

Laos Uncovered

Country(ies): Laos , Thailand

Tour type: Private

Transport: A/C minibus, flight & cruise boats

Group size: Min: 2 | Max: Any

Days: 15 days

Start Location: Chiang Rai, Thailand

End Location: Pakse, Laos

Meals: Breakfasts - 14, Lunches - 3, Dinners - 1

Highlights:

Mekong river cruise, explore the UNESCO World Heritage City of Luang Prabang, enigmatic Plain of Jars, Laos' capital Vientiane, Pre-Angkorian ruin of Wat Phu, spectacular 4000 islands



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Chiang Rai and transfer Chiang Khong, sleep in Chiang Khong

Meet and greet at Chiang Rai airport, Thailand when you will be transferred to Chiang Khong, the bordering town with Laos (normally just over a 2 hour drive). Upon checking in your hotel, free for the rest of the day. Extra days can be added in Chiang Rai if required before starting the trip.

OVERNIGHT: Chiang Khong hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Extra day in Chiang Rai - pre-tour Single room supplement (LATMLU)

Day 2: Huay Xai, Mekong cruise to Pakbeng

We transfer early this morning to the border town of Huay Xay, and after completing border formalities by 08.00am, we will transfer by tuk tuk to the boat pier where you'll board a traditional boat for your first trip on the Mekong River. The Shompoo Cruise boats are around 35 metres long and designed for cruising in the Mekong. There is a sun deck lounge area at the front, seating and tables in the middle, and a bar and further seating at the rear. The scenery along this part of the Mekong is arguably at its most beautiful and you'll stop at some tribal minority villages during the cruise downstream, such as the Hmong. A tasty buffet lunch is served on board. After arriving in Pakbeng we'll visit a local market and see the daily lifestyle of the colourful hill tribe traders as they sell and exchange their goods. You'll spend the night at a hotel in Pakbeng.

OVERNIGHT: Pakbeng Lodge or similar

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 3: Pakbeng, cruise to Luang Prabang via Pak Ou Caves

After breakfast, we board the boat again by 08.00 for the second leg of the Shompoo cruise. We'll have two stops today, the first at Pak-Ou village at the mouth of the Nam Ou River, where we visit Pak Ou Caves "Cave of a thousand Buddha's". We'll have a buffet lunch on board and also visit Ban Xang Hai, a Lao whisky village where we can observe the traditional process of manufacturing local rice alcohol. We'll arrive in Luang Prabang late in the afternoon and have time for a look around after checking into our hotel.

OVERNIGHT: Sunrise Garden House or similar in Luang Prabang

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS:

Day 4: Luang Prabang, city tour and Kuang Si waterfalls

After breakfast, we visit Royal Palace Museum, which hosts a range of interesting artifacts. Our next stop in the city is the magnificent Wat Xiengthong with its roofs sweeping low to the ground, which represents classical Laotian architecture. We will also take a look at the Traditional Art & Ethnology Center to learn about the many Lao ethnic groups. We then visit Wat Visoun, dating back to 1513 during the reign of King Wisunarat (Visoun), this is Luang Prabang's oldest temple and was once home to the Prabang Buddhas.

Laos is also known for its traditional crafts, we will take a short visit to the Ock Pop Tock Living Craft Center, where you will have a short tour so you get information about Silk, about weaver, about the Women that work in the Centre.

This then takes us to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfall where you can cool off with a refreshing swim in the pools or walk along the forest trails. You can also see up close Asiatic bears at the Bear Rescue Centre along the jungle walk to the waterfall.

Before returning to Luang Prabang, we stop to visit the Kuang Si Falls Butterfly Park (closed on Tuesday, and from 03rd May to 19th June every year), one of the must-visit spots, where you can have an optional 15-minute tour to learn about butterflies and local flora. Arriving in Luang Prabang, we ascend the 329 steps to the top of Phousi Hill for a beautiful sunset view of the city and its glowing reflection on the Mekong River.

