



**SEE ASIA DIFFERENTLY**  
CAMBODIA LAOS VIETNAM BORNEO BURMA INDONESIA



**LAOS HOLIDAY INFORMATION PACK**

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We would like to thank you for choosing to travel with See Asia Differently. We hope that you have a fabulous holiday and return home with some wonderful memories. Laos is a fantastic country and we hope that you appreciate it just as much as we do.

This pack has been designed to help you get even more out of your Laos holiday from answering the most common questions, helping you to prepare and offering suggestions once you arrive. If there is still anything that you want to know then please don't hesitate to contact us or speak to your tour coordinator once you arrive.

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## About Laos

After nearly 20 years of virtual isolation, landlocked Laos in the first years of the 21st century has become more open towards the outside world, though the numbers of foreign visitors are kept down by the general lack of infrastructure. This currently is more of a blessing than a curse as visitors still get to see a glimpse of the old Southeast Asia. Lightly populated, Laos offers visitors a breathtaking array of stunning scenery, history, culture, great food and adventure, coupled with the opportunity to see how its diverse people live. This small country is still home to some 49 ethnic groups whose lifestyles have remained relatively unchanged for centuries.

The abundance of mountains, forests and rivers make this small land green and special. From the Northern provinces where Laos meets with China, Myanmar and Thailand, the Mighty Mekong river flows throughout the entire country, fed by many pristine tributaries and finally crashing over the vast 14 km wide cataract forming the Khone Falls in the southern province of Champassak. Today Laos is enjoying peace and a stable political and economic structure. It is a safe place to travel and to live.

For the last decade, the country has seen a steady increase in the number of tourists and many significant advances have taken place. Though its traditional ways are still well preserved, it is changing quite fast.

Lao people are frank, open and friendly. They possess a strongly developed sense of courtesy and respect. Everyone who adheres to the latter will receive a warm welcome. Laos is an extraordinary country and offers the adventurous visitor a wealth of experiences.

## A Brief History

The Lao state dates only from 1945. The idea of a separate Lao nationality was formed during the 19th century, when western ideas of national identity reached Southeast Asia, and when the Lao-speaking people were being squeezed between two expansionist powers, Siam (Thailand) and Annam (Vietnam).

The current borders of Laos were created by France in 1893 and 1904. Today the official history of Laos is traced back to the Kingdom of Lān Xāng, which was founded in 1353. But in reality, the Lao share a common history with the Siamese and other people of the Tai language group, and Lān Xāng was only one of a number of Tai kingdoms in a region which had a broad linguistic and cultural unity before the arrival of outside powers.

## Climate

At a glance, Laos has a tropical climate with an average temperature of 25-29C. November through February are the cooler months and temperature, especially at night in mountainous regions where the weather can sometimes drop to 15-20C. The daytime is usually warm and sunny most of the year.

March, April and May are the warmest months but still mostly dry. The southwestern monsoon during June to October causes heavy downpours almost daily and usually in late afternoon or evening. But this is tropical rain and unlike rains in the UK where it can drizzle all day, the rains here are heavy, but short and refreshing. Rain here is usually followed by a short window of beautiful skies with dark ominous clouds and amazing thunder and lightning.

Note: Do not let the downpours of the green season stop you from coming here. Streets may turn into streams and rivers during the tropical rain but all in all, the water and rain are gone before you know it. Most of all, nature is in its most radiant peak, rice-paddies wear their most vibrant shade of green while different flowers and fruits find their way to the local market stalls.

# Main Festivals

## FEBRUARY

### Marha Puha

This is an interesting festival celebrated by Buddhists in Laos on the night of the full moon. The day is a public holiday in Laos and people go to the temple to perform merit-making activities. It is celebrated most fervently in Vientiane and at the Khmer ruins of Wat Phu, in Champasak province. The festival is marked by grand parades of candle-bearing worshippers circling their local temples, merit-making, and much religious music and chanting.

### Sikhotabong Festival

This is a religious festival held at Sikhottabong stupa from 5-8 February every year. The stupa is located about 6 km south of Thakhe, it was built in the 8-10th centuries by King Nanthasene. The ruins of stupa were restored as its original design in the 1950s.

### Wat Phu Festival

This is an interesting festival organized annually in Champasak from 5-8 February. The temple of Wat Phu is in Champasak. Festivities include buffaloes fighting, elephants racing, cocks fighting and performances of Lao traditional music and dance.

