

Language

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The official language of the LPDR is Lao as spoken and written in Vientiane. As an official language, it has successfully become the lingua franca (a universally understood linking language) between all Lao and non-Lao ethnic groups in Laos. 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 five basic dialects within the country: Vientiane Lao; northern Lao (spoken in Sainyabuli, Bokeo, Udomxai, Phongsali, Luang Nam Tha and Luang Prabang); northeastern Lao (Xiang Khuang and Hua Phan); central Lao (Khammuan and Bolikhamsai); and finally southern Lao (Champasak, Savannakhet, Salavan, Attapeu and Sekong). Each of these can be further divided into various subdialects; the differences between the Lao spoken in the neighbouring provinces of Xiang Khuang and Hua Phan, for example, are readily apparent to those who know the language well.

All dialects of Lao belong to 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 and Guangxi Provinces. 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 of the speakers of Lao west of the Annamite Chain can easily understand spoken Thai, since the majority of the television and radio programmes they tune in to are 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 more similar to Standard Lao are Thailand's northern and northeastern Thai dialects. There are actually more Lao speakers living in Thailand than in Laos, so if you're travelling to Laos after a spell in Thailand (especially the northeast), you should be able to put whatever you learned in Thailand to good use. (It doesn't work as well in the opposite direction; native Thais can't always understand Lao, since they've had less exposure to it.)

For information on food and dining in Laos, see p74. For a more in-depth guide to Lao than we have room for in this guide, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Lao Phrasebook*. If you plan to travel extensively in any Lao Sung areas, Lonely Planet's *Hill Tribes Phrasebook* could also be useful.

OTHER LANGUAGES

In the cities and towns of the Mekong River valley, French is intermittently understood. In spite of its colonial history, French remains the official second language of the government and many official documents are written in both Lao and French. Shop signs sometimes appear in French (alongside Lao, as mandated by law), though signs in English are becoming more common. As in Vietnam, the former colonial language is increasingly viewed as irrelevant in a region

that has adopted English as the lingua franca of business and trade, and among young Lao students English is now much more popular than French. Lao over the age of 50 may understand a little English, but to a lesser extent than French.

Many Russian-trained Lao can also speak Russian, though the language has drastically fallen from favour. The Russian Cultural Centre now offers more English courses than it does Russian, and the most popular event at the centre is an evening satellite TV programme of English-language shows. The occasional Lao who studied abroad in Cuba or Eastern Europe may be able to speak Spanish, German, Czech, Polish or even Bulgarian.

It pays to learn as much Lao as possible during your stay in the country, since speaking and understanding the language not only enhances verbal communication but garners a great deal of respect from the Lao people you come into contact with.

SCRIPT

Prior to the consolidation of the various Lao *meuang* (principalities) in the 14th century, there was little demand for a written language. When a written language was deemed necessary by the Lan Xang monarchy, Lao scholars based their script on an early alphabet devised by the Thais (which in turn had been created by Khmer scholars who used south Indian scripts as models!). The alphabet used in Laos is closer to the original prototype; the original Thai script was later extensively revised (which is why Lao looks 'older' than Thai, even though it is newer as a written language).

Before 1975 at least four spelling systems were in use. Because modern printing never really got established in Laos (most of the advanced textbooks being in Thai, French, or Vietnamese before the Revolution), Lao spelling wasn't standardised until after the Pathet Lao takeover. The current system has been highly simplified by transliterating all foreign loan words according to their sound only, and not their written form.

Lao script can therefore be learned much more quickly than Thai or Khmer, both of which typically attempt to transcribe foreign borrowings letter for letter, regardless of the actual pronunciation.

One peculiarity of the post-1975 system is that it forbade the use of the Lao letter 'r' in words where it was more commonly pronounced as an 'l', reportedly because of the association of the 'r' with classical Thai; although the 'r' was virtually lost in Laos (converting to 'h' in some cases and to 'l' in others), in many parts of Thailand it is still quite strong. Hence the names of former Lao kings Setthathirat and Phothisarath came to be rendered as Setthathilat and Phothisalath in post-1975 Lao script. Eventually the government loosened its restrictions and although the nasty 'r' is still not taught in the school system, it is once again allowed to be used in signage and in historical documents.

Other scripts still in use include *lao thām* (*dhamma* Lao), used for writing Pali scriptures, and various Thai tribal scripts, the most popular and widespread being that of the Thai Neua (which has become standardised via Xishuangbanna, China).

The Lao script today consists of 30 consonants (formed from 20 basic sounds) and 28 vowels and diphthongs (15 individual symbols used in varying combinations). Complementing the consonant and vowel symbols are four tone marks, only two of which are commonly used in creating the six different tones (in combination with all the other symbols). Written Lao proceeds from left to right, though vowel-signs may appear in a number of positions relative to consonants: before, after, above, below or 'around' (ie before, above and after).

