

## about Lao .....8

map .....	8
introduction .....	9
<b>pronunciation .....</b>	<b>11</b>
vowels.....	12
consonants .....	13
variations in transliterations.....	14
script.....	17
<b>grammar.....</b>	<b>21</b>
word order .....	21
nouns .....	21
adjectives.....	22

adverbs.....	23
pronouns .....	24
possession.....	28
verbs.....	28
to be .....	31
to have.....	32
negatives .....	33
modals.....	34
questions.....	36
answers .....	39
classifiers.....	40
prepositions.....	41
conjunctions.....	42

## basics .....43

<b>numbers &amp; amounts .....</b>	<b>43</b>
cardinal numbers.....	43
ordinal numbers .....	44
fractions .....	45
useful words.....	45
<b>time &amp; dates .....</b>	<b>47</b>
time.....	47
days of the week.....	48
months .....	48

seasons.....	49
dates.....	49
present .....	50
past .....	50
future .....	51
festivals & national holidays .....	51
useful words & phrases .....	56

## practical .....57

<b>getting around .....</b>	<b>57</b>
finding your way.....	57
directions.....	58
buying tickets .....	59
air.....	60
bus .....	61
taxi .....	62
samlors & jumbos.....	62
boat .....	64
useful words & phrases .....	65
renting vehicles.....	68
car problems .....	69
useful words .....	70
<b>accommodation.....</b>	<b>71</b>
finding accommodation .....	71

checking in.....	72
requests & complaints .....	74
checking out.....	74
laundry .....	75
useful words.....	76
<b>around town .....</b>	<b>77</b>
looking for .....	77
at the bank.....	78
at the post office.....	80
useful words.....	82
telephone.....	82
fax & telegraph .....	83
internet.....	84
paperwork.....	84
sightseeing .....	86

<b>shopping .....</b>	<b>89</b>	weights & measures .....	99
bargaining.....	89	sizes & comparisons .....	100
making a purchase.....	90	<b>specific needs .....</b>	<b>101</b>
souvenirs & crafts .....	91	disabled travellers .....	101
materials .....	92	travelling with the	
textiles .....	93	family .....	102
gems & jewellery .....	94	looking for a job.....	103
clothing.....	95	useful words .....	104
fabrics .....	96	on business.....	104
colours.....	97	useful words .....	105
toiletries .....	97	on tour.....	106
stationery & publications.....	98	film & tv crews .....	107
photography .....	98	pilgrimage & religion .....	107
smoking .....	99	tracing roots & history .....	109

## **social .....111**

<b>meeting people.....</b>	<b>111</b>	family members .....	119
you should know .....	111	feelings.....	121
greetings.....	112	opinions .....	122
goodbyes.....	112	common interests .....	122
forms of address .....	112	sport .....	123
body language .....	113	<b>in the country .....</b>	<b>125</b>
first encounters .....	114	weather .....	125
making conversation .....	114	trekking .....	125
breaking the		camping.....	128
language barrier .....	115	cycling .....	129
nationalities.....	116	geography.....	131
age .....	117	geographic features .....	131
occupations.....	117	animals .....	134
family .....	118	plants .....	136

## **food .....137**

at the restaurant .....	138	appetisers	
vegetarian meals .....	139	('drinking food').....	142
staples.....	140	meat salads .....	143
rice dishes.....	140	soup.....	144
noodles.....	141	stir-fried dishes.....	144
bread & pastries .....	142	fish.....	145
eggs.....	142	vegetables.....	145

condiments,	
herbs & spices .....	146
cooking methods .....	147
fruit .....	150

sweets .....	150
drinks – non-alcoholic .....	151
drinks – alcoholic .....	154

## **safe travel.....155**

<b>emergencies.....</b>	<b>155</b>
useful phrases.....	156
police .....	157
<b>health.....</b>	<b>159</b>
women's health.....	159

ailments .....	160
parts of the body .....	162
at the chemist.....	163
useful words.....	164
at the dentist .....	166

## **sustainable travel .....167**

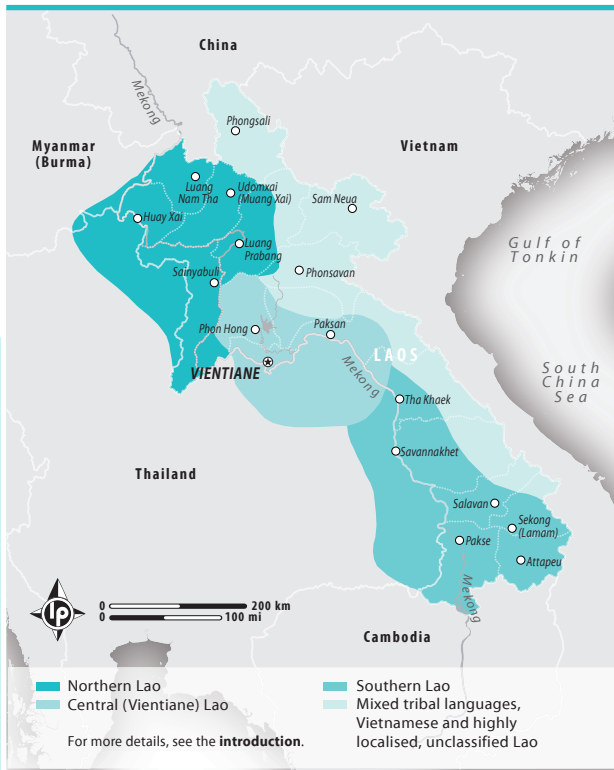
communication &	
cultural differences .....	167
community benefit	
& involvement .....	167
environment.....	168

