Christopher Kremmer's book, one feels that he has thoroughly researched his information - as is apparent through the numerous interviews he reports throughout - but without sacrificing the novelistic beauty of his writing to a dry academic account. Kremmer is in Laos ostensibly searching for the fate of the last Lao King, who was spirited away by the Communists after the Lao Revolution and whose fate has never been made public. Although this search is the coil around which the book revolves, his many other experiences are bright and brilliant. An Australian, Kremmer's style is low-key and without much of the typical arrogance that might be ascribed to Westerners in developing countries. His conversations with Lao people in the present are seamlessly interwoven with depictions of complex Lao history. The only criticism I can offer is that Kremmer's focus on the issue of the last king is sometimes neglected. This might be because there is practically no information about the king or the crown prince's fate. However, it was distracting and in the late stages of the book - despite enjoying his adventures for what they were - I was demanding to know what had happened to the royal family. In this sense, the book is like a cliffhanger with no resolution. At the time of publication, there was still no official statement about the Lao royals. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Laos after the revolution. More than just a search for the last king, Kremmer has written about the country today, the social and economic effects of the revolution, and cultural aspects.

In December, 1975 the Communist Pathet Lao deposed the last king of Laos, the stoic, gentle Savang Vatthana. In March, 1977 the king, his wife, and sons were suddenly spirited away from their

palace, never to be seen by the world again. For almost 25 years no one inside or outside Laos seemed to know what happened to them. Christopher Kremmer, an Australian journalist, was apparently one of the first Westerners admitted to certain parts of Laos since the Communist victory. In this book he describes his determined search to find out what happened to the country's last royal family. His ability --- and luck --- to discover what he did is amazing. Kremmer describes interviews and meetings with Laotians of all walks of life --- communists, royals, returned exiles, business people, peasants --- as he traverses the country. What is really surprising is that he actually gets answers --- and somewhere in those answers may be the truth. I'll say one thing for Kremmer: he is bold with his questions! In addition, this book is filled with fascinating descriptions of Laos. I'll probably never get to visit Laos, but after having read Kremmer's account of the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of that country, I feel like I've already been there. I wish there were more pictures, but the ones included show a beautiful country. For those fortunate enough to travel to Laos, this would be essential reading before your trip.

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