## APRIL

### Boun Pimai (Pimai Lao)

This is the most important of all annual festivals, especially in Luang Prabang. Lasting several days and starting from 13-15 April. Water will be thrown to people in a spirit of fun and goodwill. In addition you could join in dancing, singing traditional song and of course there is a beauty contest with the crowning of Miss Pimai.

## AUGUST

### Boat Racing Festival

This is held in Luang Prabang from 17-18 Aug. This festival includes boat racing on the Nam Khane River and a trade fair in Luang Prabang. At the Khao Salak ceremony day, people visit local temples to make offering to the dead as well to share merits making.

## SEPTEMBER

### Boun Ok Phansa

This is the end of Buddhist lent and the faithful take offerings to the temple and it mean is end of the rainy season. Boat races take place on the Mekong River with crews of more men and women. Before the race small decorated rafts are set afloat on the river.

## OCTOBER

### Boat Racing Festival Venue: Vientiane

The water festival is held during 2-3 October and is spectacular on the first day with donations and offerings to the temples. Evening candlelight processions are held around the temples and hundreds of colorful flosta decorated with flower. A popular and exciting boat racing competition is held on the Mekong.

## Emergency Contact

### See Laos Differently Emergency Telephone Numbers

24 Hours Emergency: +856 20 555 70544 Mr Andy NIOU (Operations Manager)  
Secondary: +856 20 555 29185 Mr Rob HANSON (General Manager)

### See Asia Differently Contact Details

Mobile Number: +855 165 65 496 / +855 89 4 66 715

### British Embassy Vientiane:

Rue J. Nehru, Phonexay, Saysettha District, Vientiane Laos

BritishEmbassy.Vientiane@fco.gov.uk

Tel: +856 (0)30 770 0000

## Visa Requirements

European and UK citizens can obtain a 30-day Tourist Visa upon arrival. The cost of the tourist visa is US \$35 per person and 2 passport-size photographs are required. For longer stay, the visa needs to be purchased in advance from a Lao embassy or consulate.

**If you fly into Laos, the visa upon arrival service is available on the following airports:**

- Vientiane
- Luang Prabang
- Pakse
- Suvannakhet

**If you entering Laos by road, the visa on arrival can only be obtained on the following border checkpoints:**

China-Laos: Mohan/Botene

Thailand-Laos: Chiangkhong/Houixay

Nakaxeng/Kaenthao

Lao/Thai Friendship Bridge (to Vientiane, Suvannakhet & Nakorn-Phanom)

Vietnam-Laos: Nameo/Banleui

Namkan/Namkan

Laobao/Dansavanh

Keoneua/Nampao

Cambodia-Laos: Dong Calor/Veun Kham

**Visa conditions change regularly, so for the most up to date information, please contact your nearest Lao authority.**

## Insurance

Travel Insurance is compulsory for anyone travelling on a 'See Asia Differently' holiday and you will be asked to supply us with your insurance details before travelling. Travel insurance can be acquired from a multitude of companies, but it is vital that your insurance is comprehensive and covers you for all aspects of the trip you are taking.

## Health (Vaccinations)

We recommend that you check with your local GP at least 6 weeks before your departure for general advice on travel risks, malaria and vaccinations. You can also check on: [www.Masta.org](http://www.Masta.org)

Laos has only basic healthcare. Precautionary measures like eating only well-cooked food, drinking bottled water, staying hydrated, avoiding being bitten by mosquitoes and wearing protective clothing will help prevent most common ailments.

Protection against Malaria and vaccinations against Typhoid and Hepatitis A are recommended. For Diphtheria, Tetanus and Polio is recommended for almost everywhere outside Europe and there is a combined vaccination which covers all three and lasts for 10 years. Please check with your local GP, 6 weeks before departure. See Asia Differently will not be responsible on any health issues.

If you are under medication, we recommend that you take a copy of your prescription with you and please make sure that you have a sufficient supply to last through your trip.

Ensure that your travel insurance will cover you for accident and sickness.

If you need a doctor while in Laos, you will need to pay for the service but you can claim it back on your travel insurance. Please keep all receipts and it is recommended.

## Money, Credit Cards and Business Hours

Government offices are open from 8:30 am-12:00 pm and 1:00 pm-4:00 pm (Monday to Fridays).

