LAOS

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION
Laos, a peaceful land-locked nation, is one of Southeast Asia’s hidden gems. The stunning natural beauty of forested mountains and valleys teeming with wildlife, combined with a fascinating Buddhist culture make Laos a superb destination for those seeking an adventurous and authentic cultural experience. Most of Laos today remains relatively isolated and undeveloped. Despite being the capital and largest city in Laos, Vietianne is still refreshingly laid back.

**QUICK FACTS**

- **Currency:** Lao Kip
- **Capital City:** Vientiane
- **Time Zone:** GMT +7
- **Electricity:** 230 Volts, 50Hz
- **International Airport:**
  - Vientiane VTE
  - Luang Prabang LPQ
- **Population:** 7 million
- **Language:** Lao
- **Calling Code:** +856
- **Religion:** Buddhism & Laotian folk religion
Lao cuisine has many regional variations, due in part to the fresh foods local to each region. Popular with the Laotian population, fresh vegetables and herbs are found in most Lao meals. Meat and fish are also abundant and usually grilled or steamed. As a result, dishes are fresh and healthy.

Lao food is traditionally eaten with sticky rice using fingers. In the countryside, people all eat as family style, sitting on the floor, sharing a few dishes. Lao traditional food is dry, spicy and very delicious based on fish, buffalo meat, pork, poultry and especially herbs.

Larb
A mouth-watering meat-based salad, larb uses a variety of minced meat flavoured with mint leaves, chilli, fish sauce and lime juice. Ground toasted rice (khao khua) is typically added. Larb can be made with chicken, beef, duck, fish, pork or mushrooms.

Kaipen
A popular snack, kaipen is made of river weed harvested from the Mekong Delta and other rivers in Northern Laos, peppered with sesame seeds and sun dried into paper-thin sheets. Raw kaipen is stored in rolls. For consumption, the kaipen sheets are flash-fried in a pan and usually served with chilli paste.

Khao poon
Lao noodle soup is made with long-simmered chilli and meat (e.g. fish, pork, chicken). This soup is ladled on cooked rice vermicelli and a bed of chopped vegetables including shallots, spring onion, coriander, mint leaves and string beans.

Lao Sausage
Also known as ‘sai oua’, Lao sausage makes a pleasant appetizer or snack. Chopped pork meat is seasoned with herbs including lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, shallots, cilantro, galangal and flavoured with fish sauce. This grilled sausage is often served with sticky rice and fresh vegetables.
CURRENCY & GRATUITIES

Currency in Laos
The Laotian currency is the Kip (LAK); however, the US Dollar is also widely accepted. When traveling to Laos, it is recommended that you bring new and clean US Dollars. Small denominations ($1 and $5) are useful for making local purchases. Cashing traveller’s cheques is no longer possible in Laos.

Currency Exchange
Currency is easily exchanged in Laos. We recommend changing money at the airport and as well, changing larger bills of $50 and $100 will yield the best exchange rates.

ATMs
ATMs are now available in main towns and are widespread in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. ATMs will only issue local currency. If traveling outside the large cities, please make sure you bring sufficient funds with you as ATMs may not widely be available.

Credit Cards
Credit cards are widely accepted through Laos’ major cities, at high-end restaurants, in larger boutique shops and hotels. However, many smaller shops may not be able to accept credit cards, so it is advisable to carry local currency or small denominations of US Dollars with you for purchases.

Gratuities
Tipping is not compulsory but it is greatly appreciated throughout Southeast Asia, especially in the service industry. For reference, we have provided a general guideline below.

