

# Cambodia & Laos

## PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Cambodia is bordered by Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. It has been largely influenced by the Indian subcontinent and is growing as a travel destination primarily due to the fascinating site of Angkor Wat. The government is still somewhat tenuous, but travelers can now freely visit most of the country, though accommodations in some areas are very primitive. The majority of Cambodians (nearly 90%) are of Khmer descent and a great proportion speak the Khmer language, the official language of Cambodia. Other languages spoken include French, Chinese, and Vietnamese, with English becoming more popular.

Laos is bordered by Thailand, Burma, China, Vietnam, and Cambodia and has probably one of the least disturbed ecosystems in Asia. Private enterprise has increased since the mid 1980's, but development has been hampered by poor communications in the heavily forested and mountainous landscape. Most of the population practices subsistence agriculture. The country's ethnic make up is extremely diverse, with only around 60% belonging to the largest ethnic group, the Lao. The Lao language is a member of the Tai language group also known as Tai-Kadai or Kadai.

# GETTING READY FOR YOUR TRIP

## Passports

- ❖ Passports are required of U.S. Citizens to enter
- ❖ Must be valid for at least 6 months after your trip – if not, apply or renew immediately
- ❖ Keep a copy of the picture page of your passport in a separate place while traveling
- ❖ Carry an extra passport photo in case you need to apply for a quick replacement

## Cambodia Visas

- ❖ A 1-month CAMBODIA visa should be obtained before departure.
- ❖ Instructions for filing an online visa can be found at [www.embassyofcambodia.org](http://www.embassyofcambodia.org) or we recommend using a visa service such as G3 Visas and Passports for applications sent by mail
- ❖ If you do not have enough time to apply, it is possible to get a Cambodian visa on arrival, but the lines can be long and time consuming. The fee is \$25 U.S. and you will need two passport photos.
- ❖ You will also need to bring an extra passport-sized photo for your admission pass at Angkor Wat

## Laos Visas

- ❖ The government of LAOS issues 15-day tourist visas on arrival at all official international border crossings and airports in Vientiane and Luang Prabang
- ❖ For Lao visas, you must present approximately \$35 U.S. cash (or Thai baht) in crisp new bills; two passport size photos; name of hotel in Vientiane; name of a contact in Laos; and valid return air ticket
- ❖ If you will be in Laos for more than 15 days, then you will need to apply for your visa prior to arrival
- ❖ No visas are required for Thailand for stays of 30 days or less
- ❖ Nationalities of other countries please inquire regarding visas

## Health, Immunizations

- ❖ Some immunizations are highly recommended, but none are required for entry
- ❖ Recommended immunizations include: polio, tetanus, typhoid, MMR, hepatitis A & B
- ❖ A vaccination certificate for yellow fever is required for entry, only if arriving from infected countries (Yellow fever is not endemic to southeast Asia, so you may travel without a certificate among these)
- ❖ SEEK INDEPENDENT MEDICAL ADVICE from your physician or local travelers health service
- ❖ For the latest recommendations for immunizations or malaria prevention contact the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia: 800-311-3435, or visit their website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>
- ❖ Many universities have immunization clinics that can assist you

## Time Difference

- ❖ In both Laos and Cambodia the time zone is seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +7)
- ❖ They are 15 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, and 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time
- ❖ If it is 9 PM in Siem Reap, it is 9 AM in New York and 6 AM in Los Angeles, on the same day

## Electricity

- ❖ 230 V, 50 Hz
- ❖ Most common plugs, pictured here, are the Flat blade attachment plug that is used in the U.S. or a variation of the Round pin attachment plug, though you may also find other types in your hotels
- ❖ Most standard adapter/converter kits available in the U.S. will have the necessary plug configuration to fit the standard Laos and Cambodian electric outlet



# ARRIVAL

## Entry

- ❖ You will be met upon arrival by your tour leader or representative and transferred to your hotel
- ❖ Contact information is sent with your Last Minute Reminders from JOURNEYS

## Customs

- ❖ Before arrival in Laos and Cambodia, you will receive a Passenger Declaration Form, which must be completed and submitted to Customs officials
- ❖ New customs declaration forms must be filled out when you are departing, listing any items you obtained while traveling
- ❖ Fire arms, pornography and narcotics are strictly prohibited

