

Laos Cultural Profile

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Laos Cultural Profile

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... and to all those people who have provided comment about this cultural profile.

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Laos Cultural Profile

Introduction	3
Background	4
History	4
National Symbols	7
Population	9
Language	9
Migration to Australia	10
Australian Statistics	10
Laotian Characteristics	11
Customs in Everyday Life	12
Dress	12
Communication	12
Greetings	13
Names	13
Values	14
Respect and Equality	14
Marriage	14
Domestic Situation	15
Family Structure	15
Religion	16
Churches	17
Pensions	18
Leisure & Recreation	19
Sports	19
Arts and Crafts	19
Socialising	19
Social Clubs	19
Literature	19
Songs	20
Dances	22
Radio	23
Television	23
Newspapers	23
Annual Festivities	24
Food & Diet	27
Meals	27
Recipes	28
Food Sources	36
Laotian Attitudes	37
Health	37
Traditional Healing	37
Pain and Illness	38
Mental Health	38
Ageing	38
Death & Dying	39
Laotian Contacts	40
Bibliography	41
Correction / Addition Form	42

This profile of the Lao cultural community is one of the projects undertaken by Diversicare's Special Projects and Services Development Team with funding from the Home and Community Care Program.

One of the aims of the HACC Program is to provide resources for aged-care service providers to better meet their clients' needs from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This booklet is about ensuring that needs of older people from a Lao background are met.

This profile is intended to provide some insights into the Lao culture.

Two things are important to notice. First, each person is unique and has his/her own individual necessities which need to be considered when planning care. Second, Lao culture in Australia differs a lot from the Lao culture in modern Laos, and features from both cultures are evident in Australia today.

The profile provides useful information about a range of topics and resources including books, articles, visual aids, and services.



This symbol is used to indicate a “tip” which you as the caregiver of a person who was born in Laos, may find useful in your day-to-day support of that person.

In an effort to maintain the accuracy of this profile and improve its contents for all stakeholders, we encourage readers to complete the feedback form on the last page to inform us of any inaccuracies or other resources available. It is considered that this feedback will assist us to maintain a user relevant and quality resource.

Yours sincerely

Vivienne McDonald

Director

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, the official name for Laos, is a landlocked country bordered by China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma.

Vientiane, the capital of Laos with an estimated population of 799,000 (in 2009) is situated on the Mekong River. Other principal cities in Laos are Savannakhet, Luang Prabang, Pakse and Thakhek. For government administrative purposes Laos is subdivided into 16 provinces, and the Vientiane prefecture.

Its geography consists of rugged mountains, plateaus and alluvial plains, with a tropical monsoonal climate.



Most Lao's are subsistence farmers (agriculture representing 75.1% of the total national workforce) with rice as the principal crop. Forestry is also economically important, with mining (gypsum, tin, gold and gemstones) and manufacturing limited in terms of its workforce numbers. The service industries at 19.5% are the second largest employment sector. The unit of currency in Laos is the new kip which is further divided into 100 att with barter still an established method of exchange in rural communities.

Laos is a communist state with the only legal political party being the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The head of state is President Choummaly Sayasone with the head of government being Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong. Government policies are determined by the party through the 11-member Politburo and the 61-member Central Committee.¹

History

Laos traces its first recorded history and its origins as a unified state to the emergence of the Kingdom of Lan Xang (literally, "million elephants") in 1353. Under the rule of King Fa Ngum this powerful and wealthy kingdom held sovereignty over much of what today is Thailand and Laos. His successors, in the 16th century, establish Buddhism as the predominant religion of the country.

By the 17th century the kingdom of Lan Xang entered a period of decline marked by dynastic struggle and conflicts with its neighbours. In the late 18th century the Siamese (Thai) established sovereignty over much of what is now Laos. The region was divided into principalities centred on Luang Prabang in the north, Vientiane in the centre, and Champassak in the south.

¹ Virtual Library Laos - <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~lao/laoVL.html>

Following their colonization of Vietnam, the French supplanted the Siamese and began to integrate all of Laos into the French empire. The Franco-Siamese treaty of 1907 defined the present Lao boundary with Thailand.

During World War II, the Japanese occupied French Indochina, including Laos. King Sisavang Vong of Luang Prabang was induced to declare independence from France in 1945, just prior to Japan's surrender.

During this period, nationalist sentiment grew. In September 1945, Vientiane and Champassak united with Luang Prabang to form an independent government under the Free Laos (Lao Issara) banner. The movement, however, was short-lived. By early 1946, French troops reoccupied the country conferring limited autonomy on Laos following elections for a constituent assembly.

During the first Indochina war between France and the communist movement in Vietnam, Prince Souphanouvong helped form the Pathet Lao (Land of Laos) resistance organization committed to the communist struggle against colonialism. Laos was not granted full sovereignty until the French defeat by the Vietnamese and the subsequent Geneva peace conference in 1954. Elections were held in 1955, and the first coalition government, led by Prince Souvanna Phouma, was formed in 1957. The coalition government collapsed in 1958, amidst increased polarization of the political process. Rightist forces took over the government.



“Patuxai at Night” by Mark Fischer, Flickr

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Although Laos was to be neutral, a growing American and North Vietnamese military presence in the country increasingly drew Laos into the second Indochina war (1954-75). For nearly a decade, Laos was subjected to extremely heavy bombing as the United States sought to restrict access to that portion of the Ho Chi Minh trail that passed through eastern Laos. Unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster munitions, remains a major problem.

In 1972 the Communist People's Party renamed itself the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). It joined a new coalition government in Laos soon after the Vientiane cease-fire agreement in 1973; nonetheless, the political struggle amongst communists, neutralists, and rightists continued. The fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh to communist forces in April 1975 hastened the decline of the coalition in Laos. Several months after these communist victories the Pathet Lao entered Vientiane. On December 2, 1975, the king abdicated and the communist Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) was established.

The new communist government imposed centralised economic decision-making and broad security measures including control of the media and the arrest and incarceration of many members of the previous government and military in "re-education camps."

These draconian policies and deteriorating economic conditions along with government efforts to enforce political control, prompted an exodus of lowland Lao and ethnic Hmong from Laos.

About 10% of the Lao population sought refugee status after 1975 and many resettled in the United States, France, and Australia. By 1982 an estimated 300,000 people had fled. Most lived in refugee camps in Thailand for up to eight years before settling in other countries.

Over time, the Lao Government closed the re-education camps and released most political prisoners. By the end of 1999 more than 28,900 Hmong and lowland Lao had voluntarily repatriated to Laos - 3,500 from China and the rest from Thailand.²

² Culture of Laos - history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family - <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Laos.html#ixzz1jauMxo6V>

Background

National Symbols

This is the Lao flag. The red represents the bloodshed in the fight for freedom, and the blue stands for the Mekong River and the country's prosperity. The white disc is the symbol of the country's unity under the guidance of the Lao People's Revolutionary government in addition to the country's bright future. The white disc is also said to symbolise the full moon on the Mekong River.

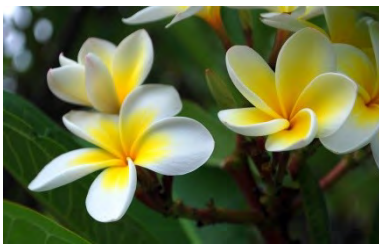


7



The national symbol of Laos is Pha That Luang—the Golden Stupa in Vientiane. This is a Buddhist stupa and was built in the 16th century. It is believed to hold the ashes of Buddha.