Although learning the alphabet isn't difficult, the writing system itself is fairly complex, so unless you are planning to have a lengthy stay in Laos you should perhaps make learning to speak the language your main priority.

TONES

Basically, Lao is a monosyllabic, tonal language, like the various dialects of Thai and Chinese. Borrowed words from Sanskrit, Pali, French and English often have two or more syllables, however. Many identical phonemes or vowel-consonant combinations are differentiated by their tone only. The word *sao*, for example, can mean 'girl', 'morning', 'pillar' or 'twenty' depending on the tone. For people from non-tonal language backgrounds, it can be very hard to

learn at first. Even when we 'know' the correct tone, our tendency to denote emotion, emphasis and questions through tone modulation often interferes with uttering the correct tone. So the first rule in learning and using the tone system is to avoid overlaying your native intonation patterns onto the Lao language.

Vientiane Lao has six tones (compared with five used in standard Thai, four in Mandarin and nine in Cantonese). Three of the tones are level (low, mid and high) while three follow pitch inclines (rising, high falling and low falling). All six variations in pitch are relative to the speaker's natural vocal range, so that one person's low tone is not necessarily the same pitch as another person's. Hence, keen pitch recognition is not a prerequisite for learning a tonal language like Lao. A relative distinction between pitch contours within your own voice is all that is necessary. Pitch variation is common to all languages; non-tonal languages such as English also use intonation, just in a different way.

Low Tone

Produced at the relative bottom of your conversational tonal range – usually flat level, eg *dii* (good). Note, however, that not everyone pronounces it flat and level – some Vientiane natives add a slight rising tone to the end.

Mid Tone

Flat like the low tone, but spoken at the relative middle of the speaker's vocal range. No tone mark is used, eg *het* (do).

High Tone

Flat again, this time at the relative top of your vocal range, eg *héua* (boat).

Rising Tone

Begins a bit below the mid tone and rises to just at or above the high tone, eg *sāam* (three).

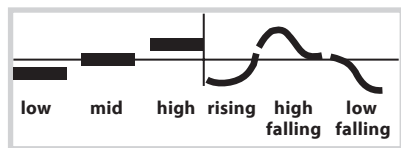
High Falling Tone

Begins at or above the high tone and falls to the mid level, eg *sāo* (morning).

Low Falling Tone

Begins at about the mid level and falls to the level of the low tone, eg *khào* (rice).

On a visual curve the tones might look like this:



TRANSLITERATION

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

A prime example is the capital of Laos, Vientiane. The Lao pronunciation, following a fairly logical English-Roman transliteration, would be Wieng Chan or Vieng Chan (some might hear it more as Wieng Jan). Since the French don't have a written consonant that corresponds to 'w', 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 (which means Sandalwood City) finishes up as '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 *lāan* (million) as in Lan Xang, which most French speakers would write as 'Lane', a spelling that leads most English speakers to incorrectly pronounce this word like the 'lane' in 'Penny Lane'.

Many standard place names in the Roman alphabet use an 'x' for what in English is 's'. This 'x' represents a Lao letter that historically was pronounced 'ch' but eventually became 's' in the Lao sound system. There's no difference in the pronunciation of the two; pronounce all instances of 'x' as 's'.

There is no official method of transliterating the Lao language (the government is incredibly inconsistent in this respect, though they tend to follow the old French

methods). This book use a custom system of transliteration based on the Royal Thai General Transcription system, since Thai and Lao have very similar writing and sound systems. The only exceptions are where there may be confusion with terms that are already in common use (eg Vientiane vs 'Wieng Chan', Luang Prabang vs 'Luang Phabang').

The public and private sectors in Laos are gradually moving towards a more internationally recognisable system along the lines of Royal Thai General (which is fairly readable across a large number of language types).

PRONUNCIATION

Vowels

Lao vowels can be written before, after, above and below consonants – in the following vowel chart we demonstrate this by using 'x' to represent any consonant.

