



## ◆◆ Laos : Travel Tips ◆◆

### CLIMATE

Laos can be visited throughout the year. The dry or cool season begins end of October and lasts until end of February. It is necessary to take along a pullover or jacket during the cool season as nights can be very cool, especially in the mountainous areas such as Luang Prabang, the Plain of Jars, Saravane and Houeixai. The hot season lasts from March to June and light cotton and hats are recommended. The rainy season starts in June and ends in October. For visitors travelling between end of March and beginning of April, please note in the mountainous area where “slash and burn” cultivation remains the smoke may cause a haze forcing domestic flights to be delayed or cancelled.

### CURRENCY AND EXCHANGE

The local currency is the Kip. The rate of exchange in July 2005 is approximately 10.600 Kip / US Dollar. Kip are issued in denominations of 1000, 2000, 5000 , 10000 and 20000 kips notes.

Travellers can exchange their hard currency either at licensed exchange shops in the major cities or at their hotels. Kip holds no value outside Laos so keep your exchange receipts in order to exchange any remaining Kip back to a hard currency when you leave the country. Credit cards are normally not accepted outside the better hotels and a select group of shops in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Traveller cheques and other currencies than US Dollar are only accepted by major banks. It is best to carry US Dollars bills in small denominations.

Euro is now more and more known and accepted

### AIRPORT TAX

USD 10.00 per person is levied on passengers leaving Laos on international flights. Airport tax may be increased by Laos Government without any notice. Price of our package is not included this airport tax.

### OFFICIAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS 2005

Jan 01,05	International New year
Mar 08,05	International Women Day
April 13-16,05	Lao New Year
May 01,05	Labour Day
Oct 30,05	Boat Racing Festival in Vientiane
Dec 02,05	Lao National Day

### FESTIVALS IN LAOS

Jul 17,05	Boun Khao Phansa
Oct29,05	Boun OK Phansa
Oct 30,05	Boat Racing in VienTiane
Nov.15-17,05	That Luang Festival

## **PASSPORT AND VISAS**

Visas are required by all nationalities. Passports have to be valid for at least 6 months after date of departure from Laos. Visas can be obtained at Lao Embassies and consulates before entering the country or upon arrival at Wattay Airport in Vientiane, at the Friendship Bridge border point or at Luang Prabang Airport.

Visa upon arrival at Hoexay are now available at the same conditions as other international check-point .

If visas are to be arranged by Thailand Vacation Tour, the following personal data must be supplied to us at least 03 (three) weeks before travelling to Laos:

- Full name as per passport mentioned
- Passport number, date of expiry
- Occupation and nationality
- Arrival and departure dates
- Date and place of birth

Visas are usually delivered to the relevant Lao Embassy and normally it requires 2 full working days to stamp the visa. Visas obtained upon arrival at Vientiane airport, at Friendship Bridge or at Luang Prabang airport is quoted USD 30.00 per person (2 photos are required). However, the procedure of getting of visa may be changed from time to time. Please contact Thailand Vacation Tour for updated information.

## **OVERLAND ENTRY POINTS TO LAOS**

At Houeisay, Bokeo province from Chiangkhong in Chiangrai Province, Thailand.

At Boten, Luang Namtha province from Mengla, Yunnan Province, China.

At KeoNeu (Lakxao), Bolikhamxai province from Vinh, Vietnam

At Lao Bao, Savannakhet province from Quang Tri, Vietnam.

At Chongmek, Champasack province from Ubon Rachathani province, Thailand

At Savannakhet, Savannakhet province from Mukdahan, Thailand.

It is possible to obtain a visa at the Lao Embassy in Bangkok but the process requires 2 working days.

## **CUSTOMS REGULATION FOR LAOS**

Persons over 18 years are permitted to entry the following tax free; 500 cigarettes or 100 Cigars or 500g tobacco, 2 litre wine, 1 litre spirits, perfume for personal use.

Exportation of antiques such as : Old Buddha images are strictly forbidden. Old bronze drums . details of forbidden item to be exported could be asked at Lao customs services .

## **LAO AVIATION INTERNATIONAL**

Lao Aviation offer flights from Vientian to Kunming, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Bangkok and Chiang Mai and also from Pakse to Siem Reap. Payment by credit cards are accepted.

## **LAO AVIATION DOMESTIC**

Domestic tickets are best bought directly from travel agents once the traveler is inside Laos. Flights can be canceled or postponed due to bad weather or insufficient number of passengers. However, local travel agents are “experts” on last minute arrangements. Do not underestimate their ability to pull travel plans together speedily. Upper-echelon hotels gladly book visitors domestic tickets.

A second French made ATR 72 aircraft is now in service at Lao Aviation.

## **MEKONG TRAVEL**

Boats run the Mekong year round. Speedboats ply routes up and down river daily, from Luang Prabang to northern Thailand. It is possible to travel by speedboat all the way to the Chinese border on the upper reaches of the Mekong. Rates are reasonable, usually under US\$20-30 (Join local boat). Tickets have to be bought locally at each port of embarkation. The scenery is spectacular. Depending on the season slow boats ply the route from Luang Prabang south to Vientiane and onward to the Cambodian border.

## **ROAD TRAVEL**

Most of the important arteries crisscrossing Laos have been rebuilt. Local transportation will take you just about everywhere. Some buses are air-conditioned and with comfortable seats. Locals often travel by converted pickup trucks. Travel agents, of course, will provide cars and minibuses for travel anywhere. In the southern parts of Laos, road construction programmes are nearly completed. The road linking Pakse to Cambodian border is now open to traffic.

