

Luang Prabang, Laos — 90-Day Survival Guide

0. City Overview & Quick Facts

Luang Prabang is a UNESCO World Heritage city at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers in northern Laos. It is small, slow, and temple-dense — a place where saffron-robed monks collect morning alms, French colonial shophouses line the peninsula, and turquoise waterfalls lie a short drive away. For nomads, it is one of Southeast Asia's cheapest and most peaceful bases, but it is also limited: small social scene, modest healthcare, patchy internet outside cafés, and a 30-day tourist visa that must be extended or reset for a 90-day stay.

Fact	Detail
Population	~55,000 (city); ~82,000 (greater area est. 2026)
Area	Small; old town covers a narrow peninsula
Elevation	~305 m above sea level
Language	Lao (official); French and English in tourist areas; some Hmong and Khmu languages
Currency	Lao kip (LAK); Thai baht and US dollars widely accepted
Timezone	ICT (UTC+7)
Climate	Tropical monsoon; cool dry season Nov–Feb, hot dry Mar–Apr, wet season May–Oct
Religion	Theravada Buddhism (dominant); animist hill-tribe beliefs
Power	230V, Type A/B/C/E plugs; mixed sockets, occasional outages
Water	Tap water not potable; drink bottled or filtered
Internet	Usable in cafés and hotels; fibre is limited; mobile data is cheap

Why nomads stay: extremely low cost, UNESCO charm, calm pace, natural beauty, strong Buddhist culture, easy access to waterfalls and hiking.

Why nomads leave: 30-day visa limitations, weak healthcare, small dating scene, limited nightlife, unreliable internet for heavy video calls, and seasonal heat or rain.

1. Landing — First 72 Hours

Arrival at Luang Prabang International Airport (LPQ)

LPQ is about 4 km northeast of the old town.

Airport to city centre

Option	Cost	Time	Notes
Tuk-tuk / jumbo	\$3–5	15–25 min	Most common; negotiate or pre-book with your hotel
Hotel transfer	\$5–10	15–25 min	Pre-arranged comfort
Walk	Free	40–50 min	Only if staying nearby and travelling light

Taxis are limited; tuk-tuks are the default.

Arrival by train

The China-Laos railway station is on the outskirts of town. Tuk-tuk or minivan transfer to the old town costs roughly 50,000–60,000 LAK (\$2.50–3) per person or \$5–8 for a private vehicle.

First 24-hour checklist

1. **Cash.** Withdraw or exchange LAK at the airport or in town. ATMs dispense kip, baht, or dollars. Cash is essential for street food, tuk-tuks, temples, and waterfalls.
2. **SIM.** Lao Telecom or Unitel. Tourist SIMs are sold at the airport, phone shops, and mini-marts. A basic data plan is cheap (often under \$5). Passport required.
3. **Base.** Old town peninsula for heritage and walking; Nam Khan side for quieter, cheaper rooms; near the airport or main road for budget long-stays.
4. **Transport.** Walking and bicycles cover the old town; tuk-tuks and songthaews for waterfalls and caves.

Move-in tests for any rental

- AC or strong fan; test for 10 minutes.
- Hot water and water pressure.
- Internet speed test — 10+ Mbps is workable; 25+ Mbps for video calls.

- Mosquito nets or sealed windows.
- Written lease and deposit terms.

2. Visa & Immigration

Laos is more restrictive than Malaysia or Indonesia for long stays.

Option	Detail	Cost (2026 est.)
Tourist e-visa	30 days, single entry	~\$35–51 depending on nationality
Visa on arrival	30 days at airports/land borders	~\$30–42 + 1 passport photo
Extension	+30 days typical	~\$2–3/day at immigration office
Long-stay / business	Longer paths exist but require sponsorship	Via agent
Overstay	Fine, possible blacklist	Avoid

Practical advice * A 90-day stay requires either two extensions or a visa run to Thailand or Vietnam. * Apply for the e-visa at laoevisa.gov.la before travel to avoid airport queues. * Passport must have 6+ months validity. * Remote work on a tourist visa is a grey area; keep a low profile and do not tell immigration you are working locally.

3. Money & Banking

Laos is highly cash-based. US dollars and Thai baht are accepted almost everywhere in tourist areas; Lao kip is needed for small purchases.

ATMs * BCEL, Lao Development Bank, and other ATMs are available in town. * Withdrawal fees are high (\$2–5 per transaction) and limits can be low. Withdraw large amounts less often. * Some ATMs dispense dollars or baht as well as kip.

