

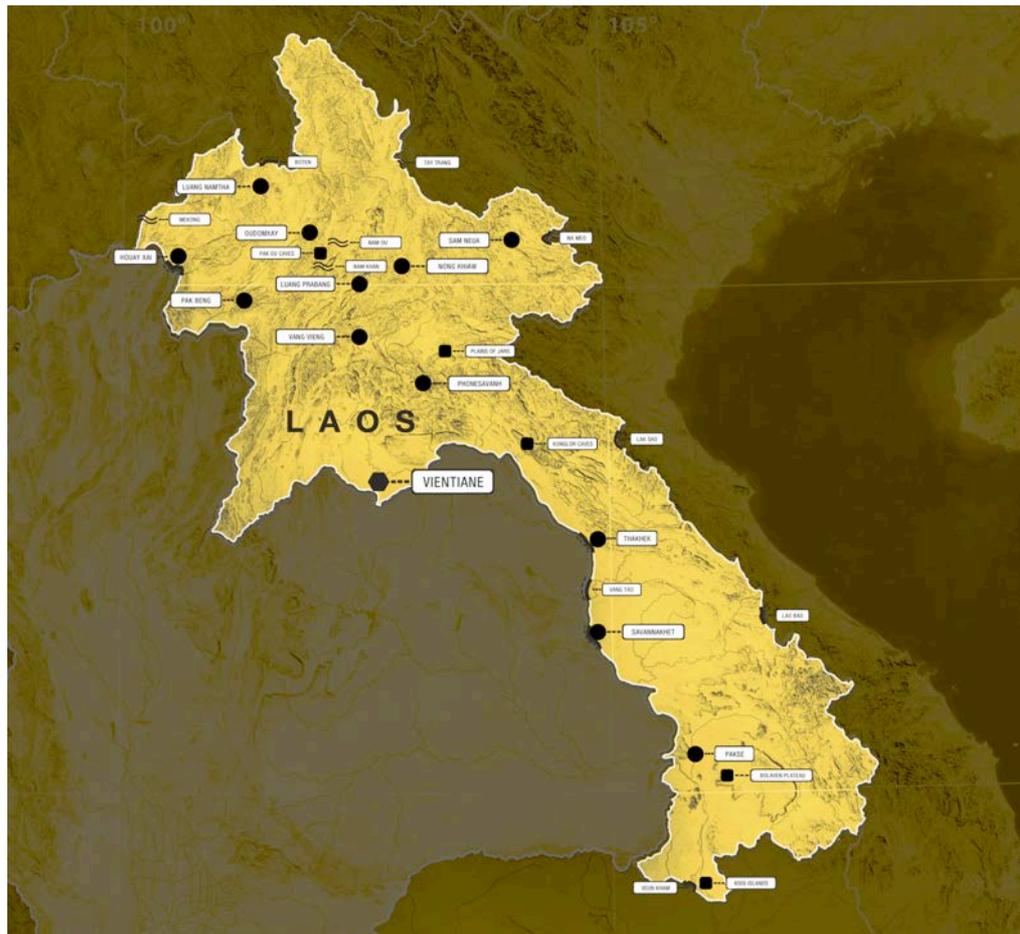


LAOS PRACTICAL INFORMATION

We are pleased to offer you herewith some useful tips and practical information on traveling in Laos.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Official Name:	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Population:	6,7 million
Capital City:	Vientiane
Area:	236,8000 km ²
People:	Lao (55%), Khmou (11%), Hmong (8%) and other (over a 100) minor ethnic groups (26%)
Religion:	Buddhism (Theravada)
Language:	Lao
Time Zone:	GMT +7 hours
International dialing code:	+856
Electricity:	220V AC 50 Hz
Driving:	Left hand side



BORDER CROSSINGS

Apart from its main international airports in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Pakse and Savannakhet, Laos is accessible by land or water from many border crossing points. Laos shares borders with Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and China. Most land border crossing points issue Lao visa on arrival.



with Thailand

Chiang Khong – Houy Xai

This border crossing leads you from the Chang Rai province to the Bokeo province.

Nakaxeng – Kaenthao

This crossing leads you from Loei province to Sayabouly province.

Nong Khai – Vientiane

If you cross the border here, you will cross the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge no. 1.

Bungkan – Pakxan

This border crossing leads you from the Nong Khai province to the Bolikhamxai province.

