

Laos Uncovered

Country(ies): Thailand

Tour type: Tailor-made

Transport: A/C minibus, flight & cruise boats

Group size: Min: 2 | Max: 0

Days: 8 Days

Start location: Chiang Rai, Thailand

End location: Pakse, Laos

Departs On: Any day

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

Places Visited: Chiang Rai, Pakbeng, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Muang Khoun, Vang Vieng, Vientiane, Tadlo & Pakse



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. Upon checking in your hotel, free for the rest of the day. Overnight in Chiang Khong.

OVERNIGHT: Chiang Rai hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Single Room Supplement (LATMLU) || Extra day in Chiang Rai - pre-tour

Day 2: Huay Xai, cruise to Pakbeng

We transfer early this morning to the border town of Huay Xay. The Luang Say Cruise boat leaves Huay Xay pier at 09:00 hrs for a cruise down the Mekong to Pakbeng. En route one stop is made to observe rural life along the Mekong and visit minority ethnic groups; then, a buffet lunch on board. Arrive Pakbeng before sunset and check-in at Luang Say Lodge. You can then enjoy dinner on the terrace overlooking the Mekong River. Overnight in Pakbeng.

OVERNIGHT: Pakbeng hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

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

Full breakfast at lodge. At 08:30 board the boat for the second leg of the cruise. A short stop to discover a Hmong village before having a buffet lunch on board. Continue to Pak-Ou village at the mouth of the Nam Ou River, and then visit Pak Ou Caves "Cave of a thousand Buddha's". On the way to Luang Prabang a brief stop is made to observe the traditional process of manufacturing local rice alcohol. Arrive at Luang Prabang before sunset. Overnight in Luang Prabang.

OVERNIGHT: Luang Prabang hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS: None

Day 4: Luang Prabang, half day 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 in Luang Prabang.

OVERNIGHT: Luang Prabang hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 5: Luang Prabang, elephant village, waterfalls, and nearby villages

8:00 am – 8:30 am: Pick up by our English speaking guide from your hotel lobby. Arrive at the Elephant Village Camp: Welcome greeting by our camp manager and participate in short briefing about elephants. From the Elephant Camp, enjoy the impressive experience of a 1 km bareback elephant ride! (1 person per elephant). Trek to Ban Huay Fai: Enjoy a 4 km trek on foot through diverse landscape. You will travel from our 'old camp' to the Khmu village of ban Huay Fai, where you can explore and discover and see how local Khmu people live. Your guide will explain about the house styles, customs, different ethnic groups and much more.

Walk around 1.5 km up the side of a steep incline where you will be greeted with a stunning view of the surrounding landscape. After which you will walk down through beautiful forest and see the different, natural fruits that grow in the forest. Dine in the forest surroundings with a picnic box lunch prepared just for you at our camp restaurant and served with drinking water (vegetarian options available). Lunch will be served next to a Hmong home and your guide will translate any questions you might have about their way of life.

Enjoy another 3 km trek on foot surrounded by unique tropical vegetation and different farmland. Your guide will explain about what people farm, including rubber trees, papaya, pineapples, mangos and more. Finishing up in the village of Suan Dala, where you can explore and discover and see a real mixture of cultures including Lao, Hmong and Khmu. You may see a diverse range of different houses and society as these 3 ethnic groups coexist next to the beautiful Nam Khan River.

An exciting boat trip back to camp. Traverse the Nam Khan River in a traditional Lao long boat from Ban Suan Dala back to the Elephant Camp. You may see the traditional methods of net fishing and other various ways with which the local population use and enjoy the river. Transfer back to your Hotel in Luang Prabang between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm

OVERNIGHT: Luang Prabang hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS: None

Day 6: Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang

After breakfast, we make our way over the mountains to Xieng Khouang, 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 at hotel in town.

OVERNIGHT: Xieng Khouang hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

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. Site 2 is at Hai Hin on Phou Salator, "Phou" in Lao means "Mountain". End your tour at site 3 in Hai Hin Lat Khai. Site 3 is the most impressive with over 150 jars. Close to this site, you will visit Ban Xiengdi where there is a small monastery with Buddha images. 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: None

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 in Vang Vieng.

OVERNIGHT: Vang Vieng hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

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: Vientiane hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

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: Vientiane hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 11: Vientiane fly to Pakse, drive to Tadlo

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: Paksong hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 12: Tadlo 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: Khong Island hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

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 Liph 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: Don Daeng hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

Day 14: Don Daeng, free day

A free day at leisure in Don Daeng. Overnight on Don Daeng.

OVERNIGHT: Don Daeng hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: None

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 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 and service charge
- Luggage handling and drinking water

Excluded

- Visa stamping fee on arrival
- International air tickets to/from 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

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.

Single Room Supplement (LATMLU)

Min numbers: 1 person

Price: \$345.00

This option books a single room in all the accommodation throughout the tour. Room shares are not available on this tour, so if you are single traveller then you will need to add this option to your booking.

Note: The price shown is a low season price. Slightly higher prices may apply during high and peak seasons - the exact price for your dates will be shown on the online booking form and is always available on request.