໊	i	as in 'it'
໋	ii	as in 'feet' or 'tea'
໌, ໍ	ai	as in 'aisle'
໎	aa	long 'a' as in 'father'
໐	a	half as long as aa above
໑	ae	as the 'a' in 'bad' or 'tab'
໒, ໄ	e	as in 'hen'
໓	eh	as the 'a' in 'hate'
໔, ໖	oe	as the 'u' in 'fur'
໕, ງ	eu	as in French <i>deux</i> , or as the 'i' in 'sir'
໘	u	as in 'flute'
໙	uu	as in 'food'
໑໑	aai	as the 'a' in 'father' + the 'i' in 'pipe'
໑໒	ao	as in 'now' or 'cow'
໑໓	aw	as in 'jaw'
໑໔, ັ	o	as in 'phone'
໑໕	oh	as in 'toe'
໑໖	eua	diphthong of 'eu' and 'a'
໑໑໗, ໑໑໘	ia	as the 'i-a' sound in 'Ian'
໑໑໙, ໑໒໐	ua	as the 'u-a' sound in 'tour'
໑໒໑	uay	'u-ay-ee'
໑໒໒, ໑໒໓	iu	'i-oo' (as in 'yew')

໑໒໔	iaw	a triphthong of 'ee-a-oo'
໑໒໕	aew	as the 'a' in 'bad' + 'w'
໑໒໖	ehw	as the 'a' in 'care' + 'w'
໑໒໗	ew	same as 'ehw' above, but shorter (not as in 'yew')
໑໒໘	oei	'oe-i'
໑໒໙	awy	as the 'oy' in 'boy'
໑໓໐	ohy	'oh-i'

Consonants

An 'aspirated' consonant is produced with an audible puff of air. An 'unvoiced' or 'voiceless' consonant is produced with no vibration in the vocal chords.

ກ	k	as the 'k' in 'skin'; similar to the 'g' in 'good', but unaspirated and unvoiced
ຂ, ຄ	kh	as the 'k' in 'kite'
ງ	ng	as in 'sing'; used as an initial consonant in Lao
ຈ	j	similar to 'j' in 'join' or more closely, the second 't' in 'stature' or 'literature' (unaspirated and voiceless)
ສ, ຊ	s	as in 'soap'
ຢ	ny	similar to the 'ni' in 'onion'; used as an initial consonant in Lao
ດ	d	as in 'dodo'
ຕ	t	a hard 't', unaspirated and unvoiced – a bit like 'd'
ທ, ກຸ	th	as in 'tip'
ນ, ນຸ	n	as in 'nun'
ບ	b	as in 'boy'
ປ	p	a hard 'p' (unaspirated and unvoiced)
ຟ, ຜ	ph	'p' as in 'put' (but never as in 'phone')
ຟ, ຝ	f	as in 'fan'
ມ, ມຸ	m	as in 'man'
ຢ	y	as in 'yo-yo'
ລ, ລຸ	l	as in 'lick'
ວ, ວຸ	w	as in 'wing' (often transliterated as 'v')
ຮ, ຫ	h	as in 'home'

ACCOMMODATION

hotel
hóhng háem
 ໂຮງແຮມ

guesthouse
hǎw hap kháek
 ຫໍ້ຮັບແຂກ

Excuse me, is there a hotel nearby?
khǎw thóht, mii hóhng háem yuu kái nǐi baw?
 ຂໍໂທດ ມີໂຮງແຮມຢູ່ໃກ້ນີ້ບໍ່

Do you have a room?
mii hàwng baw?
 ມີຫ້ອງບໍ່

How many persons?
ják khón?
 ຈັກຄົນ

one person
neung khón (khón diaw)
 ນຶ່ງຄົນ (ຄົນດຽວ)

two persons
sǎwng khón
 ສອງຄົນ

How much ...?
... thao dǎi? ... ເທົ່າໃດ

per night
khéun-la ຄົນລະ

per week
qathit-la ອາທິດລະ

air-conditioning
qe yǎn ແອເຢັນ

bathroom
hàwng nám ຫ້ອງນໍ້າ

blanket
phàa hom ຜ້າຫໍ່າມ

double room
hàwng nǎwn tiàng khuu ຫ້ອງນອນຕຽງຄູ່

fan
phat lóm ພັດລົມ

hot water
nám hàwn ນໍ້າຮ້ອນ

key
kájǎe ກະແຈຈ

room
hàwng ຫ້ອງ

sheet
phàa pǎu bawn nǎwn ຜ້າບູບ່ອນນອນ

single room
hàwng nǎwn tiàng diaw ຫ້ອງນອນຕຽງດຽວ

soap
sǎbuu ສະບູ

toilet
sǎam ສ້ວມ

towel
phàa set tòh ຜ້າເຊັດໂຕ

(I/we) will stay two nights.
sí phak yuu sǎwng khéun
 ຊົມັກຢູ່ສອງຄືນ

Can (I/we) look at the room?
khǎw boeng hàwng dái baw?
 ຂໍເບິ່ງຫ້ອງໄດ້ບໍ່

Do you have other rooms?
mii hàwng lík baw?
 ມີຫ້ອງອື່ກັບ

cheaper
théuk-kwaa
 ກົກກວ່າ

quieter
mit-kwaa
 ມີດກວ່າ

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Greetings/Hello.
sǎbqai-dii ສະບາຍດີ