The national coat of arms of Laos shows the national shrine Pha That Luang. A dam is pictured as a symbol of power generation at the reservoir Nam Ngun. An asphalt street is also pictured, as well as a stylised watered field. In the lower part is a section of a gear wheel. The inscription on the left reads, "Peace, Independence, Democracy" (Lao script: ສັນຕິພາບ ເອກະລາດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ) and on the right, "Unity and Prosperity" (Lao script: ເອກະພາບ ວັດຖະນາ ຖາວອນ).



The national flower of Laos is the Dok Champa (*Plumeria*) – in Australia it's called the Frangipani - which comes in many colours. It represents sincerity and joy in life. The flower is often used as a decoration in ceremonies or made into a garland to welcome guests. It is often found near monastic areas.

<http://www.nationalanthems.info/la.htm>

The words of the anthem in English and Laotian are:

The National Anthem (Laotian)

ཕྱེད་པོའི་བརྟན་བཞུགས།

འབྲུག་ཅན་དན་བོད་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ནང་॥

དཔལ་ལྷན་གཉིས་བརྟན་མི་ཕྱིར་བའི་མགོན་॥

འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་པོ་མངའ་བདག་པོ་ལོ་ལོ་ཤོ་ཤོ།

སྐྱེ་བ་ལྟར་མེད་པ་དྲན་ཅིང་ཆེ་བ་ཤིན་པ་ཤེས་པ།

ཆོས་ལའས་རྒྱས་བཏུག་པ་དང་ཞིང་རྒྱས་॥

འབངས་བདེ་སྐྱོད་ཏེ་མ་གར་བར་ཤོག།

For all time the Lao people have glorified their Fatherland,
United in heart, spirit and vigour as one.

And proclaiming the right to be their own masters.

and will no longer allow imperialists and traitors to harm them.

And the freedom of the Lao nation.

In order to lead the nation to prosperity.

Population

The Lao's population in 2011 was estimated at 6.5 million and is dispersed unevenly across the country. It consists of three main ethnic groups:

1. Lao Lum (lowlanders) - About half the country's people are ethnic Lao, the principal lowland inhabitants as well as the politically and culturally dominant group. The Lao are descended from the Tai people who began migrating southward from China in the first millennium A.D.
2. Lao Sung (mountain people) - Mountain tribes of Hmong-Yao, Mien and Tibeto-Burman (Kor and Phounoy) as well as Tai ethno-linguistic heritage are found in northern Laos. In all there are more than 30 tribes. Until recently they were known as Lao Sung or highland Lao but use of these distinctions is lessening over time.
3. Lao Theung (highlanders) - In the central and southern mountains, Austro Asiatic (Mon-Khmer and Viet-Muong) tribes, formerly known as Lao Theung or mid-slope Lao, predominate.

Language

The official language of Lao's is Laotian. The tribes have their own languages and dialects speaking an assortment of Mon-Khmer, Hmong-Yao (Hmong has its own written language, but only a few Hmong are literate), and Tibeto-Burman languages. French, once common in government and commerce has declined in usage, while the knowledge of English has increased in recent years.

The Lao in Australia are predominately refugees and they tend to speak the old language from the Royal Kingdom of Lan Xang - Lao. Hmong is the other Lao dialect predominant with Australian Lao. With either language group, the Lao's English proficiency is low in the older generation as it was not then taught, and there was little structured education. Children often assist with interpreting.



Tip: The Lao in Australia tend to speak Lao or Hmong. Their English proficiency is low as English was not taught in schools at that time.

Migration to Australia

The earliest Lao migrants arrived in Australia as Colombo Plan students in the 1960s and 1970s and later granted permanent residence.

After 1976, they were joined by Lao refugees who fled following the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic following the end of the war in Indochina and chain migration of family members. By 1982, an estimated 300,000 people had fled. Most lived in refugee camps in Thailand for up to eight years before settling in other countries.

An ethnic minority known as the Hmong people also migrated during the period of 1975 to 1985. From 1985 to 1990 Laotians migrated mainly under the family reunion migration scheme from second and third countries such as France, Canada and the USA.

Among the total Laos-born in Australia at the 2006 Census, 4.3% arrived between 1996 and 2000 and 4.9% arrived during 2001 and 2006.

Australian Statistics

The 2006 Census recorded 9370 Laos-born people in Australia whose ancestry is Lao (6300), Chinese (1710) and Hmong (680).

New South Wales has the largest number of Lao with 5030, followed by Victoria (2050), Queensland (1030) and Australian Capital Territory (610).

The median age of the Laos-born in 2006 is 42.9 years with the age distribution being:

- 0.9% were aged 0-14 years
- 4.5% were 15-24 years
- 50.8% were 25-44 years
- 36.0% were 45-64 years
- 7.9% were 65 and over

The main languages spoken at home in Australia are Lao (65.3%), English (7.5%) and Mandarin (7.0%). Of the 8610 Laos-born who spoke a language other than English at home, 63.6% spoke English very well or well and 35.2% spoke English not well or not at all.

Among the Laos-born in Australia, 17.9% had Diploma level or higher qualifications and 9.4% had Certificate level qualifications.

Laotian Characteristics

The Lao are known for their amiable characteristic and tolerant, easy-going attitudes.

Traditionally the society is patriarchal in structure.

Privacy is an important cultural value. Relationships are based on trust and personal questions from people they don't know very well are not appreciated.

Modesty is highly valued. Public body contact, especially between men and women is avoided.

Lao people do not like to be touched on the head as it is considered offensive. It is also considered impolite to point one's foot at another person.

It is also not appreciated if visitors behave as if they are in a hurry.

Lao people may ask visitors to their home and to remove their shoes. Many homes will have both a mat and chairs on the floor for sitting. If an older person is sitting on the floor it is generally considered impolite for the visitor to sit in a chair.³



³ Laos Cultural Profile http://www.culturalprofiles.net/laos/directories/laos_cultural_profile/-916.html

Dress

In its customary form, Lao's traditional clothing consists of dresses original to the Hmong community of Laos. With the influence of the outside world wearing of traditional clothing is increasingly for special occasions only.

The traditional clothing of Laos is different for men and women. While men's clothing is more simple, the clothing of the women is elaborate and decorated with embroidery and designs.

The men of Laos wear pants (*sampot*) with a shirt and vest. The sampot is a traditional form of dress in which the corner of the cloth is drawn up between the legs and tucked in at the back, thus forming a kind of billowing short trousers.



The women wear a sarong like skirt (*sinh*) with a shirt or a jacket. The sinh is a long traditional skirt usually made of silk that features a wide and often elaborately woven section at the foot.

The use of colourful bands worn around the waist by both men and women is a part of Laos clothing. Women may also wear large headdresses and traditional dress appropriate to their ethnic minority. This photo shows five different traditional costumes.

"Games at Hmong New Year Celebration" by John Pavelka, Flickr
(made available under an Attribution 2.0 Generic License)

Communication

Lao people tend to be reserved in most social and professional contacts. They don't value demonstrative or loud expressions of feelings.

In conversation with Lao's it is important to address the head of the family first (usually the husband or senior male member) before speaking directly with other family members.



Tip: It is important to address the head of the family first (usually the husband or senior male member) before speaking directly with other family members.

Greetings

Among ethnic Lao, a high value is placed on the avoidance of conflict and actions likely to cause emotional discomfort. Careful attention to one's place in the social hierarchy is important with inattention or deliberate flouting of the hierarchy being a potential major cause of conflict.

The traditional Lao greeting is called 'wai'. This involves placing your palms together at chest level as if praying and inclining your head. This greeting should also be used when greeting people viewed as a 'superior'. Western greetings are increasingly being accepted.

