

LAOS TRAVEL TIPS & INFORMATION

PASSPORT AND VISA

Passport valid for at least 6 months is required upon arrival in Laos.

Check [here](#) for detailed information of passports and visa to Laos

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Most of the year is hot and humid. Laos enjoys a tropical climate with two distinct seasons. The rainy season is from the beginning of May to the end of September, and the dry season is from October through April. The yearly average temperature is about 28°C, rising to a maximum of 38°C during April and May.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Medical and dental facilities are mostly operated by the government. Private clinics and pharmacies are available in the major cities.. Medicines from France, USA, Russia, Thailand, and China are widely available in most pharmacies.

ELECTRICITY

The usual voltage is 220V, 50Hz.

CURRENCY, EXCHANGE & ATMs

The local currency is called Kip. One USD is worth approximately 2,450 kip (1998). Money can be exchanged at banks, authorized shops, or hotels. Exchange rates fluctuate every day, although the fluctuation is minimal. Banks include: Banque pour le Commerce Extérieur Lao, Sethathirath Bank, Nakornluang Bank, Joint Development Bank, and Thai branch banks. Credit cards can be used at major banks, some hotels, restaurants and shops.

PACKING LIST

Light-weight washable cotton or cotton-blend clothes are suitable. A sweater or coat is needed for the winter and in upland areas.

ETIQUETTE

As in all Buddhist countries, the Lao people are quite conservative when it comes to clothing and nothing that would be suitable for the beach should be worn somewhere else. In general, showing too much skin is seen as provocative, and it is

even forbidden in pagodas to enter if your body isn't covered from shoulders to below knees.

It is also forbidden for women to touch monks, their clothes, or to hand them something directly.

It is also considered impolite to show signs of affection in public, especially in rural areas, so refrain from hugging or kissing in the countryside!

Lao people are very polite, courteous and it is recommended to adopt the same attitude when addressing to them, as well as to never touch their heads, nor touch or point anything with your feet.

TIME ZONE & WORKING HOURS

The time in Laos is 7 hours ahead of Greenwich Meridian Time (GMS +7).

LANGUAGE

The Laos language is a member of the Tai language group, sometimes known as Tai-Kadai or Kadai.

Thai is well understood in Laos, since Lao people watch Thai television and listen to Thai radio.

Laos is a tonal language, with six tones - most people will find it quite hard to differentiate between the tones, but any attempt to speak just a few words will win you instant friends.

INTERNET

It is easy and cheap nowadays to access the Internet and email in Laos. It is available at most hotels, restaurants and cafes.

POST AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telephone, fax, telegraph, and telex services are available at post offices, hotels and business centers. Mobile phones are widely used and it is possible and cheap to buy a prepaid SIM for your unlocked phone or a cheap phone and a SIM card.

NEWS

The Lao National Radio carries news in English, French, and Thai. There are daily TV broadcasts, with two local channels, Thai television and satellite reception.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS & AIRPORT TAXES

Vientiane-Wattay International is 4km from the city (approx. 20 min. from town). Taxis are available and the rate (approx. US\$4 from the city) is negotiable. There is an international airport in Luang Prabang as well with regular flights to neighboring countries.

FOOD AND DRINKS

Lao food is mostly composed of sticky rice, eaten with fingers. In the countryside, people will eat together, sitting on the floor, sharing a few dishes. Traditional Lao food is dry, spicy and delicious. Food eaten in Laos is influenced by its neighbors and by the colonial French period (the bread is an example).

Coffee can be found just about everywhere in Laos. Lao coffee is made in a "coffee sock" and is very thick, strong, and dark black. It is served in a small glass with a couple of tablespoons of condensed milk at the bottom. Coffee is always served with a chaser of either weak black tea or warm water. Strangely enough, real coffee is hard to find in hotels and restaurants, where, as in much of Asia, Nescafé and Coffee-Mate are the order of the day.

SOUVENIR

Typical Lao dresses of a low-priced machine-made fabric can be made to order. Handmade Lao silk is one of the most attractive things to buy. The Talat Sao (Morning Market) in Vientiane has dozens of small shops selling 100% handmade silk scarves or wall hangings from US\$5 upwards depending on quality, intricacy of design, and size. Beware of cheap synthetic fabrics sold as 'silk' imported from China and Vietnam. Be careful also of 'antique' silk. There is very little left of antique silk, but new fabric can be made to look old and worn. In markets, always bargain: it is expected, but keep smiling.