



Volunteers Personal Orientation Handout

Below is some information that might come useful while in the field.

General info about the Bambooschool Foundation

The Bambooschool Foundation is a German non-profit foundation with long lasting connections in Laos and good relations with official organs and other NGOs. Our aim is to improve education and health in Northern Laos' villages. It is our conviction that education and health are the most important preconditions of any further sustainable development. Therefore, our foundation initiates, plans and finances various activities regarding the respective infrastructure as schools, boardinghouses, health centers, surveys and employs volunteers of the appropriate kind.

Our attitude towards the Lao PDR is one of respect - we see ourselves as guests. Being political neutral and independent we do not interfere with any beliefs, religious or otherwise, nor do we engage ourselves in any activities of such kind.

Furthermore, the Bambooschool is not a charity organization - we do not donate material goods in order to "help" the Lao people, we rather aim at providing structures of sustainability and expect from volunteers to act along these guidelines.

The Bambooschool's team in Laos is as follow:
The Lao General Manager is based in Nong Khiaw
The Field Manager is based in Nong Khiaw

General info about Northern Laos

Safety

As documented, nearly 1 person per day is killed in Laos by UXO's, so please don't stray off marked tracks. If in doubt seek local advice.

Safety is generally not a problem. However, you should keep your personal belongings out of sight. Be aware that bag mugging can occur in Luang Prabang.

Visas are requested for Laos at a cost of between \$28 to \$43 per month. Visa extensions can be arranged in Luang Prabang as required (30 days max stay in 1 stint). All these procedures require recent photos of the applicant.

Transport

Flights are available to Luang Prabang from many destinations. Buses & boats services are extensive and serve almost every destination. Motorcycles & bicycles are available for hire in Luang Prabang, as are Tuk Tuks for short distances



General info about Muang Ngoi district

Information about the villages

Luang Prabang is a fairly developed town with all western facilities. However, Bambooschool volunteers are all based and working in the villages up in the Northern part of the Luang Prabang province, The Muang Ngoi district is accessible by boat and road. The circumstances are very rural, there is no Western infrastructure and volunteers are usually 'homestaying' with a Lao family when in remote villages.

Nong Khiaw (NK)

Transport: 3-4h bus trip from Luang Prabang
Telephone: OK
Internet: WiFi in most guesthouses and restaurants
Electricity: OK

Muang Ngoi (MN)

Transport: 1h boat trip from NK (2 boats/day) or unpaved road
Telephone: OK (Unitel is the best provider in MN).
Internet: Internet over phone sometimes possible in MN (Unitel better than ETL)
Electricity: not connected to the power grid, generators only from sunset till approximately 22.00

Other villages

Transport: 3-4h boat trip from NK (1 boat/day)
Telephone: If you climb certain hills further up the Nam Ou river, you will find reception. Providers: ask locals.
Electricity: Provided by small generator (available at night only)
Running water: Not all the houses are connected to the water system. Showers may have to be taken outdoors.

Behaviour

You should be respectful of the Lao culture, and should not interfere with any beliefs, religious or otherwise. We strongly urge you to inform yourself about the do's and don'ts before your trip! And act accordingly!

In some ethnic groups the attitude towards sex is quite spontaneous and direct. So if you find yourself in a situation where you are approached physically for sexual engagements a firm and polite "No!" will do and it should be accompanied by decent behavior and appropriate appearance on your side in any situations. You should keep in mind that any sexual contacts between foreigners and Lao citizens is against the law and can lead to severe problems! BS will not be able to help you in any kind! Please beware of this and act accordingly! Be aware that in Laos clean clothes are a must when in town or when doing business with others. Shorts, torn jeans and the likes are subjects to be frowned upon by locals and such appearance will lead to irritations and bad reputation.

Health

The health care situation in Laos is of a rudimentary kind and lacks most of what you might take for granted in your home country. That is especially true for the rural area you will be based - doctors and pharmacies are not available at all. We strongly suggest you bring your personal first aid kit, all the essential medicaments you might need and:

- Fungus cream
- Antibiotic ointment
- Mosquito repellent (DEET > 50% or Icaridine > 25%)
- Thermometer and a malaria treatment in case of infection (Malarone, Lariam - to be checked with a doctor)



Malaria is generally not a big issue along the Nam Ou River. We strongly recommend you check on-line recommendations over this issue.

Dengue fever is present in Luang Prabang Province and in Vientiane. Appropriate clothing helps but some risk remains.

Weather can be hot and humid so maintain a high water intake throughout the day!

In case of an emergency, you will have to head for the nearest hospital, which would be Luang Prabang (this trip can take from several hours to more than a whole day). Severe injuries will make a journey to Thailand necessary where the medical standard is high. Therefore, you need to get your own travel insurance, which also covers evacuation.

Food

Good supplies and variety in LP, limited supplies in NK & MN, which are smaller centers, barely any supplies in the other villages.

Do not drink from town water or streams! We suggest using only bottled water - even for brushing teeth, etc. Drinkable water, which comes in the form of „tea“, is available in all homestays.

Food served in homestays is good but basic: sticky rice with vegetables, soup, fish and, at times, meat. Monitor your reaction to widely served rice.

Volunteer status

We establish an at-will volunteer relationship with volunteers. Volunteers have no right to compensation for services rendered to the Foundation. BS may end its engagement with any volunteer at any time .

We cover the expenses for accommodation in the project area and we will reimburse you for the transportation costs from the nearest city (Nong Khiaw) to the project site and back, once the project is finished. No other transportation costs will be covered unless those related to business. We will help you with the formalities of visa extension and cover visa extension costs. We do not reimburse any expenses that volunteers incur in the course of their services, in particular health related expenses.

Getting ready

What to bring along

For your comfort, bring your own, necessary equipment, as recommended in the travel guides.

Check for temperatures and climate conditions. It may get chilly in the evenings from Dec. - Feb. (about 10-15 degrees).

Linen/Silk liner (sleeping bag liner) helps keeping off insects at night (Mosquito nets are omnipresent).

Women should dress conservatively, always cover your chest!

Be aware that mold occurs due to the high humidity and is an issue for all possessions.

Money

The local currency is Kip (please check the current exchange rate). Moreover, US\$ are widely accepted.

ATMs, Banks & Post Offices can be found in Luang Prabang & Nong Khiaw.

Cash advances (against hefty fee) possible at NK riverside resort and in Nambak (15 kms west of NK), where there is a Western Union Bank.



Abbreviations

MN	Muang Ngoi	
NK	Nong Khiaw	Field Manager's home
LPQ	Luang Prabang	
VTE	Vientiane	
BS	Bambooschool	

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us!