

Laos

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

Updated 2026-08-19

Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

Diplomats and NGO Workers

- Copy of passport
- Work visa
- Letter of employer
- Employer's investment licence
- ID working card in Laos
- Tax exemption letter issued from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Diplomatic ID card (diplomats)
- Original bill of lading (OBL) / air waybill (AWB)

Non-Diplomat Foreign Workers (Private Companies)

- Copy of passport
- Work visa
- Letter of employer
- Employer's investment licence
- ID working card in Laos
- Business licence
- OBL / AWB

Returning Lao Nationals

- Copy of passport
- OBL / AWB
- Packing list

Specific Information

One sea and one air shipment only. Even for those qualifying for duty-free entry, only one sea shipment and one air shipment are permitted duty-free. The owner may import only one of each type of electrical appliance duty-free.

Private company employees must pay duty. Non-citizens employed by private companies in Laos will pay duty on personal effects.

Returning Lao nationals must pay duty on all personal effects.

Non-citizens not employed in Laos must pay duty on personal effects and are subject to cargo inspection by Customs officers.

Transit routing through Thailand: Laos is landlocked. Sea shipments first enter Thailand (typically through the port of Laem Chabang or Bangkok) before being transported in-bond overland to Vientiane. The original bill of lading must show "In-transit to Vientiane, Laos via

Bangkok, Thailand" to ensure proper handling and avoid double clearance.

Duties & Taxes

Duty-free import is limited to diplomats and NGO workers. Non-citizens may import used household goods and personal effects duty-free only if they hold diplomatic status or work for a registered non-governmental organization with a tax exemption letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

VAT rate: 10%. Applied to most imports.

Customs duty rates: Tariffs range from 0% to 40% depending on the commodity classification. Average tariff for non-agricultural goods from non-ASEAN countries is approximately 8.3%. ASEAN-origin goods benefit from reduced or zero tariffs under the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA).

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

- Illegal drugs and narcotics
- Explosives
- Chemicals and fertilizers
- Plants and plant products
- Pornographic materials
- Anti-communist publications and materials deemed contrary to the political order
- Counterfeit goods

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Weapons, firearms, and ammunition: Permission from relevant authorities required. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Receivers, transmitters, satellite equipment, internet/broadcasting equipment: Permission from the Ministry of Information and Culture required. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Images of Buddha and religious figures made from copper, glass, wood, bone, ivory, stone, or other materials: Permission from the Ministry of Information and Culture required. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Personal allowances:

- Cigarettes: 500; Cigars: 100; Tobacco: 500 g
- Wine: 2 bottles; Other alcohol: 1 bottle

Second-hand vehicles: Restricted to diplomats and NGO workers only.

Special Categories

Research Notes

Sources consulted: IAM Country Guide (November 2016), PetTravel.com (Laos pet import requirements), Trade.gov Laos Country Commercial Guide (January 2026), ASEAN Briefing import/export procedures guide, PWC Lao PDR tax summaries (February 2026), Trading Economics (VAT rate data).

No FIDI guide available. No FIDI Customs Guide was found for Laos at any standard URL pattern.

VAT reinstated at 10%. Laos temporarily reduced VAT to 7% during the COVID-19 period but reinstated the 10% rate. Confirmed at 10% for 2026.

Key IAM guide gaps: The IAM guide (2016) does not specify customs duty rates for household goods, does not mention the VAT rate, and provides minimal detail on the transit routing

through Thailand. The one-of-each-electrical-appliance limit is a significant operational detail that needs to be communicated clearly at origin survey.

ASEAN membership context: Laos joined ASEAN in 1997 and is a member of the ASEAN Free Trade Area. Goods originating from ASEAN member states benefit from reduced or zero tariffs. This may affect duty calculations depending on where the household goods were manufactured (not where the owner lived).

Political sensitivity: Laos is a single-party communist state. Publications critical of the government or promoting political opposition are prohibited. This extends to printed materials, media, and potentially digital content within household goods shipments.

Link verification (re-checked June 2026): Customs.gov.la: now confirmed Active (200), title "Lao Customs" -- resolved from May 2026 403. MFA (mofa.gov.la): returns 503 to this proxy; resolves and TLS-connects normally -- WAF block, browser-accessible. Lao National Trade Portal: active (200). EmbassyPages: returns 403 to bots, browser-accessible. OpenFactBook (replaces CIA World Factbook): active (200). PetTravel.com Laos: active (200).

Consignment Instructions

Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air and surface shipments.

Landlocked routing: All sea freight transits through Thailand. The bill of lading must clearly state "In-transit to Vientiane, Laos via Bangkok, Thailand." Failure to include this notation can result in the shipment being cleared (and duties assessed) in Thailand rather than being forwarded in-bond.

Import permit timing: The import permission and tax exemption letter (for those who qualify) must be obtained before the shipment arrives. Allow adequate lead time, particularly for vehicle imports.

Electrical appliance limits: Even qualifying importers (diplomats/NGOs) may only bring one of each type of electrical appliance duty-free. Additional units will be dutiable.

Language barriers: English-speaking customs officials may be limited. Working through the destination agent is essential for effective communication with customs authorities.

Inventory requirements: A detailed packing list is required for all shipments.