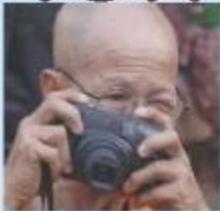
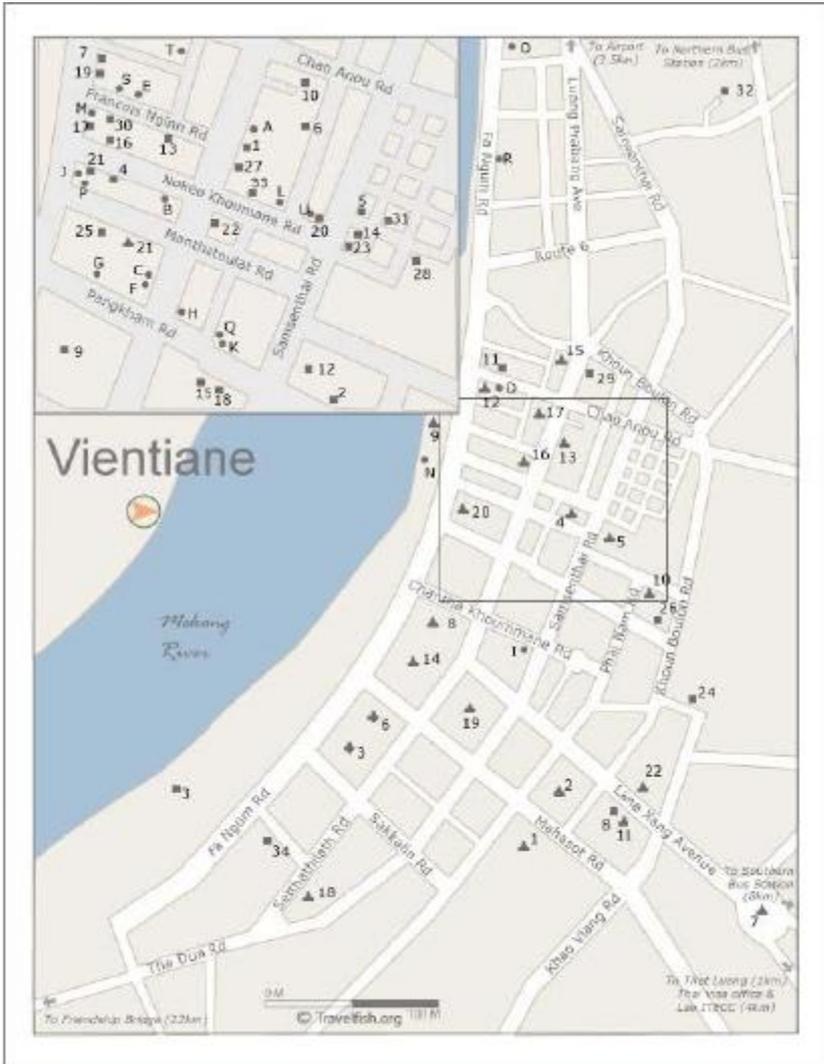


Vientiane 101



How to prepare, what to expect, and tips on settling in





MAP: Vientiane City Centre

Legend

Accommodation

- 1: Chantha Guesthouse
- 2: Day Inn Hotel
- 3: Don Chan Palace
- 4: Douang Deuane Hotel
- 5: Dragon Lodge
- 6: Haysoke 1 Guesthouse
- 7: Joe's Guesthouse
- 8: Khamkoun Hotel
- 9: Lane Xang Hotel
- 10: Lani Guesthouse
- 11: Lao Orchid Hotel
- 12: Lao Plaza Hotel
- 13: Lao Sakonh Guesthouse
- 14: Lovan Guesthouse
- 15: Mali Namphou
- 16: Mixay Guesthouse
- 17: Orchid Guesthouse
- 18: Phonepaseuth Guesthouse
- 19: PhetPhim Guesthouse
- 20: Praseuth Guesthouse
- 21: Riverside Hotel
- 22: Sabaidy Guesthouse
- 23: Santisouk Guesthouse
- 24: Saylomyen Guesthouse
- 25: Saysouly Guesthouse
- 26: Settha Palace Hotel
- 27: Souchaleun Guesthouse
- 28: Syri 1 Guesthouse
- 29: Syri 2 Guesthouse
- 30: Tai-Pan Hotel
- 31: Thawee Guesthouse
- 32: Thong Bay Guesthouse
- 33: Vayakorn Guesthouse
- 34: Villa Manoly

Eat and Meet

- A: Cafe Indochine
- B: Croissant D'Or
- C: Dao Fa
- D: Dok Champa
- E: Full Moon Cafe
- F: Joma
- G: Just for Fun
- H: Khop Chai Deu I: Kua Lao
- J: Le Cote d'Azur
- K: Le Provencal

- L: Lotus
- M: Nazim
- N: PVO
- O: Sala Sunset Khouta
- P: Saovaly
- Q: Scandinavian Bakery
- R: Spirit House
- S: Sticky Fingers
- T: Vilaylac
- U: Xayoh

Attractions and Activities

- 2: Day market
- 4: Lao National Cultural Hall
- 5: Lao National Museum
- 7: Patuxai Monument
- 8: Presidential Palace
- 9: Riverside promenade
- 10: Swimming pool and bowling alley
- 12: Wat Chanthabouli
- 13: Wat Hai Sok
- 14: Way Haw Phra Kaew
- 15: Wat Inpeng
- 16: Wat Mixai
- 17: Wat Ong Teu
- 18: Wat Si Muang
- 19: Wat Si Saket
- 20: Wat Xieng Nyeun
- 21: Lao National Theatre
- 22: French Cultural Centre

Transport

- 1: Central Bus Station

Vital Information

- 3: International Clinic
- 6: Mahasot Hospital
- 11: Tourist Information Centre

Source:

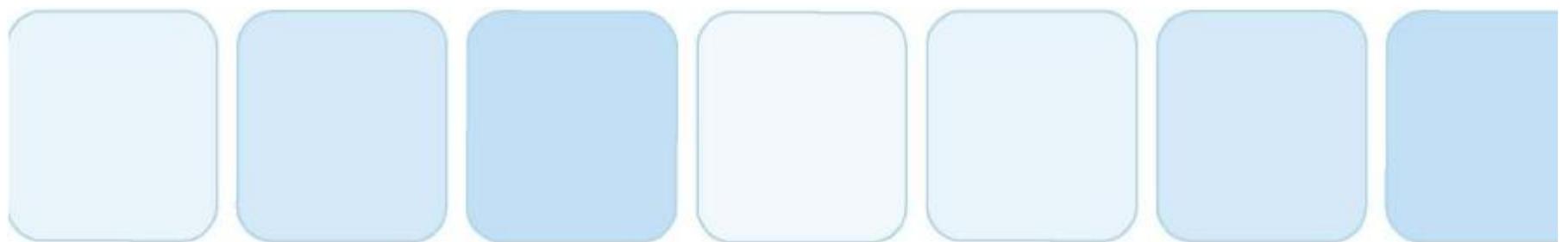
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Forward

The following guidebook is a compilation of tips on how to settle in and make the most of your time in Vientiane, on a budget. *Vientiane 101* consists of most all of the advice other researchers wish they had upon their arrival – such as where to find accommodation, how to set up a bank account, where to buy a bicycle, and where to find the best libraries in town. In normal circumstances, this information may take months to discover due to the nature of the place. Although this process is often a fun part of the learning experience, it can cost you a lot of time and frustration that you could be investing in your research.

Living in Vientiane can be very different than what you may be imagining, pre-departure. It is a great town to live in, but as anywhere in the world, there are challenges specific to the location. *Vientiane 101* should help you prepare for the bumpy road while trying to settle in, begin your research project, and gain a feeling for your surroundings.

One of the primary mistakes when moving to Vientiane for the first time is comparing it continuously to cities in Thailand. If you speak Thai or have worked or been residing in Thailand, remember that Laos is not Thailand. Many people experience culture shock – not in comparison to their country of origin, but when they compare living in Laos to Thailand. Vientiane is, for example, generally much more expensive than living anywhere in Thailand, including Bangkok. This is because almost all products are imported. Produce and food products are generally more expensive as well. For example, a bowl of noodle soup that would cost you 30 Baht in Thailand is often 15,000 to 20,000 LAK (55 to 90 Baht equivalent). On the flip side, *ahaan farang* (western cuisine) in Vientiane is better than in just about any Southeast Asian location. In times of frustration, remind yourself that the beauty of living in Laos is that it isn't a copy and paste version of Thailand, or of anywhere else you have lived or traveled. Enjoy your new surroundings and make the most of your time researching in Laos!



Chapter 1

How to prepare for your move: the 10-week count down

10 Weeks to Departure: Medical Examinations and Cost of Living

Medical Examinations

- ✓ The Fulbright Program requires a full medical check-up before arrival, so you should be physically ready to go. But just in case, the CDC recommends vaccinations against Hep A, Hep B, Japanese Encephalitis, rabies, and typhoid (in addition to the standard slew of U.S. immunizations). You should also check your records to see if you might need a booster for tetanus-diphtheria, measles, and polio. Some of these vax's are multiple-shot adventures that take over a month to complete, so please **GET STARTED SOON** if you haven't already. Most of the staff at the Embassy do not take malaria prophylaxes, but it will depend a bit on how much time you are spending in different places in Laos. Other information on vaccinations and medical conditions in Laos are available through the websites of the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS), Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at www.cdc.gov, or the World Health Organization (WHO) at www.who.int.

Expected costs of living

When people first move to Vientiane, they are often surprised how much it actually costs for them to survive. For some reason, people believe it will be cheaper than Thailand, which is a myth. On Average, it requires \$700.00 to \$1,000 per month to live a modest, but comfortable life. You will have a nice life here in Vientiane on a tight budget, but don't expect to have too much of a *lifestyle*. Of course, the more you shop at the market and cook at home, your expenses will lower. You can also cut expensive Internet costs if you are willing to use free wireless at cafés in town. Also, if you're on a tight budget, consider a bicycle rather than a car or motorbike. The table below is a very basic **approximate** break down of what former Fulbright grantees paid in the past for their living expenses.

Item	Approximate Budget (per month)
Monthly Accommodation: 2 bedroom small house in desirable neighborhood	\$350.00 400.00
Bicycle one off cost	\$100.00
Monthly groceries and food, with the assumption of cooking at home with local vegetables	\$300.00
Research Assistant 2 days a week, student assistant	\$100.00
Internet at home (optional)	\$55.00
Utilities (electricity) assumption that air conditioner is moderately used	\$60.00
Total Approximate monthly budget	\$1,015.00

NOTE: Almost everything in Laos is imported except for silk and some fruits. Consequently, prices of goods here are slightly higher than in Thailand, including for basic foods. However, the cost of living for the average Lao is quite low. Americans will find most of the items they crave are available in some small markets, but at considerably high prices. Students should expect to adopt as much as possible to a SE Asian diet stay within their budget. Expect to pay cash for everything you purchase except for more expensive items in nice stores, books at Monument Books and hotels. Generally speaking, there is a 3% charge on all credit card transactions. **American Express** cards are **not** accepted.