Banks open 8:30 am-3:30 pm (Monday to Friday) and most shops open from 9:00 am-6:00 pm (except on holidays).

The Kip is the official currency of the Lao PDR and the following bank notes are currently in circulation:

500; 1,000; 2,000; 5,000; 10,000; 20,000, 50,000 and 100,000 Kip

Credit Cards: Visa is the most common. Master Card and American Express are accepted in the big hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops in the large cities (such as Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet and Champasack). Expect at least 3% service charge.

ATM services are available in Vientiane Capital and some other provinces where there are banks.

## What to Pack

Wear light and airy clothing to protect yourself from the sun during the day and mosquitoes at night. The sun can be quite intense at times so bring a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen.

Carry a lightweight rain coat during the green season in case of an afternoon shower and a warmer but light jacket for the nights in rural and mountainous regions.

Wear practical shoes when visiting temples and monuments, you may climb narrow steps and walk on uneven surfaces. As in all travel in warm climates you pack light and sensibly.

Our list of essentials:

- Passport (with photocopies)
- Travel insurance (with photocopies)
- Airline tickets documents (with photocopies)
- Passport photographs, bring 4 to 6 with you (required for visa on arrival)
- USD cash and travellers checks
- Credit or debit card
- Flashlight
- Hat, sun block and sunglasses
- Walking shoes sport sandals
- Waterproof jacket (just in case)
- Camera, additional memory cards and camera charger
- Travel adapters
- Insect repellent
- First-aid Kit (lip balm, aspirin, band aids, anti-histamine, Imodium, re-hydration powder and any extra items and prescription drugs you personally require).

## Recommended Reading

We are aware that you may want to do some background reading into Laos before coming on your trip, there are a number of different books available. Here are the top 3 that we have read:

### **A Dragon Apparent**

A poignant description of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in 1950 with all their beauty, gentleness, grandeur and intricate political balance intact. This lost world was restored from the ashes of the Vietnam war and its aftermath shows the Vietnamese guerrilla movement in its infancy, ranged against the French colonial powers, and the early affects of imported Western materialism.

### **Villa Incognito**

Imagine there are American MIAs who chose to remain missing after the Vietnam War. Imagine a family in which four generations of strong, alluring women share a mysterious connection to an outlandish figure from Japanese folklore. Imagine them part of a novel that only Tom Robbins could create—a magically crafted work as timeless as myth yet as topical as the latest international threat. But no matter how hard you try, you'll never imagine what you'll find inside the Villa Incognito.

## Eternal Harvest

Karen Coates and Jerry Redfern spent more than seven years traveling in Laos talking to farmers, scrap-metal hunters, people who make and use tools from UXO, people who hunt for death beneath the earth and render it harmless. With their words and photographs, they reveal the beauty of Laos, the strength of Laotians, and the commitment of bomb-disposal teams. People take precedence in this account, which is deeply personal without ever becoming a polemic.

# During your Stay

## Responsible Travel

### Communities

We aim to support the local community that we live and work wherever possible. We donate US \$10 from every booking to an NGO / charity of our choice. We are also able, due to the nature of our business, make visitors aware of various community projects, NGO's and charities.

## Dos and Don'ts

The Lao world for hello is Sa Bai Dee. Touching or showing affection in public will embarrass your hosts.

**Do** remember to take off your shoes before entering a Lao home.

**Don't** raise your voice in public and always ask permission before you take someone's photo.

**Don't** give gifts to children as it encourage them begging but give to a village elder instead.

**Do** dress modestly when visiting temples and women should not touch a monk or a monk's robes.

**Don't** go swimming in the nude or go topless in public.

**Do** gently crouch down when passing someone who is already seated.

**Don't** touch someone's head is very impolite.

**Don't** use drugs in Laos it is highly illegal and the consequences can be severe.

**Don't** engage in sex tourism, it is illegal in Laos.

**Don't** litter. Picking up rubbish sets a good example for Lao youths.



## Language

The official language is Lao. There are 86 individual living languages spoken in Laos. Of these, 1 is institutional, 10 are developing, 50 are vigorous, 23 are in trouble, and 2 are dying.

