

SHOPPING

Laos is an excellent destination for anyone interested in picking up elaborate handicrafts. Hill-tribe silks, arts, crafts, home-furnishings, jewellery and couture quality textiles dominate the market. Although many of these products are available in Thailand, some of the things listed above are unique to Laos and its hill-tribes. In buying traditional crafts such as silks and carvings, tourists are invariably helping to support a still-growing and fragile economy.

Things to buy in Laos:

HANDICRAFT



Textiles, basketry, silver, woodcarvings and hand-made paper are some of the most popular handicrafts in Laos. Lao weavers are known for producing intricate fabrics in home-spun silk and cotton. Some of the best weavers come from the Tai ethnic groups in Houaphanh Province. If you are planning a visit to Luang Prabang and are interested in weaving, don't miss Ban Phanom or the night market in the center of town.

WEAVING SILK



The art of weaving is still **very much a home industry** in Laos, where some of the finest silk and cotton weavers in the world can be found in the smallest of communities. **Traditional designs and patterns vary from province to province**, and the intricate work can be purchased much **cheaper at the source than from many handicraft stores**, markets and hotel shops. Antique woven pieces are still available but are becoming increasingly rare, often fetching very high prices.

JEWELLERY



The crafting of gold and silver jewellery is another skill at which the Lao people excel. Many of the best examples of silver jewellery to be found in the country are **the work of several of the hill tribes**, who use silver and gold for portable wealth and inheritance purposes. The majority of jewellery shops trade **primarily in silver and gold**, which can be bought at a cheaper price than in neighbouring Thailand. The central markets in Vientiane and Luang Prabang have a great variety of souvenirs and unlike the private shops which have fixed prices, bargaining is acceptable.

CARVING

From the simple and mundane to the aesthetic and highly spiritual, Lao craftsmen can carve a wide ***variety of attractive pieces from wood, bone and stone***. Like most Laotian arts and crafts, religious imagery and figures such as the Buddha provide the subject and source of inspiration.