9 Weeks to Departure: Visa Arrangements

You should apply for a visa on your own with the Lao Embassy in Washington DC. If your spouse or children are accompanying you, the same procedure applies. In order to get a Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs approval to issue your visa, you will need to provide the US Embassy in Vientiane's Public Diplomacy Section (PDS) with a scanned copy of your passport's bio-data page at least **EIGHT** **WEEKS** before your arrival. This applies to your spouse or children as well. This should be sent to Ms. Vimol Dalalay, Cultural Specialist, at VimolDX@state.gov. The US Embassy Vientiane will email you a scanned copy of the diplomatic note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs approving your visa. You should include the diplomatic note with your visa application to the Lao Embassy in Washington, DC. Once you arrive in Laos, you will arrange for your multiple-entry visa through the National University's office for foreign students or the international cooperation office of your host institution. Contact Vimol for more information on visas.

8 Weeks to Departure: Avoiding Culture Shock

There is no definite way to avoid culture shock, but you can prepare for cultural differences. The best way to prepare yourself for living in Laos is to start keeping up to date on all the local news sources you can find online. If you're interested in development issues, this may include subscribing to LaoFab Document Repository and mailing list (<http://groups.google.com/group/laofab?pli=1>), the Lao Internet Non-governmental Organization (INGO) network (<http://www.directoryofngos.org/pub/index.php>), or subscribing to the *Vientiane Times* English Newspaper online (<http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/>). <https://www.facebook.com/paisai.magazine>, is a way to get an idea of the types of events and activities that go on in Vientiane. <https://www.facebook.com/jclaos> also has current events and can serve as a resource for finding apartments, etc.

The next best way to prepare from home is to simply read up on Lao culture, heritage and history. The following reads consist of nonfiction histories, fictional histories and culture shock manuals. You can find them all at www.amazon.com: Culture Shock! Laos: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette -by Stephen Mansfield A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between (A Short History of Asia series) by Grant Evans and Milton Osborne Sky Is Falling: An Oral History of the CIA's Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos by Gayle Morrison Love Songs from a Shallow Grave: A Dr. Siri Investigation Set in Laos by Colin Cotterill The Merry Misogynist: A Dr. Siri Investigation Set in Laos by Colin Cotterill The Ravens by Christopher Robbins.

5 Weeks to Departure: One-time shipment to the US Embassy

✓ Fulbright students are authorized to make a **one-time** shipment of materials in support of their programs. This shipment is limited to 4 boxes, each weighing less than 40 pounds. _____ materials CANNOT be sent back to the U.S. through the US Embassy pouch mailing system.

For your one-time shipment, please use the following address:

*Pam DeVolder Public Affairs Officer 4350 Vientiane Place
Dulles, VA 20189-4350
Hold for : ____ (your name) ____
_____*

NOTE: Due to pouch regulations, no other mail services are available through the Embassy, nor can the Embassy accept shipments via private courier services on behalf of grantees. You may not send more than 8 ounces of liquids or gels in each box through the pouch service. Boxes may be inspected during shipment and returned to sender if there are prohibited items. See U.S. postal regulations for more specifics.

2 Weeks to Departure: Confirm flights with US Embassy Public Affairs Office in Vientiane

- ✓ At least two weeks before your departure for Laos, please email Public Affairs Officer (PAO) Pam DeVolder (DeVolderPS@state.gov) and Vimol with your flight and arrival information. Include information on which guesthouse or hotel you'd like to stay in for your temporary quarters, and approximately how long you plan to initially stay there. If needed, the US Embassy will make the reservation according to your request.

1 Week to Departure: Re-establish contacts with your research affiliations

- ✓ Your Fulbright application requires that you secure research affiliation pre-arrival. However there is a good chance you haven't communicated with your approved research affiliates in a long while. Before you depart, it is a good idea to call or email your affiliates, remind them when you're coming and try to make an appointment in advance.
- ✓ Also consider bringing a small gift of appreciation to your contacts at your research affiliation. Gifts are accepted as a token of appreciation, and are considered a best etiquette practice in Laos. It's best to always have something to give, even if it is a very small token such as key chains, postcards or other inexpensive souvenirs from home.
- ✓ At this point, call your bank and notify them that you will be using your ATM card in a foreign country.

Medications & health insurance

Health Insurance

Your program will provide you with health insurance during your time abroad. Make sure you understand the terms and conditions of your health and accident insurance before you arrive, as you will need to consult with them on payment reimbursement. Make sure you have proper telephone numbers and email addresses to contact your insurance company, and check to make sure you can reach them from Laos since you will not be able to call collect.

Bringing medication with you

It is recommended that you bring a sufficient supply of prescription medications for the duration of your stay in Vientiane. There are many pharmacies in town and medication is often cheap. However, quality control and intellectual property problems do occur. The US Embassy recommends that you have enough medication to get you through the year. Please note that any prescription medications should be packaged in their originally issued container with the name of the patient clearly marked on the outside of the package.

Over-the-Counter Advice:

Peptobismal is a great product to bring with you. For some reason, it isn't available in Thailand and it is often needed after eating all the spicy food here in Laos!

Chapter 2

Your Arrival in Vientiane

Congratulations, you've made it!

Welcome to Vientiane. Upon arrival, there is some basic information you will need for your first night in town. For example, you need to be prepared for what to expect at immigration, transportation from the airport and where to eat and sleep on your first night. You may also want to access mobile phone and Internet connections in order to contact family back home to assure them that you've landed safe and sound.

Wattay International Airport

On your first trip to Vientiane you will need to fly **directly** into Wattay International Airport in Vientiane (Airport code: VTE). This is Vientiane's only airport and is located approximately 5 kilometres outside of town. Due to your visa regulations, for your first trip, you will need to fly **directly from Bangkok International Airport (BKK) to Vientiane International Airport (VTE)**.

Temporary Visas on arrival

When you arrive at the airport, a single-entry "official" visa will be waiting at airport immigration. Once in Laos, the US Embassy will arrange for the multiple-entry visa through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Do not be surprised when this step takes a month or even longer, so be patient. This is an official process, therefore you will not be charged for the visa fees.

NOTE: VISA Procedures for spouses/children are the same as yours, so make sure you send the Embassy all of your spouse and children's required documents in WEEK 8, before departure.

With all this in mind, the following information is included for future travel, after your first time landing in Vientiane.





Notes on Getting to Vientiane: future trips

There are three general ways to get to Vientiane: 1.) Fly direct to Wattay International Airport in Vientiane from Bangkok (as you have already experienced), or for the more adventurous individuals; 2.) Fly to Udon Thani International airport with a budget carrier such as AirAsia or Nok Air, and then take a bus to Vientiane, which is approximately one and a half hours away; 3.) You may also want to consider the night train: The new station is outside of Vientiane on the way to the Friendship Bridge. The train leaves once daily and its final destination is Bangkok. This trip is serene, but it requires at least 12 hours, and is often delayed. Make sure you have ample time before you decide to take the train.

Friendship Bridge Crossing

Trains, Planes and Automobiles: Arriving by budget airplane from Udon Thani, Bus from Nong Khai, or Train from Vientiane

If you're on a really tight budget, you can fly AirAsia or Nok Air from Bangkok to Udon Thani. If you book in advance, this can usually save you around \$50.00 from flying into Vientiane, but it also creates a hassle if you have a lot of luggage. If you decide to take a budget flight from BKK to Udon Thani, you will need to purchase a 200 Baht mini-van ticket to the Friendship Bridge. The mini-van ticket counter is directly outside of the arrival hall. The trip will take around 1 hour and 30 minutes to the border. Then, you will need to stamp out of Thailand, and buy a bus ticket that will take you across the bridge for 15 Baht. Once you cross the Mekong River, you will be dropped in front of Lao Immigration. Make sure you keep all of your belongings with you at all times. After you pass through immigration, cross into Laos; there, you will be greeted by a dozen tuk-tuk and van drivers wishing to take you to Vientiane. Travelling by van is faster and more comfortable. Pay no more than 200 Baht for your ride to your destination in town. Make sure you know your exact address to show the driver if you are not acquainted with Vientiane.

Trains

Alternatively, you can also take the over-night train (approximately 12 hours) from Bangkok to Nong Khai. Once you're in Nong Khai, you can buy the connecting ticket to Vientiane. Be cautioned that the train station is as far out of town as the Friendship Bridge to Thailand. Once you're at the Vientiane Train Station, you can catch a tuk-tuk to your desired destination.

Buses

You can also take an overnight bus (approximately 8 hours) from Bangkok Mochit Station to Nong Khai. At the bus station in Bangkok called *Mochit* ask for a VIP bus ticket at Chan Tours or 999 Tours. Chan Tours offers a VIP ticket (approximately 700 Baht) to Nong Khai that includes a personal entertainment system, massage seats and a light snack. Once you arrive in Nong Khai, take a bus to the Friendship Bridge, then a tuk-tuk or taxi to Vientiane.

Exchanging Dollars for Lao KIP (LAK)

It's a good idea to exchange a few bucks at the airport exchange counter before exiting the arrival hall or use the ATM in the coffee shop area. You will need LAK cash for the taxi ride to your guesthouse, to pay for your guesthouse if you're staying at a place that costs less than around \$20.00, to buy a local SIM card and to catch a bite to eat. Alternatively, you can secure Thai baht in Bangkok or elsewhere in Thailand prior to your departure; Thai baht is widely accepted in Vientiane.

NOTE: Exchange rates differ by the dollar amount being exchanged (For example, \$100 bills get you a better rate than \$1 bills). Coins cannot be exchanged.

If you're arriving from the Friendship Bridge, you can exchange cash at the exchange point near immigration. However, when arriving vis-à-vis the Friendship Bridge, Thai Baht is also gladly accepted for your taxi ride.

Airport pick-ups & taxi services

US Embassy pick up

Pam or Vimol will greet you at the airport with an Embassy expediter to ensure that you get settled into your temporary accommodation. Make sure you inform Vimol and Pam at least 2 weeks before your arrival so they can plan for your pick up. All grantees are required to have a security briefing with the Embassy's Regional Security Office (RSO) as soon as possible after arrival, in addition to the briefing with the Public Affairs Officer (PAO). This will be scheduled in conjunction with a courtesy call on the Ambassador.

Airport taxis

For future arrivals after your initial US Embassy pick-up, you can take a taxi. Taxis at the airport follow a standardized system. Find the airport taxi ticket counter outside of the arrival hall and purchase a ticket. There are two set prices: 1.) 50,000 LAK to the city centre and 2.) 70,000 LAK to anywhere outside of the city centre. The ticket counter reserves the right to decide which locations are within the city centre or not. For example, Pattuxai is not considered the city centre. Tipping your driver is not necessary, nor is it expected.

Your first night: Suggested (inexpensive) places to stay

There are several backpacker hostels and budget hotels in Vientiane; however the following are safe, clean, have air-conditioned rooms and are recommended by previous Fulbright scholars:

Wonderland Guest House 2 (\$10.00-\$15.00) Samsenthai Road near intersection going to That Dam stupa or the US Embassy (find sign at end of small soi next to Phimphone Minimart on main road). A family owned business, this guest house has a very good reputation with former Fulbrighters in Laos. Each room has air conditioning and its own bathroom.

Mixay Paradise (\$15.00 - \$20.00) rue François, near by the Mekong river, and near by Vat Mixay.

Lani I Guest House (Tel: 214919, \$30.00-\$35.00) Ban Haisok (Directly next to Vat Haisok) Setthathirat Road A quaint, colonial-style house nestled next to Vat Haisok on the main road in town (breakfast included).