Here are a few words that we have spelt out phonetically to help you on your way:

Thank you - Khawp Jai	Excuse me/I'm sorry – Khăw Thôht
Yes – Maen Leeo	I'm a vegetarian – Khoy bpen khon jay/Khoy gin jay
No – Baw	How much – anee tor dai
No thank you – Atay or-kun	One Beer Please – kaw bia un neung
Hello – Sa-bai-Dee	Goodbye – Sôhk Dee Deuh

### Numbers

1 – neung	6 – hok
2 – song	7 – jet
3 – saam	8 – paet
4 – sii	9 – kao
5 – haa	10 – sip

## Food and Drinks

Closely related to Thai cuisine, Lao food is fiery and fragrant with a touch of sour. Lao food owes its distinctive taste to lemongrass, coriander, chilies and lime. Eaten with the hands along with sticky rice, much of Lao cuisine is roasted over an open fire and served with fresh herbs and vegetables.

Pork, chicken, duck and water buffalo all end up in the kitchen, but freshwater fish is the main source of protein in the Lao diet. Many in rural Laos, especially in the more remote mountainous regions, prefer animals of a wilder sort – mouse deer, wild pigs, rats, birds or whatever else can be caught.

Though you may not encounter them on menus, you're likely to see them being sold by the side of the road when travelling in these parts.

## Tipping, Bartering and Tuk Tuks

Unlike in Europe and America Laos doesn't have a specific rule. It is up to you how much you tip, generally tip is not expected. Tip if you feel that your experience has been enhanced but don't leave too much as sometimes can be seen slightly insulting.

When in local markets don't be afraid to barter most of the shop owners will at least double their price. Remember that no shop owner will sell you something at a loss. Always think of your ideal item value before you start to barter.

For tuk tuks, mottos and all taxis in Laos, always bargain first and make sure that you agree on the price before you start the service.

## Electricity

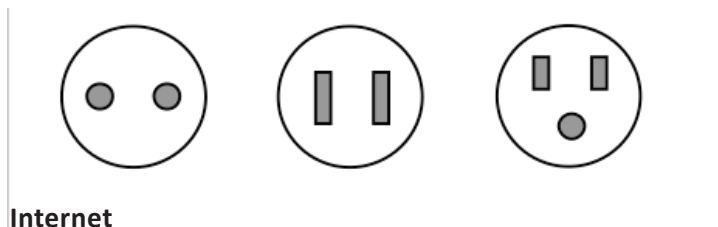
In Laos, 24 hours electricity is available in all major population centres and many district capitals.

For more details please check on: <http://www.powerplugadapter.uk/laos/>

Voltage: 230 V You can use your electric appliances in Laos if the standard voltage in your country is in between 220V - 240V (as in the UK, Europe, Australia and most of Asia and Africa).

Frequency: 50 Hz

Power Sockets:



Internet access is available in many hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants in big cities. Although internet cafe is often available in provincial capitals, it is difficult to connect on the internet in rural areas.

## Communications

The country code for Laos is +856. International calls from Laos have to go through an operator making phoning home very expensive. The easiest solution is for you to create a Skype account before you leave home, the best solution is to leave all your worries at home and switch off.

Mobile phone coverage is sufficient and you can get a SIM card which allows you to phone from your own mobile phone as long as you have got your phone unlocked before you travel. The cost is just a few dollars and can be found sold in many street side stores.

In regards to the internet there is Wi-Fi almost everywhere so you will have no problem if you decide to bring an i-Pad or travel laptop.

## Travel with Children

Travelling through Laos with children can be both challenging and fun. But the rewards far outweigh any negatives. The presence of children can help break the ice with locals, especially as the Lao people are so family-focused and love children. But long, bumpy journeys and insufficient sanitation in rural areas can make things a struggle at times.

Laos's lack of adequate healthcare facilities is a major concern for parents, so sufficient travel insurance is a must and It's worth taking a first aid set with you, as well as a rehydration solution in case of diarrhea. Some animals in Laos may have rabies, so explain to your children the dangers of playing with animals and consider a rabies vaccination before departing.

In tourist areas it should be no problem finding good healthy food that children will enjoy.

Major consideration are the long journeys which are sometimes necessary when travelling around the country , children may find them boring which can be eased of if you bring some 'in-car entertainment (i-Pad, books, few toys). Often the bumpiness will actually set your children to sleep for a bit.

Due to insurance policies, See Asia Differently does not provide child car seats thus ensure to bring your own and make sure you fit them into the car/van yourselves.