Cards and apps * Cards accepted at mid-range hotels and some restaurants; cash preferred. * No meaningful local ride-hailing app; negotiate tuk-tuks in person. * Wise/Revolut cards help with exchange rates.

Money changers * Available in the old town and near banks. Rates are reasonable for dollars and baht.

Local bank account * Very difficult as a tourist. Requires long-stay documentation and local address.

Tipping * Not customary. Round up for tuk-tuk drivers or leave small change at restaurants if you want.

4. Neighborhoods & Housing

Luang Prabang is small enough that most bases are within a few minutes of each other by bicycle.

Old town peninsula (Sisavangvong Road)

The UNESCO core. Guesthouses, cafés, temples, night market. Monthly fan room: \$250–400; AC room: \$400–700. Best for first-time visitors and those who want to walk everywhere. Can be noisy from night-market and temple activity.

Nam Khan side (east of the peninsula)

Quieter, more local, cheaper. Monthly fan room: \$200–350; AC room: \$350–600. Best for longer-stay budget nomads and those who want calm mornings.

Airport Road / Ban Phu Mok area

Cheapest long-term rooms, more basic, less charm. Monthly: \$150–300. Best for tight budgets; you will bicycle or tuk-tuk to the old town.

Boutique heritage hotels

Beautiful restored colonial buildings, often with pools. \$900–1,800/month. Best for short-stay premium travellers, not practical for most nomads.

Renting tips

- Walk around and negotiate directly with guesthouses for monthly rates.
- Many places include cleaning and sometimes breakfast.
- Electricity may be extra; AC adds cost quickly.
- Facebook groups and word-of-mouth are more useful than formal listings.

5. Transport

Walking

The old town is flat and tiny; you can walk across the peninsula in 15–20 minutes.

Bicycle

- Rental: \$1–2/day.
- Best daily transport for errands, market runs, and temple hopping.

Tuk-tuk / jumbo

- Around town: \$1–3/trip.
- Negotiate before getting in; no meters.
- Drivers congregate near the night market, Joma, and the ferry pier.

Motorbike

- Rental: \$8–15/day.
- IDP recommended; police checkpoints are possible.
- Useful for Kuang Si, Tad Sae, and rural trips.

Songthaew (shared truck)

- To Kuang Si: \$5–8 return per person.
- To airport or railway station: \$2–5 per person.
- You can hire the whole vehicle for roughly \$15–30 depending on distance.

Boats

- Mekong boats to Pak Ou Caves: \$10–25 for a shared half-day trip.
- Slow boats to/from Thailand are more of an adventure than practical transport.

Flights and trains

- LPQ has flights to Bangkok, Hanoi, Chiang Mai, Vientiane, and others.
- China-Laos railway connects to Vientiane and the Chinese border; station is on the outskirts.

6. Food & Dining

Luang Prabang has excellent Lao food, strong French influence, and one of the best night markets in Southeast Asia.

Must-try dishes

- **Laap / larb** — minced meat salad (pork, beef, fish) with lime, herbs, sticky rice.
- **Tam mak hoong** — Lao papaya salad, often spicier than Thai som tam.

- **Khao soi** — Lao-style rice-noodle soup with tomato-pork broth (different from Thai khao soi).
- **Khao niao** — sticky rice, eaten with fingers, served with almost everything.
- **Mok pa** — steamed fish in banana leaf with coconut, lemongrass, and kaffir lime.
- **Khao jee** — Lao baguette sandwich with pâté, ham, vegetables, chilli.
- **Kafei Lao** — strong Robusta coffee, often with condensed milk.
- **Or lam** — Luang Prabang-style stew with meat, vegetables, and spices.
- **Sai oua** — Lao herb sausage.

Typical prices

- Street food / noodle soup: 15,000–30,000 LAK (\$0.70–1.50).
- Hawker / night market buffet plate: 20,000–40,000 LAK (\$1–2).
- Mid-range Lao or French meal: 50,000–120,000 LAK (\$2.50–6).
- Coffee at bakery/café: 15,000–30,000 LAK (\$0.75–1.50).
- BeerLao: 12,000–20,000 LAK (\$0.60–1).

Where to eat

- **Sisavangvong Road night market** — vegetarian and meat buffet stalls; cheapest dinner in town.
- **Dara Market area** — local food and produce.
- **French bakeries (Le Banneton, Joma)** — baguettes, croissants, coffee.
- **Saffron Coffee** — specialty coffee and quiet workspace.
- **Local rice stalls along Setthathilat Road** — laap and khao soi for breakfast.