Goodbye. (general farewell)
sǎbqai-dii ສະບາຍດີ

Goodbye. (person leaving)
lǎa kawn pǎi kawn ລາກ່ອນໄປກ່ອນ

Goodbye. (person staying)
sóhk dii (lit: good luck) ໂສກດີ

See you later.
phop qǎn mai ຜົບກັນໃໝ່

Thank you.
khàwp jǎi ຂອບໃຈ

Thank you very much.
khàwp jǎi lǎi lǎi ຂອບໃຈຫລາຍໆ

It's nothing/You're welcome.
baw pǎn nyǎng ບໍ່ເປັນຫຍັງ

Excuse me.
khǎw thóht ຂໍໂທດ

How are you?
sǎbqai-dii baw? ສະບາຍດີບໍ່

I'm fine.
sǎbqai-dii ສະບາຍດີ

And you?
jǎo déh? ເຈົ້າເດີ

What's your name?
jǎo seu nyǎng? ເຈົ້າຊື່ຫຍັງ

My name is ...
khǎwy seu ... ຂໍອະຍຸຊື່ ...

Glad to know you.
díi-jǎi thii hǎu káp jǎo ດີໃຈທີ່ຮູ້ກັບເຈົ້າ

Where are you from?
jǎo máa tǎe sǎi? ເຈົ້າມາແຕ່ໃສ

I'm from ...
khǎwy máa tǎe ... ຂໍອະຍາມາແຕ່ ...

DIRECTIONS

Which ... is this?
bawn nǐi ... nyǎng? ບ່ອນນີ້ ... ຫຍັງ

street/road/avenue
thanón ກຸນົນ

city
méuang ເມືອງ

village
muu báan ຫຼູບ້ານ

province
khwǎeng ແຂວງ

Turn ...
liaw ... ລົງວ ...

left
sǎi ຊ້າຍ

right
khwǎa ຂວາ

Go straight ahead.
pǎi seu-seu ໄປຊື່ໆ

How far?
qǎi thao dǎi? ໂກເທົ່າໃດ

near/not near
kái/baw kái ໃກ້/ບໍ່ໃກ້

far/not far
qǎi/baw qǎi ໂກ/ບໍ່ໂກ

north
thit nǎua ທິດເໜືອ

south
thit tǎi ທິດໃຕ້

east
thit tqawén àwk ທິດຕາເວັນອອກ

west
thit tqawén tók ທິດຕາເວັນຕົກ

HEALTH

I'm not well.
khǎwy baw sǎbqai ຂໍອະຍຸບໍ່ສະບາຍ

I need a doctor.
khǎwy tǎwng-kǎm máw ຂໍອະຍຸຕ້ອງການໝໍ

I have a fever.
pǎn khài ເປັນໄຂ້

I have diarrhoea.
lóng thǎwng ລົງຫ້ອງ

It hurts here.
jép yuu nǐi ເຈັບຢູ່ນີ້

EMERGENCIES

Help!
suay dae! ຊ່ວຍແດ່

Fire!
fái mài! ໄຟໄໝ້

It's an emergency!
súk sǎen! ສຸກເສີນ

Go away!
pǎi dǎe! ໄປເດີ

Call a doctor!
suay tqam hǎa máw hài dǎe!
 ຊ່ວຍຕາມໝາໝໍ ໃຫ້ແດ່

Call an ambulance!
suay óen lot hóhng máw hài dǎe!
 ຊ່ວຍເອີ້ນລົດໂຮງໝໍ ໃຫ້ແດ່

Call the police!
suay óen tam-lùat dǎe!
 ຊ່ວຍເອີ້ນຕໍາຫລວດແດ່

Could you help me please?
jǎo suay khǎwy dǎi baw?
 ເຈົ້າຊ່ວຍຂ້ອຍໄດ້ບໍ່

I'm lost.
khǎwy lóng thǎang
 ຂໍອະຍາຫລົງຫາງ

Where are the toilets?
hàwng sǎam yuu sǎi?
 ຫ້ອງສ້ວມຢູ່ໃສ

allergic (to)
phǎe ແພ້

anaemia
lóhk léuat nǎwy ໂລກເລືອດໜ້ອຍ

asthma
lóhk hǎet ໂລກຫີດ

diabetes
lóhk bǎo wǎan ໂລກເບົາຫວານ

malaria
khài paa ໄຂ້ປ່າ

pregnant
thǎu pháa-máan ກືພາມານ

(mii thǎwng) (ມີຫ້ອງ)

toothache
jép khǎew ເຈັບແຂ້ວ

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Can you speak English?
jǎo pàak pháasǎa qǎngkít dái baw?
 ເຈົ້າປາກໝາສາອັງກິດໄດ້ບໍ່