English Greeting	Dutch	Closest English Pronunciation
Hello	Sabai di	SA-BY-DEE
Goodbye	Phop khan mai ('til we meet again)	POB KAN MAIL
Yes	Tiao (formal) Euh (coll.) Dai (can do)	TIAO UH DIE, DOYH
No	bo	BO
Thank you	Khob chai (deu)	KHOB JAY

Names

Lao people generally have two names, the first being the given name and the second the family name. Lao's write their first name before their surname. If only one name is used it should be the first, e.g. President Choummaly.

Respect and Equality

Since 1957 women are formally equal in the eyes of the state. However, besides age, gender is the main way in which social roles and practices are organised.

There is a tendency for women to be concerned with household chores and 'lighter' work and to play a major role in petty trade. They also have a relatively high standing in the private and civic realms of Lao culture.

While men are considered culturally superior because of their ability to become monks, this status is affected by social class. Men have this status because they tend to occupy key positions in public, predominately in political positions, something that is slowly but increasingly changing.

Men are generally recognised as the household head for religious and political purposes.

Marriage

Lao's have a considerable degree of freedom in choosing their spouse although there is some preference for cousins. Among male-lineage inheritance clans (e.g. Hmong, Lu Mien, Khmu, and others) they tend to choose their wives from outside the clan. The Hmong had a past practice of so-called "marriage by capture". Multiple wives to the one husband can be found among some highland groups.

Parents may propose a potential spouse and must be consulted about potential marriage partners. A payment like a bride-price is made with its value varying considerably.

Most young men are expected to become a monk for a short period to prepare them for marriage. This practice is also crucial for the transfer of merit from son to mother and is the source of a special bond between them.

The marriage ceremony usually takes place in the bride's family home. At the centre of the ritual is a spirit-calling ceremony. In the past the marriage ceremony was always in the morning which was believed to be the best time for a joyful celebration to take place—whereas the afternoon is considered the time for sad ceremonies like cremations. However, with modern lifestyles, convenience has become more important so the time doesn't really matter anymore.

Divorce can be initiated by either party and is not uncommon. Among male-lineage groups, parents play a much more active role in choosing spouses for their children.

Domestic Situation

The main house at the centre of a group of related women almost always contains a stem family. Amongst highland groups there are large houses containing extended families of related brothers, while in the southern highlands there are extended families of related women.

The oldest daughter and her husband move out after the marriage of the next daughter but try to live nearby or in the same compound. The main house usually is inherited by the youngest daughter who is responsible for the care of ageing parents.

The proximity of nuclear households and their continued relationship with the main house creates the appearance of a modified extended family. However, these new units move eventually, separate from the original main house, and become main houses of their own standing around which that person's extended family will build.

The moved out children support their parents by sending money back if they live far away, otherwise they come to visit and eat together as a family very often.

Aside from the youngest daughter's inheritance of the main house, the legacy tends to be equal between sons and daughters. Residential practices determine what is inherited with those moving away (most often sons) by selling land to their sisters or leaving it in their care. The passing on of a house and land signifies the passing of authority from one generation to another. Jewellery and woven cloth pass from mothers to daughters.

Family Structure

Hierarchical inter-dependence is the central value instilled in Lao children. Parents raise and support their children and the children reciprocate as soon as they can, thus creating strong family bonds.

Kinship amongst the Lao is reckoned through males and females in general with little genealogical consciousness beyond two past generations, except among the former aristocracy. Male-lineage inheritance clans can be found among the Hmong, Lu Mien, Khmu, and others.

With babies and children, separation is avoided and crying is actively discouraged. Babies are constantly in the care of the mother and are fed on demand. Older children are responsible for the care of younger children.

Usually the whole family sleeps together until the children reach puberty. Even in modern homes where children may have a separate room, they all sleep together.

Religion

The dominant religion is Theravada Buddhism (which was brought from India and is shared by Thailand, Cambodia and Burma). Co-existing easily with Buddhism are beliefs usually labelled animistic (common among the mountain people) and beliefs associated with shamanism that involve house spirits, village spirits, district spirits, city spirits, and spirits of the realm.

At the higher levels these spirits overlap strongly with Buddhism and are embodied in stupas and temples. The majority of the population has various beliefs concerning sacred places and objects. Ancestor worship is also strong among lineally organised family groups. There are also small numbers of Christians, Baha'i and Muslims.

A Buddhist shrine may be found in a Lao's home. A small house or shrine on top of a column called a spirit house (*Phi*) may be found outside.

Lao Buddhists may also wear images of Buddha around their necks or display images of Buddha in their homes. These images are there to remind Buddhists of the qualities of the perfect wisdom and the perfect compassion of Buddha. They serve to inspire Buddhists to develop these qualities. Some Lao's may also wear amulets for protection against evil spirits.

Lao's often make offerings of flowers or food to spirits. These offerings are symbols of Buddha's teachings.

The Lao practice a ritual called the *baci* in which strings are tied around a person's wrist to preserve good luck. The *baci* is associated with transitions, namely: giving birth, getting married, entering the monkhood, going away, returning, beginning a new year, and welcoming or bidding farewell to foreign guests.

At a *baci* ceremony eggs are the principal symbolic food used but rice is almost always in evidence also. The centrepiece is a 'tree' which is usually made from banana leaves and flowers but may be composed of artificial materials. Symbolic foods surround it. The monk or 'magic-man' intones prayers and benedictions appropriate to the particular occasion. Then, after the person being honoured has had some symbolic food placed in his hand, white cotton strings are tied round his or her wrists to the accompaniment of further benedictions. After this, all the participants who have been sitting round the 'tree' are allowed to tie more strings around his or her wrists while expressing their own specific good wishes. They are also permitted to tie strings around each other's wrists so that the whole affair develops into a free-for-all from which everyone emerges with at least some strings. These strings must never be cut and should not be removed for three days. Many people leave them on for longer to be on the safe side—some until they finally disintegrate months later. A prominent ritual among the upland Hmong is the sacrifice of a chicken or pig to the household spirit at New Year.

Monks are the main religious practitioners among Lao and are not only are in charge of Buddhist religious ceremonies but also function as dream interpreters, traditional medical practitioners, and counsellors.

Other religious practitioners include spirit mediums and shamans, most of whom are women, are also found among all the minorities' peoples. ⁴

Churches

Lao Buddhist Temples:

Wat Budhasamakhom Sirisaphanh
73 Highbury Drive , Red Bank Plains QLD 4301
Phone: (07) 3814 0229

Wat Lao Brisbane, QLD
34-36 Harris Street, Bell Bird Park QLD 4300
Phone: (07) 38143830



⁴ Laos Cultural Profile http://www.culturalprofiles.net/laos/directories/laos_cultural_profile/-916.html

Lao older people are not eligible for any pensions from the Laos Government. Australia and Laos have not signed any formal agreements relating to this issue.

Lao people aged 65 years or over who are not receiving an aged pension should contact Centrelink to discuss eligibility and individual circumstances.

Contact options for Centrelink can be found via its website:

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/contact_us/index.htm

Sports

Sports are part of ritual and recreational life in Laos. The That Luang festival for instance includes a traditional game of field hockey played with bamboo sticks and a ball made of roots.

However, traditional contests like this one, as well as the boat races on the Mekong River, have been “modernised”. Football (soccer) has become a popular spectator sport. Laos has competed in the Summer Olympic Games since 1980.

Arts and Crafts

The Lao's have a variety of regional and rural art forms including weaving, basket making, wood and ivory carving, silverwork, and gold work.

Socialising

Lao people typically socialise as families and most live in extended families with three or sometimes more generations sharing one house or compound. With the Lao people's simple life, it is perfectly normal for relatives or friends to drop by without calling in advance.

The fact that most Lao people were brought up in extended families that require a high level of harmony, kindness, patience and readiness to help each other, has made the Lao people a generous, kind and soft-hearted, tolerant and socialised people.

