



**INSPIRATION**  
Kenro Izu (left) draws inspiration from the people and history of Laos and Cambodia



## LUANG PRABANG

# Why I travel

**K**enro Izu is a world-renowned photographer and founder of NGO Friends Without Borders. In February the group opened the first free, full-service pediatric hospital in Luang Prabang, Lao Friends Hospital for Children. In 1999, Friends opened Angkor Hospital for Children in Siem Reap, which has now treated more than 1.3 million children and grown into a full-service hospital. Izu was inspired to set up the hospital after a photography trip to the ruins of Angkor in 1993.

## I TRAVEL BECAUSE I'M A STONE GEEK

My journey started when I was 20, from the small city of Iwakuni, Japan to the Big Apple: New York. My first photography journeys took me to the Pyramids of Egypt, Stonehenge in England and the Pyramids of Yucatán, Mexico. I traveled to Machu Picchu, Petra and Palmyra. I have a love for stone monuments. I went to France to the Carnac stone avenue, Scotland for

its stone circles and standing stones. Visiting Angkor Wat in Cambodia took it to the next level and my interest in South-East Asia bloomed – I went to Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Nepal, China, Bhutan and India.

## TRAVEL HAS ALTERED MY PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE

When I saw a picture of the entangled trees around a temple ruin in Cambodia, I sensed something kind of spiritual and I made it my mission to get there. When I stood in front of that Banyan tree sprouting from the stones around Ta Prohm, I felt a sense of peace, a feeling I hadn't really felt before.

## TRAVEL CAN ALSO OPEN YOUR EYES TO TRAGEDY

While setting up my Angkor shot, a group of kids gathered curiously around me. I noticed several of them missing limbs – the victims of land mines. So I researched the local health care system and what I found was corruption, suffering and a lack of basic health-care

knowledge. I visited a local hospital in Siem Reap to see it for myself and met a dad who had brought his daughter in to be treated. He'd spent all his money on getting there and could not pay US\$2 for the doctor – the doctors and nurses refused to see her. While I was speaking to the father, the little girl passed away. She was the same age as my daughter at the time. That sparked everything.

## I TRAVEL TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA BECAUSE IT'S AN INSPIRING PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

It's important to see the beauty in life's simplicity – seeing people happy with a minimum of material goods. Travelling often opens ones eyes. Angkor Hospital for Children and LFHC were a direct result of this. South-East Asia is full of friendly and welcoming people. Religion just seems to be a part of everyday life. The Mekong is the lifeblood of the region and it's just beautiful, the way it hugs the city of Luang Prabang. The Nambak region along Nam Ou is also stunning. [friendswithoutborders.org](http://friendswithoutborders.org)

## Dished up

*A delicious duo of dessert cafés to try in the Lao capital*

## VIENTIANE

### BEGONIA CAFE

Begonia Café is just as well known for its dreamy courtyard as it is for its espressos, rich cakes and other sweets. Designer, owner and operator Sookprapom Phimmasone changes the retro décor regularly, drawing on his family's enviable collection of antiques, quirky trinkets and vintage items. One constant is the lovingly tended garden filled with colourful begonias – the owner's grandfather loved both coffee and this flower variety. [facebook.com/pages/Begonia-Cafe](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Begonia-Cafe)

### BAANTON-MALICAKE

This café opened to energise the nascent creative spirit in Vientiane. Owner Kanlayanee "Yui" Dissatha whips up cakes and pastries with character. Try the decadent, gooey chocolate lava cake and the layered strawberry mille crêpe cake (it takes six hours to bake and assemble). Co-owner Ton, a film director with his own production company, screens movies at the café regularly. [facebook.com/BaantonmaliCake](https://www.facebook.com/BaantonmaliCake)