A little.
nówy neung
 ຫນ້ອຍນຶ່ງ
I can't speak Lao.
khàwy páak pháasáa láo baw dái
 ຂ້ອຍບາກພາສາລາວບໍ່ໄດ້

Do you understand?
jáo khào jai baw?
 ເຈົ້າເຂົ້າໃຈບໍ່

(I) don't understand.
baw khào jai
 ບໍ່ເຂົ້າໃຈ

Please speak slowly.
káilunáa wáo sáa-sáa
 ກະລຸນາເວົ້າຊ້າໆ

Please repeat.
káilunáa wáo mai boeng dụ
 ກະລຸນາເວົ້າໃໝ່ ເບິ່ງດູ

What do you call this in Lao?
an-nii pháasáa láo waa nyáang?
 ອັນນີ້ພາສາລາວວ່າຫຍັງ

NUMBERS

0	<i>sún</i>	ສູນ
1	<i>neung</i>	ນຶ່ງ
2	<i>sáwng</i>	ສອງ
3	<i>sám</i>	ສາມ
4	<i>sii</i>	ສີ່
5	<i>hàa</i>	ຫ້າ
6	<i>hók</i>	ຫົກ
7	<i>jét</i>	ເຈັດ
8	<i>pàet</i>	ແປດ
9	<i>káo</i>	ເກົ້າ
10	<i>síp</i>	ສິບ
11	<i>síp-ét</i>	ສິບເອັດ
12	<i>síp-sáwng</i>	ສິບສອງ
20	<i>sáo</i>	ຊາວ
21	<i>sáo-ét</i>	ຊາວເອັດ
22	<i>sáo-sáwng</i>	ຊາວສອງ
30	<i>sám-síp</i>	ສາມສິບ
40	<i>sii-síp</i>	ສີ່ສິບ
50	<i>hàa-síp</i>	ຫ້າສິບ
60	<i>hók-síp</i>	ຫົກສິບ
70	<i>jét-síp</i>	ເຈັດສິບ
80	<i>pàet-síp</i>	ແປດສິບ

90	<i>káo-síp</i>	ເກົ້າສິບ
100	<i>hàwy</i>	ຮ້ອຍ
200	<i>sáwng hàwy</i>	ສອງຮ້ອຍ
1000	<i>phán</i>	ພັນ
10,000	<i>meun (síp-phán)</i>	ພັນ (ສິບພັນ)
100,000	<i>sáen (hàwy phán)</i>	ແສນ (ຮ້ອຍພັນ)
1,000,000	<i>láan</i>	ລ້ານ

first	<i>thii neung</i>	ທີນຶ່ງ
second	<i>thii sáwng</i>	ທີສອງ

PLACES & LAND FEATURES

Buddhist temple	<i>wat</i>	ວັດ
cemetery	<i>paa sáa</i>	ປ່າຊ້າ
church	<i>sím khlit</i>	ສິມຄລິດ
forest	<i>paa</i>	ປ່າ
jungle	<i>dóng</i>	ດົງ
mountain	<i>phúu kháo</i>	ພູເຂົາ
park/garden	<i>súan</i>	ສວນ
rice field (wet)	<i>náa</i>	ນາ
river	<i>mae nám</i>	ແມ່ນ້ຳ
sea	<i>thaléh</i>	ທະເລ
stupa	<i>tháat</i>	ທາດ
swamp	<i>beung</i>	ບຶງ
trail/footpath	<i>tháng thiaw/nyaang</i>	ທາງທຽວ/ທາງຢ່າງ
waterfall	<i>nám tók tàat</i>	ນ້ຳຕົກຕາດ

SHOPPING & SERVICES

Where is the ...?	<i>... yúu sái?</i>	... ຢູ່ໃສ
I'm looking for (the) ...	<i>khàwy sáwk hǎa ...</i>	ຂ້ອຍຊອກຫາ ...
bank	<i>thanákháan</i>	ທະນາຄານ
barber shop	<i>hǎan tát phóm</i>	ຮ້ານຕັດຜົມ
bookshop	<i>hǎan khǎai nǎng sǎu</i>	ຮ້ານຂາຍໜັງສື

hospital	<i>hóhng mǎw</i>	ໂຮງໝໍ
museum	<i>phiphithaphán</i>	ພິພິທະພັນ
pharmacy	<i>hǎan khǎai yqa</i>	ຮ້ານຂາຍຢາ
post office	<i>pai-sá-nii (hóhng sǎai)</i>	ໄປສະນີ (ໂຮງສາຍ)