Daily food budgets

- Hawker/night-market first: ~\$5–8/day.
- Mix of local + cafés: ~\$10–15/day.
- Restaurant-heavy: ~\$20–30/day.

7. Remote Work & Coworking

Luang Prabang is not a coworking city. Most remote workers use cafés and hotel lobbies.

Internet

- Apartment/hotel Wi-Fi varies widely; test before committing.
- Mobile data is cheap and often more reliable than hotel Wi-Fi.

- Video calls are best done from a coworking-friendly café or a hotel with good fibre.

Workspaces

- **Joma Bakery Café** — reliable Wi-Fi, power outlets, Sisavangvong Road.
- **Saffron Coffee** — specialty coffee, quieter, riverside or old-town location.
- **Le Banneton** — French bakery, can be busy.
- **Hotel lobbies** — buy a drink and use the space; many have decent fibre.

Time zone

UTC+7. Good for Asia and parts of Europe; difficult for US time zones.

8. Healthcare

Healthcare in Luang Prabang is basic. Anything serious requires evacuation to Vientiane or Thailand.

Facility	Location / Phone	Notes
Luang Prabang Provincial Hospital	Ban Phoumouk, Luang Prabang; +856 71 254 026 / emergency +856 20 200 9379	Public hospital, 24-hour emergency
Phakan's Clinic	Town centre	Private clinic with English-speaking staff; walk-in
Chinese Hospital	Ban Phu Mok, Luang Prabang	Listed in government hospital directories
Lao Red Cross pharmacies	Old town and main streets	Basic meds and first aid

Travel insurance * Mandatory recommendation: get evacuation cover to Thailand or your home country. * Outpatient coverage helps for infections, dengue-like illness, and minor injuries. * Save the 24-hour emergency line before you need it.

Emergency numbers * Ambulance: **115** * Police: **113** * Fire: **114** * Tourist police: contact via local police or your embassy

9. Dental

Dental care in Luang Prabang is limited. Cleanings and simple fillings may be available, but serious work usually requires Vientiane or Thailand.

Procedure	Typical price (USD)
Cleaning + checkup	\$30–60
Filling	\$40–90
Crown	\$250–500
Single implant	\$1,000–2,000

Travel insurance usually excludes dental; budget separately or plan treatment in Thailand.

10. Safety & Emergency

Luang Prabang is one of the safest cities in Southeast Asia. Violent crime is rare; most issues are petty theft and road/river accidents.

Common risks

- **Petty theft** at the night market and in crowded alms-ceremony areas. Keep bags closed and phones secure.
- **Motorbike accidents** — roads can be rough, especially outside town; wear a helmet and inspect brakes/lights.
- **Tak Bat etiquette breaches** — do not get in monks' faces with cameras; do not buy rice from street vendors to participate unless you know the respectful way.

Natural hazards

- **Dengue fever** is present year-round; use insect repellent and remove standing water.
- **Monsoon flooding** can affect low-lying areas during heavy rain.
- **Jellyfish / river currents** — be cautious when swimming in the Mekong or waterfalls.

Legal warnings

- Lao drug laws are severe, including for cannabis.
- Respect Buddhism and the monarchy; avoid loud or disrespectful behaviour at temples.
- Do not touch monks or their bowls unless invited.

River and waterfall safety

- Kuang Si and Tad Sae have designated swimming areas; pay attention to signs.
- Do not jump from untested heights.
- Life jackets are recommended for Mekong boat trips, especially in wet season.

11. Weather by Month

Luang Prabang has three main seasons.

Season	Months	Conditions
Cool dry	November–February	15–28°C; best weather, clear skies, busy tourist season
Hot dry	March–April	20–35°C; hot, possible haze, pre-monsoon
Wet / monsoon	May–October	22–31°C; lush, afternoon rain, some roads muddy, waterfalls full

Best arrival windows: November–February. **Avoid if possible:** April (hottest), September–October (heaviest rain and haze risk).

Pack lightweight clothing, a light jacket for cool mornings, rain gear, strong sunscreen, and insect repellent.

12. Shopping & Daily Life

Mini-marts and markets

- **Sisavangvong Road mini-marts** — snacks, water, toiletries at tourist prices.
- **Dara Market** — fresh produce, household goods, local ingredients.
- **Morning market near the Royal Palace** — fruit, vegetables, sticky rice, laap.

