

TRAVEL TIP

LAOS



LANGUAGE

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



PASSPORT AND VISA

Visas can be obtained from Lao Embassies and Consulates abroad or on arrival at the international checkpoints. A passport valid for at least 6 months is required upon arrival in Laos. If you apply for visa on arrival, kindly make sure that the passport has enough blank page(s) for the visa stamp(s).



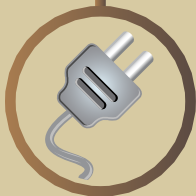
CURRENCY

The local currency is called Kip. Money can be exchanged at banks, authorized shops, or hotels.



TIME ZONE

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



ELECTRICITY

Electricity in Laos is 230V, with a frequency of 50hz, the following plugs are used:



TRANSPORTATION

Tuk Tuk or Jumbo is a pleasant way to explore the cities and sightseeing. Motorbike can be hired to discovery the countryside. Bus, river boats are common choices as well or you can take short flights as major cities are well connected by flights.



ETIQUETTE

Dos

Practice a formal greeting for Lao people such as the "Nop" and handshakes

Dress and behave modestly, especially in religious shrines or temples

Keep your head lower than Buddha and monks

Take your shoes off and leave them outside the house or on stairs when entering a Lao person's home

Accept any water that Lao people serve you even if you don't want to drink

Don'ts

Don't touch Lao people's heads

Don't expose too much skin

Don't wear shoes in Temples, Pagodas...

Don't touch the Buddha or turn your back on the Buddha

Don't use plastic bags and return rubbish to towns or villages

Don't raise your voice to Lao people, especially in public

Don't expose the feet when sitting down, rest the feet on tables or chairs and gesture with the feet

Don't step over someone and food



BEFORE TRAVELING

PACKING LIST

Light-weight washable cotton or cotton-blend clothes are most suitable. A sweater or coat will be appreciated in the winter, and in upland areas.

CUSTOMS & FORMALITIES

A valid transit, tourist visit, business, diplomatic, or service visa is required. All foreigners may enter and depart Laos via Wattay Airport, or the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, the Mekong border crossing with Nongkai, Thailand.

A visa can now be obtained upon arrival at the airport and other official entry points, given that all regulations are satisfied.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Medical and dental facilities are mostly operated by the government. Private clinics and pharmacies are available in the major cities. The International Clinic is operated under the supervision of the Ministry of Health, to accommodate foreigners and diplomats. Medicines from France, USA, Russia, Thailand and China are widely available in most pharmacies.

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 degrees Celsius, with maximum temperatures reaching 38 degrees Celsius during April and May.

In Vientiane a minimum temperature of 19 degrees Celsius is to be expected during January. In mountainous areas, however, temperatures may drop as low as 14-15 degrees Celsius during the winter months, and cold nights at higher altitudes can reach the freezing point. The average precipitation is highest in Southern Laos, where the Annamite Mountains receive over 3,000 mm. annually. In Vientiane, rainfall is about 1,500-2,000 mm., and in the Northern provinces only 1,000-1,500 mm.



WHILE TRAVELING

SAFETY

Ostentatious displays of money, jewelry, luggage and luxurious dress can encourage the wrong type of attention. When travelling, be aware of where your luggage is at all times - particularly your hand bag, camera, etc. Do not leave them unattended or hanging on the back of chairs in restaurants. Petty theft is also common on crowded trains, buses, and at supermarkets.

Importance: *You should take good care of all your belongings first; do not always rely on your guides or drivers, as their duty is not to take of your belongings during the trip, but to help you get to and well understand the destinations. Lost items are not always found by local policemen, as the reporting procedures are quite complicated and take time. In case of any loss, do not submit claim to your local agent or tour operator, as they are not the responsible party in this matter. While they may try to help you as much as possible so that you can submit a claim to your insurance company, local operators are not liable for this type of loss.*

SAFETY

The local currency is called Kip. One USD is currently worth approximately 8,300 kip. Money can be exchanged at banks, authorized shops or hotels. Exchange rates fluctuate daily, although the fluctuation is minimal. Credit cards can be used at major banks, some hotels, restaurants and shops.