I want to change ...	<i>khàwy yàak pian ...</i>	ຂ້ອຍຢາກປ່ຽນ ...
money	<i>ngóen</i>	ເງິນ
travellers cheques	<i>sek dōen tháang</i>	ເຊັກເດີນທາງ

I'm looking for ...	<i>khàwy sàwk hǎa ...</i>	ຂ້ອຍຊອກຫາ ...
How much (for) ...?	<i>... thao dǎi?</i>	... ເທົ່າໃດ

I'd like to see another style.	<i>khǎw boeng iik</i>	ຂໍເບິ່ງອີກແບບນຶ່ງ
	<i>bàep neung</i>	ຂໍເບິ່ງອີກແບບນຶ່ງ

Do you have something cheaper?	<i>mii thèuk-kwaa nii baw?</i>	ມີຫຼືກກວ່ານີ້ບໍ່
The price is very high.	<i>láakháa pháeng láai</i>	ລາຄາແພງຫລາຍ

(latex) condoms	<i>thǎng yqang anámái</i>	ກິງຢາງອະນາໄມ
sanitary napkins	<i>phàa anámái</i>	ຜ້າອະນາໄມ

soap	<i>sá-buu</i>	ສະບູ
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toilet paper	<i>jia háwng nám</i>	ເຈ້ຍຫ້ອງນ້ຳ
toothbrush	<i>paeng thuu khàew</i>	ແປງກູແຂ້ວ

telephone	<i>thóhlasáp</i>	ໂທລະສັບ
international call	<i>thóhlasáp lawaang páthèet</i>	ໂທລະສັບລະຫວ່າງປະເທດ

long distance (domestic)	<i>tháng qai</i>	ທາງໄກ
open/closed	<i>pòet/pít</i>	ເປີດ/ປິດ

TIME & DATES

today	<i>mèu nii</i>	ມື້ນີ້
tonight	<i>khéun nii</i>	ຄືນນີ້
this morning	<i>sáo nii</i>	ເຊົ້ານີ້
this afternoon	<i>baai nii</i>	ປ່າຍນີ້
all day long	<i>taláwt mèu</i>	ຕອລອດມື້
now	<i>diaw nii/tawn nii</i>	ດຽວນີ້/ຕອນນີ້
sometimes	<i>bqang theua</i>	ບາງເທື່ອ
yesterday	<i>mèu wán nii</i>	ມື້ວານນີ້
tomorrow	<i>mèu eun</i>	ມື້ອື່ນ

Sunday	<i>wán qathit</i>	ວັນອາທິດ
Monday	<i>wán jan</i>	ວັນຈັນ
Tuesday	<i>wán qngkháan</i>	ວັນອັງຄານ
Wednesday	<i>wán phut</i>	ວັນພຸດ
Thursday	<i>wán phahát</i>	ວັນພະຫັດ
Friday	<i>wán súk</i>	ວັນສຸກ
Saturday	<i>wán sáo</i>	ວັນເສົາ

January	<i>déuan mángkqwn</i>	ເດືອນມັງກອນ
February	<i>déuan kumpháa</i>	ເດືອນກຸມພາ
March	<i>déuan míináa</i>	ເດືອນມີນາ
April	<i>déuan méhsǎa</i>	ເດືອນເມສາ
May	<i>déuan pheutsápháa</i>	ເດືອນພຶດສະພາ
June	<i>déuan mithúnáa</i>	ເດືອນມິຖຸນາ
July	<i>déuan qawlakót</i>	ເດືອນກໍລະກົດ
August	<i>déuan síngháa</i>	ເດືອນສິງຫາ
September	<i>déuan qanyáa</i>	ເດືອນກັນຍາ

October	<i>dəuan túláa</i>	ເດືອນຕຸລາ
November	<i>dəuan phajik</i>	ເດືອນພະຈິກ
December	<i>dəuan thánwáa</i>	ເດືອນທັນວາ

TRANSPORT

Where is the ...

... <i>yùu sáí?</i>	
... ຢູ່ໃສ	
airport	
<i>doen bin</i>	ເດີ່ນບິນ
bus station	
<i>satháanii lot pájəm tháang</i>	ສະກຸນີລົດປະຈຳທາງ
bus stop	
<i>bawn jàwt lot pájəm tháang</i>	ບ່ອນຈອດລົດປະຈຳທາງ
departures/flights	
<i>thiaw</i>	ກຼ້ວ
taxi stand	
<i>bawn jàwt lot thaek-sii</i>	ບ່ອນຈອດລົດແທກຊີ

What time will the ... leave?

