



## USEFUL INFORMATION FOR TRIPS TO LAOS

### AIRLINES

International: The national carrier Lao Airlines, as well as Thai Airways, Siem Reap Airways, Bangkok Airways and Vietnam Airlines serves the international airports at Vientiane, Pakse, Savannakhet, and Luang Prabang. Low-cost carrier Air Asia has begun routes from Kuala Lumpur to Vientiane and China Southern flies to the capital from Kunming. Since October 2016, SilkAir operates three weekly flights from Singapore, stop in Vientiane and then continue to Luang Prabang, before heading back directly to Singapore.

Domestic: Lao Airlines serves the domestic routes and connects the capital city Vientiane to major destinations in the country.

### AIRPORT TAX

All international and domestic airport taxes are included in the price of the tickets (subject to change without prior notice from airlines and authorities).

### ARRIVAL IN LAOS

#### By Air

There are no direct flights from Europe or very few from other countries to Laos. The most frequent connections are from Bangkok (Thailand), Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) and Siem Reap (Cambodia). EXO Travel will generally not be able to offer you attractive intercontinental fares - you will be better off consulting your local travel agent or searching the internet. However, we do offer attractive regional flight arrangements once you are already in Asia. The two main international airports are Wattay International Airport in Vientiane and Luang Prabang International Airport. The smaller Pakse Airport serves the international flight to/from Siem Reap and to/from Ho Chi Minh City. Savannakhet Airport offers flight to/from Bangkok.

#### By Land

Laos shares borders with Myanmar and China to the north, Thailand to the west, Cambodia to the south and Vietnam to the east.

From CHINA	To LAOS	Visa available upon arrival
Mohan, Yunnan	Boten, Luang Nam Tha	Yes
Kunming or Xishuangbanna	Xiengkok riverport, Luang Nam Tha	No

From MYANMAR	To LAOS	Visa available upon arrival
Vangpung, Thachilek	Ban Mom, Bokeo	No



From THAILAND	To LAOS	Visa available upon arrival
Chiang Khong, Chiang Rai	Houay Xay, Bokeo	Yes
Nakaxeng, Loei	Kaenthao, Sayabuli	No
Loei	Botene, Sayabuli	No
Houaykhone, Nan	Nam Ngeun, Sayabuli	Yes
Nongkhai, Nongkhai	Friendship Bridge, Vientiane	Yes
Bungkham, Nongkhai	Paksan, Bolikhamsay	No
Nakorn Phanom, Nakorn Phanom	Thakhek, Khammouane	Yes
Mukdahan, Mukdahan	Savannakhet, Savannakhet	Yes
Chongmek, Ubon Ratchathani	Vangtao, Champassak	Yes

From CAMBODIA	To LAOS	Visa available upon arrival
Trapaeng Kriel	Nong Kiang	Yes
From VIETNAM	To LAOS	Visa available upon arrival
Tai Trang, Dien Bien (Lai Chau)	Taichang, Phongsaly (Sobhoun)	Yes
Namxoi, Thanh Hoa	Nameo, Huaphanh	Yes
Namkan, Nghe An	Namkan, Xiengkhouang	Yes
Cau Treo, Ha Tinh	Nampao (Laksao), Bolikhamxay	Yes
Chalo, Quang Binh	Naphao, Khammouane	Yes
Lao Bao, Quang Tri	Densavanh, Savannakhet	Yes
Bo Y, Kontum	Phoukua, Attapeu	Yes

## BUSINESS HOURS

Offices are usually open from Monday to Friday from 08:00 until 11:30 and 13:00 – 17:00. Shops open from Monday to Saturday between 09:00 and 17:00 and some also open on Sunday. In Luang Prabang shops often open later until 19:00 or 20:00 (During Public Holidays as well as celebrations such as Chinese New Year, most businesses are closed. Public holiday information can be found below.)