Time is also a fairly flexible commodity in Lao culture. Planning ahead and making firm times can sometimes be problematic. Invitations (e.g. to parties and weddings) are often only issued the day before the event.

Social Clubs

Social clubs can be transient. It is best to make contact with the Associations listed in the Lao Contacts section to establish if any are active at the time, and their location.

Literature

Lao literature is predominantly religious and linked to the Buddhist tradition. There is also a literary stream that while secular, is based on themes of the Hindu epic poems, for example, the Laotian epic *Sin Xay*. The most popular poems and songs are often satiric.

Songs

There are a number of musical instruments that are characteristic of the Lao. The most widely known of such instruments is the *khene*, a wood-and-bamboo mouth organ that is used by various rural peoples. Other instruments include assorted flutes, plucked and bowed lutes, drums, and cymbals.

Laos also has a wealth of regional vocal music traditions—most of which are designated by some form of the term *khap* or *lam*. Performance of such vocal music often takes the form of a spirited battle of knowledge, wit, and artistry between the sexes. Most music is not written down, rather it's transmitted through oral tradition.

Traditional Lao music can be divided into classical and folk forms. The classical form is closely related to that of the Siamese, from which it borrows.

Clicking on the following URL address takes you to a site with 4 collections of different but traditional Lao music:

http://www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/culture/traditional_music/music_collection.htm



Tip: you must have *Real Player* (a free program) installed. If it's not on your computer when you choose a song it takes you to a screen where you can download and install the program.

Collection I: Instrumental Music in Laos

- | | |
|--|---|
| ♪ Lao Dam Nuen Xay | ♪ Lao Khen Solo: Lotfay Taylang |
| ♪ Procession Music | ♪ Pavillion Music: Pheng Kaukok |
| ♪ Hmong Lay Folksong: Tueoti | ♪ Thai Meuy Folkdance |
| ♪ Sep Laum Mu: Chang Va Xeung Bang Fai | ♪ Lao Folkdance: Phuthay |
| ♪ Hmong Khao Folksong: Khuamhak | ♪ Ta Oi: Ceremonial Music for the Buffalo Sacrifice |
| ♪ Hmoung Lay Folksong: Khithot Phusao | ♪ Lao Folkdance: Khonsavavan |
| ♪ Lao Folkdance | ♪ Khmu Epic Folksong |
| ♪ Calling the Elephant | ♪ Lao Folkdance: Bankok |
| ♪ Ceremonial Music at Wat Phou "Pheng Kom" | ♪ Introduction to the Ramayana Dance: Pheng Kaunau |
| ♪ Khmu Folksong: Vautheung Khuamhaknyak" | ♪ Lao Folksong: Sunuan |

Collection II: Traditional Music in Laos

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| ♪ Lam Salavan | ♪ Samak Khy Deuan Cheng |
| ♪ Lam Phu Thai | ♪ Lam Salavan |
| ♪ Khap Salangkhu | ♪ Lam Talemon |
| ♪ Lam Pham Nge | ♪ Khap Sam Sao |
| ♪ Lam Ban Soc | ♪ Khap Thum Luang Prabang |
| ♪ Lam Cheuang | ♪ Lam Ka Loey |
| ♪ Lam Cheuang | ♪ Lam Xieng |
| ♪ Sep Talemon | ♪ Lam Salavan Sedon |

Collection III: The Voice of the Khen (Khaen)

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| ♪ Lom Phat Phai | ♪ Toey Khong |
| ♪ Lot Fai Tai Lang | ♪ Long Noi Pen Kon |
| ♪ Lay Sut Sanaen | ♪ Long Nyai Pen Toey |
| ♪ Sii Phan Don | ♪ Me Hang Komlum |
| ♪ Ban Xok | ♪ Phu Thau Ngoeykho |
| ♪ Khon Sa Van | ♪ Xang Thiamm Mae |
| ♪ Lam Long | ♪ Ma Ha Xay |
| ♪ Lam Phoen | ♪ Phu Thai Nyay |
| ♪ Tang Vay | ♪ Sa La Van |
| ♪ Lay Po Say | ♪ Kalong Nyo |
| ♪ Sam Ma Lii Pha Feuang | ♪ Lot Fai Tai Lang |

Collection IV: Traditional Khamu Songs and Music

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| ♪ Khamtuk Khmu | ♪ Choem Xieng Ngoen |
| ♪ Khmu Muan Xeun | ♪ Khap Chanlong |
| ♪ Khmu Tham Khao | ♪ Choem Pongsaly |
| ♪ Khmu Kia Sao | ♪ Pai Lom Sao |
| ♪ Choen Khmu | ♪ Khuamtuk Nyak |
| ♪ Pi Pasan Khap | ♪ Khamtuk Khong Ban |
| ♪ Ouy Phon | ♪ Totnoy Saidang |

Other Lao songs can be found on the right side of the screen at the following URL addresses for 2 Lao songs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVpy8ye1hsM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvbkM4l1GiU>

Dances

The Lao folkloric tradition incorporates a wide number of folk dances (*fon phun muang*): some are based on ancient animist rituals, some developed in celebration of the passing of the seasons, and others adapted from court performance genres.

As in neighbouring Thailand and Cambodia, one of the most popular social dances in Laos is the celebrated *lam vong* (circle dance - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s74GaUnR_6M) in which couples dance circles around one another until there are three circles in all - a circle danced by the individual, a circle danced by the couple, and a circle danced by the whole crowd.

Below is a list of website addresses where some traditional dances can be viewed:

Champa Meuang Lao Dance

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zszDLBxDSmk>

Lao Salawan dance

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xxHY9T3jNg>

Dance - Fon Lao Huam Poa

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2leHqmh1Zk>

Dance - Lao Huam Pao

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYT87VjkEX4&feature=player_embedded

Dance of the Lao Tribes- Part I

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2qlsxVKyY&feature=related>

Dance of the Lao Tribes- Part II

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33XmBigEerU&feature=related>

A number of other more modern dances and songs can be found at the following website:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYT87VjkEX4&feature=player_embedded

Other important folk dances include the welcoming dance *fon baci su khuan* which is performed in conjunction with the *baci* ceremony (see Religion); the graceful southern female dance *fon tangwai* (performed to the accompaniment of *lam tangwai*); and the male martial arts dance *fon dab*.

The Laos government controls all aspects of the media including the press, broadcasting, and the Internet.

Television

You can watch Laos TV live via the website:

<http://www.laostartv.com/live-laotv>

Radio

You can listen to radio broadcasts live at the following websites:

Laos National Radio 103.7 FM (with News in Lao, Hmong and English)

<http://tunein.com/radio/Laos-National-Radio-1037-s48012>

Radio Free Asia (US based news about East Asia and Laos)

<http://www.rfa.org/english>

CRI Vientiane 93.0 FM

<http://tunein.com/radio/CRI-Vientiane-930-s55359>

On SBS radio in Brisbane Laotian language programs are scheduled thus (as at Jan 2012)

Day	Program	Time	Analogue Station	Digital Station
Monday	Laotian	6:00pm - 7:00pm	93.3FM	
	Laotian	10:00pm - 11:00pm		SBS Radio 1
Friday	Laotian	12:00pm - 1:00pm		SBS Radio 1

There are also alternate times for Khmer language programs and Mandarin language programs.