Pharmacies

- Lao Red Cross pharmacy and private pharmacies on main streets.
- Bring a travel medical kit: rehydration salts, anti-diarrhoea, antihistamines, topical antibiotic, hydrocortisone, high-SPF sunscreen, and insect repellent.

Laundry

- Laundry shops charge roughly \$1/kg and often turn around same day.
- Many guesthouses include laundry or offer it cheaply.

Electronics and repairs

- Limited. For serious laptop or phone repairs, Vientiane or Thailand is better.

Shipping

- Pos Laos is available but slow and unreliable for valuable items.
- Bring critical spare parts and medication with you.

13. Groceries, Markets & Meat

Eating out is so cheap that many nomads rarely cook, but having a kitchen helps with diet and cost.

Fresh produce

- Morning and evening markets sell tropical fruit, vegetables, herbs, eggs, tofu, and sticky rice.
- Fruit: bananas, papaya, pineapple, mangosteen, rambutan, dragon fruit, seasonal durian.

Meat and fish

- Fresh river fish, chicken, pork, and beef are available at markets.
- Lao sausage (sai oua) is a local specialty.
- Refrigeration can be basic in budget accommodation; shop frequently.

Imported goods

- Limited selection and higher prices. French bakeries stock bread and pastries.
- Cheese, oats, pasta, and Western snacks are available in tourist-oriented shops but expensive.

Water

- Tap water is not potable. Drink bottled, boiled, or filtered water.

14. Language & Local Etiquette

English works in tourist cafés, hotels, and travel agencies; Lao is needed for deeper local interaction. French is spoken by some older residents.

Useful Lao phrases

- **Khop jai** — thank you
- **Baw** — no
- **Khor thot** — excuse me / sorry
- **Tao dai?** — how much?
- **Khao jao bo hao?** — I don't understand
- **Sep lai** — very delicious
- **Pet** — spicy

Etiquette

- Remove shoes before entering homes, temples, and some shops.
- Dress modestly at temples and during alms giving; shoulders and knees covered.
- Use your right hand or both hands for giving/receiving.
- Do not point feet at Buddha images or monks.
- Speak softly; public anger or confrontation is considered rude.
- Ask permission before photographing people, especially monks and hill-tribe vendors.

15. History & Culture Snapshot

Luang Prabang was the royal capital of the Lan Xang kingdom from 1353 to 1560 and remained a royal seat until the Lao monarchy was dissolved in 1975. The city is a rare blend of traditional Lao wooden architecture and French colonial buildings, protected as a UNESCO site since 1995.

Buddhism and daily life

- The city is home to dozens of monasteries. The morning Tak Bat (alms giving) is a daily ritual, not a performance.
- Many boys spend time as novice monks; temples are centres of education and community.

French colonial influence

- Baguettes, coffee, and colonial shophouses remain from the French period.
- The old town street grid and building styles reflect both Lao and French planning.

Hill tribes

- Hmong, Khmu, and other ethnic groups live in surrounding villages and sell handicrafts at the night market.

16. Tourism & Day Trips

Within Luang Prabang

Site	What it is	Entry
Wat Xieng Thong	16th-century temple, Tree of Life mosaic	~20,000–30,000 LAK
Royal Palace / National Museum	Former royal residence	~60,000 LAK foreigners
Mount Phousi	Sacred hill with panoramic views	~20,000–30,000 LAK
Tak Bat (alms ceremony)	Monks collect rice at dawn	Free to observe respectfully; ~5:30 AM
Wat Mai	Historic temple near the Royal Palace	Small fee
Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre	Hill-tribe culture museum	Small fee

Around Luang Prabang

Site	What it is	Entry / practical
Kuang Si Falls	Multi-tiered turquoise waterfall with pools	~60,000 LAK foreigners; songthaew \$5–8 return
Pak Ou Caves	Cliffside caves with thousands of Buddha statues	Boat trip \$10–25; small entry fee
Tad Sae Waterfall	Multi-level falls accessible by boat	Best in wet season; small fee
Ban Chan pottery village	Pottery village across Nam Khan River	Free / donation
Whisky Village	Local lao-lao rice whisky village	Usually combined with Pak Ou boat trip
UXO Laos Visitor Centre	Information on unexploded ordnance legacy	Free / donation

Day trips

- **Kuang Si half-day:** waterfall swimming + bear rescue centre.
- **Pak Ou Caves + Whisky Village:** Mekong boat half-day.
- **Tad Sae by boat:** best May–October.
- **Rural village visits:** book through responsible operators; avoid exploitative “human zoo” tours.

