

# “Mini cultural guide” for Laos

## Not to do things

### 1. Head and feet

In Laos your head is “high”, your feet “low”. Using your feet for anything other than walking or playing sport is generally considered rude. Touching someone’s head is very, very impolite.

### 2. Hygiene and clothing

Never be dirty and smelly. Lao people appreciate clean and neatly dressed visitors. And don’t forget: bathing nude in public is impolite.

### 3. As a guest

Please remember to take off your shoes off before you enter a Lao person’s house.

### 4. Just discretely

Kissing and hugging in public is impolite. Please be discrete.

### 5. Photo taking

There are a lot of interesting people and things in Laos. Before you take a photo of someone ask if it is ok.

### 6. Sacred items

There are many other sacred items and sites in Laos. Please don’t touch or enter these places without permission.

### 7. Monks

Monks are revered and respected, however woman should not touch a monk or a monk’s robe.

### 8. Wildlife protection

The illegal sale of wildlife and wildlife products endangers many species native to Laos. Help protect Lao wildlife by refusing to buy wildlife products.

### 9. Noise

Lao people speak softly and avoid confrontation. Please do not shout or raise your voice.

## Traditional greetings

In Laos, people in general greet one another with the word *Sabaidee*. This word can be used at all times of day. The word *Sabaidee* can also be used when taking leave of someone or saying good-bye. If the persons are friends or about the same age, the word *Sabaidee* alone is sufficient for greeting. A wai is a gesture of pressing the palms together in the position of a budding lotus at chest level (*upside down Y*), with the fingertips touching the tip of the nose. There are three levels of wai:

### **1. For the Buddha images or the monks only**

Raise the pressed palms until the thumbs touch the space between the eyebrows and the fingertips touch the hairline at the forehead. The tips of the index fingers are pressed against the forehead, not tilting to the left or right. This is the 1st level wai.



### **2. For parents, teachers, senior relatives, and the elderly**

Raise the pressed palms until the thumbs touch the tip of the nose and the fingertips touch the space between the eyebrows. This is the 2nd level wai.



### **3. For respected persons in general including persons of the same status**

Let the pressed palms touch the lower part of the face, with the tips of the thumbs touching the tip of the chin and the tips of the index fingers touching the nose. Bow the head a little without stooping for both male and female. This is the 3rd level wai.



It should be noted that the level of bowing or stooping depends on status and seniority of both parties. The person greeted should rap wai or acknowledge the wai from a less senior person by pressing the palms together at chest level with the fingertips at the chin, head bowing a little.

Based on this, we would say that the level of our hands position is based on respect, the monk being the highest therefore at the eyebrows level, then eventually move down to nose, then chin level. It is expected for the younger person to wai the elderly person first to show respect, and the elderly person can wai back and place his/her hands at a chest level.