Chantapanya Hotel (www.chantapanyahotel.com, \$35.00-\$45.00) Nokeo Khumman Road, across from Lao National Culture Hall A newer hotel with very decently decorated rooms, good service and free Wi-fi (breakfast included).

NOTE: For temporary accommodations upon your arrival, the Public Affairs Office is happy to book a room for you at a hotel or guesthouse of your choice. Please contact Vimol for more information on local hotels and Guesthouses. For long-term accommodation, renting a room from a house or an apartment is more economical.

Phoning Home: SIM cards & international calls

There are several different telecommunication companies from which you can purchase a local SIM card. These companies include Beeline, Mphone and ETL. MPhone and Beeline offer 3-G services for your iPhone and Blackberry, if they are unlocked.



You can buy a SIM card at any M Point convenience store in Vientiane for approximately 50,000 LAK. Local rates differ from company to company, but they are always very competitive with one another, so the choice is yours. You can receive international calls to your local phone number, free of charge. Outbound international calls, however, are very expensive and vary depending on your location. To make an international call to the US dial, 001 (international area code) + the phone number. If your phone is locked, you can either unlock it at I-Mobile Shop on the corner of Sayom Road and Lane Xang Avenue, or simply purchase a cheap back-up phone for around \$15.00.

Note: Remember that you cannot make toll-free calls from Laos and may not be able to call collect. You can, however, use Skype or similar Internet calling services to reach a U.S. number.

Hang Ten: Free Internet surfing around Vientiane

If you'd rather avoid hefty international charges and expensive Internet rates at home, you can connect to the Internet for free at several locations in town. These locations include Scandinavian Bakery (open 7 am until 9 pm) at Namphou (the fountain), Joma Café (open until 9 pm) at Setthathirat Road, Sticky Finger's Café – 10/3 Francois Ngin Road (open until 10 pm), and Fullmoon Café (open until 10 pm)– next to Sticky Fingers. Cafes in Vientiane generally do not mind if their customers sit and relax for as long as they wish, so no worries; there's plenty of time to write e-mails to family and friends.

Chapter 3

Settling in

Searching for accommodation?

Now that you're here, it's time to find a place you feel comfortable settling into. Guesthouses are generally much more expensive than finding a house or an apartment to rent. Keep in mind that finding accommodation in Vientiane can be tricky if you're unfamiliar with the city's neighbourhoods and price ranges. The most convenient way to find a good deal is to call Wong, a very popular housing agent in Vientiane, and describe your accommodation wishes to him. Tell him your monthly budget, how many bedrooms you will need, how many months you will be renting the house for, and how many months you are able to pay in advance. Wong will then find all the houses within your description. His services are great. You can reach Wong at + 856 20 9999 1305. Alternatively, you can find him bartending at Sticky Finger's Café from around 6 pm to close. If you can't locate Wong, there are ads in the Vientiane Times every day from the various agents, including Oudalee (www.oudaleehomes.com, 020 55 51 25 02 and 020 55 65 91 46), LaoLand (www.laoland.com, 020 5551 0155, 23 666 333, and 021 453 919). If you want to share a house or an apartment with other visiting interns, students, or NGO employees, take a look at www.findinlaos.com, www.worklivelaos.com, and www.jclao.com. Especially www.findinlaos.com is a good site to keep checking, it's where most newcomers find open rooms in houseshares, used bicycles and motorcycles, and used furniture and appliances. While people still hang print-outs at the Phimphone and Simeuang minimarkets (as mentioned below) it is far more common now to post online only.



General price ranges for housing

Accommodation prices in Vientiane vary greatly. The landlord, versus a market demand, most commonly decides on property prices. In most all urban and suburban areas of Vientiane expect to pay \$350.00 to \$600.00 per month for a 2 bedrooms, 2-bath house or apartment. In just about every neighbourhood in Vientiane, you can find a wide range of housing prices. Keep in mind that some landlords require 6 to 12 months payment in advance. Month-to-month payment is possible in some cases (but is rare), but most landlords will discount for advance payment.

Most all houses and apartments will come with basic furniture such as beds, desks and living room furniture. Some houses will also have very basic kitchen supplies available as well. Furniture in Lao houses may not suit your personal aesthetics, but it does cut down on your costs for a temporary living arrangement. You can purchase basic furniture at the many markets around town (Khua Din and Talat Sao) and at Home Ideals Centre Point and at D-Mart on Dongpalane street. You will often find similar goods at the markets or in little stores along Dongpalane street for cheaper, especially kitchen supplies. Sheets and towels tend to be of poorer quality than many westerners are used to and are expensive for what you get. Consider a quick trip to Udon Thani to get these items.

Lao ITECC on T4 occasionally has furniture fairs. **Home Ideal's China Town location** on Heng Boun Rd. is also a popular place among some ex-pats for more modern furniture and items like bookshelves and cookery. K&B is located on the road after the Germany Embassy in Ban Sokpaluang.

Houses versus Apartments

Unlike other places in the world, apartments in Vientiane are often more expensive than houses. This is often because of their western amenities, proximity to the city centre, and other services such as 24-hour security. Most foreigners live in houses within a short drive or bike ride to Vientiane's city centre.

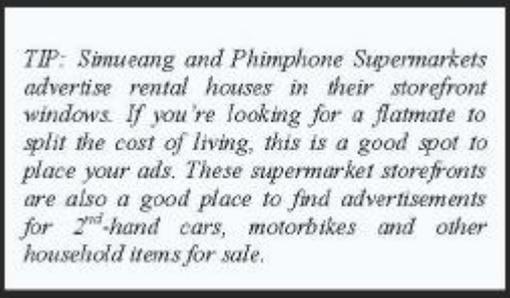
Attractive neighbourhoods for foreigners

In just about every neighbourhood in Vientiane you will find Lao and foreign neighbours coexisting. Most neighbourhoods will have similar safety issues, all centred on unarmed robberies. With this said, just about all neighbourhoods are safe. If you hear that there has been a break-in in your future neighbourhood, don't fret. Often robberies are a one-off occurrence and happen just about everywhere.

The further you move outside the city, the more local your neighbourhood will become. This does not guarantee that you will not experience a robbery, as most foreigners are targeted at some point in time. Use general common sense when searching for your rental property including your landlord's personality, outdoor lighting, grates on windows and more than one lock on all doors.

NOTE: Some houses for rent are in close proximity to the landlord's home. This can be beneficial if you have a plumbing or electrical emergency. In addition, the landlord may be willing to keep an extra eye on the house for you while you are away. Ask your landlord where he or she lives and ask them if they are willing to keep an eye out for your house, in the event you're away.

When shopping for your rental home consider the following convenient neighbourhoods outside the immediate city centre:



TIP: Simueang and Phimphone Supermarkets advertise rental houses in their storefront windows. If you're looking for a flatmate to split the cost of living, this is a good spot to place your ads. These supermarket storefronts are also a good place to find advertisements for 2nd-hand cars, motorbikes and other household items for sale.

Name of neighbourhood (Ban)	Attraction
Ban Phonexay	Near Pattuxai, the World Bank, Indonesian and Malaysian Embassies, and a short bike ride to town. An older and reputedly safe neighbourhood. Approximately 2 kilometres from city centre. This is an attractive area if you plan on trekking to the National University since it is situated between town and the University campus.
Ban Sokpaluang	An older neighbourhood with large yards near the German Embassy and Vientiane International School (VIS), off of Kouvieng Road. Approximately 3-4 kilometres from the city centre. Not ideal if you are travelling daily to the National University of Laos. Very ideal if you have kids at the Vientiane International School (VIS).
Ban Umong	On the Mekong River off of Luang Prabang Road (airport road). Approximately 2 kilometres from the city centre, upstream. If you'd like to live near the Mekong, this area is generally cheaper and more local than the neighborhoods downstream.
Ban Dongpalane and Ban Fai	Off of Dongpalane Road. A busier area in close proximity to the Morning Market. Approximately 2-3 kilometres from the city centre.

Trusted agents

There are other good agents in town aside from Wong such as:

Cameron
J&C Realty
<http://www.jclao.com/>

In Laos, all neighbourhoods (Ban) are named after their surrounding temple. For example, in Ban Mixay you will find Vat Mixay, and so on. In most circumstances if you can name the temple, tuk-tuk drivers and taxis will be able to help you find your house.

Living in Ban Dong Dok near the National University of Laos

If you're going to be researching at the National University of Laos (NOUL), keep in mind that it is approximately 12 kilometres away from the city centre. Ban Dong Dok is a quaint Lao village, but could be more difficult for foreigners to reside in due to the distance from town and since there are less western amenities. Many people decide to live somewhere in-between the city centre and Ban Dong Dok such as near Ban That Luang or Ban Phonexay area.

Living in Dong Dok can be difficult, but for those who are adventurous and seeking to experience Laos and Lao culture "full-on" then it is perfect, especially if you are working at the University. There is plenty of decent housing in Ban Dong Dok for much cheaper than city accommodation rates. If you want to live in Ban Dong Dok, contact Miles Kenney-Lazar at miles.kenney@gmail.com for more information.

Housing through the NOUL is usually not possible for Fulbright scholars. There is student accommodation near by the University campus, it is however very basic and usually includes one room, in a row of rooms facing outdoors, resembling a motel.

Avoiding cultural hiccups

Getting to know your neighbours & village chief (Nai Ban)

Once you've found your perfect rental house or apartment, it's time to assimilate yourself into your new neighbourhood. The first step to a successful relationship with your neighbours is to register with your Nai Ban, or "village chief". All Bans have a Nai Ban with neighbourhood office. When you sign your contract, ask your landlord whom your Nai Ban is, and where his or her office is located. It is good etiquette to register with your Nai Ban as well as introduce yourself to your neighbours. Once people know your name and can put a face to it, they will watch after you and your property.

Being Mindful of Your Belongings

At home in the US, there's a general belief that you do not take what's not yours. In Vientiane, if you leave your motorbike outside unlocked and if it gets stolen, it is considered your fault for not being mindful of your belongings. To avoid theft, put your motorbike and bicycles inside at night, lock your doors and front gate as well. Do not assume that your belongings are safe anywhere. You may not be in physical danger, but your belongings are always at risk of being stolen. When you leave your house in the morning, hide your computer, or at least put it out of sight. Follow the general rule of thumb: Out of sight, out of mind.

Believing in the *baci*

Although you may live in a house surrounded by a concrete wall, you are still living within a Lao community. Therefore, Lao neighbourhood customs should be respected to the best of your ability. For example, if you know you will be living in your rental property for 10 months or longer, you could consider having a small *baci*, a traditional Lao ceremony, and invite your neighbours. The *baci* will protect you, your home and all the neighbours attending. It also demonstrates that you're in-tune with Lao culture and willing to throw a little party for your neighbours. Not sure how to hold a *baci*? Just ask your landlord and they will tell you. They will be flattered you are interested in having the event in their house. In fact, most landlords will organize it for you. If you have a *baci*, be prepared to serve your visitors food and drink after the ritual. Having a neighbourhood *baci* is the best protective social measure you can take when living in a Lao neighbourhood. It's also a great opportunity to hold a traditional Lao event in your house.