17. Master Links

Resource	URL / Contact	Use For
Lao eVisa official	laoevisa.gov.la	Visa application
Tourism Luang Prabang	tourismluangprabang.org	Official travel info
GOV.UK Laos medical facilities list	gov.uk/government/publications/laos-list-of-medical-facilities	Hospital contacts
Wikipedia Luang Prabang	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luang_Prabang	General reference
Wikivoyage Luang Prabang	en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Luang_Prabang	Travel guidance

18. Final Budget Table

Monthly cost-of-stay estimates for Luang Prabang, in USD. FX rate used: **20,000 LAK = 1 USD**.

Category	Lean Nomad	Comfortable Nomad	Premium Nomad
Room	\$250 (fan guesthouse room / local house in Nam Khan area)	\$450 (AC guesthouse room or small hotel in old town)	\$1,000 (boutique heritage hotel or serviced apartment)
Food	\$160 (street food, night market, sticky rice, local noodle soup)	\$280 (mix of hawker + cafés + occasional restaurant)	\$500 (daily restaurant meals, imported items, alcohol)
Transport	\$25 (bicycle rental + occasional tuk-tuk)	\$60 (tuk-tuks + shared songthaews to waterfalls)	\$150 (private tuk-tuk/motorbike + airport/railway transfers)

Category	Lean Nomad	Comfortable Nomad	Premium Nomad
Coworking	\$0 (hotel/café Wi-Fi)	\$0 (café rotation)	\$50 (occasional hotel business space)
Insurance	\$70 (travel insurance with evacuation cover)	\$100 (travel + outpatient + evacuation)	\$180 (comprehensive nomad insurance)
Visa	\$40 (e-visa + one extension amortised)	\$60 (e-visa + extension or visa-run cost)	\$100 (visa runs / agent / longer-stay path)
Entertainment	\$40 (temples, waterfalls, night market, local trips)	\$100 (regular waterfall/temple trips, Mekong boat)	\$220 (private tours, frequent trips, spa, fine dining)
Buffer	\$15	\$25	\$50
TOTAL / month	\$600	\$1,075	\$2,250
90-DAY TOTAL	\$1,800	\$3,225	\$6,750

Assumptions by Tier

Lean Nomad (~\$600/mo) Fan guesthouse room or local house in Nam Khan area, street food and night market, bicycle plus occasional tuk-tuk, hotel/café Wi-Fi, basic travel insurance with evacuation, free/cheap temples and waterfalls.

Comfortable Nomad (~\$1,075/mo) AC guesthouse or small hotel in old town, mix of hawker food and cafés, regular tuk-tuks and shared songthaews to Kuang Si/Pak Ou, outpatient + evacuation insurance, regular waterfall/temple and Mekong trips.

Premium Nomad (~\$2,250/mo) Boutique heritage hotel or serviced apartment, daily restaurant dining and imported items, private tuk-tuk or motorbike, occasional private workspace, comprehensive nomad insurance, private tours, spa, and fine dining.

19. Glossary of Local Terms

- **Laap / larb** — minced meat salad
- **Tam mak hoong** — Lao papaya salad
- **Khao soi** — Lao tomato-pork rice-noodle soup
- **Khao niao** — sticky rice
- **Mok pa** — steamed fish in banana leaf
- **Khao jee** — Lao baguette sandwich

- **Kafei lao** — Lao coffee
- **Or lam** — Luang Prabang stew
- **Sai oua** — Lao herb sausage
- **Tuk-tuk** — three-wheeled taxi
- **Songthaew** — shared pick-up truck
- **Tak Bat** — morning alms-giving ceremony
- **Wat** — Buddhist temple
- **Mekong** — major river through Laos
- **Nam Khan** — river that meets the Mekong at Luang Prabang
- **Khop jai** — thank you
- **Baw** — no

20. Sources & Credits

- Wikipedia — Luang Prabang, Laos
- Wikivoyage — Luang Prabang
- Lao eVisa (laoevisa.gov.la)
- Tourism Luang Prabang (tourismluangprabang.org)
- GOV.UK Laos medical facilities list
- Rapid Penang / Laos transport sources
- Hawker, market, and guesthouse pricing from 2026 sources

Compiled: 2026-07-16. Confirm visa, medical, and transport details directly with official sources before travel.