

Travel Tips

L A O S

General Information

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TIME ZONE & WORKING HOUR

Laos operates on Indochina Time (ICT), which is GMT +7 hours. Standard business hours are typically from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday to Friday. Many restaurants, shops, and services in tourist areas stay open until 9:00 PM or later.



LANGUAGE

Lao is the official language of Laos, and while English is widely spoken in major tourist areas, fluency can be limited in rural regions. Thai is commonly understood, especially near the Thai border, as Lao and Thai languages share similarities. In business and trade, Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese are also spoken.



PASSPORT & VISA

A valid passport with at least six months of validity is required. Most nationalities need a visa, which can be obtained through Visa on Arrival (VOA) at international airports and land borders, or an e-Visa system for select nationalities. Starting September 1st, 2025, Laos requires all international travelers to complete the mandatory Digital Immigration Card, which replaces the traditional paper arrival/departure forms. The standard tourist visa is valid for 30 days. It is recommended to check the latest visa regulations before travel.



TRANSPORTATION

Getting around Laos is an adventure, with a variety of transportation options available. Tuk-tuks and songthaews (shared pickup trucks) are the most common means of short-distance travel in cities and towns. Metered taxis and ride-hailing apps like Loca are available in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Buses and minibuses connect major cities. Motorbike rentals are also popular among tourists, but an international driver's license is required.



CURRENCY

The official currency is the Lao Kip (LAK), but US dollars (USD) and Thai Baht (THB) are widely accepted in tourist areas. As of 2024, the exchange rate is approximately 20,000 LAK per US dollar. While credit cards are accepted in high-end hotels, restaurants, and large stores, cash is the preferred method of payment in most places, especially in rural areas. ATMs are available in major cities but may charge high withdrawal fees, so carrying enough cash in smaller denominations is recommended.



ELECTRICITY

Laos operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz frequency. The common plug types include Type A (two flat prongs), Type C (two round prongs), and Type E/F (common in Europe). Travelers are advised to bring a universal adapter, as electrical outlets can vary depending on the accommodation.



Etiquette



Do's

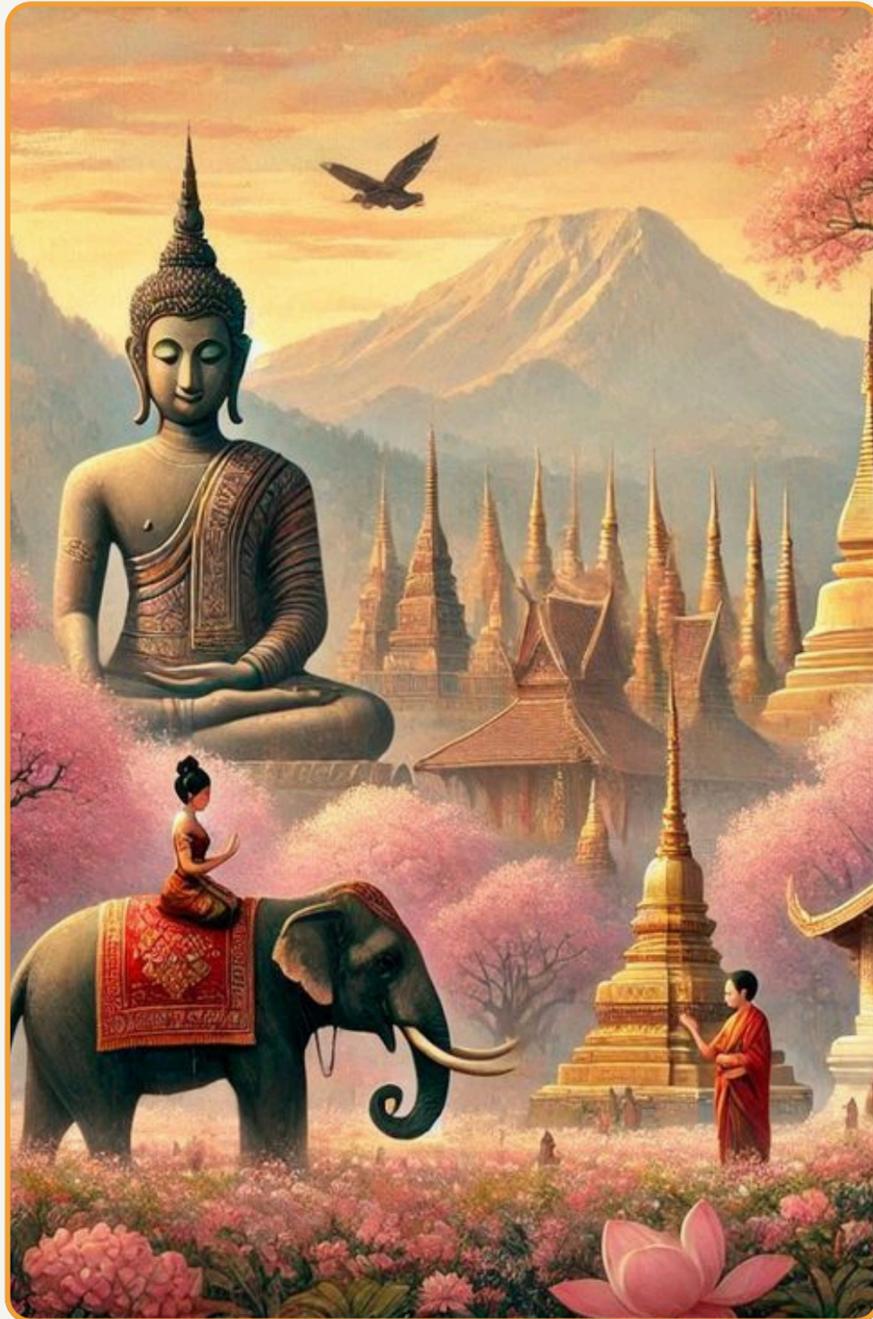
- Greet people with a Nop (pressing your palms together in a prayer-like gesture) instead of a handshake.
- Show respect to elders, monks, and religious traditions through polite speech and gestures.
- Use both hands when giving or receiving items, especially to elders or officials.
- Dress modestly when visiting temples or religious sites (cover shoulders and knees).
- Remove shoes before entering homes, pagodas, or temples.
- Ask permission before taking photographs of people, monks, religious sites, or rural communities.