To make alternate choices of language and/or locations in Queensland go to the following website and enter your preferences in the language and location boxes:

<http://www.sbs.com.au/schedule/radio/preferences/change>

Newspapers

The following Laos newspapers are available online, often in a choice of languages:

Lao News Agency - Khaosan Pathet Lao (in English)

<http://www.kplnet.net>

Vientiane Mai - Online news (in Lao)

<http://www.vientianemai.net>

Vientiane Times (Official news from Laos, English-language weekly)

<http://www.vientianetimes.org.la>

Pasaxon - News headlines (pdf format in Lao)

<http://www.pasaxon.org.la>

Festivals (or “boun”) in Laos tend to be linked to agricultural seasons or religious holidays and involves doing good things during the festivities in order to gain merit for subsequent lives.

In addition to the many traditional festivals celebrated on a nationwide basis, there are also a number of important regional festivals linked mainly to religious ceremonies, often involving traditional performances, sports and games.

For the Lao people, the Buddhist lunar calendar marks the major annual religious rituals.

At the full moon every month there is a festival, the most important of the religious festivities being Buddha's enlightenment in the sixth month (May); the beginning and end of lent (July and October); and New Year (15 April).

Sacred stupas and temples also have special festivals with the most important held at the That Luang stupa in Vientiane in November.

The most important secular celebrations are:

- Army Day on 20 January
- Pathet Lao Day on 6 January
- People's Party Day 22 March
- Women's Day 8 March
- Labour Day on 1 May
- Children's Day on 1 June
- Free Lao Day on 13 August
- Liberation Day on 23 August
- Freedom from the French Day on 12 October
- National Day on 2 December

Important National and Regional Festivals

Boun Khoun Khao (Boun Khoun Lan) (January-February, two days)

This is a nationwide rice harvest festival and is held in villages around Laos. A *baci* ceremony is performed in order to give thanks to the land.

Lunar New Year (January-February, one week)

Lunar New Year is celebrated around Laos by the Chinese and Vietnamese communities in Laos. Firecrackers explode throughout this holiday and cakes and sweetmeats are made especially for the occasion.

Boun Khao Chi (February, two days)

Held on the third full moon of the lunar calendar, this nationwide festival involves a morning ceremony at the wat (temple) in which a special type of bread made of sticky rice is offered.

Boun Phrawetsandone (March, three days)

This nationwide three-day and three-night festival is a religious occasion celebrated to commemorate the virtue and charity of Prince Vessantara. During the festival monks recite the *jataka* tale *Phravetsandone*. The festival is also an occasion for senior abbots to ordain new monks.

Boun Phimai Lao (Mid-April, three days)

Culturally related to *songkran* in neighbouring Thailand, Lao New Year is celebrated nationwide at the same time each year.

On 13 April (every year on this date, or determined by the lunar calendar) Buddha images are taken out of the *wats* to be cleansed with scented water by devotees and placed on temporary altars within the *wat* compounds. Devotees gather the scented water falling off the images to take home and use it to pour on friends and relatives as an act of cleansing and purification before the New Year.

On the evening of 15 April (every year on this date, or determined by the lunar calendar) the images are returned to their proper shrines within the *wats*. In Luang Prabang the festival also features a beauty contest with the crowning of *Nang Sangkhan* (Miss Phimai).

Boun Bangfai (Mid-May, one day)

Held at the eve of the planting season, the nationwide Rocket Festival is held to coax rain and fertility back to the earth. The festival commences with a morning ceremony praying for rain at the *wat*. In the afternoon people gather in fields on the outskirts of the villages and towns to launch home-made rockets amidst scenes of great revelry. Villages compete for the 'best decorated' and 'highest travelling' rocket.

Men disguised as women perform a ritual dance involving wooden phalluses in order to anger the gods: as revenge, the gods are expected to send thunderstorms. Performances of *lam* are often featured. Beginning in around mid-May, the festival is staggered from place to place in order to ensure greater participation.

Boun Visakhabousa (Mid-May, one day)

This nationwide festival celebrates the day of Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away. Held during the sixth full moon of the lunar calendar it involves chanting, sermons and a candlelit procession to the *wats*.

Boun Khao Pansa (Mid-July, two days)

Held during the eighth full moon of the lunar calendar, the countrywide Khao Pansa Festival marks the beginning of the Buddhist Lent: a time of austerity when monks are confined to their own *wat* where they fast and spend most of their time in prayer and meditation.

At dawn on the first day, worshippers (mainly women wearing vividly coloured silks) flock to the *wats* carrying silver bowls full of offerings and gifts for the monks. The rituals of *tak baat* (offering gifts to the monks) and *yaat nam* (pouring water into the ground to ensure that the offerings benefit one's ancestors) are then performed.

Boun Haw Khao Padabdin (August-September, two days)

Starting on the 15th day of the ninth lunar month during the wet season when the land is lush with greenery and fruits, the nationwide Khao Padabdin Festival is held in commemoration of dead ancestors. Buddhist devotees flock to the *wats* carrying silver trays of offerings for monks and deceased ancestors. Music is traditionally performed in the grounds of the *wat* and donations are made. In Luang Prabang the festival also features long boat racing competitions.

Boun Haw Khao Salak (Mid September, one day)

Held during the tenth full moon of the lunar calendar this nationwide festival involves offerings to dead ancestors in order to gain merit. In many provinces long boat racing competitions are also held.

Boun Ok Pansa and Boun Souang Heua (Boat Racing Festival) (Mid-October, two days)

Held to celebrate the end of Buddhist Lent, the nationwide Ok Pansa Festival starts at dawn on the first day with donations and offerings made at *wats* around the city. Then in the evening candlelight processions are held at *wats*, and in a ceremony known as *boun lay heua fai*, hundreds of colourful paper boats decorated with flowers, incense and candles are set adrift on the Mekong River to pay respect to the river spirit and eradicate bad luck, bad deeds, and disease.

Boun Kathin (October-November, one month)

This nationwide festival begins immediately after the last day of Lent and lasts until the next full moon and features the ceremonial offering of robes and other items to monks. The word *kathin* describes the wooden device used for keeping the robes taut while they are being made.

Nor Chia (Hmong New Year) (November, one week)

Celebrated in all Hmong communities around the country commencing with November's full moon. This festival is celebrated particularly in Oudomxai, Xieng Khouang, Luang Prabang and Vientiane Provinces. Special celebrations involve colourful displays of traditional costumes, music from traditional Hmong instruments, the *mak khon* (cotton ball) throwing ceremony, crossbow ceremonies, and traditional games such as ox fighting, and spinning-top races.

Lao National Day (2 December)

Lao National Day commemorates the founding of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos on the 2nd December 1975.

Meal Protocols

The Lao's in relation to meals give the impression of being completely relaxed, hospitable, informal, and free of any feelings of hurry, anxiety or ostentation. In fact, however, the relaxed atmosphere invests procedures which are surprisingly formal.

Two important concepts in Lao life are *piep* (prestige) and *lieng* (means feeding, giving nourishment). The concept of *lieng* gives rise to what might be called contractual obligations. Both concepts apply to Lao meals.

This means, in practice, that at a family meal the father and mother being the persons of highest rank in the family unit take the first mouthfuls followed by the other family members in descending order of age.

Once this 'first tasting' has been accomplished the meal appears to be free for all but in fact is still subject to rules. For example, no-one should help themselves at the same time as anyone else or go in front of a person of higher rank which would cause that person to lose *piep*.

A guest must observe the same rules, as well as some additional ones. If you begin to eat without first being invited to do so by the host/hostess, you will be deemed to have no *piep* at all. You may not continue eating after the others have finished.

If you are still hungry it will be necessary for at least one member of the household to continue eating with you; however, you cannot go on eating indefinitely as custom requires that you should leave something on your plate. If you were not to do so the host's *piep* would suffer since it would seem the host had not provided enough food.

Meals

Lao meals are traditionally served on a round rattan table low to the floor. Few dishes are considered strictly breakfast, lunch, or dinner dishes.