Nakon Phanom – Thakhaek

This crossing connects the Nakon Phanom province to the Khammouane province.

Mukdaharn – Savannakhet

This crossing will lead you from the Mukdaharn province to the Savannakhet province via Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge No. 2.

Chong Mek – Vangtao

This crossing is between Ubon Rathchathani province and Champassak province.



with Cambodia

Stung Treng – Veun Kham

This crossing connects Northern Cambodia with Champassak province in southern Laos, with crossing by boat. Note: The immigration office at this crossing point has been closed (2010). This means crossing Cambodia-Laos border at this checkpoint is no longer possible for foreigners.

Dong Kralor – Veun Kham

Just a few hundred meters from the previous crossing point is this road crossing. Visa on arrival is available here.



with Vietnam

Tay Trang – Sobboun

This crossing connects Laichau, Vietnam to the Pongsaly province in Laos.

Nameo – Banteui

This border crossing leads you from Thanh Hoa to the Huaphanh province.

Namkan – NamCan

Nge An is connected here to Xiengkhuang province.

Keoneua – Namphao

You can travel from Hatinh to Bolikhamxai province.

Chalo – Napao

This border crossing connects Quangbinh to the Khammoun province. Visa on arrival is not issued here. If you wish to cross this border, make sure you have obtained a visa prior to your arrival.

Lao Bao – Dansavanh

This crossing leads you from Quang Tri the province to the Savannakhet province.

Bo Y – Phukeua

You can travel from Kon Tum province to Attapu province here.



with China

Mohan – Boten

This is the border you'll cross when you travel from Yunnan to Luang Namtha province by road.

Xiengkok riverport

This crossing on the Mekong River to Luang Namtha province does not issue visa on arrival. Make sure you have obtained your visa before you cross this border.

Sobhun checkpoint



This checkpoint connects Yunnan to the Phongsaly province and also does not issue visa on arrival.

with Myanmar

Xieng Kok

The brand new first border between Laos & Myanmar will be presumably open to cross from October 2015.



PASSPORTS & VISAS

We strongly advise you to make copies of all your important documents (visa, passport, credit cards, air-tickets, etc.) If they are lost, it will help in organizing replacements much easier! When getting your Laos visa your passport should be valid for six months after your planned date of departure from the country. You can either get your visa in advance at any Lao embassy, which will be valid for 30 days. Otherwise you can obtain your visa at the border 'on arrival'; such a visa will be valid for 30 days and cost depends on your nationality (from 30-42USD). One passport-sized photograph is also required. It is also possible to extend your 'visa on arrival' for another 30 days at a cost of about 2USD per day. Otherwise you will be charged 10USD per day by border authorities when you leave the country. Citizens of Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia can travel visa-free in Laos for 30 day

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Khiri Travel will do everything possible to ensure clients a safe and enjoyable trip. However, traveling always brings certain possible risks and these risks should be recognized by participants. Thus, we highly recommend the purchase of short-term travel insurance for our adventures. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to: canceled trips, delays, medical problems, baggage loss or damage.



MONEY

The Lao kip is the official currency of Laos. US dollars are also widely accepted in bigger cities, particularly in restaurants. It's a good idea to arrive in Laos with some US dollars as the Lao kip cannot be exchanged outside Laos and thus you won't be able to buy any in advance of your arrival. Note that torn and old US dollar notes are not generally accepted in Laos. In areas located near the Thai border, the Thai currency, Baht, is also accepted.

Travelers' checks (in US dollar or Euro) can be cashed at banks. Credit cards (Visa, MasterCard and Amex) are accepted in major hotels and in a very limited number of upscale shopping places. Please note that there is usually a levy of 4 % charged on credit card purchases. In Vientiane and Luang Prabang you'll find several ATM machines, which dispense Lao kip only.





Heading to the countryside it is recommended that you carry kip with you as banks are not always available.

Carry your money in a way that you will feel most comfortable with e.g. money belt, wallet etc. You may want to carry a combination of travelers' checks, credit/debit cards, cash or all three. It's always a good precaution to split your money about your person and/or wallet.

Make sure to keep some cash in small denominations for last minute purchases, as well as airport taxes (see below). Most hotels offer safe-keeping for your valuables if you so wish.

Allow USD 5- USD 15 per meal for additional meals not included in the trip price. You may also want to have some cash for shopping in markets etc. -budget according to your taste.

