



# SEE ASIA DIFFERENTLY

CAMBODIA LAOS VIETNAM THAILAND BURMA INDONESIA



**LAOS**  
**HOLIDAY INFORMATION PACK**

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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 of this incredible region and we look forward to hearing all about it!

This Holiday Information pack has been designed to help you get even more out of your Cambodian holiday with us. We are here every step of the way to assist you; so, if you have any further questions that are not answered in this pack then please get in touch with your Sales or Customer Services representative.

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## About Laos

Most people come to Laos just to visit the UNESCO town of Luang Prabang, one of the most charming cities in South-East Asia, and leave without knowing anything else about this fabulous holiday destination. Each part of the country has hidden secrets and offers you different experiences throughout your Laos Holiday.

Laos is justly famous for its magnificent French colonial buildings, but will soon be renowned for its abundance of natural attractions and beautiful river waterways. The tourist infrastructure in Laos has developed tremendously in recent years, including the opening of quality hotels and restaurants and the upgrading of roads and transport links. Laos is more accessible today than at any time in the past three decades and a journey here is a journey to a land of timeless grace and charm.

Get back to nature and spend time in the enchanted north with the Laotian hill tribes and the mysterious Plain of Jar sites. Take a boat trip and meander around the picturesque 4000 islands taking in the river life as you go. Visit the country's fascinating caves and beautiful cascading waterfalls. Go elephant riding or simply take time to relax on the river banks and enjoy some fabulous cuisine. Nowhere is this better symbolised than the majestic stupa of Pha That, Laos's most important national monument that sparkles in the Vientiane sunlight. Beyond the capital and spiritual home Luang Prabang; Laos offers the adventurer a land of hill tribes, wildlife and bold landscapes, and the south with its numerous islands and waterways as well as the increasable Wat Phou temple. Many of these destinations are unknown to the outside world, helping the visitor feel more of an explorer than a tourist.

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, and 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 South-East 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.

**Kingdom of Lan Xang (1368 – 1707)**

**Siamese and Vietnamese dominations (1763 – 1848)**

**Creation of Laos (1826 AD – 1909)**

**French Laos (1893 – 1954)**

**Establishment of a protectorate (1886 – 1896)**

**Administrative reorganization (1898 – 1907)**

**Colonialism in Laos (1904 – 1931)**

**Laos during World War II (1939 – 1945)**

### **The period of the Kingdom of Laos (1955-1975)**

Elections were held in 1955, and the first coalition government, led by Prince Souvanna Phouma, was formed in 1957. The coalition government collapsed in 1958 under pressure from the United States. In 1960 Captain Kong Le staged a coup when the cabinet was away at the royal capital of Luang Prabang and demanded reformation of a neutralist government. The second coalition government, once again led by Souvanna Phouma, was not successful in holding power. Rightist forces under General Phoumi Nosavan drove out the neutralist government from power later that same year. A second Geneva conference, held in 1961-62, provided for the independence and neutrality of Laos, but the agreement meant little in reality and the war soon resumed. Growing North Vietnamese military presence in the country increasingly drew Laos into the Second Indochina War (1954-1975). As a result, for nearly a decade, eastern Laos was subjected to the heaviest bombing in the history of warfare, as the U.S. sought to destroy the Ho Chi Minh Trail that passed through Laos and defeat the Communist forces. The North Vietnamese also heavily backed the Pathet Lao and repeatedly invaded Laos. The government and army of Laos were backed by the USA during the conflict and the United States formed and trained irregular forces. Shortly after the Paris Peace Accords led to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam, a ceasefire between the Pathet Lao and the government led to a new coalition government. However, North Vietnam never withdrew from Laos and the Pathet Lao remained little more than a proxy army for Vietnamese interests. After the fall of South Vietnam to communist forces in April 1975, the Pathet Lao with the backing of North Vietnam were able to take total power with little resistance. On December 2, 1975, the king was forced to abdicate his throne and the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established.

### **The Laos People's Democratic Republic (1975 to Present Day)**

The new communist government led by Kaysone Phomvihane imposed centralized economic decision-making and incarcerated many members of the previous government and military in "re-education camps" which also included the Hmongs. While nominally independent, the communist government was for many years effectively little more than a puppet regime run from Vietnam. The government's policies prompted about 10 percent of the Lao population to leave the country. Laos depended heavily on Soviet aid channelled through Vietnam up until the Soviet collapse in 1991. In the 1990s the communist party gave up centralised management of the economy but still has a monopoly of political power. Currently tourism is growing fast however corruption is still ever present in day to day life but the country is very safe to travel to.