OVERNIGHT: Sunrise Garden House or similar in Luang Prabang

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 5: Luang Prabang, Alms giving, MandaLao Elephant Conservation centre and waterfalls

You can set your alarm early today and wake up as the sun rises, ready to join the most sacred tradition of Laos, the daily morning alms giving, which dates to the 14th century. More than 200 Buddhist monks depart from various temple to gather their daily meal from the faithful residents sitting quietly on the streets.

We then visit the temporary morning market near the former Royal Palace. Just set on the ground, the local people come here to barter their day's catch from rice, to vegetable, to fish, or chicken.

Our next visit today is to the MandaLao Elephant Conservation centre, around 20km outside Luang Prabang. Elephant camps and the interaction of the animals with tourists is something that has rightly received a lot of attention in recent years. We do not allow any elephant riding or 'shows' for tourists on our tours, and instead only visit centres that have the elephant's welfare right at the core of what they are doing. The Manda Lao centre fits this billing, and aims to help visitors connect with elephants in the most natural way possible. There is no riding, bathing, and the animals are not chained or coerced with bullhooks or similar implements. Instead, you will walk through the jungle alongside two adult will trek through the jungle alongside two adult elephants, surrounded by jungle streams and luscious rice fields. There may be up to 8 travellers for this morning section, and then a maximum of 4 for lunch and the afternoon. Lunch will be served in the forest, Lao style, just before you visit the isolated Tad Kuang Song waterfall. The overall walk is around 5km (shorter options are available). We feel this experience is both fun, educational and rewarding, and supports the improvement of both rescued and wild elephants in Laos much more than many other camps or 'sanctuaries'.

OVERNIGHT: Sunrise Garden House or similar in Luang Prabang

MEALS: Breakfast,Lunch

EXTRAS:

Day 6: Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang

After breakfast, we make our way over the mountains to Xieng Khuang, the province which is best-known for having been heavily bombed during Indochina War. But of course it is also famous for the historic Plain of Jars. The journey takes about 8 hours and we can make some stops at villages to observe the rural life of local people,

including ethnic minorities such as the Hmong people. Our first stop is at Ban Kiew Nya for the panoramic view before continuing down to Ban Phoudam, where we can see the two hill tribe minorities of H'Mong and Khamu living in harmony. After that we visit the H'Mong market at the junction of Phoukhoun. From there, we will drive further to visit Tham Pra, which served as the hospital for the army during Indochina Wars. Arrival in Phonsavan, the capital of Xiengkhouang province and check into your hotel.

OVERNIGHT: Vansana Plain Of Jars hotel or similar in Xieng Khuang

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 7: Xieng Khouang, Plain of Jars & Muang Khoun

In the morning, you will journey through Phonsavan and the Plain of Jars.

The Plain of Jars is a huge archaeological complex littered with mysterious 2000 years old stone jars sized from 70cm up to 3 or 4 meters. Their true origin remains a mystery. It seems that they were carved into boulders. Several researches lead by the French archaeologist Madeleine Colani in the 30's suggested that they could be old graves, but to this day they remain an enigma.

Your trip will enable you to visit the 3 sites and also discover some local villages where you can observe local village life. Site 1, close to the town is settled at Thong Hai Hin and is the biggest site. On the way back, you will pass areas that were important battlefields during the American secret war. You can still see bomb craters from that time today.

Attention: The Plain of Jars has been heavily bombed during the war and you have to respect all the signs and stay along the defined trails due to bombs, UXO and landmines.

In the afternoon, enjoy a half day trip to Muang Khoun. Muang Khoun one place in the old provincial capital that was not been destroyed by the American bombings during the secret war. Muang Khoun is home to unique sitting giant Buddha as well of some old pagodas that lies in ruins. The foundation and columns of Wat Pia Wat are still standing and close to this site, there is also an old 30m stupa constructed in the Lan Xang/Lanna period.

Then return to Xieng Khouang and overnight.

OVERNIGHT: Xieng Khouang hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 8: Xieng Khouang to Vang Vieng

After breakfast, we visit Mulberries Silk Farm, a Lao Sericulture company specializing in fair trade silk production. We then get back on the road again for our journey to Vang Vieng. In the afternoon we arrive in Vang Vieng, a small and tranquil town, which is nestled on a bend of the Nam Song River. Its stunning scenery with a mixture of quiet water and limestone outcrops remains unspoiled, despite recent developments with the advent of tourism. On arrival we check into your hotel.