HEALTH

Before traveling to Laos it is important to ensure that you have adequate protection against disease. About two months before departure you should consult with your tropical medicines doctor who will advise you as to the type of vaccinations that you will need. These will vary depending on the regions that you can on visiting. Bear in mind that there is a malaria risk in very rural parts of Laos. Consult your tropical medicines doctor for the latest information.

In general, most visitors to Laos will require the following vaccinations:

- Hepatitis A and B
- Tetanus
- Typhoid
- Polio
- Diphtheria

CLIMATE

Laos has a tropical monsoon climate with two distinct seasons: May to October is the rainy season and November to April is the dry season. It gets hottest in March and April when temperatures can reach as high as 38C/100F. The lowest temperatures, usually in December, are around 15C/59F. The average temperature is between 25C/77F and 30C/84F.

FOOD & DRINKS

Lao food is very similar to Thai cuisine and offers delightful national staple food like sticky rice (**Khao Niau**), **Laap** (a meal of minced meat or fish with lime juice, garlic, onions, mint leaves and chilies) or **Tam Maak Hung** (a spicy salad made of green papaya). Vegetarian food is widely available, in no small part due to the strong Buddhist influence. Bottled mineral water, soft drinks, tea and coffee are readily available. Beer is the main alcoholic drink and is usually a light lager style.

As a general rule, travelers should avoid tap water, ice made from tap water, peeled fruit and vegetables, uncooked food, shellfish and street vendor offerings. Traveler's diarrhea is common and easily treated, choose a remedy that works best for you (Imodium, Pepto-Bismol, etc...); antibiotic solutions are also available for intestinal ills.

(Glass) bottled water can be purchased almost everywhere at local convenience stores, hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, etc. Please consider the environment and limit the consumption of water from plastic bottles. We do not recommend you drink water from the tap in any location. If camping on one of our trips, you are not required to buy water as boiled/treated water with which to fill your water bottles will be provided every evening after dinner. If you wish to add water purification tablets to the water, you should bring those with you. Special Dietary Requests If





you are a vegetarian, vegan, allergic to any foods or adhere to a special diet, please advise us prior to your booking so we can comply with your dietary requirements. We can accommodate to any diet.

TIPPING & TAXES

Tippling is a personal matter, and passengers are encouraged to tip an amount they find appropriate. For your convenience we've included a tipping guide below for your travels in Laos. Please note however that these amounts are only suggestions, we encourage our passengers to reward guides based on their performance. Meals (restaurants): USD 1-2 for good service

Tips for guides and drivers are completely at your discretion, but here are some guidelines:

- USD 5 per half day, USD 10 per full day tour per person for guides
- USD 2 for half day and USD 5 per person for full day for drivers
- Another "pot" for the guides – USD 8 to USD 10 per day

Tips for the staff of cruise ships and all inclusive lodges are generally pooled - one "pot" for the staff excluding guides – USD 10 per day. Regarding bellboys; it's up to you; the average amount is USD 1.0/bag or luggage. Chambermaid: again it's up to you; the average amount is USD 1.0/day.

Airport departure tax is included in tickets booked via Khiri.

DONATIONS & GIFT-GIVING

Do not give to begging children as it reinforces for these children that begging is an acceptable way to make a living. However in many places, it is considered acceptable to give to the elderly and disabled, as there is no social security or other way these people can earn money.

Giving money and goods away at random to individuals can result in the local communities acting like beggars. It accentuates an unequal relationship between locals and visitors, with tourists being seen as purely 'money givers'. We also need to be careful not to pay for acts of kindness in monetary terms, for example paying for photographs. We do not want to encourage the development of a society that equates every human action as a potential money making scheme.

Do not to give sweets to children in villages that we visit. Local people do not have access to dentists, nor can they afford them and again there is the issue of turning children into beggars. Pens, toothbrushes, clothing or other perhaps 'worthwhile' items are best distributed via a local charity, schoolteacher, or community leader.

COMMUNICATION

Depending on your (foreign) provider, some mobile phones will receive a signal in major towns as Vientiane. But you can also easily purchase a local SIM card.