# GETTING ALONG AS A VISITOR

## Food & Restaurants

- ❖ Most restaurants are clean and trustworthy
- ❖ A wide variety of food offered in Laos and Cambodia can accommodate vegetarians
- ❖ Eat only foods that are thoroughly cooked, and raw fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself
- ❖ Drink only bottled drinks, and avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes
- ❖ Don't buy food from street vendors or stalls
- ❖ Avoid fresh salads unless the vegetables are washed with purified water, and avoid dairy products that are unpasteurized or may not have been refrigerated properly

## Accommodations

- ❖ Depending on areas of travel, are usually centrally located, 4 star hotels with Western style toilet facilities

## Money and Currency Exchange

- ❖ The Cambodian currency is the Riel (KHR)
- ❖ Currency in Laos is the Kip (LAK)
- ❖ Thailand Baht and U.S. Dollars are also accepted as currency in both Laos and Cambodia
- ❖ Local currency or Thai Baht are preferred in smaller towns and villages
- ❖ Currency can be obtained freely from hotels, banks or local money changers
- ❖ Check the current exchange rates at <http://www.xe.net/ucc/>
- ❖ Cash is the most preferred form of money exchange
- ❖ Bring newer dated currency for exchange, that has no rips, marks, folds, or holes
- ❖ Traveler's checks can be changed at only a limited number of banks
- ❖ Credit cards are not widely accepted and there are no ATM machines in Laos or Cambodia
- ❖ Where accepted, be aware that you may need to show your passport when using a credit card. Also, credit card companies are now charging a 3%+ surcharge on all foreign currency purchases (purchases of goods made outside of the US). Check with your credit card company before you travel as the charges change frequently without notice and vary with card and destination.
- ❖ We suggest bringing \$40-50 per day for items not included in cost of trip. However, if you enjoy shopping, we suggest bringing more
- ❖ Cambodia's domestic airport taxes are approximately \$10, and international departure tax is \$25
- ❖ International departure tax from Laos is approximately \$10

## Tipping

- ❖ A tip is always appreciated
- ❖ Anytime you especially appreciate someone particularly informative or helpful, an extra tip is always gratefully accepted



- ❖ In urban settings where tipping is most common, you can sometimes expect 10% to be added to your restaurant or hotel bill, but this may not necessarily be paid to the service people. An additional 5% tip may be appropriate for excellent service
- ❖ \$1-2 tips are appropriate in baggage handling situations
- ❖ Tipping \$5 per person, per service, to people such as a boat captain or a helpful bellman is appropriate
- ❖ We suggest tipping your guide \$5-10 per person/per day and driver \$3-6 per person/per day (depending on the size of your group)

## Emergency Services

- ❖ Emergency services and care for major medical illnesses may be limited
- ❖ Prevention of injury is always the best policy
- ❖ Your guide will advise you in the case of urgent medical need during your tour

## SPECIAL REMARKS

### People

- ❖ You will find the people very friendly and welcoming
- ❖ It is best to ask permission before taking portrait photos. If in doubt, ask your guide

### Time

- ❖ Relax and enjoy the easy-going rhythm of the country you are visiting
- ❖ Do not expect everything to happen on time; remember that in some places time is not as important as it is back home, and there is often little concern for punctuality
- ❖ Despite best efforts, departures and arrivals could be a little before or after the time given. This applies particularly to aircraft movements. Operating requirements, weather and terrain sometimes present problems, and on these occasions, to ensure your safety, flight times may vary

### Restroom Facilities

- ❖ It is a very good idea to carry your own small supply of toilet paper. In cities where there are flush toilets you will usually find a wastebasket next to the toilet - most sewage systems can't handle paper. Most bathrooms will neither look nor smell as sanitary as those you are used to.

### Safety

- ❖ Observe the same precautions taken at home
- ❖ Do not flaunt a bulging wallet, always lock unattended vehicles, do not leave baggage unattended in public
- ❖ Make use of security facilities provided for valuables in your accommodation
- ❖ In towns, the best place to carry your passport and money is in a pouch worn around the neck inside of the shirt or in a money belt around the waist
- ❖ It is highly recommended that you buy travel insurance that covers your baggage before you leave
- ❖ Don't take anything you can't afford to lose or can't replace

### Shopping

- ❖ Popular souvenirs include: Silk & textiles, Woodcarvings, Antiques or replicas (it is illegal to take antiques out of Laos), Paintings, and Jewelry
- ❖ Bartering is the norm at street markets. Ask your guide for tips on local bartering. Don't push too hard - remember that what is only a few dollars to you may mean a great deal to the average seller or artisan. Never barter unless you intend to buy.