Lao's tend to prepare more food than will be consumed. They serve the food by laying out a wide variety of foods at once.

The essential components of a typical meal are:

- Sticky Rice
- Chilli Paste
- A soup
- A meat dish
- A vegetable dish



Tip: Lao meals are traditionally served on a round rattan table low to the floor. Few dishes are considered strictly breakfast, lunch, or dinner dishes.

Sticky rice is a variety of rice and is eaten at every meal by taking a small amount into the palm of your hand and squeezing it into a small ball. It is then dipped into the chili paste and eaten with another piece of food, or you can eat it as it is.

Noodle soups are an alternative to rice. There are two basic varieties here in the North - Phô or Kao Soi. A large round noodle is made with rice flour and then rolled up.

No Lao table is complete without a chilli paste. Chilli paste comes in a wide variety. Some are quite spicy, others are not. Pepper (capsicum) and ginger are widely used in Lao cooking. Another ingredient (or it can also be a meal) is *pa daek* which is a highly pungent fermented fish sauce.

The Lao's also have a taste for food that is raw rather than cooked.

Apart from fish sauce another distinctive dish is *laap*. It is made with fish, chicken, duck, pork, beef, buffalo, or with game. The Lao prefer *laap seu*, or "Tiger laap" which is raw chopped meat.

A rice vermicelli or *klao poun* is another favourite. This is served cold with a variety of raw chopped vegetables on which is poured coconut milk sauce flavoured with meat and chillies. It is considered a favourite dish at weddings and other celebrations.



Tip: The Lao's also have a taste for food that is raw rather than cooked.

Recipes

A number of Lao meat dish recipes can be found at the following website:

<http://asiarecipe.com/laomain.html>

Recipes provided at this website include:

- Aioan Chua Noeung Phset Kretni (Stir Fried Chicken w/ Mushrooms)
- Sousi Pa (Fish w/ Coconut Cream)
- Steamed Fish w/ Young Ginger
- Sousi Pa Gnon (Small Catfish)
- Pa Ling Sousi Haeng (Piquant Fried Catfish)
- Ua No Mai (Stuffed Bamboo Shoots)
- Yall Dip (Fresh Spring Rolls)
- Sien Savanh (Lao Beef Jerky)
- Kai Lao (Laotian Chicken)
- Stuffed Chicken w/ Nutty Cinnamon Rice
- Channam Touk Beef Salad
- Chicken Soup w/ Coconut milk
- Or Lam Nok Kho (Quail Stew)
- Nok Kho Hum Sai Kalampi (Braised Quail w/ Cabbage)
- Steamed Fish with Young Ginger
- Stuffed Chicken w/ Nutty Cinnamon Rice

A number of Lao vegetarian dish recipes can be found on the following website:

<http://asiarecipe.com/laoveg.html>

Recipes provided at this website include:

- Five Vegetable Stir-fry
- Fragrant-Eggplant
- Hot & Sour Mushroom Soup
- Yam Yai
- Prawn Salad (Pla Gung)
- Sweet and Sour Vegetables
- Sweet & Sour Tofu
- Cucumber Salad
- Sweet and Sour Tofu Salad
- Lao Green Papaya Salad (Tam Som)

A number of Lao dessert recipes can be found on the following website:

<http://asiarecipe.com/laodesserts.html>

Recipes provided at this website include:

- Khao Nieow Ma Muang (Sticky Rice and Mango)
- Baked Coconut Rice Pudding
- Oranges in Syrup
- Light Orange-blossom Oranges
- Bananas in Coconut Cream
- Banana Rice Pudding
- Another Banana Dessert

A Lao Salad sauce recipe can be found on the following website:

<http://asiarecipe.com/laosauce.html>

Recipes

Aw Lahm (Lao Stew)

Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons cooked sticky rice, flattened to 1cm thickness
- 1/2 chicken breast, skinned, boned and flattened (or beef, pork, smoked or cured meats)
- 2 yard-long beans, cut in 5 cm bits, soaked
- small handful of new pumpkin shoots, soaked
- 1 stalk lemon grass, bruised
- 2-3 small sprigs dill
- 4 leaves saw tooth herb (stinkweed)
- 3-4 cups water for stock
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ Knorr chicken bouillon cube (or 1 Maggi chicken stock cube)
- 8 pieces sakhan (genus piper), each approx. 3 cm by 1 cm diameter (Optional, or make a bouquet garni of 1 teaspoon black peppercorns and a dried chilli)
- 8 Thai small round eggplants, destalked and partly cut in half vertically from the top
- 30-40 cm rattan shoot cut into 3-4cm pieces
- 1-2 fresh chillies
- 1 large sprig holy basil, leaves only



Method

1. Grill the flattened sticky rice and chicken over a low flame until the rice is dry and partly brown and chicken is just cooked. Cool.
2. Wash and prepare vegetables and herbs and put in a bowl of cold water to soak.
3. Put 3-4 cups water in a saucepan, add salt and crumbled stock cube, bring to the boil over low heat.
4. Break sticky rice into 1cm pieces and add to the simmering stock. Add lemon grass, sakhan, prepared egg plants and rattan. Simmer for 4 minutes. Add chillies, and simmer for 10 minutes more.
5. When soft remove eggplants and chillies from stew and set aside in a mortar (or food processor).
6. Cut grilled chicken into 1.5 x 4cm pieces, and add to the simmering stew together with the holy basil.
7. Pulp the eggplants and chillies using a pestle and mortar (or food processor)
8. Drain and add the remaining vegetables and herbs to the stew, then add eggplant and chilli pulp. Remove bouquet garni if used. Add salt to taste, serve.

Recipes (continued)

Chicken Soop (serves 4)

Ingredients

- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ Knorr chicken bouillon cube or 1 Maggi chicken stock cube
- 1/2 chicken breast, cut horizontally so it lies flatter
- 1 stalk lemon grass
- 1 green chilli (or more to taste)
- 3 large cloves garlic
- 1/3 cup finely chopped saw tooth herb (stinkweed, long-leaved coriander, phak hom nhan (La))
- ½ cup finely sliced green tops of spring onions (scallions)
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped coriander leaves (cilantro)
- ¼ cup finely sliced mint leaves
- juice of 1 lime
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce



Method

1. Boil 2 cups of water in a saucepan, add salt and crumbled bouillon cube.
2. Put flattened chicken breast in the boiling stock, simmer over low heat for 5 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, grill the white part of the lemon grass, green chilli and the cloves of garlic over a low flame on a splatter guard until brown and charred. Remove each from the fire as they brown. The garlic takes the longest.
4. Peel the burnt layer from the lemon grass stem and bruise with the back of a knife. Add to simmering stock.
5. Turn chicken over so it simmers evenly.
6. Peel roasted garlic, leaving a bit of brown charring on, place in a mortar along with the grilled chilli and using a pestle, pound together to a coarse paste (or use food processor).
7. When done, remove the chicken from the stock and set aside. Add the garlic and chilli to stock. Remove saucepan containing the stock from the heat and stir in the chopped stinkweed, spring onion, coriander, mint and the lime juice.
8. Shred the chicken into 5cm slivers and add to the stock, stirring to combine.
9. Stir in 1 tablespoon of fish sauce, taste and adjust lime juice and fish sauce to suit.
10. Recommended accompaniments are Fish Moke, Awm Wai, a jeow (spicy dipping sauce) and sticky rice.

