

Lao Culture - At a Glance

Common cultural norms, values, and traits of the Lao population



BE HEALTHY. BE SAFE. BE READY.

Traditional Beliefs on Health and Medicine

- Depending on a person's level of education and exposure, Western medicine competes or combines with folk practices.
- Many believe in a balance and imbalance of humors that can be remedied by diet and herbal medicines.
- Many believe in spirit loss. If this occurs, a baci, or shamanistic ceremony may be performed.

Gender

- Men are generally recognized as the head of household for religious and political purposes.
- In rural areas, men and women tend to share work.
- Men are generally involved in the political sector, with women more likely to be in charge of trade and private life.
- Women are usually responsible for household chores.

Personal Space & Social Gestures

- Careful attention to one's place in the social hierarchy is important. Intentionally flouting hierarchical norms causes conflict.
- Polite forms of speech and body movements are important.
- Body contact is avoided in public, especially between men and women.

Religion

- The ethnic Lao and some Thai groups are Theravada Buddhists.
- There are many shamanistic beliefs that involve house, village, district, city, and realm spirits.
- There are many various beliefs concerning sacred places and objects.

Communication Styles

- Superiors are greeted by clapping one's hands in a prayer motion combined with a slight bow.
- Avoiding conflict or any actions that will cause emotional discomfort is important.

Familial Structure

- Laos has 49 ethnic groups, there are many differences in family structure.
- Inheritance is often equal among sons and daughters. However, in some areas the youngest daughter inherits the main household so that she may care for her aging parents.
- Although some regions are patrilineal, much of Lao society is matrilineal, with men moving to join their bride's family.

About ECHO

The mission of ECHO is to leverage partnerships to deliver vital health, safety, emergency and civic engagement information to help the ever-changing, diverse population integrate and become successful in our communities.

The above information was provided by <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Laos.html>

This information sheet is not intended to be an exhaustive approach or complete representation of the Lao culture, but rather a basic introduction and foundation.