

Laos Travel Tips and Information



OVERVIEW

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a stunning landlocked country home to many different ethnicities: Lao people making up 60% of the population, minority groups and indigenous hill tribes account for the remaining 40%, mostly living in the foothills and mountains. Vientiane is the capital, Luang Prabang a beautiful UNESCO World Heritage site.

TOURIST VISA

A visa is required by all nationalities. You can apply for a 30-day tourist visa at your nearest Laotian embassy, or most nationalities can obtain a visa-on-arrival at international entry ports, including Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse. Two passport photos are required along with the visa fee, which varies depending on your home country (Australia USD 30, Germany USD 30, Singapore USD 30, UK USD 35, USA USD 40, France USD 45). Your passport must be valid for a least six months.

CLIMATE

Laos has a monsoon climate with a distinct dry and wet season. Dry season runs from November - May, with December and January being the coolest months. Rainfall in the wet season varies depending on altitude and the wet months vary according to location: Vientiane sees rainy season from May - Sept, Luang Prabang is wettest in August though the country sees a high percentage of sunshine.

HEALTH & VACCINATIONS

For expert advice visit your doctor or travel clinic. No vaccination is mandatory, but some are recommended, as well as additional ones for remote areas. Avoid being bitten in the first place with preventative measures such as mosquito repellent containing DEET and long clothes. If you are on medication, bring this with you - it may be hard to find. We recommend to only drink bottled water as tap water is not safe enough for ingestion.

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Sunset over the Mekong & Bolaven Plateau in southern Laos

CURRENCY & MONEY

Lao kip is the local currency, but in practise three are used: kip, Thai baht and US dollars. In larger cities and towns, Thai baht and US dollars are accepted at most businesses, while kip is preferred in smaller towns and villages. Most upscale hotels and shops in Luang Prang and Vientiane now accept Visa / Mastercard. The Lao kip is not convertible to any currency outside of Laos. ATM's are rare outside of major cities.

TIPPING

Tipping is not customary in Laotian culture, so it is not necessarily expected in bars and restaurants. Tips are, however, very gratefully received. With the average Laotian wage still very low, tips from tourists can make a real difference, so we do suggest to honor good service. Our guests typically reward our guides with USD 5 - 15 per person per day, while drivers usually receive USD 3 - 5 per person per day.

CLOTHING AND CULTURE

When visiting pagodas and temples, revealing clothes must not be worn, as bare shoulders and knees will be viewed as disrespectful. It is advisable to carry a sarong (scarf) to wrap around your shorts or to cover your shoulders. Warmer clothing is needed for visiting Northern Laos in the winter months November to February. For the early morning Alms Gathering in Luang Prabang please be respectful when taking photographs.

EATING & DRINKING

Some of the more exclusive restaurants charge close to international prices, particularly for wine. However, very good Asian and Western food is available from USD 5 - 20. Laotian cuisine shares many similarities with Thai food, using spices such as lemon grass, ginger and tamarind. Unlike the jasmine rice in neighbouring Cambodia, the main staple is sticky rice.

INSURANCE

We strongly recommend you have adequate health insurance when travelling in Southeast Asia.

ADAPTORS & OUTLETS

Laos uses socket 'type C,' but most hotels feature universal, two prong outlets. Voltage 220v AC. While nearly all laptops and phones are universal and work on any voltage, you should consult the owner's manual for appliances such as curling irons and electric shavers.