Don't

- Do not touch a person's head, including children, as it is considered sacred.
- Do not point at people or objects with your index finger; use your whole hand instead.
- Do not raise your voice or show anger in public; Lao people value calmness and avoiding confrontation.
- Women should not touch monks or hand items directly to them—place offerings on a table or cloth.
- Avoid excessive displays of affection in public.
- Do not discuss sensitive topics such as politics or past conflicts unless invited to do so.





HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Travelers to Laos are advised to consult with their healthcare provider or a travel medicine specialist to ensure they are up-to-date on routine vaccinations and to discuss necessary immunizations. Recommended vaccinations may include:

- **Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR):** Ensure you are fully vaccinated, as outbreaks have occurred in various regions.
- **Diphtheria and Tetanus:** Keeping vaccinations current is essential due to periodic outbreaks.
- **Hepatitis A and B:** Vaccination is recommended due to the potential risk of exposure.
- **Typhoid:** Advised for travelers, especially those planning to consume local or street food.
- **Rabies:** Consider vaccination if you plan to engage in activities that could bring you into contact with animals, particularly dogs or monkeys.
- **Japanese Encephalitis:** Recommended for travelers spending extended periods in rural areas or during the transmission season.
- **Malaria & Dengue Fever:** Mosquito-borne illnesses are a risk, particularly in remote or forested areas. Use insect repellent, wear long-sleeved clothing, and sleep under a mosquito net if staying in rural locations.

It's highly recommended that all travelers purchase comprehensive personal travel insurance before departure. This insurance should cover health-related expenses, including medical evacuation, as well as loss or theft of personal belongings. Having insurance from your home country can simplify the process in case of accident or illness, avoiding complicated paperwork abroad.

WHAT TO BRING

To ensure a comfortable and safe trip to Laos, consider the following packing tips:

- **Clothing:** Pack lightweight, breathable clothing suitable for a tropical climate. Include a light jacket or sweater for cooler evenings or air-conditioned environments.
- **Health Essentials:** Bring sunblock, a wide-brimmed hat, and insect repellent containing DEET to protect against mosquitoes.
- **Medications:** Carry a basic first-aid kit and any prescription medications you require, along with a copy of the prescription.
- **Documentation:** Keep photocopies of important documents, such as your passport, visa, travel insurance, and vaccination records, in a secure location separate from the originals.
- **Miscellaneous:** A reusable water bottle, travel umbrella, and power adapter suitable for Laos's electrical outlets can be very useful.



Before Traveling



CUSTOMES & FORMALITIES

Travelers arriving in Laos are generally required to complete an arrival card and customs declaration form upon entry. These forms are typically distributed on flights or can be obtained at immigration counters. Visitors with an eVisa should present a printed copy of their approval letter along with their passport.