### Equipment & Packing

- ❖ A good goal is to fit everything into a single piece of checked luggage and a carry-on daypack
- ❖ We recommend a durable, water-resistant, soft duffel bag (for treks) or lightweight soft-sided suitcase as



your checked luggage. Hard suitcases are not practical due to space limitations.

- ❖ A small backpack or hip-pack is ideal for carrying bottled water, camera, extra sunblock, etc, while on excursions where the terrain requires your hands to be free
- ❖ Choose a distinctive, easily identified bag, and use a JOURNEYS luggage tag for bag identification by staff, and your name and address should be also indelibly affixed inside the luggage
- ❖ Lightweight & light colored clothes will help keep you cooler. Also keep in mind that synthetic fabrics dry faster than natural fibers like cotton, especially in humid areas, so you can pack less if you are able to wash and dry your clothes easily.
- ❖ Casual clothing is appropriate at all times
- ❖ Some hotels may have laundry services, but you will probably need to wash out some clothes en route
- ❖ Be aware that weight limits on checked luggage are 44 lbs total on most Asian flights
- ❖ You may want to bring an extra smaller, collapsible (lockable) duffel, to leave items in a city hotel while you are on an excursion or to use on your return for souvenirs

## CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS CHECKLIST

### Pre-Departure Tasks

- Obtain or renew passport
- Buy travelers checks in low denominations
- Evaluate and obtain trip cancellation, baggage and medical insurance
- Consult with physician for immunizations and prescription medicine recommendations
- Break-in primary footwear
- Make final payment to JOURNEYS at least 60 days before trip departure

### Clothing

- Lightweight hiking boots or comfortable athletic or walking shoes
- Extra shoes or sandals
- Shorts (NOTE: Shorts, tank tops and shoes are not permitted in religious centers)
- Comfortable, lightweight pants
- Nicer pants or skirt (optional)
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt
- T-shirts, short sleeve shirts
- Sweater or sweatshirt
- Light jacket and/or windbreaker
- Rain gear - poncho or jacket and pants
- Sun hat or cap with wide brim
- Bandana
- Swim suit
- Socks
- Sleepwear
- Under clothes

### Personal Items

- Sunblock (waterproof, high SPF)
- Lipbalm with SPF
- Insect repellent with DEET content
- 2 spare passport photos (in case of lost passport)
- Wrist watch and/or travel clock
- Sunglasses (with strap, case)
- Extra eyeglasses/contacts
- Money belt or pouch for valuables



- Small flashlight with extra batteries
- Copies of all important documents
- Day pack (can also serve as an airline carry-on bag)
- Camera, memory cards, film, batteries, charger
- Underwater camera (disposable kind is very handy)
- Lead bag/containers to protect film in X-ray machines
- Lightweight binoculars
- Plug adapter (if needed)
- Soft duffel with shoulder strap or durable suitcase
- Luggage tags
- Ziploc-type bags for packing shampoo or other liquids
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags for organizing inside luggage (also useful for dirty laundry)
- Thread, needles, safety pins for minor repairs
- Small packable umbrella

### Personal First Aid Kit

- Aspirin or other pain killer
- Cold relief tablets, antihistamine, cough drops
- Band-aids, gauze pads
- Antibiotics
- Prescription medicines
- Aloe gel or lotion in case of sunburn
- Anti-diarrhea medicine
- Antibiotic cream/ointment
- Supply of feminine hygiene items
- Motion sickness tablets
- Earplugs

### Essential Items For Your Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Domestic and international air tickets
- Travelers checks, money and credit cards
- Insurance certificates
- Address and telephone number of emergency contact
- Prescription medicines
- Extra set of underclothes
- Toiletries in small leak-proof bottles
- Camera gear, film and other valuables

### Optional Items

- Binoculars
- Address book, writing paper, or journal, pen/pencil
- Small washcloth
- Wet wipes/moist towelettes and Kleenex
- Favorite snack foods (pre-packaged)
- Pictures of your house and family
- Mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit (if applicable)
- Map
- Silica bags for moisture (protect camera equipment)
- Video camera
- Phrase book