***Still man's best friend?* Lao dogs and you.**

Stray and neighborhood dogs are a nuisance in every Lao neighbourhood. They are renowned for their favorite pastime of chasing people driving motorbikes and riding bicycles past dusk. They are especially lovely when they collectively haul in the middle of the night during mating seasons (commonly August and February). Most Lao dogs are actually very timid, despite their bark. If the dogs become too aggressive, tell your landlord and Nai Ban. Be mentally prepared for the nuisance and try to make peace with the dogs since they can sense fear.

In general, DO NOT pet the dogs. These dogs are not like domesticated house pets in the USA. Many of them suffer from fleas, mange, rabies, and other diseases. Also, avoiding eye contact with the dogs and acting like you know where you are walking when you are new to the neighborhood will be helpful. If one approaches you, just pretend like you are throwing a rock at it. Most will retreat with their tail between their legs.

Ear plugs: potentially a good investment

In general, the more local your neighbourhood, the more noise you will potentially encounter, even if you move outside the city. Lao people enjoy loud music and karaoke at all events including weddings, funerals, birthdays and Buddhist holidays. Make sure to ask your landlord about your neighbourhood's noise level before signing a lease. If the noise level gets out of hand i.e., after mid-night, politely raise the issue with your Nai Ban. Most neighbours are very respectful of other's sleeping schedules and will end their parties by mid-night. On the flip side, when you want to have a party, also try to wrap up the noise by the same time.

Understanding your responsibilities & rights in a Lao neighbourhood

As it is your responsibility to register with your Nai Ban when you move in, it is also your responsibility to notify your Nai Ban when something goes wrong such as arguments with other neighbours, break-ins, and so on. It is also your responsibility to understand Lao law, and avoid breaking it. This includes all drug related activities. Also caution that it is illegal for a Lao person of the opposite sex to stay overnight in your home. It is a common fact that if your Nai Ban finds out that your suspected Lao significant other is sleeping over, he/she will knock on your door in the middle of the night to catch you both in the act. This is a situation to be taken seriously, and to be avoided because if you get caught you may be fined, go to jail, or in the worse case, be deported.

U.S. citizens who move to Vientiane are encouraged to contact the U.S. Embassy for security advice.

Travelers in Vientiane should exercise caution, particularly after dark, at roadside restaurants and stalls near the banks of the Mekong River. Foreigners are often the victims of purse snatching while sitting down to eat or while riding bicycles or motorcycles in this area. To help ensure the security of valuables and documents, travelers may wish to carry them in a bag that cannot be easily stolen. U.S. citizens traveling to Vang Vieng should be aware that some tourists have been robbed and assaulted while walking alone to the caves on the far side of the Nam Song River. Several people have drowned during the rainy season while inner-tubing or swimming in the Nam Song River. Camping at night anywhere except in authorized campgrounds in national parks is dangerous.

Many restaurants in popular tourist locations offer menu items, which may contain unknown substances or opiates, particularly, "pizzas", "shakes" or "teas". These products are often advertised as "happy" or "special" items. These unknown foods and drinks can be dangerous, causing illness and death.

For more information please read the Consular Information Sheet for Laos at <http://travel.state.gov>

Living on dirt roads

Before you move into your new house, take a look around the premise and try to imagine what the property will look like during the height of the monsoon season. Is there proper drainage? Will you be able to bicycle or motorbike out of the dirt road in front of your house? Neighbourhoods along the Mekong River area commonly flood on an annual basis.

Security check: avoiding break-ins

Check your house's security before moving in. Do your windows have grates or bars? Do all doors have deadbolts and padlocks? If not, it is perfectly fine to negotiate with your landlord to upgrade security before you sign your contract. Also make sure your front gate has a proper lock and that there are sufficient outdoor lights at night.

It may be beneficial to bring several padlocks (2-3 medium sized padlocks with key) from the USA. Many of the locks sold in Laos are knock-off locks from China that can easily be picked by experienced thieves. Your landlord may think these are good locks, while they may not be. If you bring a pad lock, you can ask your landlord to install it for you.

Singing a contract... and breaking it

So, you've finally found your perfect rental house. It's inexpensive, safe and convenient. Congratulations! Now it's time to sign the rental agreement. In Laos, all contracts in Lao language precede the English translations – no matter the circumstance. However, make sure that the agreement includes the items you believe the landlord should pay for in the event they break, leak, or flood. Most landlords take close ownership of their properties, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

For the most part, landlords are not interested in breaking their contracts since you've probably paid upfront. Most commonly, once you've moved in the house is yours and with in reason, you are allowed to change things around to make your time in the house most enjoyable. If you want to break your contract and move out sooner than anticipated, do not expect to get your money back. Instead, try your best to sub-let before you move out to compensate your loss.

Banking Services

General Note: Laos is a cash economy. While the local currency – the kip – is in usage, dollars are accepted for all transactions, as are Thai baht. A limited number of establishments (including top hotels) accept credit cards. Several cash machines (ATMs) are located at banks and other areas in Vientiane. It is recommended that you utilize ATMs located only at banking establishments.

NOTE: Grantees do not have access to the Embassy's cashier service.

Setting up bank accounts

In order to set up a local checking or savings bank account, your resident visa and passport are required. There is no minimum amount to set up an account in Vientiane. Based on customer service in English language, Australia National Bank (ANZ) and Indochina Bank (Korean Owned) are amongst the best banks in town. The Joint Development Bank is also a local favorite. Be aware that ANZ and Indochina banks do not have ATMs outside of Vientiane, therefore the JDB may be a more logical choice if you're travelling to the province. With your checking account you will receive a domestic ATM card and you will have the option to purchase a VISA check card for an annual fee of around \$50.00.



ANZ Vientiane

33 Lane Xang Avenue Tel: +856 21222700

<http://www.anz.com/laos/en/about-us/our-company/ANZ-Laos/>

Joint Development Bank

82 Lane Xang Road

Tel: 856-21-213531-6

<http://www.jdbbank.com/>

Indochina Bank

Capital Tower, 116, Rue 23 Singha

<http://www.indochinabank.com>

Cash-in-advance, Wire transfers; and ATMs

During the period of time when you're waiting for your resident's visa, you can access your US bank through two primary ways: 1.) cash-in-advance, 2.) ATM machines. Charges from ATM machines can be considerable. For example, ANZ charges 40,000 LAK to other banks ATM cards, and that does not include what your host bank will charge you at home. BFL charges slightly less, 30,000 LAK. ANZ and BFL both let you withdraw the largest withdrawal amount of 2 million LAK, which is only equivalent to approximately \$250.00 Other banks will usually only let you withdraw up to 1 million LAK but will charge you usually only 20,000 LAK per withdrawal. BFL and ANZ banks can be found across from Joma downtown, near the namphou fountain.

If setting up a bank account is too much of a hassle for your short stay here in Laos, you can consider cash-in-advance services, which can be accessed from your Visa or MasterCard check card. Cash-in-advance services are another way to avoid hefty ATM machine fees.



At JDB, cash-in-advance/cash-on-credit services are available for up to \$700.00. They charge a flat fee of 3% per transaction. Once you have a bank account, it is possible to transfer funds into the account from abroad, and vice versa.

WATCH OUT!

ATM machines only allow 3 withdrawals per day. If you try a 4th time, there is a chance that your home banking institution will be notified and they may hold all transactions. To avoid this inconvenience, notify your bank of your whereabouts well in advance.

Western Union operates in Laos with local banks. The money transfer information is sent through the company's international computer network. The recipient can collect the funds a few minutes after the transaction is complete. Western Union charges a 5% service fee. They have several locations in Vientiane. Similar to Western Union, MoneyGram transfers funds electronically through its network of over 50,000 international agents. However, unlike Western Union, which charges a flat fee, MoneyGram's fee is based on the origination and destination cities, amount of money sent, and the desired speed of transaction. MoneyGram has many locations in the Vientiane Capital Area.

Post Office Boxes & Receiving Packages

Post Office Boxes

It is possible to set up a post office box, but the mailing system here is not 100 % reliable, so use with caution. The charge for a post office box is approximately 150,000 LAK per year and does not include charges for holding boxes. A small box costs around 30,000 LAK at pick up. Prices vary according to box size and how long they are held for.

To set up a post office box, go to the main post office, across from Talat Sao. Make sure to bring your passport with your resident's visa inside and 2 passport pictures. They will issue you a post office box identification card. Post office boxes are located in the building behind to the main post office where DHL operates.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to receive packages when living in Laos. Most wait to pick up their mail orders in the US or try to find the book or goods in other areas of SE Asia, such as in Singapore or Kuala Lumpur. Some people have things shipped to their office, with varying success. Definitely ask you co-workers before you give out the address.

Paying the bills: How to set-up and where to pay your electricity, gas, water, house phone and cable bills

Utility Set-ups: Electricity & gas

When you move into your rental home, the water and electricity will already be set up for you. If you want a house phone, it is acceptable to negotiate this with your landlord. However gas tanks used for cooking, are usually not included. You will need to contact your local gas delivery company yourself. Make sure to ask them when (time and date) they will come to your house, and give them your mobile phone number so they can ring you if they get lost on the way. The cost of a gas tank is around 200,000 LAK and will last around 6 months, depending on your usage.

A reliable gas tank delivery company is:

Khoualoung Gas

Tel: 021 212272, 021 219806, 020 5513282, 020 5516006

Utility bills will vary depending on usage. If you're accustomed to Wisconsin spring temperatures, and plan to run your air-conditioner fulltime, expect to pay around 800,000 LAK per month. If you're on a budget, be careful! Air-conditioning bills during the hot season can really run a hole in your pocket. Ceiling fans are alternatively very cheap to buy (around 800-1,000 Baht) and most stores will install them for you at around 200 Baht. If you want to invest in a ceiling fan to lower your electric bill, there are several places to shop on Dongpalane Road. These shops of course also sell standing fans, which can be moved from room to room and make a nice complement in the hot season.

House Phones

If you have a problem with the electricity, ask your landlord. If you want to hook up a land phone line, contact Lao Telecom:

Lao Telecom

Lane Xang Avenue Tel: 21 216465, 21 213493

Cable TV

Hooking up cable TV is usually the landlord's responsibility. Ask your landlord if your TV isn't already set up. The charge is usually your landlord's call since you will most likely be using their connection, but is generally around \$30.00 per year for basic cable (CNN, BBC, HBO, etc).

Paying the Bills

Each month, you should receive a separate bill for each utility. If you do not, notify your landlord. When you receive your utility bills, you can pay all three (water, electricity and house phone) at the post office. As you enter the main post office across from Talat Sao, turn to your left and you will find a window to pay your bills. Bring your bill and cash with you and the entire process will take less than 15 minutes.

Farangs versus Locals

There's a big difference when it comes to the price of utilities. Make sure before you sign a rental agreement that you ask your landlord if your home is charged a farang rate, or a local rate. If they say local, you're in the clear. If they say farang, make sure you see past bills and find out exactly how much you are charged. Properties that are owned specifically to rent to farangs have to pay an extremely high price for utilities. This price could be up to 4-5 times more than a home with a local utility set-up.

Note: If you plan to bring any appliances for use in Laos, please keep in mind that the electricity is 220V / 50 cycles. Another important note: Look at your laptop adapter. If the acceptable range of voltages includes 22V, you will not need a transformer or an adapter for it to work; simply plug it into the wall.

