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# Lao

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# Lao

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Paper in this book is certified against the Forest Stewardship Council™ standards. FSC™ promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.



# acknowledgments

## about the author

After investing most of his youth strangling Stratocasters in dark bars, Joe Cummings ran away from home with the Peace Corps and discovered South-East Asia. Returning to his native USA, he earned meagre but steady cash as a professional student for several years, gaining two master's degrees, one in South-East Asian Studies/Thai Language and another in Applied Linguistics. He has also worked as a translator/interpreter of Thai, a Lao bilingual consultant in the USA and as a tour guide in Laos. Along the way, Joe hit the road for LP, writing the first editions of LP's *Thailand* and *Laos* guides, which he continues to update regularly. He has also authored LP's *Thai phrasebook*, *World Food: Thailand* and *Buddhist Stupas of Asia: The Shape of Perfection*. Joe visits Laos frequently from his home base in Thailand.

## from the author

I'm much indebted to a Lao friend who helped with the Lao script for this phrasebook, but who wished not to be mentioned by name. Thanks also to Steven Schipani, who facilitated many exchanges. For logistical support, I thank Oliver Bandmann of Baan Khily Gallery in Luang Prabang.

## from the publisher

This expedition was mounted by Sally Steward, Peter D'Onghia and Ingrid Seebus in its early days, then commandeered by Jim Jenkin. Karina Coates and Karin Vidstrup Monk planned the imminent stages of departure and made short work of the dense jungle, thus guiding the team to new territory. Dogsbody Ben Handicott edited the scribe's account. Yuki Yoshi Kamimura was expedition artist from cover to cover, and also charted the layout of the whole affair. Bruce Evans lent a learned eye to the itinerary, Sophie Putman was the invaluable trip jack-of-all-trades (master of many), Natasha Velleley plotted the map, Bibiana Jaramillo made sure it was all recorded in the correct typeface and Fabrice Rocher, another crazy Frenchman, provided his sparkling eyes and guaranteed a stylish, timely arrival at destination. Special thanks to Manivone Watson for the creation of the Sustainable Travel section.

## make the most of this phrasebook ...

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Anyone can speak another language! It's all about confidence. Don't worry if you can't remember your school language lessons or if you've never learnt a language before. Even if you learn the very basics (on the inside covers of this book), your travel experience will be the better for it. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when the locals hear you making an effort.

### finding things in this book

For easy navigation, this book is in sections. The Pronunciation and Grammar chapters are the ones you'll thumb through time and again. The Getting Around and Accommodation chapters cover basic travel situations like catching transport and finding a bed. The Meeting People chapter gives you conversational phrases and the ability to express opinions – so you can get to know people. Food has a section all of its own: gourmets and vegetarians are covered and local dishes feature. The Health and Emergencies chapters equip you with health and police phrases, just in case. Use the comprehensive Index to find everything easily. Otherwise, check the traveller's Dictionary for the word you need.

### being understood

Throughout this book you'll see coloured phrases on each page. They're phonetic guides to help you pronounce the language. Start with them to get a feel for how the language sounds. The Pronunciation chapter will explain more, but you can be confident that if you read the coloured phrase, you'll be understood.

### communication tips

Body language, ways of doing things, sense of humour – all have a role to play in every culture. The aside boxes included throughout this phrasebook give you useful cultural and linguistic information that will help you communicate with the locals and enrich your travel experience.