OVERNIGHT: Faraway Suites or similar in Vang Vieng

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 9: Vang Vieng to Vientiane

This morning We then have time for a short walk and a visit to the impressive Tham Jang caves as well as a boat ride on the Nam Song River to admire the impressive limestone karst scenery. This afternoon we drive south to the Lao capital of Vientiane. En route we stop off at the salt mines of Ban Kheun, for a fascinating tour to see how the salt is produced. We arrive in Vientiane by late afternoon where you have the rest of the day at leisure.

OVERNIGHT: Aaron Hotel or similar in Vientiane

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 10: Vientiane, half day city tour

Your half day city tour enables us to explore Vientiane capital by visiting the major sights of the capital; including the oldest Wat Sisaket with thousands of miniature Buddha statues and the former royal temple of Wat Prakeo, which previously housed the famous Emerald Buddha Image. Enroute to Lao's national precious heritage, the famous and sacred structure of That Luang Stupa, you will have the opportunity to take some pictures of the imposing Patuxay Monument, which is well known as Vientiane's own Arc de Triumph. The remainder of the day is at leisure. Overnight in Vientiane.

OVERNIGHT: Aaron Hotel or similar in Vientiane

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 11: Vientiane fly to Pakse, drive to Paksong

You will be transferred to the airport early this morning for your flight to Pakse. On arrival in Pakse, depart for the Bolaven Plateau, a mountainous region home to dozens of hill tribes, waterfalls and coffee and tea plantations. The first stop is the visit of Tad Lo waterfalls, a beautiful formation of three separate falls. From the bridge, you will first see Tad Hang and then Tad Lo in the distance. The most impressive of the three, Tad Suong, is located a further 10km upriver.

From there, we will drive to the small village of Ban Houay Houn, famous for its Katu textiles. Here, you will have the chance to observe the women weaving without a traditional loom but using their legs to stretch the fabric. We continue our journey through the Paksong and Boloven Plateau. The Boloven Plateau is known for its cooler temperature being located high above the Mekong Valley. Rivers run off this high plateau in all directions and then plunge out to lush forests along in a series of spectacular surging waterfalls.

OVERNIGHT: Sinouk Coffee Resort or similar in Paksong

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 12: Paksong to Khong Island via Wat Phou

After breakfast, we departure for Champasak. Along the way, we will have chance to enjoy the scenery around Tad Fan waterfall, which is spectacular with twin waterfalls plummeting into a deep gorge surrounded by flourishing vegetation. We will also see the cultivation of rich coffee, tea, cardamom, bananas, and other crops that are grown in the area.

Arriving in Champasak, visit Wat Phou, an ancient Khmer religious complex dating back to the 5th Century. Recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, Wat Phou is a spectacular pre-Angkorian temple that sits amidst the rice fields and waterways of southern Laos. The temple was constructed in three levels: the bottom

level is focused on the baray (water reservoir) and promenade, the second level features quadrangular pavilions and galleries of carvings, and the top level is the sanctuary itself. The temple was built during the rule of the Khmer empire before the construction of Angkor Wat. The temple served as the most important economic and political centre of the region and still is one of the Lao people's most revered temples. After your visit, we continue in to Champasak to see samples of French colonial architecture before driving to Done Khong where you have the rest of the day to relax or to explore the island. Overnight in Done Khong Island.

OVERNIGHT: Pon Arena Hotel or similar in Don Khong

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 13: Khong Island, Khone Island & Don Daeng

Following breakfast, we enjoy a visit to the surrounding countryside, and embark on a long tail boat tour of the Don Khone area, which takes you to visit the remains of the French period and Lphi Waterfall or "the Corridor of the Devil". We return to the mainland at the fishing village of Ban Nakasang and drive further south to visit Khone Phapheng. Khone Phapheng is considered the largest waterfall by volume in South East Asia; this is a really impressive near the Lao-Cambodian border, set within an area which is teeming with wildlife, making this area one of the most breathtaking destinations in Laos. Afterwards we drive back north, and then take a boat to the delightful island of Don Daeng. Overnight on Don Daeng.