- Guides (>4 travellers): $10 - $15 per day per traveller
- Drivers (>4 travellers): $5 - $7 per day per traveller
- Guides (<5 travellers): $5 - $10 per day per traveller
- Drivers (<5 travellers): $3 - $5 per day per traveller
- Restaurants: 5-10% of the total bill
- Hotel Maid Service: $2 - $3 per day
- Porters: $2 - $3 at time of service
- Local Boat Transport: $5 - $10 per boat
- Overnight Cruise: $20 - $30 per person per night (to cover all crew)

Please note all prices are quoted in USD.
Insurance
Travellers are highly recommended to purchase trip and travel insurance. This can cover anything from trip cancellation to accidents, emergencies, hospital fees, property loss and medical evacuation. It is compulsory to have comprehensive travel insurance whilst traveling in Laos. Comprehensive travel insurance may cover you for unforeseen circumstances prior to departure, should you be forced to cancel. Comprehensive travel insurance should cover you for emergency and medical evacuations, hospital fees, loss of property etc.

Health
Please consult your doctor to discuss your particular health or immunisation requirements. If you would like to have a source of further information, please refer to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov.

Medical
When traveling in Laos, it is advisable to avoid public hospitals as they may be unsanitary. If a problem arises where you are in need of medical attention, the best option is to visit an international clinic. Please contact your hotel or guide for information on clinic services and to find one that is appropriate for Western visitors. Additionally, when traveling to Laos, it is important to remember to bring enough of your regular medication for the duration of your stay.
YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A Yellow Fever Vaccination certificate is only required for travellers coming from – or in transit through an airport of – a country with risk of yellow fever transmission. The vaccination requirement is imposed by this country for protection against yellow fever since the principal mosquito vector Aedes aegypti is present in its territory.

If you are visiting Laos and you live in or have travelled through a yellow fever zone, then you need to have a yellow fever certificate to show that you have been vaccinated against the illness. When you arrive in Laos, you will be asked for your yellow fever certificate. You need to show this at the medical counter before queuing for immigration.

Check to see if you have been in any of these places during the last six months. Please consult your doctor to discuss your particular health or immunisation requirements. If you would like to have a source of further information, please refer to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov

AFRICA
Risk of yellow fever transmission exists in these countries:

AMERICAS
Risk of yellow fever transmission exists in these countries:
Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela.

Validity of Certificate
A yellow fever certificate is valid for ten years after vaccination.

Children
A vaccination certificate is required for children over one year of age.

Common Procedure:
1. Complete yellow fever form
2. Wait in queue for an assigned health counter
3. Submit required documents to immigration officer and proceed to arrival immigration counter
PACKING ESSENTIALS

The following should act as a useful checklist of essential items worth taking

- Passport - ensure your passport is valid for at least 60 days after your date of return
- Passport Photos: These may be invariably needed
- Emergency contact numbers: Trails of Indochina, insurance company, friends and family
- Debit/credit card cancellation numbers in case of loss
- Money Belt: Ensure that it is discrete and comfortable to wear
- First Aid kit - Basic travel kit to cover basic mishaps which may occur along the way
- Personal medication with international doctors’ note to ensure easy passage of medication across international borders
- Sun block – High UVA protection ideally
- Sunglasses & hat
- Comfortable walking shoes and sandals or flip flops for visiting temples or pagodas
- Mosquito spray & insect repellant
- Long sleeved tops and trousers to protect against mosquitoes at dawn and dusk and the sun through the day
- Electronics, chargers and adapters
- Sufficient amount of currency in USD small and large notes to last the duration of your stay. Please note bills marked prior to 2007 will not be accepted, nor will worn or torn bills

Clothing
Laos is a conservative Buddhist culture and improper dress can be offensive and inappropriate. Shorts, short skirts or revealing clothing are not appropriate especially when visiting temples or any other religious sites. Lightweight, cotton clothing is ideal all year round. A winter sweater or jacket and socks may be needed in the cool season, particularly when visiting the mountains or highlands where the weather can dip to cooler temperatures during the evenings.

We recommend wearing comfortable walking shoes, which can be easily removed when required. Sandals, thongs or flip-flops are very convenient footwear, especially for visiting temples where shoes must be removed prior to entering.

Plugs and Converters
In Laos, the electricity runs at 230 Volts, 50Hz. The standard plug used is a two-pin round plug
If you have any questions or encounter any issues, please contact us at our Laos office so we can provide an immediate solution.

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