## CLOTHING

Comfortable lightweight clothing in natural fabrics such as cotton is most suitable for traveling in Laos. The dress code is fairly casual as in most parts of the tropics but it is advisable to cover arms and legs in the evenings against biting insects. A lightweight raincoat is a good idea in the rainy season. Warm clothing is needed for visiting the northern Laos during the winter months from November to February. Visitors to Laos should not wear shorts, short skirts or other skimpy clothing when visiting religious buildings and shoes should be removed before entering a private home.

## CREDIT CARDS

The use of credit cards is still not widespread in Laos. Most upscale hotels and many shops and restaurants in Luang Prabang and Vientiane accept VISA and Master Card but in other parts of the country often only cash is accepted.



## **ELECTRICITY**

Lao uses 220V. Power outlets usually feature two-prong round or flat sockets however, there is no set standard. It is recommended to bring a universal plug adaptor.

## **ENTERTAINMENT**

There is not much in the way of western style entertainment in Laos but Vientiane and Luang Prabang have good restaurants and quite a few bars and nightclubs. In the rest of the country, entertainment is mainly confined to the hotels and mainly tourist-orientated restaurants.

## **FOOD**

Lao cuisine has many similarities to Thai with lots of aromatic herbs and spices such as lemon grass, chillies, ginger and tamarind used to flavor dishes. Sticky rice, or *kao niao*, is the main ingredient in Lao cuisine, usually served with fermented fish and a fish sauce similar to that used in Vietnamese cuisine called *nam pa*. Chicken and pork dishes are also popular but beef is expensive in comparison. Soups served with noodles, bamboo shoots and fresh vegetables can be found everywhere.

## **HEALTH**

No vaccinations are required except for yellow fever if you are coming from an area where the disease is present. However visitors should be inoculated against typhoid, cholera, hepatitis A & B, tetanus and polio. Malaria is present in parts of Southeast Asia and it is advisable to take precautions especially if traveling off the beaten track. Medical facilities are rather limited in Laos but you can easily find good medical facilities in the main Thai towns and along the Thai-Lao borders. It is essential to take out a good medical insurance policy before traveling in case evacuation is needed (usually to Bangkok or Singapore). If you are on any medications, please bring an adequate supply of pills with you as it can be difficult to find within the country.

## **INSURANCE**

We highly recommend that all travelers to Southeast Asia purchase Travel Insurance which covers medical evacuation by air. In case of an emergency, be sure to collect all receipts and invoices, as well as a copy of the medical report, for your insurance company.

## **INTERNET**

Major hotels throughout Laos have Business Centers with PCs connected to the Internet and most offer wireless broadband access. Check with reception for fares (often free of charge) and facilities. Cyber cafes are easily found in major towns and cities and prices are reasonable- around 1USD per hour. In many Internet cafes, you can buy pre-paid international phone cards to dial from a computer to landlines or mobile phones worldwide. Most Internet cafes are equipped with webcams, headsets and microphones.

## **LANGUAGE**

The national language of Laos is Lao, which is closely related to Thai and is spoken in many different dialects. Lao, like Thai, is a tonal language. In Luang Prabang and Vientiane, English is widely spoken and French is still spoken by many government officials and educated members of the older generations.



## **MONEY & ATMs**

The kip is the currency unit of Laos and are presently in distributions of 1000, 5000, 10000, 20000, 50000 and 100000 kip. US dollars, Euros and Thai baht are also accepted in many places and can be more convenient to carry than great wads of the local currency. Banks, hotels and jewelry shops all offer currency exchange. Banks are typically open Monday to Friday from 08:00 to 12:00 and 14:00 to 15:00. In Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Pakse, and other major towns you can find ATMs to withdraw money (ATMs distribute only Lao kips with a maximum of 1,000,000 – 2,000,000 per transaction). VISA and MasterCard are accepted at larger hotels and restaurants throughout the country. *NOTE: Should you wish to pay a bill expressed in Lao Kip with USD, ask for the exchange rate or ask your EXO Travel guide for assistance. For everyday expenses, we recommend carrying a mix of US dollars and kip. For larger items or when the exchange rate works in your favour, use US dollars. For tuk tuks, local food stalls and small purchases, it's best to use kip. Make sure you always have a stock of small notes so that you don't have to worry about change especially in the countryside. The BCEL Bank can change American Express Travellers' Cheques for Lao kip or US dollars in cash. Note that a 3 % or 5% commission is charged. Very few shops, hotels or restaurants accept Travellers' Cheques and they can be difficult to exchange outside of the main cities.*

## **POSTAL MAIL**

Postcards are sold at all main tourist sites and stamps are available from post offices and some hotel reception desks. A postcard to North America costs about 9,500 kips and takes 10 days to two weeks to reach its destination.