transport.....	168
accommodation.....	168
shopping .....	169
food .....	169
sightseeing .....	170

## **dictionary.....171**

## **index .....215**

# Lao



# ABOUT LAO > introduction

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.

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

<b>adj</b>	adjective	<b>pl</b>	plural
<b>adv</b>	adverb	<b>prep</b>	preposition
<b>conj</b>	conjunction	<b>sg</b>	singular
<b>lit</b>	literal translation	<b>v</b>	verb
<b>n</b>	noun		



The rendering of Lao words into Roman script is a major problem, as many Lao sounds, especially certain vowels, do not occur in English. The problem is compounded by the fact that, because of Laos' colonial history, transcribed words most commonly seen in Laos are based on the colonial French system of transliteration, which bears little relation to the way an English speaker would usually choose to write a Lao word.

Take, for example, the capital of Laos, Vientiane. The Lao pronunciation, following a fairly logical English transliteration, would be Wieng Chan (some might hear it more as Wieng Jan). The French don't have a written consonant that corresponds to 'w', so they chose to use a 'v' to represent all 'w' sounds, even though the 'v' sound in Lao is closer to an English 'w'. The same goes for 'ch' (or 'j'), which for the French was best rendered 'ti-'; hence Wieng Chan comes out 'Vientiane' in the French transliteration. The 'e' is added so that the final 'n' sound isn't partially lost, as it is in French words ending with 'n'. This latter phenomenon also happens with words like **lâan** (ລ້ານ, million) as in Lan Xang, which most French speakers would write as 'Lane', a spelling that leads most English speakers to pronounce this word like the 'lane' in 'Penny Lane' (which is way off base).

As there is no official method of transliterating Lao (the Lao government is incredibly inconsistent in this respect, though they tend to follow the old French methods), we have created a transcription system similar to that used in Lonely Planet's Thai phrasebook, since the languages have a virtually identical sound system. The public and private sectors in Laos are gradually moving towards a more internationally recognisable system along the lines of the Royal Thai General Transcription (which is fairly readable across a large number of language types). This can also be problematic, however, as when an 'r' is used where an 'h' or 'l' is the actual sound, simply because the Lao symbols for these sounds look so much like the Thai 'r' (spoken Lao has no 'r' sound). Don't worry though, with our system, you'll be fine.

## vowels

The x in the Lao script indicates the position that a consonant must fill to produce a written syllable.

### vowels

ໄ	i	as the 'i' in 'it'
ໄ	ii	as the 'ee' in 'feet' or 'tea'
ເ, ັ	a	as the 'u' in 'fun'
າ	aa	as the 'a' in 'father'
ແ	ae	as the 'a' in 'bat'
ເ, ັ	e	as the 'e' in 'hen'
ເ	eh	as the 'a' in 'hate'
ຸ	u	as the 'u' in 'flute'
ຸ	uu	as the 'oo' in 'food'
ູ, ອ	aw	as the 'aw' in 'jaw'
ຳ	am	as the 'um' in 'rum'
ເ, ັ	oe	as the 'uh' in 'huh'
ຸ, ັ	eu	similar to the 'i' in 'sir' or the 'eux' in the French 'deux'

### diphthongs

ໄ, ໄ	ai	as the 'i' in 'pipe'
ເ, າ	ao	as the 'ow' in 'now'
ເ, ັ	o	as the 'o' in 'phone'
ໄ	oh	as the 'o' in 'toe'
ເອ	eua	combine eu and a
ເ, ັ, ັ	ia	combine i and a, or the 'ie' in the French 'rien'
ໄວ	ua	as the 'our' in 'tour'
ເວຍ	uay	as the 'ewey' in 'Dewey'
ໄວ	iu	as the 'ew' in 'yew'
ເງວ	iaw	similar to the 'io' in 'Rio'
ແວວ	aew	combine ae and w
ເວ	ehw	combine eh and w
ເ໋ວ	ew	same as eh above, but shorter
ເ, ັ	oei	combine oe and i
ເອຍ	awy	combine aw and y