## **Weather**

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.

The best time for visiting most of Laos is between November and February, when it rains the least and is not too hot.

## Main Festivals

- January – **Boun Pavet**
- February – **Magha Puja, Wat Phu Festival & The Elephant Festival**
- March – **Boun Khoun Khao**
- April – **Pi Mai Laos (Laos New Year)**
- May / June – **Rocket Festival (Bong Bang Fai)**
- September – **Boun Haw Khao Padup Din & Luang Prabang Boat Racing Festival**
- November – **That Luang Festival**
- December – **Hmong New Year & Lao National Day**

\*Please note that dates of some festivals can change slightly from year to year.

## Before You Leave

### Emergency Contact

#### See Laos Differently Emergency Telephone Number

24 Hours Emergency: +856 (0) 5570 5079

#### See Asia Differently contact

- Cambodian Office Number – +855 (0)63 966 355
- International Number – +44 (0)208 150 5150
- Cambodian Mobile Number – +855 (0)16 565 496

#### British Embassy

Rue J. Nehru, Phonexay, Saysettha District, Vientiane, Laos  
Vientiane@fco.gov.uk Tel: +856 (0)30 770 0000

### Visa Requirements

#### ***Do I need a Visa to enter Laos?***

Yes: Residents of most nationalities must obtain a visa before entering the country.

#### ***How to get a Laos Visa?***

There are two ways:

**1) On Arrival** – You can get a visa on arrival at the three International airports and all land border crossings with Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand. A tourist visa costs \$35 and is valid for a period of 30 days however extensions are available for longer stays.

\*Please note that if you cross over a land boarder you may have to pay a stamping / processing fee of around \$5.

**2) In Advance (Embassy)** – You can obtain your visa for Laos in advance by visiting your nearest embassy. The visa will cost you the same amount as getting it on arrival which is \$35.

#### ***Additional Information:***

- Please make sure that your passport does not expire within 6 months of your holiday. And that your passport has at least one full clean page for the visa and another page for additional stamps.
- If applying for a visa on arrival please make sure that you have 2 passport photographs with you.
- For every day, you are in the country without a valid visa you will have to pay a fine per day.
- Please note that you are no longer needed to pay an airport departure tax as this is included in your airline ticket.

## 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 see your doctor or a travel clinic at least 6 weeks before your departure for general advice on travel risks, malaria and vaccinations.

Rather than giving out the wrong advice we have found that [www.masta.org](http://www.masta.org) offers excellent medical advice about recommended vaccinations and malaria advice. With them you can buy a number of useful products including mosquito repellent, malaria tablets and many other forms of travel related products. An alternative you might like to try the Travelpharm.

If you are currently taking medicine or drugs, whether prescription or not, please make sure that you take a sufficient supply to last through your trip. Also ensure that you have insurance for accident and sickness. If you need a doctor while in Laos, you must be prepared to pay for these services and claim it back on your insurance on your return to your home country. Ensure you keep all receipts and it is recommended that you take a copy of your prescription with you.

## Money, Expenses & Credit Cards

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 Champasak). Expect at least 3% service charge.

ATM services are available in most of the larger cities, so do carry some extra cash with you just in case so that you don't fall short.

## 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 (with photocopies)
- 2 Passport photographs for visa on entry (bring 4 to 6 as backup)
- USD cash and travellers checks
- Credit or debit card
- Flashlight
- Sun hat. sun block. sunglasses and after sun (iust in case)

- Walking shoes/sport sandals
- Waterproof jacket (just in case)
- Camera, additional memory cards and camera charger
- Travel power adapters
- Insect repellent
- First-aid kit (should contain lip salve, aspirin, band aids, anti-histamine, Imodium, or similar tablets for mild cases of diarrhoea, re-hydration powder, extra prescription drugs)

## Recommended Reading & Films

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 effects 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 Travel

### Responsible Travel

Laos is a safe country in which to travel and it is most unlikely that you will find yourself with any problems during your holiday. Just be as careful as you would be in your home country and use your common sense. For example: Don't make it easy for thieves by putting your passport or cash in your back pocket and don't take expensive jewellery with you.