Recipes (continued)

Fish Moke (serves 4-6)

Ingredients

- 1 small (500-750g) catfish or similar firm fish
- 2 stalks lemon grass, white parts finely sliced
- 1 chilli
- 1 large clove garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ Knorr chicken boullion cube (or 1 Maggi chicken stock cube)
- 2 tablespoons dill leaves
- 2 tablespoons holy basil leaves
- 1 tablespoon raw sticky rice, soaked until soft and pounded to a pulp in a mortar (or 1 tablespoon ground roasted sticky rice)
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- For 2- 4 packets: Banana leaves cut into 4- 8 rectangles approx. 25-30cm, soaked in hot water until pliable.



Method

1. Cut the fleshy fish parts into chunks (approx. 2cm x 4cm).
2. In a mortar and pestle pound until sticking together, the lemon grass, chilli, garlic, salt and crumbled stock cube.
3. Finely chop dill leaves, add to the mortar and pound until ingredients form a rough paste.
4. Transfer paste to a larger bowl, toss the chunks of fish in the paste. Add basil leaves and mix with a spoon until fish is well coated.
5. Add the prepared sticky rice and 1 tablespoon of fish sauce. If you like, also add the chopped fish head, tail piece, and fin wings. Mix together. If adding the extra fish, add more finely sliced green herbs, another tablespoon each of pounded or ground sticky rice and fish sauce and another stock cube.
6. Take two crosswise (X) arranged pieces of banana leaf and spoon about a cup of fish mixture into the middle. Do this until the mixture is used up (2-4 packets).
7. Fold the leaves so the two opposite sides parallel to you meet with the V at the top. Hold them together while folding up the other two sides (on your left and right) to also meet at the top of the filling. This forms a pouch around the filling that looks like a collapsed umbrella. Fold the left side 'wings' around the filling, then wrap the right side 'wings' around to form a pyramid shape. Secure the top with a bamboo toothpick, and trim the top off with scissors. (Or simply gather the banana leaf together and tie it with a string.)
8. Steam the packets in a covered steamer over boiling water for 30 minutes.
9. Remove packets from steamer, open onto individual plates and trim bamboo leaves round to fit.

Recipes (continued)

Kao Soi (Northern Lao Noodles serves 4-6)

Ingredients (Pork Sauce)

- 10 large dried red chillies, stem off and deseeded
- 2 cups water
- 3 medium cloves garlic, peeled
- 10 small brown shallots (onion type) thumb-joint sized, peeled
- generous pinch salt
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 tablespoons fermented bean paste (with chilli), or substitute miso or yellow bean sauce squashed to a paste)
- 200g pork, chopped to a coarse mince texture
- 1-1½ cups water
- 1 chicken bouillon cube
- ½ teaspoon salt



Ingredients (Noodles)

- 375g fresh or dried flat rice noodles (approx. 6mm when dry)
- 2 litres water (for cooking noodles)
- 6 cups water (for stock)
- Large handful of chicken pieces
- 1 teaspoon salt to taste
- 3 cups seasonal green vegetables (e.g. 3 yard-long beans, cut in 5 cm lengths and small bunch watercress, washed & trimmed)
- 5 small spring onions, including 8 cm green tops, finely sliced
- 5 small sprigs of coriander leaves (cilantro) including stems, finely chopped

Method

1. Place dried chillies in saucepan with 2 cups of water, bring to boil, simmer until chillies are soft and swollen. Cool, remove and drain chillies.
2. Chop chillies finely until a fine paste is made (or use food processor). Set paste aside.
3. Pound garlic, shallots and salt in a mortar until slightly opaque paste formed.
4. Heat wok, add oil. Add shallot and garlic, stir fry over high heat for 2 minutes. Lower heat, stir frying continually until onion starts to brown. Add chilli paste, continue to stir, add fermented bean paste, squashing the mixture down and scraping the sides and bottom of the wok where it sticks occasionally, about 2 minutes.
5. Add pork to mixture, stir fry 2-3 minutes, then add 1-1½ cups water. Continue to cook over low heat until mixture reduces and thickens. Add crumbled bouillon cube and ½ teaspoon of salt.
6. Add noodles to 2 litres of boiling water, boil until al dente. Drain and set aside.
7. Bring 6 cups water to the boil, add chicken pieces and salt, cover, simmer for 10 minutes. Add vegetables (except spring onions and chopped coriander), simmer for further 2 minutes.
8. Divide noodles into 5 noodle bowls (each half full). Add 2-3 heaped Chinese soup spoons full of meat sauce mixture (about ½ cup) to each bowl. Top with generous sprinkling of sliced spring onion and chopped coriander (cilantro). Place one third of the vegetables on top of the noodles to one side of each bowl. Discard the chicken pieces, and carefully pour the chicken stock over the noodles in each bowl.
9. Serve with accompaniments of soy sauce, chilli flakes, sugar and wedges of lime, to taste.

Recipes (continued)

Lahp Tofu

Ingredients

- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 500g firm tofu, cut into 2cm cubes
- 2 large cloves garlic, sliced
- ½ cup water or vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- Half a banana flower shaved from tip into a bowl of cold water (or substitute with green beans or green bananas with peel still on)
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons ground roasted sticky rice
- 2 reddish chillies, finely sliced
- 1/3 cup finely chopped spring onion tops (scallion tops)
- 3 tablespoons chopped mint
- 3 tablespoons coriander (cilantro), finely chopped

Ingredients (Garnish)

- 1-2 yard-long beans, trimmed
- cucumber, peeled, cut in 6mm rounds then halved
- 1 red chilli (or tomato), diced

Method

1. Heat oil in wok until hot, add tofu and fry over medium to hot heat, turning occasionally to ensure even browning until golden (about 4-5 minutes). Remove from oil, drain and cool.
2. Place tofu cubes on chopping board and coarsely mince with a large knife. Put the minced tofu into a large bowl for mixing with other ingredients later.
3. Reheat 2 tablespoons of the used oil in pan, add garlic, fry until barely golden, then add water (or stock) and 1 tablespoon of soy sauce.
4. Squeeze out the banana flower, add to the minced tofu and mix lightly. Add 2 tablespoons of soy sauce, the fried garlic and some juice from the frying pan.
5. Sprinkle the ground roasted sticky rice over the mixture, and mix together by hand. Taste and adjust soy sauce if necessary.
6. Add sliced chillies, chopped spring onions, mint and coriander. Lightly mix, then pile on a serving dish and garnish with cucumber slices, yard-long beans and pieces of chilli or tomato.



Recipes (continued)

Luang Prabang Fried Rice (serves 1)

Ingredients (Fried Rice)

- 1/4 - 1/3 cup oil
- 1/4 cup chopped garlic
- 1/4-1/2 cup boneless chicken, finely sliced
- 1 Thai small round eggplant, cut into eighths
- 1/3-1/2 cup bamboo shoots, sliced (fingernail sized pieces)
- 1/3-1/2 cup cut yard-long beans (1cm pieces)
- 1/2 cup diced red onion, (1cm pieces)
- 1/3-1/2 cup fresh oyster mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cups cold steamed long grain rice
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1-2 tablespoons Luang Prabang chilli paste (or other sweet and mild spicy chilli paste)
- 2 tablespoons oyster sauce
- 1 sliced small tomato, for garnish



Ingredients (Soup)

- 1 cup water or vegetable stock
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/3 cup Chinese cabbage or other greens, chopped (3cm pieces)
- 4 pieces tofu, cut into 4cm cubes
- ground black pepper to taste

Method

1. **Fried Rice:** Heat oil in wok until hot, add chopped garlic. Stir fry over medium to hot heat until garlic starts to turn golden. Toss in chicken. Stir fry for 1 minute until colour becomes white, add the eggplant followed by the bamboo shoots, tossing between each addition. Keep things moving all the time, add successively the chopped yard-long beans, red onion and mushrooms.
2. Add the cooked rice, toss until mixed and warm, then sprinkle over the soy sauce, chilli paste and oyster sauce. Keep stir frying until all is hot and mingled.
3. To present, arrange some tomato in the bottom of a deep oiled bowl (e.g. rice bowl or coffee cup). Spoon the fried rice on top of the garnish and pack down firmly until bowl is full. Put a plate on top of the bowl and invert both. Lift the bowl up, leaving the moulded rice on the plate.
4. **Soup:** In a frying pan or small pot, add the water and soy sauce. Bring to the boil, reduce heat so the stock simmers. Add Chinese greens then the tofu cubes. Simmer for 3 minutes.
5. To serve, spoon soup into a small Chinese bowl and grind black pepper to taste on top.
6. Serve as an accompaniment to the fried rice dish.

