

Arriving in Laos

On crossing the border into Laos, I learned a very important lesson for anyone traveling in Laos that is: “There is no hurrying in Laos.” This is one of the countries major appeals making it a great place to relax; since there isn’t really all that much from a classic tourist perspective. There are no amazing must see monuments like neighboring Cambodia, no beaches like Thailand, but so many people I have talked to loved the country. I had to see what all the fuss was about. The laid back attitude of the country is a pretty stark contrast to the hustle, and business centered China. The two countries



Loading up the songthaw, my ride from to Namtha from Boten.

respective border towns illustrate this contrast well. On the Chinese side there is a bustling small town of Mohan, while on the Lao side there is Ban Boten a collection of mostly closed buildings and a lot of parked trucks. I walked across the border and immediately realized that onward transportation could be a problem, as I looked to be just about the only person looking for transportation. I stood by road and tried to hail down a couple vehicles but got no positive responses. Eventually after a half hour or so, as I was hoping, a songthaw driver found me. A quick aside for a definition for those readers not familiar with travel in Southeast Asia: A songthaw is a pickup truck with a covered back and benches that is used as a bus from most routes shorter than 3-4 hours. Back to journey or rather wait. He showed me to a collection of parked songthaws which was apparently the bus station. I sat there for another hour until a woman who had apparently just been on a Chinese shopping spree judging by the amount of stuff she was bringing joined us. Finally I was on my way out of Boten. But not really, after all this is Laos, first was one more stop at someone’s house where we loaded enough empty Beer Lao bottles on board to supply lambda lambda lambda for a toga weekend.

Arriving at Luang Namtha, the provincial capital in the Northeast, and “major” city in the region (as major as a city with 3-4 paved streets can be) I found that the city was without power for one week. I had arrived on day 3.



Rest house in rice fields near Muang Long.



Near Muang Long.

There were fewer people than I had seen anywhere in China and a whole lot higher concentration of Westerners. All of them concentrated in one or two small tourist cafes along the main street which had generators to break the towns otherwise darkness. It was nice to speak some English and get information. But I was interested in getting a little more off the beaten track so the next day I headed further to the Northeast to the town of Muang Long, not mentioned in the Lonely Planet guide which is a sure sign I won't be seeing another Westerner. And I didn't.



Bridge near Muang Long. Yes, I crossed it, and yes it held, and yes I was nervous.



Akha man in Village near Muang Long.