You will be seen as a role model here and you're also an ambassador for yourself and your home country. Set a good example at all times in the way you dress, your behaviour, and your time keeping. Be aware that whilst the vast majority of people and organisations are genuine, there are some known instances where this is not the case. Be aware of mothers asking you to buy them milk powder for their babies. The babies are not receiving the milk and are being exploited so the older children and adults can make money by returning the milk powder to the shop after the donor has left.

Avoid paying for simple acts of kindness with cash, a thank you is sufficient. Giving money to adults and children promotes a culture of begging, which is not sustainable. In particular, don't give money or food to children; if you must do something then a payment for goods or services (postcards or shoeshine) is better, though even better is only transacting with adults.

Dental care is limited in parts of Asia, so it's best not to give sweets or chocolate. If you want to help then supporting local NGOs and hiring local guides and drivers, going to local restaurants, and buying locally are your best contribution.

## Do's and Don'ts

The Lao word 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 encourages 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 Laotian 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** – Khǎw Thôht

**Yes** – Maen Leeo

**I'm a vegetarian** – Khoy bpen khon jay/Khoy gin jay

**No** – Bomi

**How much** – anee tor dai

**No thank you** – bo khob chai

**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 Drink

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, chillies, 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 & Tuk Tuk's

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.

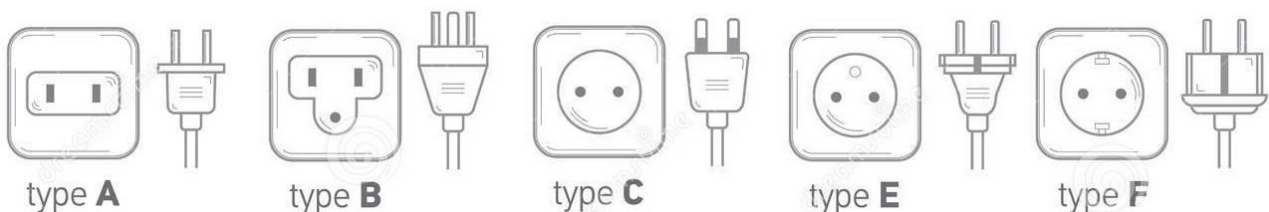
## Electricity

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 in Laos:



## 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 or WhatsApp account before you leave home, however the internet is not great in many parts of the countries outside the cities. The best solution however is to leave all your worries and technology at home and completely 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.

### Internet

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.

## Our Recommendations

We believe that in parts of your holiday you should follow your instinct as to where to eat, drink and what to do in your spare time as people's tastes vary dramatically. However, in this section we have listed a few of our favourite places to give you a helping hand.

### Vientiane:

#### Le Banneton

Perhaps one of the best bakeries in Vientiane, Le Banneton serves the freshest croissants and excellent pastries. They also serve house-made sorbet and ice-cream which are great on hot days.

#### Tyson Kitchen

Tyson Kitchen is a Canadian run restaurant, that's got you covered if you've had your fair share of Lao cuisine and are craving something more familiar.

#### Doi Ka Noi

Loatian food at its best. With an ever-changing menu, multiple visits are in order if you want to experience everything this place has to offer.

### Vang Vieng:

#### Lao Valhalla Bungalows & Restaurant

You will have to walk 1km past the bridge to reach this gem of a restaurant. The menu is short, but packs a punch and the view is stunning!

#### Earth Recycled Bar & Restaurant

The Earth Recycled Bar & Restaurant is an Australian owned restaurant made from recycled materials. As per usual in Vang Vieng, you will be treated to an awe-inspiring view of the surrounding karts mountain to go along with your Meal.

### Luang Prabang:

#### Chez Matt

Wine amateurs will feel right at home Chez Matt. This wine bar has a large selection of wines to choose from and their cheese platters are nothing short of delicious!

#### Viewpoint Café

Not the best food you'll ever eat, but one could not ask for a better view when eating at the Viewpoint Café. Perched high above the Mekong river bank, you'll have a postcard view of the Mekong as you enjoy your meal.

### Champasak:

#### Nakorn Café Guest House and Restaurant

Looks can be deceiving, but a quick look on Tripadvisor, and you'll see that Nakorn Café is sitting on top of Champasak's top restaurants list. The food is tasty and the setting is perfect for anyone looking for a lazy day.

#### Champasak Flavor

A restaurant focused on delivering traditional recipes with fresh ingredient grown locally. Whatever you choose on their menu, you can't go wrong.