Thirsty? Drinking water delivery service

As you already know, it is not safe to drink the tap water in Laos. To compensate, there are several companies around Vientiane that will deliver 5 gallon drinking water bottles to your house. There is usually a water bottle deposit of around 20,000 to 35,000 LAK that will be refunded after you return the used bottle. The actual water costs only 5,000 LAK per bottle.

One drinking water delivery service is,

Global Pure Water - 020555 2611

Note that many of the Gas and Water companies don't have English speaking staff. It might be easier to ask your mae ban or your landlord to help you arrange for this.

Mobile phone contracts vs. Pre-paid Plans

Mobile phone contracts are available and are less expensive than topping-up (pre-paid plans), however most people prefer to pay-as-you-go with pre-paid plans. The average local call on a post-paid plan costs around 300 LAK per minute. TIGO "post paid" offers you the convenience of paying your phone bill monthly, while staying in touch with many foreign countries across 5 continents with their roaming service. For more information visit, <http://www.beeline.com/> ETL also has post-paid plans that include value-added services such as Internet connection from your phone <http://www.beeline.com/>.

Internet at home: Surviving with slow and expensive net connections

Laos, unfortunately, is definitely not renowned for its Internet connectivity. Generally speaking, it is expensive, slow and unreliable. With this said, we all need it to survive. There are free wireless locations throughout town, namely the Ecole de Francais Extreme Orient (EFEO) library, Joma Café, Swedish Baking house, Sticky Fingers and FullMoon Café. If you would like round-the-clock connectivity with unlimited download, expect to pay around 100 dollars per month for varying speeds. Companies advertise up to 12 MBps but actual speeds hover around 128 Kbps - 256 Kbps Speeds.

Wireless routers for home internet use are available but the rates are very expensive (around \$100 per month). Most people get by with portable USB-modems/sticks that work quite well, depending on the time of day and location. You'll have to buy a stick first (around 200,000-300,000 Kip) and then either pay per month (unlimited, around 130,000 kip at Beeline), pay per day (4,000 kip at ETL) or pay by data amount transferred (both Beeline and ETL, prices vary). In general, internet speed tends to be highest in the morning, and late at night. Streaming videos, uploading pictures, and sending attachments are generally possible if you time your internet activities right.

Preferred services in town, based on customer service are:

Planet Online

They have a shop on Setthathirath road between Monument books and Joma, open during regular business hours.

You may want to write an email to Planet before you arrive to reserve your router since there has been a waiting list in the past, planet@laopdr.com.

(NOTE _ THIS WAS NOT AN ISSUE IN 2012!)

Lao Telecom

<http://www.laotel.com/>

Beeline

www.beeline.la

Corner of Lane Xang and Saylom

ETL

(www.etllao.com)

Off of Saylom street near Lao Telecom

Getting Around Town: Transportation Options

You will need some sort of personal transportation in Vientiane. Tuk-tuks are expensive and can cost anywhere from 5,000 to 30,000 LAK per ride, depending on the distance travelled and on the tuk-tuk driver's mood. One of the most reliable, honest and English speaking tuk-tuk drivers in town is Mr. Key. You can call him in advance to book your ride. An average ride to the airport will cost approximately 50,000 LAK from just about any location in town. Mr. Key only works during daytime hours. You can reach Mr. Key at +856 20 5540 7824.

Public Transportation in Vientiane

Public transportation in Vientiane is virtually non-existent, although there are buses that travel regularly to various cities in Laos from Vientiane. to the Friendship Bridge, and into Thailand.

Bicycles

There are pluses and minuses to every kind of personal transportation available. Bicycles are available but often inconvenient during the hotter and rainier months of the year. Also, neighborhood dogs find bicycle chasing a favorite sport. The geographical terrain is in your favor: Vientiane is quite flat and easy to bike, if you're up for it. It also provides an opportunity to exercise for free.

For your most basic used bicycle, expect to spend \$60.00 to \$100.00.

There are a few different bike shops that sell used bikes. The one with most options to choose from is located right before the Khouvieng-Dongpalane intersection. Coming from the Dongpalane roundabout, go towards Khouvieng (away from Lane Xang). Right before the end of Dongpalane, and before you cross the canal to Khouvieng, take a left behind the auto dealers. In the back yard, you'll see hundreds of old bikes stacked up. If you go further into the back yard, you'll see the bikes that have been repaired. There's a lot of poor quality and rusty bikes here, but you can also find good-quality brand-name mountain and trekking bikes for anywhere between 120-180\$.

Willy's on Dongpalane Rd., near Wat Ban Fai, is probably the best shop in town for more serious cyclists. Willy is also the go-to guy for more serious bike repairs. His shop sells excellent-quality bikes from Taiwan; however, expect to pay around \$200 and up for a bicycle. It is also a great place to get into the cycling scene in Vientiane and to stock up on biking gear like helmets, back and front lights, locks, etc.

Dai's bike shop (no sign) on Thadeua road, at the intersection with That Khao road (coming from Simeuang, on your left side, 2nd and 3rd store fronts from the corner) has some used bikes that Dai fixes up. Dai speaks good English, is very friendly and provides fair-priced and excellent quality repairs. He's generally open 9-5 from Monday to Friday. He also is involved in the cycling scene and organizes twice-yearly bicycle rides to Luang Prabang over 3 days.

Another two bike shops can be found on Dongpaina street, on the left side coming from the Dongpalane roundabout heading towards Sengdara. The first one only sells new bikes, the second one sells new bikes and does repairs, sells helmets, locks, baskets and lights.

For quick-fixes like refilling your tires with air (about 2,000 kip) or mending a puncture (about 5,000 kip) any roadside motorcycle shop should do.

You will often see people riding bicycle cruisers on the road. These bikes are usually Thai-made with brand names like LA Sport, Crocodile, and Turbo. They are decent for getting around the city, but beware! LA Sport bikes are notorious for falling apart after a month of regular use. These bikes can be purchased at various places, such as the Talat Sao (Morning Market), That Luang market, and local bike shops scattered around the city. A new bike usually cost \$65.00-90.00, but can also be rented at local shops in the tourist area between Fa Ngum and Samsenthai Roads for approximately \$2.00-\$3.00 per day. These shops usually require you to leave your passport, driver's license, or other form of identification with your deposit.

Bike Theft

Bicycle theft is common in Vientiane. When you purchase a bike, make sure you buy a helmet and a good lock to go with it. Keep in mind that, even if your bike is locked behind a fence and is in your yard, it will still get stolen. Either keep it inside, or physically lock it to your house to avoid attempted theft.

Motorbikes

NOTE: Commuting around Vientiane is extremely dangerous. You are likely to see motorbike accidents (and car accidents) daily. If you are a n inexperienced motorbike driver, wait to buy a bike until you have witnessed traffic in Vientiane and feel comfortable proceeding.

If you need to arrive to your daily meetings less sweaty, motorbikes are the next best option. However, please keep in mind traffic conditions can be very dangerous. Motorbiking is only advised for those with previous motorbike driving experience. KoLao, a Korean-Lao joint venture (<http://www.kolao.net/index/index.php>), is an inexpensive and reliable option. You can find used bikes advertised at SiMeuang and Phimphone Supermarkets in town for around \$300.00 and new motorbikes with a 6–12 month warranty at the KoLao shop on Chao Anou starting at \$650.00 (if you want a new motobike you must register your bike under a Lao citizen's name in order to receive a license plate and registration for the bike; for more information, can contact Vimol at the embassy). If you purchase a used bike, make sure you receive all paper work including the bike's registration, proof of ownership and the bike's repair history. If you are not well acquainted with motorbike functions, it is advised to purchase a new one, with a warranty. If you purchase a new bike from KoLao, they will help arrange for your license plate.

Cars

Similar to Internet service, cars in Laos are extremely expensive. Expect to pay double what you would pay in the US for used vehicles since import tax will double the cost of the car. Check SiMeuang and Phimphone Markets for used car advertisements. If you arrive with a family, a car is absolutely necessary to get around and out of town. It is typical to find used (5 to 10 years old) SUVs for around \$7,000 to \$10,000. Gasoline is not cheap either. The average price for gasoline is approximately 10,000 LAK per litre.

If you wish, you can also arrange to rent a car with a driver for the duration of your program through the US Embassy at a cost of approximately \$400 per month. Contact Vimol at the Embassy for more information.

Before you buy any car, new or used, it is strongly advised to take it to mechanic Mike Murphy for inspection. Mike charges \$40.00 per inspection, but he will check it inside and out. Mike advises to avoid buying cars imported from Thailand since their steering wheels have to be switched, or were once switched, from right hand driving to left hand driving. For more information on buying a car in Laos contact Mike Murphy directly at +856 20 5550 3491

NOTE: June is often a good time to shop for a car, since many families wait until the end of the school year before switching locations.

Car/Motorbike Insurance

You will need to purchase 3rd party insurance for your new motorbike or car. Insurance is not expensive, and it will save you a headache when a local motorbike hits you, or in the worse-case scenario, you hit them. Allianz General Laos (AGL, <http://www.agl-allianz.com/>) is the best place to purchase motor vehicle insurance in town and can cost anywhere from \$50.00 to \$200.00 per year.

Visit AGL on Lane Xang road across from Talat Sao. It is in the same building as Australia National Bank (ANZ) and Planet Online, so you can set up your bank account and internet while you are there as well; see later sections for details. AGL's Head Office is located on 2nd and 3rd floor of ANZ Vientiane Commercial Building and is opened from Monday to Friday, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Flat tire? Where to repair your motor vehicle...

In general, motorbike repairs are extremely cheap. Even for new breaks and a starter the bill usually won't run over 250,000 LAK. If you're driving a motorbike, you can do small repairs such as tire repairs and light replacements at any garage in town. You can expect to pay 15,000 – 30,000 LAK for a new tire, and 2,000 LAK to fill it up with air.

For KoLao owners, go to the KoLao repair shop near the Northern Bus Terminal on ASEAN Road. They are 110% reliable and prices are fixed. Make sure to bring your KoLao registration and repair history booklets with you. The KoLao repair garage is open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

For car repairs, Canadian mechanic Mike Murphy is your man. Contact Mike at 020 5550 3491. Mike's garage is located near the Philippine Ambassador's home, not too far from the new Thai Consulate.

Local driver licenses

You can drive a car or a motorbike with an internationally recognized US driver's license; however, it is always better to have local identification that the Police can read and understand. If you would like to get a local driver's license, contact Vimol at the US Embassy for more information.

Finding Domestic Assistance

Mae bans, nannies, gardeners and guards

Mae bans

There is no formal system or company to contact for individual domestic household assistance. It is standard, although by all means not required, to hire a *mae ban* (housekeeper) for at least once a week, or as often as you may desire. At first you may be hesitant to hire a *mae ban*, but Laos is a lot dustier than other places in the world, so hiring some help to clean and do laundry is actually quite sensible. A *mae ban* who cleans a small single family home costs approximately 50,000 to 60,000 LAK per session. Many have a *mae ban* that comes every day, others, just once a week. You are expected to purchase all the cleaning supplies for the *mae ban* and train her as necessary. If she does not clean to your standard on the first try, be patient. It is normal to politely demonstrate how you want certain things cleaned, and then the next time around there's a good chance she will do it exactly as you showed her. You can also ask her to wash your clothes; however, it is not polite for you to ask her to wash female underwear.