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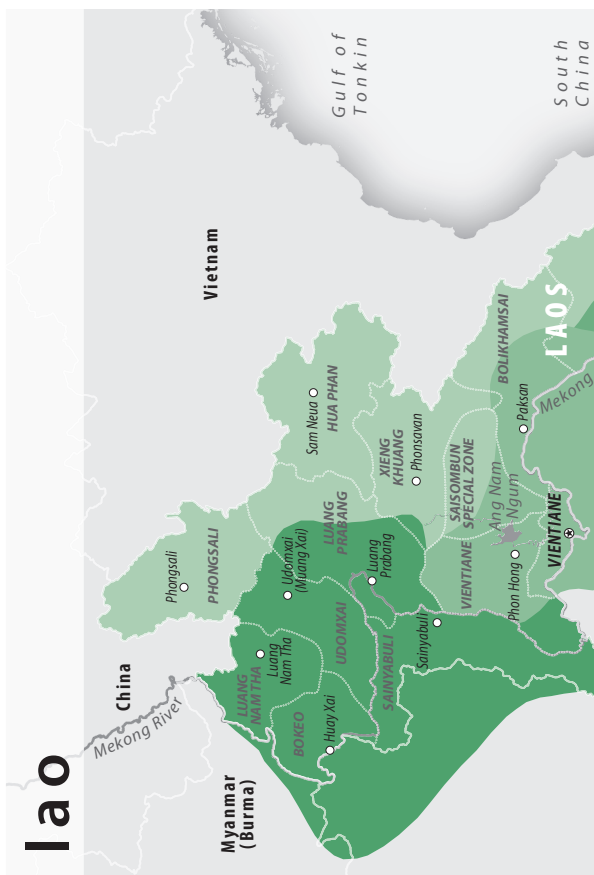
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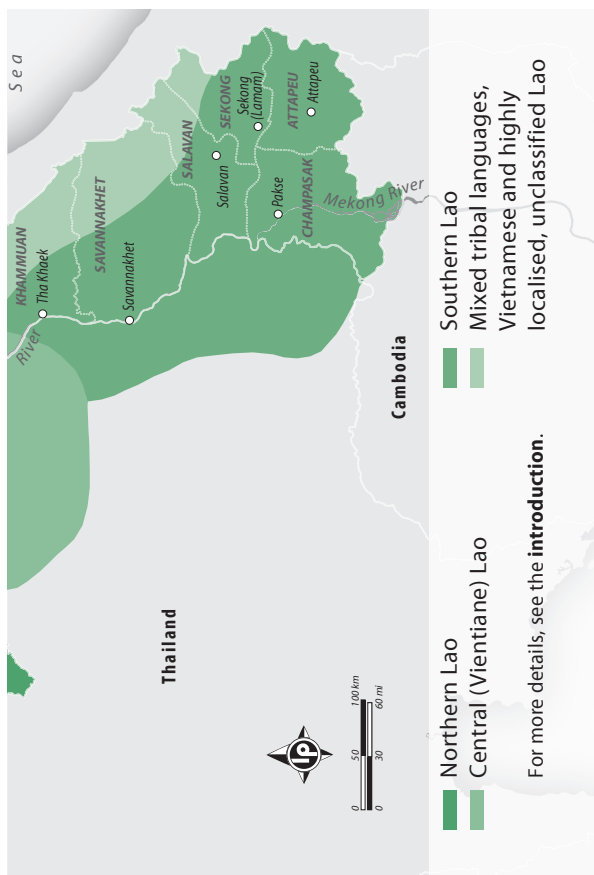
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The official language of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) is Lao as spoken and written in Vientiane. As an official language, it has successfully become the lingua franca between all Lao and non-Lao ethnic groups in Laos. Of course, native Lao is spoken with differing tonal accents and with slightly differing vocabularies as you move from one part of the country to the next, especially in a north to south direction. But it is the Vientiane dialect that is most widely understood.



Modern Lao linguists recognise four basic dialects within the country: Vientiane Lao; Northern Lao (spoken in Sainyabuli, Bokeo, Udomxai, Phongsali, Luang Nam Tha and Luang Prabang); North-Eastern Lao (Xieng Khuang, Hua Phan), Central Lao (Khammuan, Bolikhamsai); and Southern Lao (Champasak, Salavan, Savannakhet, Attapeu, Sekong). Each of these can be further divided into subdialects; a distinction between the Lao spoken in the neighbouring provinces of Xieng Khuang and Hua Phan, for example, is readily apparent to those who know Lao well.

All dialects of Lao are members of the Thai half of the Thai-Kadai family of languages and are closely related to languages spoken in Thailand, northern Myanmar and pockets of China's Yunnan Province. Standard Lao is indeed close enough to Standard Thai (as spoken in central Thailand) that, for native speakers, the two are mutually intelligible. In fact, virtually all speakers of Lao living in the Mekong River Valley can easily understand spoken Thai, since the bulk of the television and radio they listen to is broadcast from Thailand. Among educated Lao, written Thai is also easily understood, in spite of the fact that the two scripts differ (to about the same degree that the Greek and Roman scripts differ). This is because many of the textbooks used at the college and university level in Laos are actually Thai texts.

## 12 Abbreviations Used in this Book

Even closer to Standard Lao are Thailand's Northern and North-Eastern Thai dialects. North-Eastern Thai (also called Isan) is virtually 100% Lao in vocabulary and intonation; in fact there are more Lao speakers living in Thailand than in Laos. Hence if you're travelling to Laos after a spell in Thailand (especially the north-east), you should be able to put whatever you learned in Thailand to good use in Laos. It doesn't work as well in the opposite direction; native Thais can't always understand Lao since they've had less exposure.

### ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

|      |                     |      |             |
|------|---------------------|------|-------------|
| adj  | adjective           | pl   | plural      |
| adv  | adverb              | prep | preposition |
| conj | conjunction         | sg   | singular    |
| lit  | literal translation | v    | verb        |
| n    | noun                |      |             |

