



Laos



Country Overview:

Location: Southeastern Asia, northeast of Thailand, west of Vietnam

Size: 236,800 km

Population: 6,695,166 (July 2013 est.)

Capital: Vientiane (Viengchan)

Exports-commodities: wood products, coffee, electricity, tin, copper, gold

Imports-commodities: machinery and equipment, vehicles, fuel, consumer goods

Currency: kips (LAK)

Ethnic groups: Lao 55%, Khmou 11%, Hmong 8%, other 26%

Religion: Buddhist 67%, Christian 1.5%, other and unspecified 31.5% (2005 census)

Government type: Communist state

Chief of State: President Lt. Gen. CHOUMMALI Saignason (since June 2006)

Head of Government: Prime Minister THONGSING Thammavong (since Dec. 2010)

Language: Lao (official), French, English



Laos People's Democratic Republic, Pathet Lao (unofficial)

Meetings and Negotiations

-Lao culture operates on comparatively **relaxed** views of time. Remain patient and sensitive to timely and thorough discussion.

-Lao people should be addressed by their first names, **preceded** by the title, "Mr." or "Madame." If occupying a position of respect use "Than" (pronounced "tan").

-Although a handshake **can** be used, accompanying the Sabaideebor is often the "nop" or "wai". This is preformed with two hands clasped together in a prayer in front of your body and a slight bow or nod (the **higher** the hands are held the **greater** degree of respect; for social equals, place hands in front of mouth).

-Always distribute and receive business cards with **both** hands as a sign of respect. Additionally, it is courteous to **inspect** cards upon being received.

-If a business negotiation contains

multiple members, maintain awareness of the group's **social hierarchy**. Undermining this can be a source of conflict.

-Lao people view negotiations as important social occasions to a business relationship. Initially **concentrate** on being accepted and credible.

-Maintain attention to **nonverbal** cues and body language. Laotians utilize many **types** of smiles to indicate pleasure, embarrassment, or even frustration.

Business Attire

-The Lao culture is **less** formal in business dress but accepting of conventional western choice.

-For Men: lightweight suit, shirt, and tie are worn

For Women: long skirt and a blouse or sleeveless top. Conservative dress is always safe.

Behavior

-Public body contact, especially

between men and women, should be **avoided**.

-In Lao culture, smoking is acceptable for men but **not** women as it is associated with promiscuity.

-For Lao, the **head** is the most sacred part of the body and the feet the lowliest. Be conscious about how your actions may be perceived. For example, do not cross your legs with the feet pointing toward your counterpart.

-**Avoid** pointing. Instead use whole palm when signaling.

Gift Giving

Appropriate Gifts:

-Green and red wrapping paper is most suitable. Woven designs or other simple handcrafts.

Gifts to Avoid:

-using the color white as gift wrap; it is considered unlucky.

-gifts associated with one's feet, such as socks

Business Tips continued

Conversation

-**"Saving face"** is important in Lao communication. "Yes" does not always mean "yes," as **non-confrontational** tactics are the norm.

-Like many Asian societies, the Lao significantly **downplay** personal achievements and contributions. It is advisable that

their Western counterparts also observe this modesty.

-In business setting, an arm's length of personal space is quite appropriate.

-As over 60% of the Lao are Buddhists, remain **gentle** in interpersonal relations and avoid actions likely to cause discomfort.

-Allow small talk before

proceeding to business discussion.

Topics to Discuss:

-the family, Laotian culture, cuisine, Buddhist practices and principles.

Topics to Avoid:

-As the Lao people are reserved and polite in conversation, remain conservative in discussing sexuality and politically sensitive issues.