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LAOS

Land of a Million Elephant



Located between Thailand and Vietnam in the heart of **Southeast Asia**, Laos is also the least developed and most enigmatic of the three former French Indochinese states, it is an often overlooked oasis. Dominated by majestic mountains, verdant valleys, stellar waterfalls and broad snaking rivers, Laos is jam-packed with incredible sights, this country is perfect for **nature lovers** and those seeking **adventure**.

Capital city: Vientiane

Population: 6.5 million

Language: Lao

Currency: Kip (KN)

Time zone: GMT+7





DESTINATION

Laos is well-known for its beautiful natural sites such as forests and waterfalls, the charming cities are attractive, too.

Mountains: enjoy the stunning beauty of nature and take part in outdoors activities such as walking, trekking, biking... In the nature reserve areas, visitors may have the chance to see wild animals such as elephants, bears, tigers...

Limestone caves: visitors explore the mysterious caves, some can be reached on land, some can be reached by boats.

Temples and pagodas: There are thousands of Buddhism temples and pagodas in Laos with distinct structure that will impress any visitors

Waterfalls: the water was collected in turquoise blue pool as it flows downstream, suitable for a relaxing trip.

Riverside Villages: Experience the life of local people on the bank of Mekong river in Laos, kayaking yourself will be an unforgettable experience

Cities: Discover the historical monuments, night markets, taste the street food during a city tour, the cities in Laos may not be as luxurious as other countries', but it's full of interesting surprises.

CLIMATE

Laos has a **tropical monsoon climate** with two distinct seasons: rainy season and dry season. Rainy season is from May to October. Dry season is from November to April. The average temperature is between 25C (77F) and 30C(84F).

The hottest period of the year is from March to April, travelers are not advised to visit Laos this time of the year because the temperatures can reach 38C (100F), the sunlight is intense during daytime. The coolest season runs from November to January - the most popular time to visit Laos. In the far north of the country, the temperatures during this time can be pretty cold.

Rainfall varies regionally with the high amounts so it may be a good idea to carry an umbrella or raincoat with you.



PASSPORT AND VISA

Passports should be valid for six months from the date of entry into Laos. We recommend you make a photocopy of your passport and keep it somewhere separate, or scan it and keep it in an accessible email account.

Visas valid for 30 days can be easily obtained on arrival. Cost depends on nationality (from US\$30 to US\$42). One passport-sized photograph is required.

TRANSPORTATION

The transport network is slow due to the incomplete infrastructure in some parts of the country. So traveling around may take more time than you think, make sure your plan has enough time to transfer.

Taxi: is the easiest way to travel between towns and cities with a set price

Tuk tuk: is easy to be found in any parts of the country, the price is more reasonable than taxi but it's a bit slower

Motorbike taxi or motorbike rental: Travel by motorbike yourself in Laos is not safe so we don't

recommend traveling by motorbike, but if you're confident with your riding skill, then this can be an interesting experience.

LANGUAGE

Laotian is the official language of Laos. It's closely related to Thai, so much so that if you can speak Thai, you'll be able to get by in Laos just fine.

Today, many of the Lao people can speak a bit of English, so you'll still be able to manage on your own while traveling there even though you can't speak Laotian or Thai.

But in some areas, due to the poor education, lots of people can not speak English, we recommend using language guide, or translate software in your mobile phone.

CURRENCY

The official currency in Laos is the Lao Kip, you will need to bring US dollars to exchange. The kip is worth roughly .00012 USD Besides, US dollars is widely used in big cities, in some areas located near the border between Laos and Thailand, people also commonly use Baht (Thai's currency).



You can exchange US dollars to Lao Kip at the airports or the banks. Be sure you always have an amount of Lao Kip in your hand because ATMs may not be available in some parts of the country.

Visa and MasterCard are accepted in many of the big hotels and restaurants, especially in the larger cities. ATM's are also available in larger cities and tourist spots

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Postal services are available in Laos. The best

way to receive any mail is to get it sent to a post office and collect it yourself.

Telephone connections to the rest of the world are widely available, however they can be expensive.