Duty-Free Allowances

- **Alcohol:** Up to 1 liter of spirits.
- **Tobacco:** Up to 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco.
- **Other Goods:** Personal items and gifts with a total value not exceeding \$50 USD.

Restricted & Prohibited Items

- Travelers are prohibited from bringing the following into Laos:
- Narcotics and psychotropic substances.
- Firearms, explosives, and ammunition (unless with prior government authorization).
- Obscene materials or politically sensitive publications.
- Endangered wildlife species and products derived from them (such as ivory and certain animal skins).

Medications & Special Declarations

- Travelers carrying prescription medications should bring them in original packaging, along with a doctor's note or prescription to avoid issues at customs.
- Large amounts of cash (exceeding \$10,000 USD) must be declared upon arrival and departure.

Departing Laos

- Antique artifacts and cultural relics require special permits for export. Always buy from reputable dealers who provide official documentation.
- Large amounts of Lao Kip (LAK) cannot be taken out of the country. It's advisable to exchange any remaining currency before departing.





CLIMATE & WEATHER

Laos has a tropical monsoon climate, characterized by three distinct seasons:

Cool & Dry Season (November to February)

- Comfortable temperatures ranging from 15–27°C (59–81°F).
- Low humidity with clear skies, making it the best time to visit.
- Northern regions and highlands, such as Luang Prabang and Phongsaly, can get quite chilly at night, sometimes dropping below 10°C (50°F).

Hot & Dry Season (March to May)

- Temperatures rise to 30–40°C (86–104°F), with April and May being the hottest months.
- High humidity, especially in lowland areas like Vientiane and Pakse.
- The Mekong River water levels drop, exposing sandbanks and limiting some boat travel.

Rainy Season (June to October)

- Temperatures range from 25–35°C (77–95°F).
- Frequent but short-lived heavy rains, mostly in the afternoon or evening.
- Lush green landscapes, full rivers, and fewer tourists at major attractions.
- Some rural roads may become muddy and difficult to access due to flooding.





COMMUNICATIONS

- **Phone/SIM Card**

Laos has relatively high international call rates, so it's best to check with your hotel before making direct calls. Using VOIP services such as WhatsApp, Skype, or Zoom can help reduce costs. If your phone is unlocked, purchasing a local SIM card is a cost-effective option. Prepaid SIM cards with 4G/5G mobile data are widely available in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and other major cities, starting at around USD 5. You can easily top up credit at convenience stores, mobile shops, or through mobile banking apps. The main telecom providers in Laos are: Unitel, Lao Telecom, Beeline Laos.

- **Internet**

Internet access is widely available in hotels, restaurants, cafés, and internet service centers. Free Wi-Fi is common in hotels, airports, and popular tourist spots, though speeds may vary, especially in remote areas. 4G connectivity is reliable in cities, while rural areas may have slower speeds. Laos is expanding its 5G network, but coverage is still limited to Vientiane and a few urban areas.

- **Post Service**

Laos' postal service offers standard international mail services, with Express Mail Service (EMS) available for faster delivery to many countries. International mail typically takes 5 to 14 days, depending on the destination. Major post offices are found in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Pakse, and some hotels offer mailing services for convenience.

LAOS CUISINE

Laotian cuisine is known for its bold flavors, fresh herbs, and sticky rice, which is a staple in almost every meal. Influenced by Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese culinary traditions, Lao food often features grilled meats, spicy dips, and fragrant soups.

- **Foods**

Larb (a minced meat salad with herbs and lime).

Tam Mak Hoong (spicy green papaya salad).

Khao Poon (a coconut-based noodle soup).