Services for making international phone calls are widely available. All major tourism centers offer internet access (rates in Vientiane 1min/100 kip) and some provide chat-webcams. Email is the cheapest and fastest way to communicate while traveling. All major cities and tourist towns have email services. The rate is usually around 1 min/100kip in Vientiane. Some Internet cafes provide chat and webcams. Services for making international phone calls are widely available in tourist areas. Your own mobile phone should be able to receive a signal in major towns like Vientiane and Luang Prabang or you can easily purchase a local SIM card.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Experiencing cultural diversity is one of the great joys of traveling, and it is important that these differences are encouraged and respected. Things are done differently in Asia, which is why we love it! At a general level, we need to respect the cultural rules in the areas we travel to. Please remember to accept these differences and not try and change them for the benefit of your own comfort. The traveler who wishes to have a happy and successful trip should keep as calm,





cheerful and friendly as humanly possible. Patience and courtesy are virtues that open many doors.

Demanding tourists do not get smiles, service or respect. For more extensive insights into cultural difference, please read the Responsible Tourism note included in this pack.

Please bear in mind that in Laos, the feet are considered to be the lowest part of the human body, so please take off your shoes before entering temples or a house. Similarly, never pat a person on the head, even a child, as the head is the most sacred part of the body.

Attire

Asian people generally dress modestly. Modest clothing is required in Laos. To respect the Laotian culture it is advisable to wear pants and skirts to below knee-length. Bare shoulders are not really appreciated.

Modest clothing goes a long way towards making a good impression with the local people. As previously mentioned more formal dress codes apply for temples or any other religious sites you may visit. So to prevent the wrath of the gods as well as the locals these should be closely followed. In general one should have covered shoulders and legs, shoes and hats should be removed.



Swimming

While Laos is landlocked you may have opportunities to swim in waterfalls. Remember that there are no areas in Asia where nude sunbathing or swimming is acceptable. In most places Lao people will swim wearing all their clothes, which is a reminder of the level of modesty that exists in here. If you are staying in a small village you will probably be bathing in a stream, river or waterfall, and women should wash in a sarong or in the mode that the local women use.



Saving Face

It is inappropriate to express anger in a raised voice. Becoming angry is embarrassing to the local people with whom you are dealing - they will not be embarrassed for themselves, but for you making a fool of yourself. "Keeping face", that subtle but important quality of personal dignity, is important! Personal candor in Asia is largely a matter of sensibility and face.

General points of etiquette

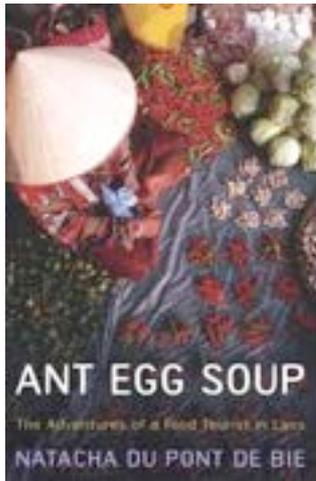
There are a few general codes of behavior that apply in Laos:

- Crooking your finger to call somebody is considered impolite. Asian people generally use a subtle downward waving motion to summon someone.
- Public displays of affection are considered to be quite offensive in Laos - definitely no kissing! It is also extremely rare to see couples holding hands. To the contrary it is quite common to see friends of the same sex holding hands.
- It is polite to remove your shoes before entering a house. Look for shoes at the front door as a clue and follow suit.
- Criticism should only be used when put among praise.

SAFETY

In general, Laos is quite a safe country for traveling. However, you should always take some precautions to protect your belongings and also yourself when you're traveling. Watch out for pickpockets and bag snatchers, especially in crowded touristic areas.





LINKS & READING

The website <http://www.falangprabang.com/> provides you with lots of useful information about things to do, see and explore in and around the city of Luang Prabang.

If you really want to get to know the country, reading some of the following books can really open your eyes to the culture and history of Laos:

- One Foot in Laos by Dervla Murphy
- A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between by Grant Evans
- Laos: Culture and Society by Grant Evans
- Ant Egg Soup: The Adventures of a Food Tourist in Laos by Natacha Du Pont De Bie
- The Mekong: Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future by Milton Osborne
- Across the Mekong River by Elaine Russell
- Another Quiet American by Brett Dakin

LANGUAGE

The official language is Lao and there are many dialects throughout the country, particularly in tribal areas. The language is very close to Thai. The most widely spoken foreign languages are English and French. Some Lao people also speak German, Russian, and Vietnamese. During the communist regime some Lao people received university training in Eastern Europe. Elderly Lao people may speak French as a result of being a former French colony.