... <i>jà àwkw ják móhng?</i>	... ຈະອອກຈັກໂມງ
aeroplane	
<i>héua bin</i>	ເຮືອບິນ
bus	
<i>lot</i>	ລົດ
boat	
<i>héua</i>	ເຮືອ
minivan	
<i>lot túu</i>	ລົດຕູ້

What time (do we, does it, etc) arrive there?

<i>jà pái háwt phún ják móhng?</i>	ຈະໄປຮອດພຸ້ນຈັກໂມງ
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Where do we get on the boat?

<i>lóng héua yuu sáí?</i>	ລົງເຮືອຢູ່ໃສ
I want to go to ...	
<i>khàwvy yàak pqi ...</i>	ຂ້ອຍຢາກໄປ ...

I'd like a ticket.	
<i>khàwvy yàak dái pii</i>	ຂ້ອຍຢາກໄດ້ປີ້

How much to ...?	
<i>pqi ... thao dqi?</i>	ໄປ ... ເທົ່າໃດ

How much per person?	
<i>khón-la thao dqi?</i>	ຄົນລະເທົ່າໃດ

May I sit here?	
<i>nang bawn nii dái baw?</i>	ນັ່ງບ່ອນນີ້ໄດ້ບໍ່

Please tell me when we arrive in ...	
<i>wéhláa háwt ... bàwk khàwvy dae</i>	ເວລາຮອດ ... ບອກຂ້ອຍແດ່

taxi		ລົດແທກຊີ
<i>lot thâek-síi</i>		
samlor (pedicab)		ສາມລໍ້
<i>sám-lâw</i>		
sáwngtháew (passenger truck)		ສອງແຖວ
<i>sáwngtháew</i>		
tuk-tuk (jumbo)		ຕູ້ກ ຕູ້ກ
<i>túk-túk</i>		
Stop here. (lit: park here)		ຈອດຢູ່ນີ້
<i>jàwt yuu nii</i>		

I'd like to rent a ...		ຂ້ອຍຢາກເຊົ່າ ...
<i>khàwvy yàak sao ...</i>		
car		ລົດ (ໂອໂຕ)
<i>lot (ôh-tôh)</i>		
motorcycle		ລົດຈັກ
<i>lot ják</i>		
bicycle		ລົດກີບ
<i>lot thiip</i>		

Glossary

For a list of Lao words for different food and drink, see p80.

qahaan – food

anatta – Buddhist concept of nonsubstantiality or nonessentiality of reality, ie no permanent ‘soul’

anicca – Buddhist concept of impermanence, the transience of all things

Asean – Association of South East Asian Nations

bān – the general Lao word for house or village; written Ban on maps

bqasii – sometimes spelt *basi* or *baci*; a ceremony in which the 32 *khwān* (guardian spirits) are symbolically bound to the participant for health and safety

baht – (*bát*) Thai unit of currency, commonly negotiable in Laos; also a Lao unit of measure equal to 15g

BCEL – Banque pour le Commerce Extérieur Lao; in English, Lao Foreign Trade Bank

bja – beer; *bja sôt* is draught beer

bun – pronounced *bun*, often spelt *boun*; a festival; also spiritual ‘merit’ earned through good actions or religious practices

corvée – enforced, unpaid labour

dhamma – (Pali) truth, teachings, the teachings of the Buddha, moral law; dharma in Sanskrit

Don – pronounced *dqwn*; island

dukka – Buddhist concept of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, dis-ease

falang – from the Lao *falang-sèht* or ‘French’; Western, a Westerner

fôe – rice noodles, one of the most common dishes in Laos

hǎi – jar

hǎw tǎi – monastery building dedicated to the storage of the Tripitaka (Buddhist scriptures)

hét bun – ‘making merit’, mostly by alms-giving to monks

héua – boat

héua hang nyáo – longtail boat

héua pháí – rowing boat

héua wái – speedboat

huáy – stream; written Huay on maps

jao – pronounced *jáo*; lord or prince

Jataka – (Pali-Sanskrit) mythological stories of the Buddha’s past lives; *sáa-dók* in Lao

jəhdií – a Buddhist stupa; also written Chedi

jjin háw – Lao name for the Muslim Yunnanese who live in Northern Laos

jumbo – a motorised three-wheeled taxi, sometimes called tuk-tuk

kháen – a wind instrument devised of a double row of bamboo-like reeds fitted into a hardwood soundbox and made air-tight with beeswax

khào – rice

khào jji – bread

khào niǎw – sticky rice, the Lao staple food

khào-nôm – pastry or sweet; sometimes shortened to *khanôm*

khúu-bqa – Lao Buddhist monk

khwǎeng – province

khwǎn – guardian spirits

kip – pronounced *kiip*; Lao unit of currency

láap – a spicy Lao-style salad of minced meat, poultry or fish

lák méuang – city pillar

lám wóng – ‘circle dance’, the traditional folk dance of Laos, as common at discos as at festivals