- **Drinks**

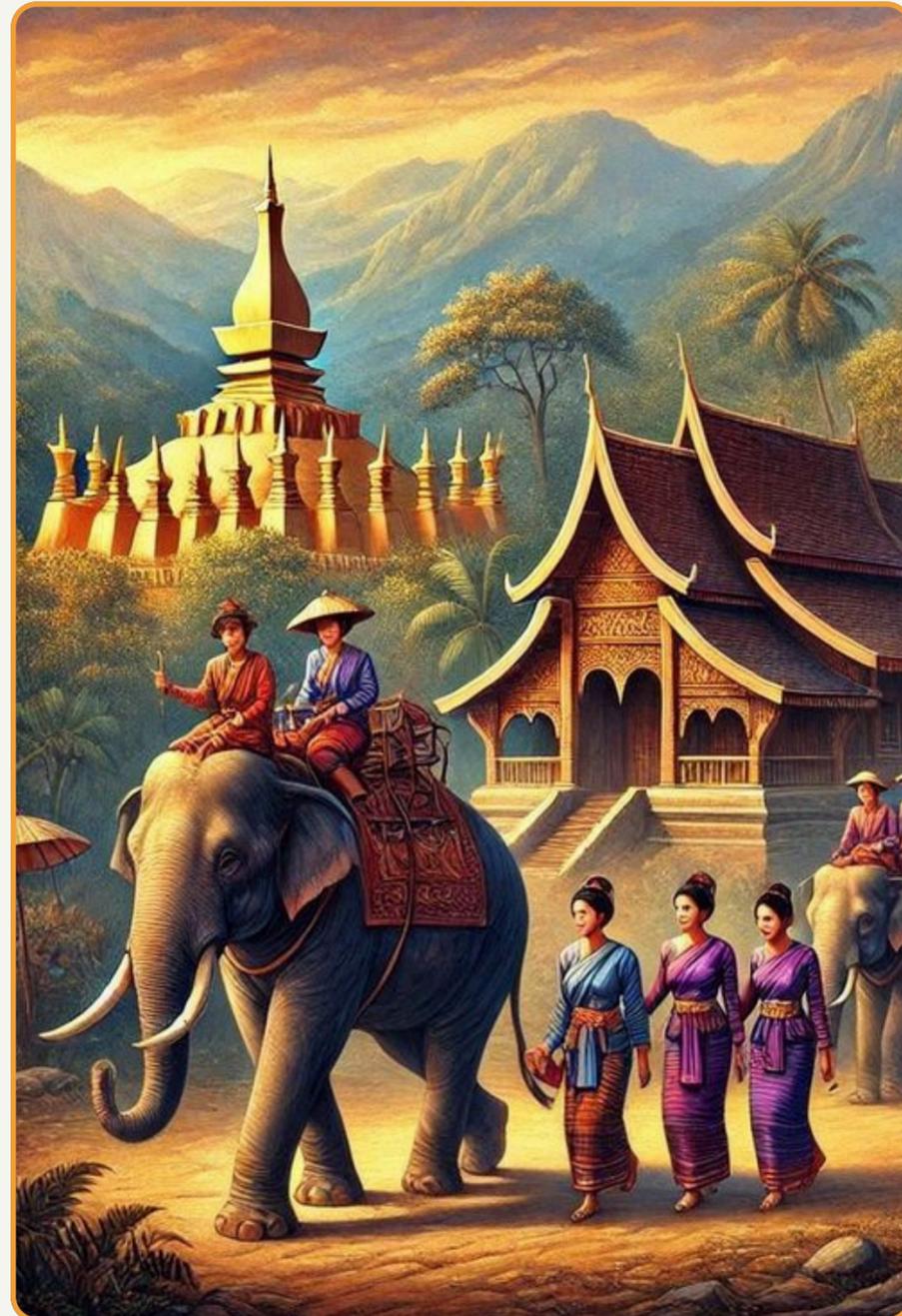
Coffee: Laos produces high-quality coffee, especially from the Bolaven Plateau. Lao coffee is typically strong and served with condensed milk (café nom yen) or as black coffee.

Beer: The most popular beer is Beerlao, a locally brewed lager that is widely available and highly regarded in Southeast Asia.

Rice Wine & Lao-Lao: Lao-Lao is a traditional rice whiskey, commonly found in rural areas and local markets. It has a strong taste and is often

Water Safety: Tap water is not safe for drinking. It is recommended to drink bottled or filtered water, which is widely available at reasonable prices. Many hotels and restaurants provide free filtered water refills.





CURRENCY, MONEY EXCHANGE & ATM

The official currency of Laos is the Lao Kip (LAK). Banknotes come in denominations of 500; 1,000; 2,000; 5,000; 10,000; 20,000; 50,000; and 100,000 LAK. As of 2024, the exchange rate fluctuates around 20,000 LAK per US dollar. However, in many tourist areas, the US dollar and Thai Baht are also widely accepted, particularly for larger transactions.

Credit Cards

Visa and MasterCard are accepted at major hotels, upscale restaurants, and larger businesses in cities like Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Pakse. However, many small shops, local markets, and rural areas operate on a cash-only basis. Some businesses may apply a 3%–4% surcharge on card transactions.

ATMs

ATMs are widely available in major cities and tourist areas, but they often have a withdrawal limit of 1,500,000–2,500,000 LAK per transaction (approximately \$75–\$125 USD). International transaction fees may apply, so it's best to withdraw larger amounts at once to minimize fees. Some ATMs dispense both Lao Kip and Thai Baht.