## **RELIGION**

As in the neighboring countries of Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion and saffron-robed monks are a common sight in Laos. There are also a small number of Catholics and Protestants.

## **SAFETY**

Laos is generally a safe country. Nevertheless and as a global rule, never leave your belongings unattended and always maintain eye contact or a firm grip on cameras and shoulder bags. In some tourist sites you may encounter some insistent souvenir sellers. A polite but firm "No, thank you" usually will suffice.

## **SHOPPING**

The best buys in Laos are ethnic minority handicrafts and textiles. The Lao sarong or *pha sin* made from silk or cotton is popular souvenir. Other souvenirs to look out for include silverware, in particular from Luang Prabang, and wood carvings.

## **TELEPHONE**

Most hotels have IDD phones and fax machines, however these services are expensive in Laos. Internet cafes offer cheaper dialing rates although the quality is not always great and away from the major cities it may not always be possible to make international calls. If you have worldwide coverage, you can bring your mobile phone and use it to make domestic or international calls which again can be expensive. The Lao mobile network is cheap and affordable. Local SIM cards can easily be purchased in the main cities and international rates are around 2000 kip per minute.

## **TIME**

Laos is GMT+7 and does not operate on a daylight-savings system (therefore GMT+6 in summer time).



## **TIPPING**

Tipping for good service is not expected but is always appreciated in Laos. It is customary, though not compulsory, to tip tour guides and drivers at the end of a tour. Hotel and station porters should also be tipped a small amount for their troubles.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Laos laws do allow foreigners to rent and drive a car themselves. It is highly recommended to arrange a self-drive package in advance to get road maps, suggested stops and advice on driving in Laos as traffic conditions may vary dramatically from what you are used to. If you wish to hire a driver, please remember that in Laos drivers are only drivers. Tour guides must be licensed by the National Tourism Authority. EXO Travel Laos employs arguably the best tour guides in Laos and we are specialized in arranging tours with private drivers and tour guides. For in-town transportation, 3-4 seater tuk tuks (motorcycle-pulled carts) are the most popular option with larger songthaews (also called jumbos) available to carry up to 12 people. Laos towns are small enough to be toured by bicycle and most hotels and guest houses have them for rent at reasonable rates.

## **VISAS**

Approval is no longer required for visas to Laos. Foreign tourists are generally admitted into Laos for 30 days with a visa on arrival (obtained at most border check points) without prior authorization or for 30 days with a visa issued at a Laotian embassy. This costs 30-42 USD (depending on nationality) and requires the filling in of an application form and two passport photos. An additional 1 USD/person can be charged if you arrive on a weekend or public holiday. Two passport-size photos are required and your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond your expected departure date. Please contact your local Lao embassy for the most accurate information.

## **WEATHER**

Laos has a monsoon climate featuring a dry and a wet season. The dry season lasts from November to May with the cooler period in December and January. At its coldest temperatures fall to as low as 15°C. It is coldest at night, in the early mornings and at higher altitudes. During the hot period of the dry season, between March and May, temperatures can reach the high 30's °C. Rainfall in the wet season varies according to altitude. Generally speaking, the monsoon season produces severe rain that lasts for short periods of time. The wet months vary according to location. In Vientiane, they are from May to September; in Luang Prabang, August is far wetter than any other month. Laos is sunny year-round and we highly recommend bringing sun protection from your home country. Wearing sun screen and a hat are the best ways to avoid heatstroke and sunburn.

## **WATER**

Keep in mind to always clean your fruits and vegetable with purified water or to peel them. Bottled water is safe for Westerner and easy to find in most of places.