

Lao Language Guide Script

For those of you keen to have a written version on the podcast, here is the script below:

Noi: Sabaai-dii

Scott: Umm, I'm afraid I don't speak any Lao

Noi: Sabaai-dii is a greeting word in Lao which means 'Hello', 'Hi', 'How do you do?' and you should reply by also saying 'Sabaai dii'. Are you coming into the Wat?

Scott: Ah, Sabaai-dii. Does Wat mean temple?

Noi: Yes, that's right, would you like me to show you around?

Scott: That would be great – have you been a monk for long?

Noi: Yes, for about 15 years now, since I was 18. Come, lets go inside, please take off your shoes.

Scott: This is so peaceful, is this a small wat?

Noi: This is part of the Wat, it is called is the place of worship/devotions (Bot), which is where we meditate or reflect – see the monks chanting over there? Do you think I practise my English and teach you some Lao as we walk around?

Scott: I would really appreciate that – thank you. I've noticed that local people bow to one another, what is this called?

Noi: This is Nop, you place your palms together in front of your chest – but not touching it and bow your head. You will see that sometimes people hold their hands quite high, this is to show respect, the higher the hands are the greater the respect. 'My name is Noi, in Lao we say khoy seu Noi.

Scott: Very nice to meet you Noi, Khoy seu Scott. How do I ask what a persons name is?

Noi: You say Chao seu nyang? Is this your first time to Laos?

Scott: Chao sy nyang. Yes, I arrived in Vientiane a few days ago, I've come from Bangkok and it is so different here, so quiet and untouched.

Noi: Yes, Laos is not as developed as Thailand or Vietnam, we lead a more traditional life. But we are seeing more tourists coming here. Are you staying for long?

Scott: I'm here for a few weeks, I'm going to go up the river to Luang Prabang next week. How do I say boat in Lao?

Noi: Boat is ‘heua’ it is a very nice journey that takes about two days, you will see lots of the countryside and might get to know some locals along the way.

Scott: ‘Heua’. I can practise some of my new Lao on them! What about if I want to take a bus, train or taxi?

Noi: I’m afraid there are no trains in Laos, if you want to get somewhere quickly you take the bus which is ‘lod mei’ otherwise you take boats. There are some taxis in the cities, taxis are ‘lot thaek si’, otherwise you can get pedicabs – but you will need to negotiate the price for this before you get in.

Scott: Ok so bus is lod mei, taxi is lot thaek si otherwise pedicab. If I’m getting a boat or bus somewhere how do I say ticket?

Noi: This is pi lod. Come I will take you into the Vihaan to see the Buddha images.

Scott: I didn’t realise there were so many parts to a Wat.

Noi: Yes, there is the Bot where we just were, the Vihaan which houses images of the Buddha, the Haw Trai where the scriptures are kept, the Kuti which is the monks quarters and the Haw Glawng, the drum tower.

Scott: This morning I saw a group of monks walking through the town and receiving offerings from people. Is there a festival or special day on today?

Noi: No, this happens every day. As monks we have no possessions, we rely on the generosity of the community for our food and clothing. So each morning we collect alms – which are the offerings you saw the people giving the monks.

Scott: It must be very strange and kind of liberating not to have any possessions – backpacking has been hard enough for me. In the absence of alms I’ll be buying all my food - so can you teach me how to say ‘how much’

Noi: yes, it is hard to let go of things. To say ‘how much’ is ni thao dai. Please remove your shoes again, this is the Vihaan where we keep our sacred Buddha images.

Scott: These statues are amazing, the Buddha looks so noble and at peace.

Noi: He achieved enlightenment when he was quite young then he spent the rest of his life travelling and teaching.

Scott: Not a bad life to emulate really. Can you teach me how to count the statues... well maybe a few of them – what is 1-10 in Lao?

Noi: This is one (neung), two (song), three (saam), four (sii), five (haa), six (hok), seven (jet), eight (paet), nine(kao), ten (sip)

Scott: neung song three saam sii haa six hok jet paet kao sip

Scott: What about things like please, thank you and excuse me?

Noi: Yes, these are good to use. Ka rou na is please, khop chay is thank you and khaw thoht is excuse me.

Scott: So, ka rou na khop jai khaw thoht

Noi: Yes, in Lao maen leo is yes and very good is dii lai. Lao is a difficult language, it is similar to Thai and we have many different ways of saying the same thing.

Scott: Ok, so I have to watch the way I say things. Can you teach me some basic directions like 'Where is' and 'Which way to', oh and how do I say 'no'

Noi: For 'where is' you say 'you sai' and for 'which way to' you say thaang dai and 'baw maen' is no.

Scott: So, 'you sai' and thaang dai and 'baw maen' is no. I haven't booked anywhere to stay in Luang Prabang, I thought I'd find a bed when I got there. How do I ask '-have you a room?

Noi: This is chao mi hong neung bo

Scott: chao mi hong neung bo

Noi: Luang Prabang is popular with tourists since it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, so you will not have trouble finding somewhere to stay.

Scott: Ok, great and what about if I want to see a room before I book it, how do I say 'can I see it?

Noi: This is khoy kho berng hong naan dai bo.

Scott: khoy kho berng hong naan dai bo. What if I think it's too expensive – how do I say this 'too expensive'

Noi: We say aan ni peng maak

Scott: So, aan ni peng maak. Do you get to travel around much?

Noi: Yes, a little. The aim of Buddhist practise is to end all kinds of suffering in life. So as well as our own learning and meditation we try to help our communities.

Scott: Are most Laotians Buddhists?

Noi: Laotians are mostly Buddhists or Animists – which is a very ancient practise. Come, lets move outside into the courtyard.

Scott: I'm loving the pace of life here – how do I say 'I like this

Noi: We say khoy maak baep ni

Scott: khoy maak baep ni and I suppose I'll need to know 'I don't like this'

Noi: Yes, you may need this as well – you say khoy baw maak baep ni

Scott: So, khoy baw maak baep ni . So far I have liked all that Vientiane has to offer. Can you tell me how to say today, tomorrow, yesterday and now? These will be useful when I'm booking tickets or a night in a guest house.

Noi: Of course, today is meuh nii, tomorrow is meuh eun, yesterday is meuh waan nii and now is diaw nii

Scott: So, meuh nii, meuh eun, meuh waan mii and diaw nii

Noi: Yes, that is very good, you are learning quickly.

Scott: I feel like I've nearly got enough basics to get by – there are just a few more things I'd like your help with if that's ok?

Noi: Yes, of course.

Scott: I know that Laos is generally very safe, but just in case can you teach me police, stop thief, hospital and doctor.

Noi: I'm sure you will not need to use any of these phrases – (Police) is dtum louat,

Scott: dtum louat

Noi: Stop thief is chaap khon khi laak

Scott: chaap khon khi laak

Noi: hospital is hong moor and doctor is thaan moor

Scott: hong moor, thaan moor. Well, if you thought that was amusing, you will think I'm totally mad now – but – you just never know when you might need this, so can you give me the translation for 'Don't shoot, those drugs aren't mine!'

Noi: Scott, this is very funny, truly Laos is not like other Asian countries you may have been to. But, you should say ya nying, ya sep tit lao naan bo maen khong khoy

Scott: ya nying, ya sep tit lao naan bo maen khong khoy. Thank you, Noi, you have been a great help to me – I'm not sure I've been as helpful to you.

Noi: Any chance to practise my English is good, so you have been very helpful. Shall we keep walking?

Scott: I'd like that, lead the way.