Money Exchange

Foreign currencies can be exchanged at banks, exchange offices, and some hotels. The US dollar and Thai Baht are the most commonly exchanged currencies. Exchange rates can vary slightly between locations, so it is advisable to compare rates before exchanging large amounts. It is recommended to carry small denominations of Lao Kip for everyday purchases, as larger bills can sometimes be difficult to break.

SAFETY

Personal Belongings

While Laos is generally a safe country for travelers, it is important to take precautions with your personal belongings. Avoid displaying valuable items such as jewelry, large amounts of cash, or expensive electronics in public. Use a money belt or a secure anti-theft bag to store your valuables, especially when exploring busy areas. Many hotels provide safes in rooms or at the reception, which can be used to store passports and other important documents.

Petty Theft

Pickpocketing and bag snatching can occasionally occur in crowded places like markets, bus stations, and popular tourist sites. When riding in tuk-tuks or on motorbikes, keep your bag securely strapped to your body and avoid using your phone near traffic, as snatch theft can happen. Be extra cautious at night, especially in less-populated areas.

Lost Items

Filing a police report for lost or stolen items can be a slow process, and the chance of recovering stolen goods is low. To minimize losses, keep photocopies of important documents such as your passport, visa, and travel insurance. Carry only what you need when going out and leave extra cash and valuables secured in your hotel. It is highly recommended to purchase travel insurance that covers theft, loss, and emergencies for added security.





DOMESTIC FLIGHTS & AIRPORT TAXES

Airport Tax

- Airport taxes for both domestic and international flights are included in the ticket price. No additional payment is required at the airport.

Check-in Recommendations

- International Flights – Arrive at least 3 hours before departure.
- Domestic Flights – Arrive at least 2 hours before departure.
- Online check-in is available for most airlines, but some domestic airports may require a printed boarding pass.

Baggage Allowance

- Lao Airlines, the national carrier, allows 1 checked bag (20–23kg) and 1 carry-on (7kg) for economy class passengers.
- Budget airlines such as AirAsia and Thai AirAsia often charge extra for checked baggage, so it is recommended to review baggage policies before booking.
- Overweight luggage fees can be costly, so pre-booking additional baggage is advisable if needed.

SHOPPING & BARGAINING

Laos is known for its handwoven silk, silver jewelry, wood carvings, bamboo crafts, and locally grown coffee.

Local Markets

- Vientiane's Morning Market (Talat Sao) and Luang Prabang's Night Market, which offer textiles, handicrafts, and souvenirs.
- Local craft villages sell authentic handmade products directly from artisans.

Bargaining in Cambodia

- Bargaining is expected in markets and with street vendors but not in fixed-price stores or malls.
- A friendly approach helps in negotiating a fair price, and walking away may encourage a lower offer.
- Be respectful and reasonable when haggling to ensure a positive exchange.

Street Vendors & Hawkers

- Vendors can be persistent, especially in tourist areas. A polite but firm "Bo khop chai" ("No, thank you" in Lao) is enough to decline an offer.
- Be cautious when buying silver, gemstones, or antiques, as some may not be authentic. Buy from reputable stores for quality assurance.





TIPPING

Tipping is not a strong cultural tradition in Laos but is becoming more common in the tourism industry. While not mandatory, a small gratuity is appreciated for good service. Below are suggested tipping amounts (in USD):

Tour Guides & Drivers

- Private Tour: \$5–10 per guest per day for a local or city guide.
- Group Tour: \$4–7 per guest per day for an escorted guide; \$2–5 per guest per day for a local guide.
- Drivers: Typically receive half of what guides get (\$2–5 per guest per day).
- Trekking or Adventure Tours: Additional tipping is recommended, around \$3–5 per guide per day.

Hotel & Restaurant Staff

- Restaurants: 5–10% of the bill if a service charge is not included.
- Housekeeping: \$2–3 per day per room.
- Porters: \$1–2 per trip, depending on luggage size.

Boat Cruise Staff

- Day Boat Trip: \$1–3 per guest.

Other Service Providers

- Spa & Massage Therapists: \$2–5 per treatment, especially for good service.
- Tuk-Tuk & Taxi Drivers: Not required, but rounding up the fare or giving \$1–2 for longer rides is appreciated.



Thank You



Head Office: Vinare building, 141 Le Duan street, Cua Nam Ward, Hanoi, Vietnam

Tel: +84 24 3747 2597 | www.auroratravel.asia | sale@auroratravel.asia