## **BUSINESS HOURS**

8-12 am and 1 to 4 pm Monday through Friday. Ministries, the post office included, are no longer opened on Saturday morning. Travel agencies and airline ticket offices works half a day on Saturday.

Working hours : Government offices are generally opened Monday to Friday from 08:00-12:00 am, and from 13:00-16:00 pm. Shop and private businesses open and close a bit later and normally stay open during lunch.

## **BANKING**

Just about every major Thai bank has a branch in Vientiane. They are helpful when dealing with tourists. Every branch has English-speaking staff. Cash advances are possible using American Express and Visa. Wire transfers are easily executed.

## **E-MAIL**

The major hotels in Vientiane have business centers equipped with email service. There are many "cyber cafes" in Vientiane and the former royal capital Luang Prabang and all offer email service.

## **TAXIS**

Three wheeled motorcycle taxis, called either Samlo or Jumbo, are popular and cheap. You can travel anywhere in any town for about US\$1. Most people do not use normal taxis as they are more expensive. Motorcycle taxis are rare. Pedicabs are available, but they tend to be uncomfortable for anyone larger than the average Laotian.

## **MOTORBIKES**

Motorbikes are easily rented in Vientiane although you may have to surrender your passport as security until you return the motorbike. Rates vary, but US\$10 per day is considered reasonable.

## **HEALTH REQUIREMENTS**

No vaccinations are presently required. If travelling to remote or border areas, travelers should check with their doctor or a travel immunization clinic regarding the advisability of inoculation against Typhoid, Hepatitis, Tetanus and Japanese encephalitis.

The Japanese funded the construction of a new hospital in Vientiane called "Sethathirat Hospital". The hospital opened in February 2001. Japan will continue giving scientific and technical support to the hospital. However, please contact your physician for each individual needs.

## **LOCAL TIME**

Laos like Thailand, is 7 hours ahead of Greenwich mean time. Thus 12 Noon in Vientiane is 1 AM in New York, 5 AM in London, 6 AM in Paris.

### **SAFETY**

There has been no more security problems anywhere in Laos since January 2001.

### **GENERAL ADVICE**

Show respect and use your head; eyes and commonsense will guide you well in navigating Lao culture safely. When in Laos, try and do as the Lao do and remember: 1. Don't touch anyone's head. 2. Don't lose you cool. 3. Dress and behave modestly and don't expose too much skin.

Use your normal sense of good manners; Leave your shoes outside when you enter someone's house. Return a greeting. Be careful not to upset religious feelings. The Lao are very friendly and hospitable and a minimum of effort will smooth your trip and make it more memorable. Respect the culture and in turn you will be respected.

### **WELCOME**

Traditionally, Lao people use the "nop" on meeting. You will win friends instantly if you make a sincere effort of returning the greeting. When you greet a Lao man you will normally shake hand but try to use the "nop" when you greet Lao women (especially older). The Lao use the phrase "Sabai dee" when they meet. Never use the Western way of greeting by either a kiss or a hug.

How to "nop"? Raise your hands in a praying gesture with the palms of your hands together. The higher you go the more respect you show, but don't go over the top!

### **FEELINGS IN PUBLIC**

Public displays of affection are taboo in Lao society, so don't cause shock or embarrassment by kissing or cuddling in front of people.

Modest dress and discreet behavior will insure you don't attract unwanted attention or embarrass others.

### **FOOT AND HEAD**

In Buddhism and generally in Asian society the head is the seat of the soul and its purity while the feet walk the earth and all that is deposited on it. Laotians always take care not to expose the feet when sitting down> Don't rest the feet on tables or chairs and do not gesture with the feet. The locals can be insulted or regard you as something of a barbarian.

Observe and try to follow the local people's example if you don't know what to do with feet and shoes.

### **SHOUTING**

Never raise your voice to Lao people as they never react well to it. Even shouting to friends or for taxis will cause shock and worry.

This is a land of calm and patience, and shattering the peace will do you no favors.

### **APPEARANCE**

Bodily hygiene and cleanliness are of the highest standard in Laos and a visitor's failure to keep clean is not well received. Wash yourself and your clothes daily or prepare to be avoided and laughed at.

### **IN A LAO HOUSE**

Shoes generally stay outside at the bottom of the steps. Use your eyes and common sense to maximize your chances of social success.

Keep your head and general profile low at gatherings, particularly when passing by older people respect should be shown.

## **RELIGION**

Religion is a major part of daily life. Most people will show their faith regularly and especially during religious festivals.

Show respect in temples and shrines. Observe how the locals behave in such places. The basic rules are:

--no shoes in temple buildings

--keep your head lower than Buddhas and monks

--don't touch the Buddha

--don't turn your back on the Buddha or touch him

--ladies please should remember; Never touch a monk, as the vinaya or the code of Buddhist monk discipline has strictly involved monks in a life of strict chastity .

## **ENVIRONMENT**

You will rarely be alone in Laos so don't be a litter bug.

Bins are scarce, so use your plastic bags to return rubbish to towns or villages.

## **DRUGS**

Penalties may be severe for you, and even worse for the Lao society.

## **AUTHORITIES**

Cooperate with the authorities, showing patience, respect and goodwill, and your stay should be lovely. Ask for receipts if you need to pay money. Put on a friendly face and never lose your temper or you may have more formalities to complete.