If you prefer, you can take your clothes to one of the many cleaners in town for approximately 8,000 to 10,000 LAK per kilo, depending on the additional ironing services you select. Don't become a victim: when you hire a *mae ban*, ask them to provide you a copy of their identification card and information on where they live in Vientiane. This way, if something goes missing from your home and the *mae ban* ceases to show up, you have basic information to share with the police and your landlord.

Gardeners

The same price and philosophies apply to gardeners. Most gardeners will bring all power equipment such as lawn movers and weed whackers with them. Most landlords do not include *mae ban*, guard or gardening services but you may want to see if your landlord could suggest a trusted individual.

To find a *mae ban* or gardener contact Women's International Group or call Wong at + 85620 9999 1305

Women's International Group (WIG)

WIG is a social activities group for expatriates living in Laos. They engage in a wide-range of activities from Cultural Study Groups, to Coffee Mornings, Fieldtrips around town, Happy Hours and annual Bazaars. WIG is a non-profit group channelling its earnings towards Education and Medical projects for least-advantaged Lao women and children. WIG is a great place to meet expatriates living in town, and to find domestic assistance. Members of WIG are able to mass email their other members in search of mae bans, gardeners, drivers and guards. You can become a member by contacting WIG Membership coordinator Meriem Gray at dumeriem@yahoo.com and by paying the annual 150,000 LAK fee. If you cannot get a hold of the Membership Committee, pick up a copy of WIG World, the Group's Newsletter at Phimphone Supermarket.

Guards

Is a guard necessary? Guards are definitely not necessary for day-to-day living in Vientiane. However if you plan on travelling for more than a month, you may not want to leave your house vacant. If a house sitter is not available, then you may want to consider hiring a guard. There are several security companies around Vientiane. To find a guard for your home, contact Women's International Group. It's most important that other people in town recommend the guard you hire. Guards and gardeners can often be the same person and will cost around 800,000 to 1 million LAK per month, depending on how often he works for you (around 1 million for daily assistance).

Rodent control

General Services Lao (GSL) is one of the primary rodent control companies for Vientiane. Rat control for 6 months costs 800,000 LAK and includes a once a month visit as well as "emergency" visits for other pests such as snakes. GSL technicians are predictably 30 minutes late for all of their scheduled visits. GSL: +856 21 31490/21 314 883

Chapter 4

Living in Vientiane on a Budget

If you're feeling overwhelmed by Vientiane's unforeseen high cost of living, don't fret. Localizing your life will help you cut corners and save cash.

Localizing your life to save money

Markets

It's tempting to eat French cuisine every day in Vientiane but if you're on a tight budget and want to immerse yourself into local culture, try to shop for vegetables and fruits at the local markets instead of the supermarket. On Wednesday and Saturday morning there is an **organic farmer's market** at That Luang. At the same location, there is a nightly market with freshwater grilled fish (*bpa bing*) and grilled chicken (*gai bing*) – both local favourites. Phimphone Market (at the corner of Pangkham and Setthathirat) and Simeuang market are a good supermarket where you can find groceries, while Ban Anou Night Market (near the corner of Chao Anou and Sihom) offers great street food for around 8000-15,000 kip. Home Ideal and D-mart also offer groceries, but often more expensive than at local minimarkets or the market. For vegetables, ask your mae ban or landlord where you can find the next local market. They tend to be open every day from early morning until about 7 or 8 pm.

Staying fit on a budget

There is one primary gym in Vientiane called Sengdara Fitness centre. It is, however, quite expensive (35,000 LAK for daily use, and approximately 400,000 LAK per month for off-peak hour unlimited use). If you're interested in how Lao people stay fit, check out Pattuxai Park and That Luang parking lot daily at dusk. Local joggers enjoy making rounds around Pattuxai monument, while others enjoy playing sports in front of the National Assembly at That Luang.

Vientiane Yoga Studio offers yoga classes taught by Marnie, the co-founder of Sticky Finger's Café. The studio is located off of Khou Vieng Rd., near the German Embassy. Classes are 65,000 kip. Check back with the studio when you arrive – they are currently closed for lack of teachers. WIG also started an aerobics class. Check with the WIG World newsletter for more information. There are also aerobic classes held outside on Luang Prabang Road near Fa Ngum monument. There are daily free step aerobics sessions at the Mekong river front at 6 pm, with color coded-dress (each day of the week, a different color) for those who like to look good.

Vientiane also has its own **Hash House Harriers**, a weekly running group. For their schedule, look for their advertisements and information at the Scandinavian Bakery near the Nam Phu fountain.

There is also a biking group that trains in Vientiane. Check with Willy at his bike shop on Dong Palane Rd. for more information. The group also holds an annual bike ride, usually from Luang Prabang to Vientiane.

Chapter 5

Studying and researching in Vientiane

Language Studies: Finding a Lao instructor or class that suits you

It's surprisingly difficult to find good Lao lessons in Vientiane. This is because private instructors are usually relatively expensive and usually booked solid. Some books are available in the local markets, but there do not seem to be commercial tapes available to accompany them. . The best self-learn book is "Lao for beginners" by Benjawan Poomsan Becker. You can find it on amazon.com in the US, or (sometimes only without CDs) at Monument books in Vientiane. There are a handful of schools and private instructors that previous Fulbright students suggest:

Private instructors:

Ms. Pitsamai – she used to teach at Candlelight (see below) and has good materials prepared for basic to intermediate Lao instruction. She'll come to your house or office, or you can suggest a coffee shop to meet at. She charges 80,000 LAK per hour, and tailors lessons to your needs, depending on whether you want to learn to read and write, or not. Comes highly recommended from many people but is often very busy. Telephone: 020 222 06 898.

Mr. Khanthong – is another private instructor who gets good reviews. 020 7760 3653

Mr. Phet – works at the 21st Century College, he'll teach at your house if you like. 020 77 181 039

Ms. Mina – another Lao teacher that can teach you at home. 020 556 093 43.

Dr. Hongkad – a Johnny Cash-lookalike and local architect, Dr. Hongkad uses music to try and teach you to hear the 6 different Lao tones. He has an office across from Vat Inpeng on Setthathirath road. 555 11 707

„Thiam’ is a **private Lao instructor** working out of her home in China Town near Centre Point. Super friendly, super flexible and super affordable. She will create Lao lessons according to how you want to structure them. 50,000 LAK per hour. Contact Thiam at + 856 20 77601464



Master's IT Center offers two levels of basic Lao classes in the morning, afternoon or evening. Classes run for 10 weeks, with 6 hours of instruction per week. The teachers don't necessarily speak good English, but the materials they use are quite good (although not as professional as Candlelight) and the courses are much cheaper, at about 1,200,000 LAK for 60 hours. After two levels, you will be able to understand basic conversations and will be able to navigate life in Laos independently – the market, talking to your mae ban, exchanging pleasantries with your neighbors, finding out where to buy something, and how to get there, etc.

Lao Singapore Business College offers basic Lao lessons in the evening. The course is very inexpensive, but also may not be as intense as researchers may like. However, it is a fun and relaxed class and a great way to meet people in Vientiane. The course generally runs language about 8 weeks and is around \$120.00. Lao Singapore Business College is conveniently located next to the new Thai consulate near Dongpalane Road. Drop in to find out what the college is currently offering.

www.lsbcollege.com/

Tel: +856 021-262-523

Candlelight Language Centre offers a wide range of Lao courses, which are suited to fit your level and learning pace. As it is a full-time language school, it is also more expensive than some of the other choices around town, but former Fulbrighters claim it is the best school in town. They have different classes throughout the year, but generally you can take a class with 3-4 other students for 40,000 kip an hour. Private one-on-one tutoring is offered as well, but much more expensive (100,000 kip per hour.) Candlelight's texts and CDs are also for sale at the school, and are highly recommended for those looking to study the language independently. Candlelight is located not too far from the National Circus: 84/07 Phontong, Ban Phontong St. candlelightlaos.weebly.com
Tel: +856-21 5616 45

Other places which offer Lao classes during the year include the National University of Laos (NUOL, or Dong Dok), Lao-American College, and Centre Culturel et de Cooperation Linguistique (taught in French).

NOTE: Remember that your stipend is small and does not provide for separate language instruction. You will need to be creative in finding inexpensive ways to improve your language skills.

Learning Lao For Free

There is always the possibility of exchanging language lessons, especially with a Lao student. Just teach one hour of English, and then get one hour of Lao for free. It's a great way to get to know Lao students as well. If you don't know any Lao students, the best option would probably be to approach the Faculty of Letters at the National University of Laos (NUOL), where there are tons of students who would love to take up this opportunity. You may even be able to arrange some sort of group session and make it somewhat of a social event.

Planning your research: points to consider

Planning around holidays

Lao schools and universities work on a different holiday schedule than the US. Major holidays when universities are closed include That Luang Festival (late-November every year) and Pi Mai, the Lao New Year (mid-April). During national celebrations, university students often participate in the festivities, resulting in class being cancelled yet again. For example, when the Southeast Asian Games were played in Vientiane in 2009, university classes were paralyzed for approximately one month. In 2010, Vientiane's 450-year celebration in November also impacted university schedules. If you plan on working at the National University, try to contact your research affiliate and confirm the university's holiday schedule before you arrive.

Avoiding sensitive research topics

Laos is a very under researched country in comparison to her Southeast Asian neighbors. Before you arrive, you may want to choose a research topic that includes a very timely issue. Keep in mind that many of these topics are politically sensitive and should be approached in Laos with extra caution. You may also find private sector development interesting. It's not to say that you cannot study topics cutting into the private sector, but approach is everything. Try to be open-minded and approach certain topics with utmost caution for your safety and the success of your research project. If you have questions regarding what is a suitable research topic, contact Pam or Vimol.

General research ethics

Remember, as you research Laos: try to also give back the some of the knowledge you have gained upon completion. Independent researchers in Laos are a relatively new concept, so assist in the nurturing of this development process. Often, in the field, you hear of researchers coming in, extracting the information they need and then never returning to the community again. Try to make your research collection period as reciprocal as possible so your informants can learn from your research as you have learned from them.

Research centres & libraries

There aren't too many research centre options in Vientiane, and there are no US University-size collections. But there are the following options:

Ecole de Francais Extreme Orient (EFEO) is by far the best place in town to read on SE Asia and to use the free Internet. How to get there: Take Nongbone Road to the fork and go right. Directly after the fork in the road you will see a Vat Naxai sign on the right. Continue to the end of the soi and the EFEO will be in front of you. EFEO is open Monday through Friday 8.30 am to 4.30 pm and closed daily for lunch from 1-2pm.

<http://laos.efeo.fr/spip.php?page=accueil&lang=en>

The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** Learning Resource Centre on Lane Xang Avenue also has a very nice reading room focusing on the development of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries and has free Internet connections.

Just across the road from the ADB resource centre is the French Culture Centre. The **French Culture Centre** has a media centre, which is a nice, quiet place with air-conditioning to read. Their collections are all in French.

If you're into **Buddhist Palm Leaf Manuscripts**, the **National Library** is your place. Around back of the National Library is the Palm Leaf Manuscript Project centre where you can find out more about their preservation, digitization and translation efforts. Try to find David and he'll be able to answer all your questions about Palm Leaf Manuscripts in Laos.

The **National Library** is an interesting place to visit, but the collection is primarily limited to fiction, and it is a dusty and a bit dreary place to work.