Internet access is available in most major tourist places such as hotels, restaurants and cafes.

ELECTRICITY

230V AC electricity. Power outlets are two-prong round or flat sockets (type A and C).





SAFETY

Laos is a safe place to visit. The Laotians are generally friendly and kind. You can travel alone without worrying about the risk of crimes, kidnap or terrorism. But it's good to be cautious anywhere you go. Don't leave money or valuable property out in your hotel room or in public, especially in crowded places such as market, bus.

In some parts of Laos, there are still unexploded ordinances left over from the Indochina War, so use caution when traveling in these areas. If you see strange metal objects, do not touch them. The remaining rockets, mines, bombs... may still work and unexpectedly explode.

VACCINATIONS

Please be aware that your health can be at risk in Laos due to poor sanitation and lack of effective medical facilities. The tropical climate is also a favorable condition for diseases and vectors (flies, mosquitoes, cockroaches, rats ...) to multiply, especially in rainy season. Rural areas may have few pharmacies and hospitals so you may have to travel a long way to get

one. Make sure you travel with a full supply of any prescribed medicine you take.

You should also book an appointment with your doctor or travel clinic, no less than two months before your departure to get the necessary vaccinations.

If you have a medical condition or allergy which requires particular attention, please carry a doctor's letter with you that describes the nature of the condition and treatment needed. Packing a medical kit, including paracetamol and antiarrhoea remedy is a great choice for a family trip.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Every traveler is responsible for his or her own health. Travel inevitably involves some risks and this should be recognized by holiday-makers. Travel insurance is a cost effective way of protecting yourself and your equipment should any problems occur such as cancelled trips, delays, medical emergencies, baggage loss or damage. It also gives you peace of mind so that you can entirely enjoy your trip without worry. Please also ensure your travel insurance covers all activities planned on your trip.



RELIGION

The predominant religion of Laos is Theravada Buddhism. So there are many pagodas and temples in this country. Foreigners are always welcome in temples, however, it is important that a few simple rules of etiquette are followed:

- Act with the utmost respect when visiting temples and other religious sites: don't speak loudly, run in the temples or point your finger or the soles of your feet toward anyone or anything, especially the figures of Buddha or other Gods.
- Do not wear shorts, skirts, or tank tops and, sure your shoulders and knees are covered.
- Remove your shoes and hat before get inside
- If you sit down in front of the dais (the platform on which the Buddha's are placed), sit with your feet to the side rather than in the lotus position.
- A woman may accept something from a monk but should never touch a monk.

- Turn off mobile phones or the ringtones so as not to annoy other people praying.

FOOD

Like is other Southeast Asian countries, rice is a staple food in Laos. However, sticky rice is preferred here, it is often crushed into a ball with fingers and used to soak up sauces. Wild boar and river fish are commonly seen in the meals of Laotians. The freshness of ingredients is very important. Herbs such as galangal and lemongrass are one of the most popular and padaek (Lao fish sauce) is found on every table.

A national dish called Lap is a must-try when visiting Laos, it is a spicy mixture of marinated meat and/or fish that is sometimes served raw

Don't drink the tap water in Laos before being boiled. Water bottles are cheap, convenient and available throughout the country, though it's not environmental-friendly.



ETIQUETTE AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Knowing a few important customs of the Laotian people will help make your visit more enjoyable:

- Try not to get angry. Showing any frustrations or annoyances by shouting or becoming abusive is extremely impolite and unlikely to achieve a positive outcome.
- Pointing your finger is seen as offensive. Try to gesture using your whole hand instead.
- Refrain from public displays of affection, they are considered offensive. It is extremely rare to see couples holding hands.
- It is offensive to touch another person's head as it is considered the most sacred part of the body.
- It is polite to remove your shoes before entering a house – look for shoes at the front door as a clue.

- In Laos, people greet each other with a slight bow and a prayer-like gesture, known as the 'nop'. For foreigners and business, handshakes are becoming more acceptable.

HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS

Laos New Year is the main public holiday, which is celebrated on the 13th – 14th – 15th and 16th April.

