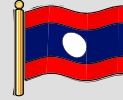


CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH PEOPLE FROM



LAOS



Greetings



The formal Lao greeting is the *nob*, which involves placing one's hands together in a prayer position at chest level, but not touching the body. The higher the hands, the greater the sign of respect, although they should never be held above the level of the nose. Informally, the Lao may shake hands with members of the same sex or touch one another on the arm (never the shoulder). Peers address each other by first name. Where applicable, people nearly always use professional or official titles. When parting, one uses the same gesture that was used upon greeting. To use a different gesture is an insult. That is, to greet with a *nob* but leave with a handshake is rude.

Conversation



When conversing with an elder or superior, one stands a few feet away. When conversing with a superior, one crosses the hands rather than keeping them by one's side.

Gestures



To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm facing down. To indicate direction, one points with the forefinger or entire hand; for long distances, one points in the direction with the hand above the head. One never touches a person's head without express permission. People do not show the bottom of their foot or use a foot to point at a person or sacred object.

Business Attire



Business attire is not always that formal with full business suits being rare. However, it is best to keep to more formal dress for initial meetings and move toward "corporate casual" once a relationship has begun. Buddhist cultures put a high value on modesty and neatness for both men and women. Revealing clothing, rumpled attire, or poor personal hygiene mark the offender as lacking personal spiritual harmony.

Hierarchy/Family



The Lao have large, close-knit families; often three generations live together. The eldest man is the patriarch of the family and represents the household. The Lao have great respect for parents and elders. It is an honor to have children (four are preferred) and a disgrace to be without them.

Manners



It is considered very bad taste to publicly criticize a person since it results in a loss of face within the community. Necessary criticisms and suggestions should be made within a general context to avoid placing blame or shame on any individual. Showing anger or disappointment in public is inappropriate. Men and women rarely show affection in public. It is forbidden for a woman to touch a Buddhist monk. To pass in front of someone or between two people, one asks permission and bows until slightly past. Smoking is very common among Laotians, and they will offer cigarettes to visitors. Visitors should offer their own cigarettes as well.

Cognitive Styles



The Lao are a kind, open and friendly people. They also have a strongly developed sense of courtesy and respect. *Bo pen nyang* (never mind) is a common expression that characterizes Lao feelings toward life. Life should be enjoyed at the moment; problems are not taken so seriously as to disrupt this enjoyment. Loyalty to family and friends is important. Humility, modesty, and patience are the most admired characteristics.

Currency



The unit of currency is the Kip.

Ethnic Make-Up



68% of the population are known as *Lao Lum* (lowland Lao). The *Lao Theung* (midland Lao) include the Khmu, Katang, Makong, and Xuay ethnic groups and constitute 22% of the population. The *Lao Sung* (highland Lao) include the Hmong, Kor, and Yao peoples and comprise about 9% of the population.

Language



The official language is Lao. Other main languages include Thai and Hmong.

Religion



Almost two-thirds of the population is Buddhist and one-third are animists, who emphasize a reverence for all living things.