Food Sources

36

Restaurants

Thai Lao

2 Smiths Road, Goodna QLD 4300

Phone: (07) 3818 1520

Thai Wi-Rat

20 Duncan Street, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Phone: (07) 3257 0884

Bamboo Shoot Restaurant Brisbane

58 High Street, Toowong QLD 4066

Phone: (07) 3871 1688

Edge Hill Thai & Laos Takeaway

122 Collins Avenue, Edge Hill QLD 4870

Phone: (07) 4053 2844

Health

The major health problems in Laos are malaria, hepatitis, parasitic diseases, dysentery and tuberculosis.

Depending on a person's level of education and past exposure, modern medical ideas compete with or combine with folk ideas. These ideas include spirit loss and the balance and imbalance of humours which can be remedied by diet and herbal medicines. For spirit loss, a baci, or a shamanistic ceremony may be performed.

When in danger, Lao's usually pray for protection to gods, angels, or spirits, depending on their beliefs. Some people wear Buddha's as necklace chains for protection from evil spirits. The wearer must follow strict rules of behaviour. Breaking these rules is thought to lead to nightmares, mental or physical illness, some form of danger, or losing the necklace's power.

Traditional Healing

Lao's whether animist or Buddhist believe people who are ill have lost part of their spirit. The family elder follows a ritual of praying to the spirits of the patient's different body parts. The elder promises to reward the spirits with rice wine and chicken which are given to the patient when healed to feed the returning spirits.

Some Lao's believe an illness can result from doing something offensive to deceased ancestors. Birth defects or chronic illnesses in babies are believed to be caused by sins the baby or parents committed in their last life. A birthmark is seen as a mark from the baby's parents in his or her last life.

Traditional treatments such as coining, cupping or pinching may be tried first. This can result in bruises or marks on the forehead, the abdomen, the base of the nose, between the eyes, and on the neck or chest. It is important not to mistake these marks as a sign of abuse.

Traditional medicine consists of herbal, root and animal remedies, and consulting a medicine man. These medicines are taken in a variety of ways: applied directly to wounds or skin; taken orally; inhaled through the mouth or nose; or by taking a shower, bath or sauna. Although many herbal remedies are difficult to find in Australia some may be acquired at herbal medicine stores in places like Chinatown, or purchased via the internet. A sick person is put on a strict diet of grilled dried meat, some vegetables and fruits, and certain kinds of rice.

While the majority of Lao immigrants believe modern medicine and healing practices are superior to the traditional medicine and magic healing, many still believe in some superstitions.

Lao's prefer treatment from Asian medical staff primarily because they believe they share a similar culture. Female patients are more comfortable with female interpreters, and doctors and nurses where possible. Male patients prefer male interpreters, and doctors and nurses where possible.

Pain & Illness

Lao Buddhists believe many aspects of illness and disease are a result of one's actions in the past and current life (bad karma). Good deeds, thoughts, and words result in good karma whereas bad karma is a result of impure thoughts, words, and bad deeds.

In general, Lao's who are unwell will seek assistance from the family and/or community before visiting a western health professional.

Mental Health

Mental health issues are very sensitive for Lao's. It is considered shameful to be treated for a mental illness as it may be attributed to conflict with the spirits or spirit loss.

In Laos psychiatrists are solely meant for insane people. There are no professional counsellors who deal with personal or family problems or depression. People with these problems may secretly seek help from their parents, elders, fortune tellers, medicine men or monks.

Ageing

Elders are perceived as 'the ones with the wisdom of life' who gave life to their children.

Lao's believe in honouring and respecting 'elders'. For example, at the Pimay Lao (New Year) 13th–15th April, families gather to wish each other well and to pay respect to their living elders. This is called Somma.

Traditionally it is the youngest daughter who not only inherits the main house but who is also responsible for the care of ageing parents. A profound belief in their own culture make older Lao's reluctant to change and to adapt to their new environment and this can lead to intergenerational conflict with their children and grandchildren. Transportation is often an issue for older people particularly when all the adults in a family are working, most often due to their low understanding of English.

A Low understanding of English and low literacy levels can also complicate an older Lao's comprehension and ability to access Australia's health, aged-care, and support systems.

Among the Lao, cremation is practiced except for those whose death is somehow out of the ordinary, such as women who die in childbirth.

The aim of most Lao death rituals is to speed the soul of the deceased through the various hells and into rebirth through the transference of merit from the living to the dead.

The remains (ashes) normally are placed in a small stupa inside the temple fence. These remains are powerful magically, and offerings to them channel that power into the fulfilment of one's wishes.

There two Buddhist hospices in Qld both practice the Vajrayana sect of Buddhism.

Cittamani Hospice Service (FPMT)

320 Woombye Road, Palmwoods QLD 4555

Phone: (07) 5445 0822

Email: 100357.3004@compuserve.com

Director: Ven. Hillary Clarke

Karuna Hospice Service Pty Ltd (FPMT)

PO Box 2020, Windsor QLD 4030

Phone: (07) 3857 8555

Fax: (07) 3857 8040

Email: karuna@karuna.org.au

Web: www.karuna.org.au

Director: Ven. Yeshe Khadro

Lao Brisbane Association Inc.

34-36 Harris Street, Bellbird Park QLD 4300

Phone: (07) 3814 3830

President: Mr Khamsing KHAMMANIVONG

Lao Community Advancement Nsw Co-Op Ltd

24 Lovoni Street, Cabramatta NSW 2166

Phone: (02) 9724 1951

Web: <http://laocommunityaustralia.doomby.com/contact/contact.html>

Wat Budhasamakhom Committee

73 Highbury Drive, Red Bank Plains QLD 4301

Phone: (07) 3814 0229

Laos Consulate in Australia

Embassy of the LAO P.D.R to Australia and New Zealand

1 Dalman Crescent, O'Malley ACT 2606

Phone: (02) 6286 4595

Email: laoemb@bigpond.net.au

Contact: Excellency Mr Rangsy KONGSAYSY

Virtual Library Laos

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~lao/laoVL.html>

Laos-born Cultural Profile, Dept Immigration & Citizenship, Australian Government, 2006
Cultural and Religious Profiles to Assist in Providing Culturally Sensitive Care and Effective Communication, Multicultural Education Project, Migrant Information Centre, Melbourne, Victoria, 2004

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US Department of State, Background Note – Laos, 2011

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2770.htm>

Laos Cultural Profile

http://www.culturalprofiles.net/laos/directories/laos_cultural_profile/-916.html

Culture of Laos - history, people, clothing, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family
<http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Laos.html#ixzz1jauMxo6V>

Lao Eating Habits and Attitudes to Food, Editors - Alan and Jennifer Davidson

<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/othertopics/foods/eatingHabits.htm>

Correction/Addition Form

42

Please complete the following page if you are aware of either incorrect details or you know of additional resources that should be included.

Correction	
Listed Item	Correction
Title	
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Additional Resources / Contact	
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