

## To Responsible Tourists Visiting Luang Prabang

Proposed by an old resident of the city.

1. Read the culture and society chapters of your guide book before arriving and be prepared to respect as much as possible the local traditions. Show consideration for privacy. When you hesitate, deference, dignity and generosity will help you.
2. Smile, take your time and try to be as exquisitely polite and relaxed as most of Lao people you will meet. They may be poor and with many problems in their everyday life, they will usually try to keep dignity, avoid bothering others with their personal problems and do their best to show you their nicer face. Do the same, control your emotions, do not show anger when something goes wrong. Learn from your Lao experience this attitude when life is difficult.
3. Get dressed properly. Cover largely your shoulders, breasts, stomach and thighs. Adjust your way of dressing to local uses rather than expect to push Lao people to adjust to western fashion or "modernity". If you are a woman try to wear a "sin", the local tube skirt, for a dinner or a more formal occasion. You will be surprised how Lao people will appreciate.
4. See the "Tak Bat" differently. Go to see the Tak Bat ritual (morning alms giving to monks), do not take pictures nor make any offering, but admire in silence this ceremony, feel the generosity of the people offering rice as well as the meditating attitude of the senior monks. Then later in the morning put some money in an envelop and ask your guide or a Lao friend to go with you in a temple to give the money to the Abbot or to a senior monk who probably will bless you in return.
5. Respect and experience the harmony of the evening prayers of the monks. Go to a temple around 6 pm at sunset. Sit outside on the steps of the sanctuary in silence. Be decently dressed. Gently refuse to speak to novices who may approach you. Close your eyes and listen to the monks chanting. Feel the peace overwhelming your heart. Go back to your hotel without speaking.
6. Offer books. Bring books with you in your suitcase. Choose useful and not too difficult ones. Offer them to a library like the Planet Internet one close to the Dara Market or the Santhiphab High School (see: The Language Project). Encourage and support school attendance. Do not buy anything from truant children.

7. Rent a bicycle. Go round gently without polluting while exercising. Admire the landscape from the other bank of the Nam Khan River (Vat Phone Saat); as well do not miss the other bank of the Mekong River (Vat Chom Phet). Stop at a small stall along the road to rest when you feel the sun is too hot. Be careful; the way people drive can be surprising for you.

8. Go visit markets. Buy locally made things to support local economy. Learn to recognize quality textiles by reading the booklet "How to choose textiles in Luang Prabang" published by the "Heritage House" (La Maison du Patrimoine) and test your knowledge at the night market. Keep Lao heritage in it's homeland. Buy good modern copies of ancient Buddha statues and refrain from buying antiques. Bargain with some restraint, keeping in mind that most people are poor. A schoolmaster or a nurse regular salary is around 20 us\$ per month. (2005)

9. Hire a boat. Enjoy floating on the majestic Mekong River and its tributaries. Do not content yourself with going to the over-visited Pak Ou caves. Ask the boatman to show you a simple traditional village. Buy at Luang Prabang Market some simple notebooks for pupils and give them to the village headman or to the schoolmaster in the village. Put your name or a mark on them to avoid re-selling. Do not use speedboats; they are exhausting, dangerous, and environmentally unfriendly.

10. Experience using your eyes another way. Spend one day without your camera and declare that it is a "no photos" day. With a digital camera it is so easy to shoot. You think probably that you should not miss "the great photo" and then you snap like a machine gun. People in Laos are not yet irritated by photos, but shooting at them like wild animals could be very humiliating especially from close. For that "no photo" day, try to stop and look at things and people you like as long as necessary to record forms, colours, atmosphere in your mind as if you were preparing yourself to paint them later in your room. You may like one day to take a sketchbook with you and when back home to take watercolours lessons.

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