

# Directory

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## ACCOMMODATION

The range and quality of accommodation in Laos is rapidly improving. That said, once you get off the beaten track (Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Pakse and Vang Vieng) the options are more modest, typically restricted to budget-priced guesthouses and hotels and the occasional midrange offering.

Paying in the requested currency is usually cheaper than letting the hotel or guesthouse convert the price into another currency using their unfavourable (to you, at least) exchange rates. If the price is quoted in kip, you'll do best to pay in kip; if priced in dollars, pay in dollars.

Accommodation prices listed in this book are high-season prices for rooms with attached bathroom, unless stated otherwise. An icon is included to indicate if air-con is available; otherwise, assume that a fan will be provided.

## Homestays

Staying in a village home is becoming increasingly popular. Homestays are invariably in rural areas, cheap at about US\$5 for your bed, dinner and breakfast, and provide a chance for travellers to experience life, Lao style. For an idea of what to expect, and what not to expect, see the boxed text, *Feeling the 'Real Laos'*, p45.

## PRACTICALITIES

- The *Vientiane Times* ([www.vientiane-times.org.la](http://www.vientiane-times.org.la)), published Monday to Saturday, the country's only English-language newspaper, cleaves to the party line.
- Francophones can read *Le Rénovateur* ([www.lerenovateur.org.la](http://www.lerenovateur.org.la)), a government mouthpiece similar to the *Vientiane Times*.
- The LPDR's single radio station, Lao National Radio (LNR; [www.lnr.org.la](http://www.lnr.org.la)), broadcasts sanitised English-language news twice daily.
- Short-wave radios can pick up BBC, VOA, Radio Australia and Radio France International. A good frequency for BBC in the morning is 15360.
- Lao National TV has two TV channels. Programming in Lao is limited so most people watch Thai TV and/or karaoke videos.
- The LPDR uses 220V AC circuitry; power outlets usually feature two-prong round or flat sockets.
- The metric system is used for measurements. Gold and silver are sometimes weighed in *bàat* (15g).

## Guesthouses

The distinction between 'guesthouse', 'hotel' and 'resort' often exists in name only, but legally speaking a guesthouse in Laos has fewer than 16 rooms. They typically occupy large, two-storey homes of recent vintage, but occasionally you'll find them in more historic and charismatic wooden homes. In places such as Don Det (p289) in southern Laos or Muang Ngoi Neua (p207) in northern Laos you'll come across guesthouses consisting of simple bamboo-thatch huts with shared facilities, going for as little as US\$3 a night.

Facilities are improving across the country, but the most inexpensive places might still have cold-water showers or simple Lao-style bathing, where you wash yourself using a plastic bowl to scoop cold water from large jars, tanks or even 44-gallon drums. Hot water is hardly a necessity in lowland Laos, but is very welcome in the mountains.

The price of simple rooms in most towns averages between US\$5 and US\$8 a night with shared bathroom. For an attached bathroom and hot shower expect to pay about US\$9 to US\$14; anything above this will usually also have air-conditioning and a TV, with cable TV in English if you're lucky. Some guesthouses have stepped up the style and offer upscale rooms for between about US\$15 and US\$30.

## Hotels

Hotel rooms in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng, Savannakhet and Pakse offer private bathrooms and fans as standard features for between about US\$10 and US\$20 per night. There is then a vast range of rooms with air-con, hot water and TV costing between about US\$15 and US\$70, differentiated by their location, the city and the levels of style and service.

Small and medium-size hotels oriented towards Asian business and leisure travellers and tour groups exist in the larger cities. In Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse these may be housed in charming old French colonial mansions. Whether modern or historic, tariffs at hotels such as these run from about US\$40 to US\$100 for rooms with air-con, hot water, TV and refrigerator.

Then there are the few top-end hotels with better decor, more facilities and personalised service, often occupying more carefully-restored colonial villas or modern, purpose-built buildings. These typically cost between US\$80 and US\$200, occasionally even higher.

What is common among all hotels in Laos is that the rooms are great value compared with what you'd pay at home. Solid midrange places, that would cost US\$80 or more at home, can be had for US\$20 or US\$40. And at the top-end boutique luxury, that would cost

### ROOM RATES

In this guide all accommodation is listed by price order, starting at the cheapest, *not* in order of preference. We have divided accommodation by the price of a double room thus:

|                 |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>Budget</b>   | less than US\$20  |
| <b>Midrange</b> | US\$20-80         |
| <b>Top end</b>  | more than US\$80. |

The overall quality of rooms in Laos has improved substantially in recent years but prices remain remarkably reasonable. By Western standards, they're a bargain. It's worth remembering this if you're trying to bargain the price down, particularly at the budget end where competition is fierce and margins are small.

For example, the farmers flogging bamboo bungalows on Don Det aren't making any money on their US\$2 rooms, they're just hoping you'll buy some food and beer. Taking this into consideration, as well as the fact that international economic imperatives like inflation and the price of oil affect Laos as much as they do prices in your own country, it's important to understand that room rates may go up during the life of this book. When that happens, please don't just assume you're being ripped off.

By all means try to get the best rate you can; that's part of travelling. But be aware of the cultural context. Generally speaking, the Lao avoid conflict as much as they possibly can and while they are happy to bargain a little, they don't usually buy into protracted negotiations or arguments over price. If the rate seems unfair to you (as opposed to being beyond your budget) by all means make a counter offer. This will usually be accepted, or not, straight away.