INTERNET

It is easy and cheap to access the Internet and email in Laos. In urban areas, wifi 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 local SIM card. The international access code to dial Laos from abroad is 856.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS & AIRPORT TAXES

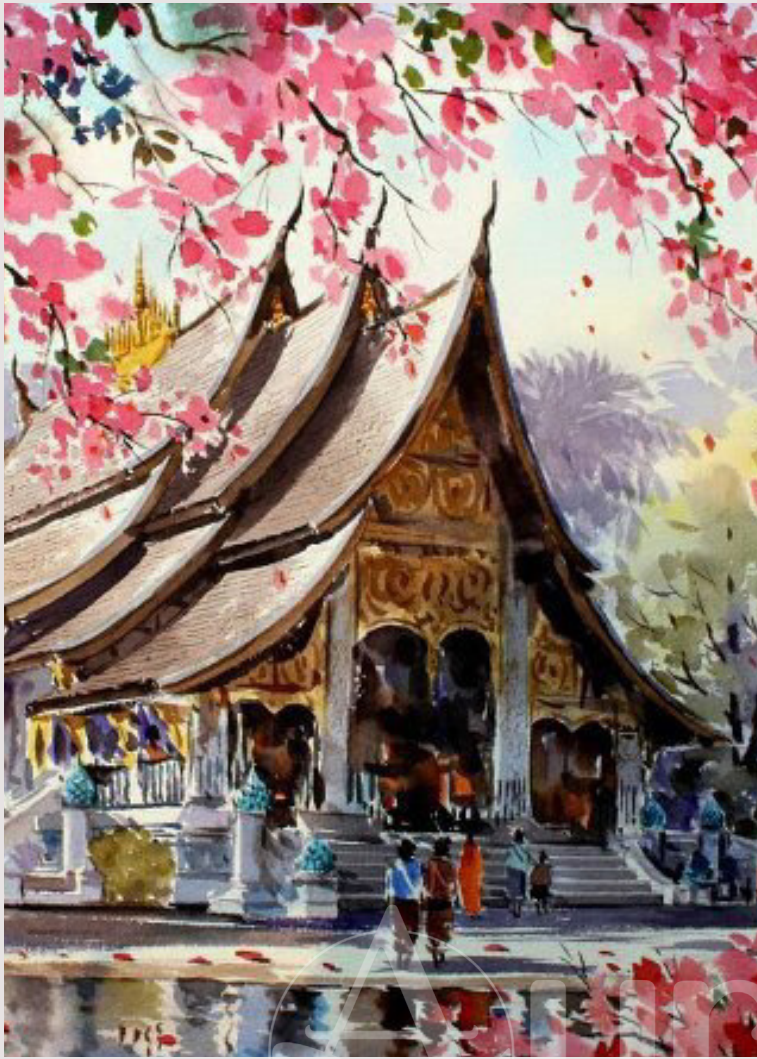
Three international airports in Laos are Luang Prabang International Airport, Wattay International airport (Vientiane), and Pakse International Airport. Airport departure tax for domestic and international flights is included in the airfare issued.



FOOD AND DRINKS

Lao food is usually based around sticky rice, eaten with the 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 (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. Western style coffee is a bit hard to find in hotels and restaurants, where, as in much of Asia, Nescafé and Coffee-Mate are the order of the day.



SOUVENIRS

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.

TIPPING

Gratuities are a prime motivator for tour guides, as well as a major source of their income and therefore are commonly expected in the travel industry of Southeast Asia in general.

If you are pleased with the services provided by your tour guides and drivers, then a tip for their hard work and being away from home will be very much appreciated. Tips are expected by hotel, boat and restaurant staffs also.

All suggested tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars (do not use coins, personal or traveler's check for tips). Of course, whether you tip, how much you tip, and how you tip is always at your own discretion.

Tour guides and drivers

The following gratuity guideline is introduced solely for the convenience of our travelers.

If you are on private trip:

- US\$04-06/guest/day for local (city) guide

If you are on group trip:

- US\$04-07/guest/day for escorted (through-out) guide
- US\$02-04/guest/day for local (city) guide

Normally, drivers expect to receive half of the guides'

For biking/trekking trip: as guide and driver work harder than on regular cultural tours, you may consider tipping more in addition to the above tipping guidelines.

Hotel & Restaurant staffs

Most hotels and restaurants levy a 5% service charge, but this may not go directly to the staff. A tipping of 5-10% of the total bill is appreciated. If you stay a couple of days in the same hotel, try to tip the hotel cleaner, possibly US\$2-3/day/room. For hotel porters, US\$1-2/time/room is appreciated by those who have escorted you to your room and/or delivered your baggage.

Boat Cruise staffs

If you travel on a local basic boat, a suggested tip is from US\$1-2 per guest.

For an overnight boat trip, the suggestion is US\$20-50 for the entire boat cruise team depending on group size, or US\$3-5 per passenger.