The US Embassy also has a resource centre with some good reads, but unfortunately, you cannot bring your laptop inside with you. Ask Vimol or Pam about borrowing books from their collection.

Unfortunately, the library at the **National University of Laos** is very limited and can also be congested with University students. If you're interested in Natural Resource Management and Climate Change Initiatives, check out the Natural Resource Management and Climate Change Initiative Resource Centre at the Faculty of Forestry.

News sources available in Vientiane

You will be able to keep up-to-date by cable TV channels available such as BBC, CNN and MNBC News. In Vientiane, you can also find local news sources in English such the *Vientiane Times* and *KPL* newspapers. At Simeuang and Phimphone Supermarkets you can purchase the *Economist* and *Newsweek* for only 14,000 LAK per issue. Magazines are available at Monument Books across from the National Culture Hall, but most magazines aside from the *Economist* and *Newsweek* are very expensive.

Your professional image

Maintaining a good relationship with your host affiliate: The Do's and Don'ts of ministerial etiquettes

DO: Arrive open-minded and without expectations. Remind yourself that Vientiane functions at a different pace than other capital cities such as Washington, DC. Always wear a smile when entering the Ministry. Always carry a letter with you in English and Lao (if possible) explaining who you are and which programme you are affiliated with.

DON'T: Expect too much guidance from your host affiliate. They are there to officially support your research interests, but how you make the most out of your time in Laos is entirely up to you.

DO: Arrange frequent meetings with your host affiliate and share with them your research plans, updates and timelines. The more present you are at your host affiliate, the more they will be able to assist you when you need their help.

DON'T: Be afraid to call your host affiliate on his or her mobile phone to make an appointment, but don't show up at their office without an appointment and expect for them to see you immediately.

DO: Dress appropriately in a Ministry setting at all times. Women should wear a "sin" or a traditional skirt that goes below the knee and a shirt covering the shoulders, while men should wear a shirt and decent trousers. No shorts, tank tops or short shirts.

Dressing properly: where to buy 'sins'

As mentioned above, it is most important that you look professional when entering the Ministry. In Lao society, how you appear is taken very seriously. Women should expect to purchase at least 1 *sin* while they are here. If you want to pack light, you can leave your shorts at home and replace them with traditional „*sin*’ skirts while living here. They are acceptable to wear everywhere you go in Laos.

You can purchase „*sins*’ at Talat Sao and just about every other market in Vientiane. They come in a wide range of materials, but the most classic ones are either silk or cotton. You can expect to pay anywhere from 70,000 LAK for a basic everyday work „*sin*’ to over \$100.00 for silk **sins** worn at weddings.

After you buy your *sin*, you will need to get it sewn together into a skirt. A very good place to get your sin fitted is at the „Dress Makers (that's the name of the shop) across from Vat Inpeng on Setthathirat Road in town, or the True Colour tailor a little further down on Setthathirath road, across from Vat Mixay. Alternatively, you can find seamstresses in the markets near where you purchased the *sins*.

Broken Record Success: Calling and calling again to reconfirm appointments

In Laos, you won't be considered a nuisance if you call to reconfirm, and then call once more on the day of your appointment to reconfirm. In fact, it's a really good idea and most people will appreciate the friendly reminder. Polite and calm repetitiveness is an effective communication strategy in almost every professional setting in Laos.

The *bor bpen yang* phenomenon: Taking your daily dose of ‘chill pill’

There's a good chance that things just won't pan out the way you imagined. There's also a chance that many appointments you've been waiting for which are necessary for your research will be cancelled more than once. There's no way to prevent events from being cancelled, but the most important thing to remember is to take it easy and keep calm. Never ever lose your cool in front of your host affiliates, or in front of local people in general. In Laos, those whom are able to maintain their collective cool are respected individuals. When you're frustrated because the University has decided to close for 3 weeks during your research stay, or when your host affiliate has lost all your research data, repeat *bor bpen yang* as your mantra.

***Help needed?* Finding a research assistant**

If you're Lao language skills are limited, it may be worth your while to find a research assistant. The easiest and most effective way of finding the right person to assist you with your research efforts is by placing an advertisement in the *Vientiane Times* for \$15.00 per week. The advertisement will go into the daily paper with your phone number and a request with the basic description of the person you're looking for. You will be surprised how many people will be interested in the part-time work opportunity. In the past, Fulbrighters have employed research assistants for 3,000 Thai Baht a month for 2 days of work per week (usually Saturday and Sunday, since this will most likely be the assistant's 2nd job). You can also ask around at the University or post advertisements around your faculty of choice. For more information and advice on hiring a research assistant, you can contact former Fulbrighter Tiff Hacker at Tiffhacker@gmail.com.

What kinds of work facilities will my research affiliate provided me with?

Grantees should work with their host institution to determine what kind of facilities can be made available. However, please be aware that local facilities are generally very modest and will most likely not have Internet/e-mail access, or a space for you to conduct work. Telephone and fax access may be limited. When you arrive in Vientiane, expect to work from your home and to communicate regularly with your host institution.

Chapter 5

Moving to Vientiane with a Family

By this time, your partner and children have already received their visas. Just as you did, they will need to send the required information (see Chapter 1) to the US Embassy 8 weeks prior to departure.

Kindergartens and School options

There are a number of international schools in Vientiane, including Vientiane International School (VIS) located in Ban Sokpaluang. <http://www.vis.laopdr.com/>. There are also a number of preschools and day care facilities. For further information on schools, please contact Pam or Khammanh at the US Embassy with your specific questions.

Tutors and After School Activities

If you need an after school tutor, or if you are interested in after school activities, check out the bulletin boards at Vientiane International School. You can also place an ad on the bulletin board for a tutor and you will definitely hear from a several people able to help you with your needs.

Around Vientiane, there are several after school activities going on such as music lessons (traditional Lao to piano and guitar), swimming lessons, karate (at Sengdara fitness centre), golf lessons, etc. Contact Women's International Group (WIG) for more information on tutors and after school activities for your kids.

Playgroups

There are 2 primary playgroups in Vientiane which many parents and kids engage. The concept is that the playgroup rotates houses every week, so you will only be responsible for the group's welfare every so often.

PLAYGROUP 1

Contact Coordinator: Mrs Niculina Matter-Huder +856 20 7751 0741, email: nhuder@gmx.ch This playgroup meets weekly on Tuesday's in a rotating manner. Children's ages range from newborns to about 5 years old (and a little older during school holiday times). Format is toy playing and coffee/tea/cakes/fruit for everyone provided by host for that morning.

This playgroup starts 9:30 am and finishes at 11:30 am.

PLAYGROUP 2 Contact Coordinator: Ms Noelle O'Brien email: noelle2020@googlemail.com

This playgroup is located in Ban Saphanthong Tai and takes place on Saturday mornings, 9:30-11:30. This group includes slightly older children. Activities usually include general play and snack breaks.

Finding a 'noo noo'

In Lao, a "noo noo" (literally, little mouse) usually refers to a nanny. It may seem challenging to find a Nanny that speaks English and one that you trust leaving your children alone with. The good news is that there are heaps of available and qualified "noo noos" in Vientiane for you to hire. The best way to find a trusted individual to look after your children is to ask other trusted people. This may include WIG's network or Vimol when you first arrive.

Volunteering when you cannot work: your partner in Vientiane

If your partner is accompanying you to Vientiane, there are many volunteer opportunities available to keep them engaged with local Lao society. If you are not sure what your volunteer interests are, you can contact Women's International Group's Career Matter's interest group at wiglaosmembership@gmail.com or Tiffhacker@gmail.com to brainstorm.

Chapter 6

Emergency & Medical Services

Emergency services provided by US Embassy

If you are faced with an Emergency, call the US Embassy immediately. They will arrange for your emergency services to the best of their ability. This may include ambulances, arranging for 24-hour bridge crossing to Thailand or airlifts.

As an official Public Diplomacy Section visitor, you are always welcome to call the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) (5551 1740) and/or Vimol (555 10356) at any time in case of an emergency. Also, the US Embassy has a duty officer (5550 2016) available to take calls 24/7.

It's a good idea to save these phone numbers in your mobile phone as you never know when an emergency may occur.

Ambulances & air lifts/ 24-hour bridge crossing

In the event that you cannot contact the US Embassy, keep Aek Udon's 24 hour international services number in your mobile phone. They can also arrange helicopter airlifts and ambulance services. Aek Udon's International Emergency services: Tel: (+66 42) 342555

NOTE: Check with your program officials and with your health care coverage provider on medevac coverage.

Medical care available in Vientiane

French Clinic

All foreigners have access to the French Clinic for medical advice and basic diagnostics. The clinic is staffed by European-trained doctors, and can also provide dental care, psychological and physical therapy.

Location:

Kouvieng Rd., Ban Simeuang

Tel: 021 214150, 020 5584617

cmafiao@gmail.com

Got Traveller's Diarrhoea?

Don't worry, you're not the only one. A very good and natural solution is to pass by your neighbourhood pharmacy and pick up charcoal tablets. The tablets absorb just about everything in your digestive system and will work wonders.

If your stomach problems persist for more than 5 days, always make sure to see a physician for advice.

However, general healthcare (outside of the international clinics) in Laos is generally very poor, so in the event of a serious illness or accident the Embassy will help you arrange transportation to Thailand.

Avoiding traffic accidents

In general, commuting around Vientiane is extremely dangerous. As a pedestrian, biker, car driver or motorcyclist, take extreme caution on the roads. Most people driving do not have licenses, and have very limited training. The rule of thumb is, drive defensively all the time and do not assume anything. You will experience circumstances where people in the left lane decide without warning to turn right, that people will stop without warning and back up in the middle of the road, that sidewalks during rush hour are considered motorbike lanes, and that many people believe drunk driving is a "matter of luck."

Always, always wear a helmet for your personal safety and to avoid getting a hefty fine from the police. Always, always drive slowly, with caution. In the event of an accident where there are no injuries, leave the motor vehicle in the road and wait for the police to arrive. In the event of an accident with injuries, contact the Public Affairs Office (PAO) at the US Embassy immediately.

NOTE: It's a good idea to keep the US Embassy Public Affairs Office (PAO) contacts (including Vimol's mobile number) in your mobile phone as an emergency contact.

If you experience an injury, the US Embassy will help you coordinate medical services to Thailand. Depending on the level of the injury, you may be taken via ambulance to Udon Thani. For more serious accidents, victims are flown to Bangkok. Contact Vimol or the PAO for more information.

If you would like to see a doctor in Thailand, and it is not emergency related, you can consider one of three primary health centres in either Udon Thani or Bangkok. Make sure you contact your insurance company for coverage details before you make your appointment.

Suggested hospital in UdonThani

Aek Udon

There is one primary international hospital in Udon Thani called, **Aek Udon**. The hospital offers 24-hour ambulance service to the Friendship Bridge and to partner hospitals in the Vientiane area. Aek Udon is known amongst Vientiane expatriates as having good emergency, ob/gyn and dental services. For diagnostics, most choose to go to a larger hospital in Bangkok.

If you need to stay overnight at Aek Udon, they have a guesthouse with clean rooms with aircon starting at 500 Baht. Contact Aek Udon's international services to arrange for an ambulance or to book an appointment.

NOTE: Don't be turned off by Aek Udon's website.