Lao Issara – Lao resistance movement against the French in the 1940s

lào-láo – distilled rice liquor

Lao Loum – ‘lowland Lao’, ethnic groups belonging to the Lao-Thai Diaspora

Lao Soung – ‘high Lao’, hill tribes who make their residence at higher altitudes, for example, Hmong, Mien; also spelt Lao Sung

Lao Thoeng – ‘upland Lao’, a loose affiliation of mostly Mon-Khmer peoples who live on mid-altitude mountain slopes

lingam – a pillar or phallus symbolic of Shiva, common in Khmer-built temples

LNTA – Lao National Tourism Administration

LPDR – Lao People’s Democratic Republic

LPRP – Lao People’s Revolutionary Party

mae nām – literally, water mother; river; usually shortened to *nām* with river names, as in Nam Khong (Mekong River)

mǎw lám – Lao folk musical theatre tradition; roughly translates as ‘master of verse’

meuang – pronounced *méuang*; district or town; in ancient times a city state; often written Muang on maps

múan – fun, which the Lao believe should be present in all activities

Muang – see *meuang*

muu bān – village

náang síi – Buddhist nuns
naga – *náa-kha* in Lao; mythical water serpent common to Lao-Thai legends and art
nám – water; can also mean ‘river’, ‘juice’, ‘sauce’: anything of a watery nature
néhn – Buddhist novice monk; also referred to as *samanera*
NGO – nongovernmental organisation, typically involved in the foreign-aid industry
nibbana – ‘cooling’, the extinction of mental defilements; the ultimate goal of Theravada Buddhism
NPA – National Protected Area, a classification assigned to 20 wildlife areas throughout Laos
NVA – North Vietnamese Army

pạ – fish
pạ dæk – fermented fish sauce, a common accompaniment to Lao food
Pathet Lao – literally, Country of Laos; both a general term for the country and a common journalistic reference to the military arm of the early Patriotic Lao Front (a cover for the Lao People’s Party); often abbreviated to PL
pha – holy image, usually referring to a Buddha; venerable
phàa – cloth
phàa bjang – shoulder sash worn by men
phàa nung – sarong, worn by almost all Lao women
phàa salòng – sarong, worn by Lao men
Pha Lak Pha Lam – the Lao version of the Indian epic, the Ramayana
phansāa – Buddhist Lent beginning in July, which coincides with the beginning of the rainy season; also *watsa*
phii – spirits; worship of these is the other main religion of Laos (and exists alongside Buddhism)
phúu – hill or mountain; also spelt *phu*

sāa – the bark of a mulberry tree, from which paper is handcrafted
sālāa lóng thám – a *sala* (hall) where monks and lay people listen to Buddhist teachings
sām-lāaw – a three-wheeled pedicab; also written *samlar*

sabai-dji – the Lao greeting
sāinyasāt – folk magic
sakai-làep – alternative name for *jumbo* in Southern Laos due to the perceived resemblance to a space capsule (Skylab)
sala – pronounced *sāa-lāa*; an open-sided shelter; a hall
samana – pronounced *sāamanāa*; ‘seminar’; euphemism for labour and re-education camps established after the 1975 Revolution
samanera – Buddhist novice monk; also referred to as *néhn*
sāwngthāew – literally, two-rows; a passenger truck; also written *songthaew*
se – also spelt *xe*; Southern Laos term for river; hence Se Don means Don River, and Pakse means *pàak* (mouth) of the river
shophouse – two-storey building designed to have a shop on the ground floor and a residence above
sii – sacred; also spelt *si*
sim – ordination hall in a Lao Buddhist monastery; named after the *sima*, (pronounced *siimāa*) or sacred stone tablets, which mark off the grounds dedicated for this purpose
soi – lane

tàat – waterfall; also *nám tók*; written Tat on maps
talàat – market; *talàat sào* is the morning market; *talàat mèut* is the free, or ‘black’, market; written Talat on maps
thàat – Buddhist stupa or reliquary; written That on maps
thaek-sii – taxi
thanôn – street/road; often spelt Thanon on maps; shortened to ‘Th’ as street is to ‘St’
tuk-tuk – see *jumbo*

UXO – unexploded ordnance

Viet Minh – the Vietnamese forces who fought for Indochina’s independence from the French
vipassana – insight meditation

wat – Lao Buddhist monastery
wihāan – (Pali-Sanskrit vihara) a temple hall