OVERNIGHT: La Folie Lodge or similar in Don Daeng

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 14: Don Daeng, free day

You have a free day at your leisure in Don Daeng today (no guide included).

OVERNIGHT: La Folie Lodge or similar in Don Daeng

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 15: Don Daeng , return to Pakse for flight home

After breakfast, you will be transferred back to Pakse and onto the airport for your departing flight.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Extra day in Pakse - post-tour

Included:

- Transportation in private vehicle
- Accommodation in twin/double shared room

- Domestic air ticket as stated only (Vientiane to Pakse on day 11)
- English speaking guide (some other languages available on request)
- Admission fee to indicated sights
- Meals: daily breakfast at hotel, lunch/dinner where stated only
- Government tax, VAT and service charge
- Luggage handling and drinking water

Excluded:

- Visa stamping fee on arrival
- International air tickets to/from Thailand/Laos (available on request)
- Travel Insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Single room accommodation (quoted separately)
- Other foreign language guide (fee may apply)
- Peak tourist season or special event rates
- Child or adult in triple sharing room
- Tipping, drinks, meals not indicated on itinerary

Notes

Due to the remote nature of parts of the trip, the itinerary is subject to change subject to available flights, road conditions, weather conditions and room availability.

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

No Options

1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the local 3 and 4-star level, as well as some comfortable guest houses on this tour. Accommodation is based on twin, triple or double en-suite rooms. Please check the itinerary for examples of the hotels normally used on this tour. Accommodations in remote areas can be quite simple and availability can be limited. If you have any specific accommodation requests please let us know and we'll be happy to provide you with a customised quotation.

2. Transport

Our trips feature a mix of different transport options. We want you to feel like you're really experiencing the country you're travelling through, but at the same time we want you to finish journeys refreshed enough to enjoy the next stage of the tour. With this in mind we use public transport where we think it offers a good local experience & this may include local buses and local ferries. We also use private transportation including jeeps, song- thaews or pickup trucks, and mini buses for sightseeing tours where required. This tour includes a traditional cruise boat on the Mekong River, some local tuk tuks as well as private air conditioned vehicles.

3. Transfers

The tour includes a 24-hour arrival and departure airport-hotel transfer service and all other transfers. Arrival transfers will be provided from Chiang Rai Airport (Thailand) and departures to Pakse Airport (Laos).

4. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

As we don't offer guaranteed group departures on this tour we can run the itinerary for however many people you happen to be travelling with, starting from 1 upwards. The prices given for this tour are based on a minimum of 2 passengers travelling, so if you have a different number of passengers in your group please contact us for a customised quotation.

In Laos we provide fully trained, local English-speaking guides for all of the sightseeing tours. A small groups we'll generally use different guides in each cities and as such this is the way the tour has been priced. If you'd prefer to have an escort guide then we'll be happy to quote based on this. At Encounters Travel we only use local guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

5. Dates & Prices

This tour is designed as a sample tailor-made tour itinerary. As such we do not offer set group departure dates that you can join. Rather, the tour is available for you to do privately starting on any date of the year. Guideline seasonal prices are given below, based on 2 people travelling. If you would like to adjust the tour itinerary, or there will be more or less people travelling, please contact us and we will customise a price for you.

For many people planning a trip to Laos, the weather will be a determining factor in choosing when to travel. The driest and coolest time to visit Laos is from November to February. You will experience days of cool breezes and low temperatures and miss the monsoon season (May to November). Certain provinces of Laos (Xiang Khuang, Hua Phan and Phongsali) will also get rain blowing in from Vietnam and China from February to May but this northeast monsoon usual bypasses the rest of Laos. This time of year is also Laos's main season for both national and regional bun (festivals) though December to February and August are the peak tourist times.

January, in particular, is very busy and booking ahead is advisable. If you are interested in river travel you will best visit during November when the floods have subsided but the rivers are still filled to capacity. This type of travel can be difficult from January to June when water levels are low. Please speak with our reservations team who will be happy to help you in selecting an appropriate time for your tour.

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Note: Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.