A note on Dengue Fever

It is important to note that unlike Malaria, Dengue Fever is a serious threat in Vientiane. In fact, during your time in Vientiane, you will meet many people that have contracted the fever. It's easy to avoid contracting Dengue Fever: spray yourself daily with mosquito repellent, especially during the morning hours if you go outside. If you have a fever for more than 3 days, make sure you see a physician. Also, never take aspirin when you have a fever, instead take paracetamol-based fever reducers. Aspirin can make a person with Hemorrhagic Dengue fever bleed internally.

555/5 Posri Rd. Amphur Muang, Udonthani Province 41000

Tel: (+66 42) 342555

Fax: (+66 42) 341033

Email: computer_aekudon@aekudon.com

Suggested hospitals in Bangkok

There are numerous hospitals in Bangkok, which have superior medical services. However, most expatriates choose to either go to **Bumrungrad International** or **Samitivej International** private hospitals. Both hospitals have an outstanding track record. Again, contact your insurance provider to assure your coverage before making an appointment.

NOTE: If your insurance provider does cover these hospitals, be aware you will most likely have to pay for the entire bill up-front and reimburse the payment with your insurance company.

Bumrungrad International Hospital

33 Sukhumvit 3 (Soi Nana Nua), Wattana, Bangkok, 10110 Thailand

Tel: +662 667 1000

Fax: +662 667 2525

Emergency: + (66)2 667 2999

Out-patient Appointment: + (66)2 667 1555

Dental Appointment: + (66)2 667 2300

www.bumrungrad.com/

Samitivej International Hospital

133 Sukhumvit 49, Klongtan Nua, Vadhana, Bangkok 10110 Call Centre: 027118181 133 Sukhumvit 49, Klongtan Nua, Vadhana, Bangkok

10110 Tel: +(66) 2711-8000 Fax: +(66) 2391-1290 International Calls: +(66) 2 11 8181

info@samitivej.co.th

<http://www.samitivejhospitals.com/>

Dental Care

Dental care is available at the French Clinic in Vientiane, but if you're in Bangkok in the Samitivej area (Thonglor, Soi 49), the Bangkok Dental Hospital is a very good place to seek dental care:

Bangkok Dental Hospital

THONGLOR DENTAL BUILDING 61/6 Sukhumvit 55 Rd., Klontong-Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110. Tel. + (66) 2382 0044 Fax : + (66) 2382 0035
<http://www.bangkokdentalhospital.com/>

General notes on security in Vientiane

While Laos generally has a low rate of violent crime, it is not immune from crime. While in Laos, Americans should remain aware of their surroundings and exercise appropriate security precautions. With the introduction of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs, thefts and assaults in Vientiane have increased and some have turned violent. Bag snatching is increasingly frequent and sexual assaults have also occurred. Residential burglary is commonplace. Expatriates attempting to report burglaries in progress to the police often find that police telephones are not answered or they are informed that the police are not authorized to respond to criminal activity at night or that they have no transportation. U.S. citizens who move to Vientiane are encouraged to contact the U.S. Embassy for security advice.

Robberies – how to prevent and in the case of, how to deal

There is a good chance you will get robbed once (in one way or another), while living in Laos. Of course it is best to protect your belongings to the best of your ability, which includes doubling-up on locks, investing in dead bolts (even if your landlord won't reimburse you for the investment), making sure windows are securely closed and that you leave some lights on at night. Also, put valuables in less obvious hiding spots around your house when you leave. This includes putting your laptop in a safe location when you leave the house during the day for a short period of time.

NOTE: In the US, it is common to have your computer out, while listening to your iPod and checking your messages on your iPhone. You can do all of these things in Vientiane, but electronics are harder to come by, and therefore carry a more valuable worth than back home. Be cautious when and where you are using your hip and high-tech devices.

If your house gets robbed,

- 1.) Notify the Public Affairs Office at the US Embassy as soon as possible.
- 2.) Then, notify your Nai Ban and your landlord. Your Nai Ban will ask you if you want to register the case with the police.
- 3.) Even if there is minimal damage, it is a good idea to register the case with the police, if for no other reason than for the police to keep a proper record of all robberies.

Getting robbed once doesn't mean you will, or will not, get robbed in the future. The best thing to do is to secure your house to the best of your ability and leave the lights on when you're not home. Also, try not to entice thieves by leaving bicycles, motorbikes and/or electronics in a visible area. Make sure you do not leave any cash in your house.

Guard services & getting a dog

As mentioned earlier, there are guard services provided by local security companies in Vientiane. If you prefer, you can also get a dog, which can deter thieves. Be cautioned that veterinary service is limited in Vientiane and can be an extra expense, if you're already trying to juggle your budget. Also, if you find your dog has been poisoned in your yard, take extra caution: this is a common sign that your house is about to get robbed.

Chapter 7

Homesickness and Culture Shock

Social support groups for expatriates

It's most likely that during your stay you will experience a degree of homesickness or culture shock. As we know, there's no way to deal with feelings of homesickness other than being able to actually visit back home. If you are feeling especially down because of homesickness, there are a few options to try to heal the feelings. The first option is to try to get in touch with social support groups such as WIG that focus on the welfare of expatriates, especially women. If you believe you are becoming depressed, it may be a good idea to visit the mental health clinic at the French Clinic. . The y can set up a meeting via skype with psychologists in France that speak English. There no longer is a psychologist resident at the French Clinic.

Work place culture shock: It's been 2 months and my research project hasn't made any progress...

If your project hits a brick wall, and ceases to progress, try to assess the problem as soon as possible. Is the problem one of your own? Should you be making more regular contacts with your research affiliates? Once you have identified what the problem is, you can seek advice from the Public Affairs Office on how to deal with the circumstance. When research stagnates, it often deals with communication problems between the researcher and the research affiliate. Whereas you should try to be as patient as possible, you also need to be on top of your research and be prepared to constantly remind people to assist you with whatever it is you may need, to assure the success of your research.

Research Support Focal Points

Former Fulbrighters and research fellows to Lao PDR have developed informal *Research Support Focal Points* to assist future researchers in their area of study. If you have a specific question related to the following areas of research, do not hesitate to drop a former Fulbrighter or research fellow an email. This informal Focal Point system acts as a support group in times of need when you're stuck with your research here in Lao PDR. If you would like to become a *Research Support Focal Point*, please contact Tiff Hacker at Tiffhacker@gmail.com.

Focal Points (In alphabetical order, according to subject):

Cultural Heritage, Religion and Civil Society

Tiffany Hacker

Tiffhacker@gmail.com

+856 20 56120695

Education, Service Learning, Youth Leadership

Marcia Harr Bailey

marcia.harr.bailey@gmail.com

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)

Vanessa Hongsath

hongsath@gmail.com

Land concessions, Land tenure and Rural Livelihoods

Miles Kenney-Lazar

miles.kenney@gmail.com

Teaching English as a Second Language

Joe Herrin

joecurtisherrin@yahoo.com

Traditional Medicine and Palm Leaf Manuscripts

Bethany Elkington

bethany.elkington@gmail.com

Chapter 8

Getting out of Vientiane

Now that you're here and settled in, you're probably already conspiring your first escape route to a more rural & quiet location in Laos, or to Bangkok for an urban shopping fix. Either way, check in with the Public Affairs Office when you travel outside of Vientiane. A casual email to Vimol or Pam will do. It's also a good idea to let your landlord know when you will be away so they can keep an eye out for your house.

You have mostly likely already experienced that flying directly in and out of Wattay International Airport in Vientiane is relatively expensive. This is due to the fact that Lao Airlines and Thai Airways are the only two carriers flying to Bangkok. In fact, the only budget carrier flying out of Vientiane is AirAsia to Kuala Lumpur, 3 times weekly.

Flying safe: UN approved domestic flights vs. new private carriers

Travel blogs online question the safety of Lao Airlines, the national flag carrier of Laos, formerly known as Lao Aviation. Lao Airlines is however on the United Nation's fly safe list of approved air carriers. There are other private air carriers in Laos such as Lao Capricorn Air (<http://www.laocapricornair.net/>) and the upcoming multi-sector conglomerate, Phongsavanh Airlines (<http://www.alternativeairlines.com>). When travelling on domestic routes, you may want to prioritize taking a UN approved air carrier.



Travel.State.Gov, A Service of the Bureau of Consular Affairs noted,

AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT: "As there is no direct commercial air service to the United States by carriers registered in Laos, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not assessed the Lao Civil Aviation Authority for compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Laos's air carrier operations." For more information on travel safety in Lao PDR visit <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

Lao Airlines

Flying directly from Vientiane to Bangkok may not be the most economical option, but it is by far the most convenient option when you're trying to catch a connecting flight to the rest of the region. Lao Airlines flies daily to Bangkok, and co-chairs the last flight with Thai Airways. It costs approximately \$120.00 to fly direct from Vientiane to Bangkok. You can either book online at www.laoairlines.com, or visit their office located at Namphou (the fountain) in town.

Tickets & Reservation

Lao Airlines is located on the road in front of Namphou (the fountain in town), off of Setthathirat Road (the main road in town)

Tel: (856-21) 212051-54

Email: reservation@laoairlines.com
ticketing@laoairlines.com

The following timetable reflects daily flights from Vientiane to Bangkok, as of June 2012 (www.laoairlines.com):

Flight	Departure: Vientiane	Arrival: Bangkok
QV441	0730	0835
QV441	0730	0835
QV4571	1350	1455
QV415	1640	1750

Booking Lao Airlines Online?

If you're in town, simply don't. Lao Airlines charges a hefty fee for booking online. The fee can be from \$20.00 to \$40.00 more than booking directly with the reservation centre on the road across from Namphou in town.

Flying Budget: Udon Thani International Airport

Udon Thani International Airport is a 1.5 hour bus journey from Vientiane. From Udon Thani International Airport, you can catch budget flights to Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket, to name a few popular destinations. Take note that NokAir flights fly to Don Meuang Domestic Airport while AirAsia and Thai Airways fly to Suvarnabhumi International Airport. Flights to Bangkok depart several times daily on AirAsia, NokAir and Thai Airways:

Thai Airways Schedule

(www.thaiairways.com)

Flight	Departure: Udon Thani	Arrival: Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi)
TG003	1130	1230
TG011	1515	1615
TG015	2000	2110

NokAir

Flight	Departure: Udon Thani	Arrival: Bangkok (Don Mueang)
DD9201	0735	0835
DD9211	1355	1455
DD9217	1835	1935

(www.nokair.com)

Air Asia Schedule (www.airasia.com)

Flight	Departure: Udon Thani	Arrival: Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi)
FD3361	0855	1000
FD3365	1740	1840

International buses from Vientiane to Udon Thani and Nong Khai

An easy and cheap way to get to Udon Thani and Nong Khai bus terminals is to hop on the International Bus at the Talat Sao bus terminal in Vientiane. The busses will take you across the border, and directly to the bus terminals in Thailand, without having to transfer. You have to purchase your ticket on the same day. You also need to show your passport at the ticket counter when buying your ticket, so make sure you remember to bring it with you.

Timetables: Vientiane – Nong Khai International Bus (Fare: 55 Baht) Vientiane – Udon Thani International Bus (Fare: 80 Baht)

Departure: Vientiane	Coach
0730	1
0930	2
1240	3
1430	4
1530	5
1800	6

Departure: Vientiane	Coac h
0800	1
1030	2
1130	3
1400	4
1600	5
1800	6