Extra day in Pakse - post-tour

Min numbers: 2 Adults

Price: \$60.00

This option adds an extra day to the end of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport departure transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Extra day in Chiang Rai - pre-tour

Min numbers: 2 Adults

Price: \$60.00

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport arrival transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Tour Notes

1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the 2 and 3-star level hotels and guest houses on this tour. Accommodation is based on twin, triple or double en-suite rooms. Please visit the accommodation tab of this tour for examples of the hotels normally used on this tour. 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.

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. International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to suggest flights to go with the tour. Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from.

Your airport arrival & departure transfers are included on the first and last days of the tour.

Most of our Thailand tours start and finish in Bangkok, and include an arrival and departure airport transfer from/to Bangkok international airport (BKK). However, some tours also finish on one of Thailand's islands. Transfers back to Bangkok or to one of the nearby island airports can be arranged on request.

5. 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.

6. Entrance Fees

The tour price includes entrance fees to all the tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. You will need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit.

7. Tipping

Tipping is not part of Thai culture but has become customary but not compulsory in the tourist and service industry. Tipping is always optional, and any amounts paid should reflect excellent service. You may therefore wish to tip your guide and driver at the end of the tour. You should not feel obliged to tip any particular amount, and should consider your personal budget. We are often asked to provide a guide however, and can suggest that approx. GBP 5 / USD 8 per person per day would be appropriate.

8. Health and Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

Thailand: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Vietnam: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from an infected area.

Cambodia: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Laos: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Poliomyelitis, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from an infected area.

The above information can change at short notice. For up to date health information & vaccination requirements we recommend that you contact your medical practitioner or a travel clinic.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view a [World Health Organisation map](#) of areas where the virus is present in monkeys and therefore a potential risk to humans. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary.

Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

9. Passports and Visas - Thailand

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

Most foreign nationals (including UK, EU, USA, CA, AU, NZ, SA) are granted a visa exemption on arrival for stays in the country of up to 30 days. If you are looking to spend longer in Thailand then you will need to leave the country and re-enter to extend your stay. We strongly recommend arranging your visa in advance if you would like to stay longer than 30 days in Thailand.

10. Passports and Visas - Laos

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

15-day visas are available for most foreign nationals and cost US\$30. These are available on arrival into Vientiane International airport or when crossing into Laos from Thailand, either at the friendship bridge land border or even when crossing over from northern Thailand into Huay Xai. Longer 30 day tourist visas and business visas can be arranged prior to departure either in your home country or by using an agency in one of the neighbouring countries although this will incur a fee. When leaving the country by air there is a US\$10 departure tax payable at the airport.

As visa regulations often change we recommend that you check this information with your nearest consulate. Obtaining the correct visa is the responsibility of the traveller.

11. Culture and Customs

Dress code

The Thai people consider dressing appropriately to be important and respectful, so please follow their example. This means covering up your swimwear while not on the beach or by the pool, and while shorts and T-shirts are fine, please try not to look scruffy. Remember to take your shoes off before entering local houses or any religious buildings.

Temple etiquette

When entering temples you should wear clothes that cover your knees and shoulders. Women may be asked to wear long skirts, not trousers, and shorts are not appropriate for either sex. You may wear a shawl to cover up and these are sometimes available to hire before entry. Again please take your shoes off before entering.

Buddhist Culture

Thailand is a Buddhist country and Buddhism permeates nearly all aspects of society and culture, resulting in a country with different customs to much of the West. Rudeness and disrespect are frowned upon and you will be judged on your behaviour. Some tips for behaviour to avoid causing offence are; do not touch other people with your feet, point your feet at Buddhist statues or shrines (be careful of this when you sit), and don't touch the head of someone you don't know well. Public displays of affection are frowned upon, so save these until you are in private. You'll find being polite using a few Thai words will really pay dividends (thank you is Kawp Khun Kaa if you are

female, and Kawp Khun Kraap if you are male. Your tour guide will provide more information and advice while you are on the tour; please don't hesitate to ask them any questions or for advice.

The Royal Family

The Thai people have huge respect for their Royal Family and this is enshrined in many laws as well. You should bear this in mind when speaking to Thai people and in simple things like remembering that Thai paper money has the King's face on and should therefore be treated carefully.

Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs are illegal in Thailand and heavy penalties including very large fines and jail time can be imposed. Don't think that because you are a tourist you are exempt or will be treated differently. Drinking is legal and you should not worry about having a few beers or cocktails while on tour. However remember to be respectful to your surroundings, fellow group members and the local population.

12. Time

The time in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos is GMT plus 7 hours. Daylight saving adjustments are not observed.

13. Voltage

Sockets are two round or flat pronged and 220 volts (Type A, B, C). Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are normally available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already. If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

14. Money - Laos

The currency Laos is the 'Kip' (LAK).