Not unlike Songkran, the Laos Pee Mai celebration mixes religious tradition with water. In Laos, water is often used for bathing Buddha images in temples, not really for dousing foreign tourists. However, water fights are catching on, so get ready for an exciting water fight on the streets if you travel to Laos this period of the year.



TIPPING

Travelers are recommended to tip for the service if you feel satisfied. Though it isn't compulsory, the staffs will be appreciated, so you can tip any amount you feel is appropriate.

- Bellboy: \$1
- Chambermaid: \$1 per day
- Guides: \$5-\$10 per day for guides (depending on group size and performance)
- Drivers: \$3-\$5 per day, per person
- Restaurants: In smart establishments, you may find that the tip is already included in the bill. In local restaurants, tips are not expected but you may wish to leave loose change on the table.

PRICE GUIDE

Laos is generally an inexpensive country to travel around, however, some goods are more expensive than neighbouring countries if they have to be imported.

Street food:

- Noodle soup: 15,000 KIP
- Noodle with pork/chicken/vegetable: 15,000 KIP
- Baguette: 15,000 KIP

Restaurants:

- Western food: from 45,000 KIP

- Lao set menu: 60,000 KIP

Drinks:

- Soft drinks: 7,000 KIP
- Beer Lao/bottle: 12,000 KIP
- Other:
- Souvenirs (bags/t-shirts): between 30,000-150,000 KIP
- Mobile Phone: 200,000 – 250,000 KIP
- SIM card: between 10,000- 30,000 KIP
- Oversea call: 2,000 KIP/minutes
- Bicycle rental: city bikes 20,000 KIP, Trek bikes 15USD
- DVD: 5,000 KIP

DONATIONS AND GIFT GIVING

Poverty is still rife in Laos, especially ones in rural areas. It's common to see children begging for money or selling souvenirs on the street. Please keep the following advice in mind so as not to fall into the trap of buying from them.

- Don't give money to the beggars, or buy goods from them, especially children. This encourages more families to send their children onto the street to earn money. By this way, many children in Laos are taken advantage of to earn money for their family instead of going to school.



- You can give money to the elderly or disable as you want to help
- Don't give sweets to children in villages you visit.
- If you want to help or donate, there are many charities and organizations, but first make sure they are legal.

CLOTHING

The weather is hot in the tropical countries such as Laos, so bring lightweight clothes, don't forget to bring hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and cover clothes for sunny days

Prepare appropriate clothes when visiting religious and historical sites, showing too much your legs and shoulders is considered disrespect, so don't wear shorts, skirts, or tank tops.

In many temples or pagodas, you'll have to take shoes off, so slip-on shoes or sandals are useful.

HOT TIPS

1. Keep in mind the telephone number of your country's embassy in Myanmar.
2. Don't put your passport or visa anywhere that's easily reached. Record images of your passport and visa in case of loss or theft.
3. Insect repellent are necessary when exploring forests and national parks, especially during rainy season.
4. The sunlight may be intense. Avoid outdoor activities during hottest hours (about 11am to 2pm).

USEFUL WEBSITES

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade travel information:

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/laos/index.html>

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel information: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/laos>

The official tourism website:

<http://www.tourismlaos.org/web/index.php>

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



❖ Documents

- Passport (at least six months validity from date of entry)
- Photocopy of passport
- Visa or a passport photo and US\$20 for visa on arrival
- Travel insurance
- All relevant tickets
- Reconfirmed flights

❖ Clothes

- Lightweight clothing
- Long-sleeved shirts and trousers (to religious sites)

- Shoes, sneakers for trekking, cycling and walking
- Sunglasses, sunscreen

❖ Travel aids

- Suitcases, backpack
- Foreign currency (US\$) and/or ATM card
- Maps
- Pocket knife
- Language guide
- Medications, first aid kit
- Insect repellent
- Electrical adaptor: 220V, 50Hz; 2 pin plugs

Please note: domestic airlines impose baggage weight restrictions of around 20kg maximum, so travel lightly where possible.

Authentic Asia wish you a safe and pleasant journey.

In case of an emergency, please contact us at:

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