Common notes:

100 kip

500 kip

1,000 kip

2,000 kip

5,000 kip

It's worth noting that US\$ are widely accepted throughout Laos and are often actually preferred for higher value purchases. Travellers arriving from Thailand will also find that the Thai baht is another currency welcomed in Laos. However, when paying in these currencies change will most likely be given in kip which should be kept for more day-to-day purchases and transactions. You can change money at any bank (08.30 & 16.00 Mon-Fri) although a variable commission will be charged. In general, it's a good idea to try and find the lower rates which are usually available through exchange kiosks or hotels. In the capital city Vientiane you can exchange UK£ pound, Euros, AUS\$ and other currencies but in the smaller towns around the rest of the country, US\$ and Thai baht are preferred.

Traveller's cheques are widely accepted in major cities and do benefit from a slightly better rate but this can be offset by the commission charged to change them.

ATM's have now made it into Laos and these are available in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Viang Vieng. For some reason, Mastercard is sometimes preferred to Visa but a lot of debit cards such as Cirrus and Maestro are now accepted. You can also use credit cards to pay for hotels and some restaurants but credit and debit cards are far from being accepted everywhere so having an alternate way of accessing funds is vital.

15. What to take

Luggage: Suitcases, rucksacks or fabric holdalls are all fine to bring with you to Thailand, though if your itinerary has many stops and different travel included within it, we recommend packing light and not bring any large cases. You should also bring a small daypack/bag to take out during the day. Your main luggage will normally be left in the hotel during your sightseeing trips – you will not need to carry it far, and there are nearly always hotel porters to assist.

Luggage limits: There is no luggage limit for this tour. However, most airlines restrict you to between 20kg and 25kg for your hold luggage and between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage. Please check with your airline before travelling to the airport.

Climate and Clothing: There are three reasonably well-defined seasons in Thailand, but unlike in Europe, where seasons are temperature based, Thailand is tropical and generally speaking warm all year round. Rains from the monsoon are the marker of seasons and the rainy season is from June to October. Pre-monsoon is from March to May, when the weather becomes progressively hotter. Post monsoon is from November to February when the weather is cooler. The range of temperature is more marked in the north where pre-monsoon can be very hot, though the heat is much drier than in the south. Winter in the north can feel cool, particularly in the mountains. Take light clothes with something warmer for the winter nights if you are travelling to the north. Some light raingear would be useful in the wet season.

Other items: We recommend you also bring:

- Cool footwear (sandals are ideal). If you are interested in exploring the reefs, a pair of reef shoes is recommended to avoid injuries. If you are trekking, then bring comfortable and sturdy walking shoes or light walking boots.
- Swimming costumes – rash-guards/t-shirts are recommended for snorkelling to avoid sunburn.
- Sunscreens, after sun lotions and personal hygiene products – Please adhere to 100ml restrictions for anything you wish to carry on hand-luggage on flights.
- Prescription medications (if required) – please bring supporting documents.
- Power adapter for phones, laptops etc
- Sunglasses and hats
- Basic first aid kit and toiletries
- Money belt
- Small torch
- Dive certification card and log book if you intend to participate in SCUBA diving.
- Sleeping bag if your tour includes any hill-tribe or village trekking

16. 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 (Xieng 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.

17. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

18. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event). [More information...](#)

You may arrange your own insurance, or you can take advantage of a comprehensive policy that we can arrange for you through Endsleigh Insurance which has been designed to be suitable for our tours. The policy is available to travellers of all nationalities and you do not need to live in the UK to take out the policy. For full details of cover provided, prices and to apply for one of our policies, please complete [travel insurance application form](#).

Note: Any country that borders the Mediterranean is considered as 'Europe' for the purposes of travel insurance (including Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Morocco). If you are doing a tour that visits one country in 'Europe' and one that is 'Worldwide' (for example, an Egypt and Jordan tour), then you need a 'Worldwide' policy. When completing the form you should enter your travel dates including any extra days involved in overnight flights or connecting travel between your home and the tour. Our policies are not able to cover any extra time or activities other than your tour and options booked with us and your travel to & from home.

Note - to comply with insurance sales regulations, our travel insurance policies are only available to customers booking directly with us. If you have booked through a travel agent you will need to arrange your own insurance.

If you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally, or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

19. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and an ABTA Member (Y4447) and you can be confident when booking with us that your money is safe and protected.

Financial failure insurance is also provided through Affirma to protect all customers for the land portion of your tour. Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

20. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

21. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

www.twitter.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

22. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's '[Travel Aware](#)' campaign which provides further useful and invaluable information.

23. Entrance Fees

The tour price includes entrance fees to all the tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. You will need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit.

24. Transfers

Our South East Asia tours all include a 24-hour arrival and departure airport-hotel transfer service, and all other transfers throughout the tour. If you are already in the country then we will provide you with your first hotel details, contact numbers for our local representatives, and details of your first meeting time.

25. Tipping

Tipping is not part of culture in South East Asia in the same way that it is standard practice in other parts of the world. However it has become more customary but not compulsory in the tourist and service industry. Tipping is always optional, and any amounts paid should reflect excellent service. You may therefore wish to tip your guide and

driver at the end of the tour. You should not feel obliged to tip any particular amount, and should consider your personal budget. We are often asked to provide a guide however, and can suggest that approx. USD 5-10 per person per day would be appropriate for your guide(s).

Printed on: Sunday 22nd of September 2019

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.
