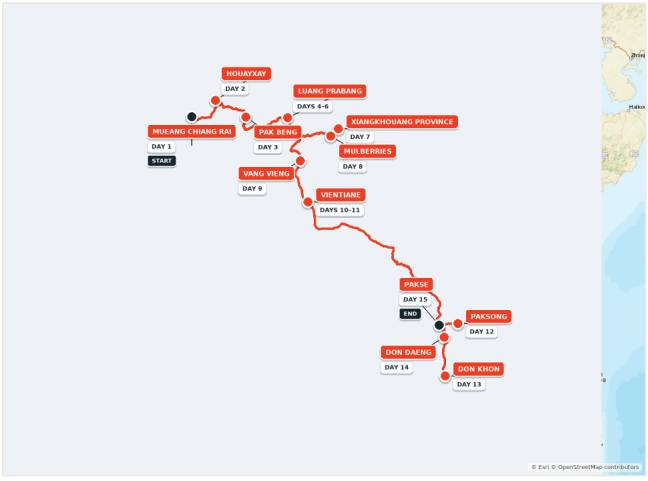
ENCOUNTERS TRAVEL

Your passport to adventure

Laos Uncovered

COUNTRY(IES)	Laos , Thailand
TOUR TYPE	Private
TRANSPORT	A/C minibus, flight & cruise boats
GROUP SIZE	Min: 2 | Max: 18
DURATION	15 days
STARTS	Chiang Rai, Thailand
ENDS	Pakse, Laos
MEALS	Breakfasts - 14, Lunches - 3, Dinners - 1

TOUR ROUTE MAP **15 Days**



ROUTE: **Mueang Chiang Rai** (Start) → **Houayxay** → **Pak Beng** → **Luang Prabang** → **Xiangkhouang Province** → **Mulberries** → **Vang Vieng** → **Vientiane** → **Paksong** → **Don Khon** → **Don Daeng** → **Pakse** (End)

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 the onward transfer after arrival at Chiang Rai International Airport and travel to Chiang Khong. Once there, the schedule is free. Exploring the town or enjoying Mekong views are independent possibilities and not organised activities. No border crossing occurs within this collection, so the description should remain focused on the airport arrival, road journey to Chiang Khong and leisure time afterwards.

ACTIVITIES

- **Arrive at Chiang Rai International Airport**
  Arrival at Chiang Rai International Airport in Thailand followed by a road transfer to Chiang Khong. This introduces you to the border region along the Mekong River.

- **Travel from Chiang Rai Airport to Chiang Khong**
  A road transfer from Chiang Rai, Thailand to Chiang Khong on the Laos border. This is the staging point before entering Laos.
- **Free Time in Chiang Khong**
  Free time to settle into Chiang Khong, Thailand near the Mekong River. A quiet border town setting before crossing into Laos.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Chiang Khong hotel	None	Extra day in Chiang Rai - pre-tour, Single room supplement (LATMLU)

DAY 2 Huay Xai, Mekong cruise to Pakbeng

This day marks the beginning of a classic Mekong River journey through northern Laos. After reaching Huay Xai, travel continues by boat along the Mekong, passing remote riverbanks, forested hills, and small settlements that reflect life along the waterway. The slow pace of the cruise highlights the river's role as a lifeline for transport, trade, and daily living. Arrival in Pakbeng introduces a quiet riverside town that serves as an important stop along the route. A visit to the local market offers insight into regional produce and everyday life in northern Laos.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive to Huay Xai**
  A morning transfer to Huay Xai in northern Laos. This is the gateway for starting the cruise along the Mekong River.
- **Mekong River Cruise on Huay Xai to Pakbeng**
  A scenic Mekong River cruise from Huay Xai to Pakbeng. Stops include minority villages and riverside viewpoints in northern Laos.
- **Explore Pakbeng Market**
  A short visit to the local market in Pakbeng, Laos. It provides insight into daily hill tribe trading along the Mekong.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Pakbeng Lodge or similar	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 3 Pakbeng, cruise to Luang Prabang via Pak Ou Caves

This journey continues down the Mekong River toward Luang Prabang, following one of Laos's most important historic trade and travel routes. Cruising past forested hills and riverside villages highlights the quiet rhythm of life along the water. Along the way, a visit to the Pak Ou Caves reveals a major spiritual site filled with thousands of Buddha images placed by pilgrims over generations. The experience also includes a stop at Ban Xang Hai, where traditional Lao whisky production reflects local craft and rural livelihoods. Together, the day blends river travel,

spiritual heritage, and village culture before reaching Luang Prabang.

ACTIVITIES

- **Mekong River Cruise on Pakbeng to Luang Prabang**
  A continuation of the Mekong River cruise toward Luang Prabang, Laos. The route passes dramatic riverside scenery and small villages.
- **Explore Pak Ou Caves**
  A stop at Pak Ou Caves near Luang Prabang, Laos. This ancient riverside cave complex contains hundreds of Buddha images.
- **Explore Ban Xang Hai (Lao Whisky Village)**
  A visit to Ban Xang Hai, Laos known for traditional lao-lao whisky making. You observe the production process using local rice alcohol methods.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Sunrise Garden House or similar in Luang Prabang	Breakfast,Lunch

DAY 4 Luang Prabang, city tour and Kuang Si waterfalls

After breakfast, visit the Royal Palace Museum, which hosts a range of interesting artefacts, before continuing to the magnificent Wat Xiengthong, with its roofs sweeping low to the ground in a style that represents classical Laotian architecture. Take a look at the Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre to learn about the many Lao ethnic groups, then visit Wat Visoun, which dates back to 1513 during the reign of King Wisunarat (Visoun) and is Luang Prabang's oldest temple, once home to the Prabang Buddhas. Laos is also known for its traditional crafts, so a short visit follows to the Ock Pop Tok Living Craft Centre, where a short tour gives you information about silk, about weaving and about the women who work in the centre. This then leads to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfall, where you can cool off with a refreshing swim in the pools or walk along the forest trails, and see Asiatic bears up close at the Bear Rescue Centre along the jungle walk to the waterfall. Before returning to Luang Prabang, 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 take an optional 15-minute tour to learn about butterflies and local flora. Arriving back in Luang Prabang, 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.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Royal Palace Museum in Luang Prabang**
  A tour of the Royal Palace Museum in Luang Prabang, Laos. It showcases historical artifacts from the former royal family.
- **Explore Wat Xiengthong in Luang Prabang**
  A visit to Wat Xiengthong, one of Luang Prabang's most important temples. Its sweeping rooflines represent classic Lao architecture.
- **Visit Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre – Luang Prabang**
  A cultural stop at the Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre in Luang Prabang, Laos. It highlights the lifestyles of

diverse ethnic groups.

- **Explore Wat Visoun in Luang Prabang**
  A visit to Wat Visoun, the oldest temple in Luang Prabang, Laos. It houses important Buddhist images and historical structures.
- **Explore Ock Pop Tok Living Craft Center in Luang Prabang**
  A stop at the Ock Pop Tok craft center in Luang Prabang, Laos. You learn about silk weaving and the women artisans who work here.
- **Explore Kuang Si Waterfall in Luang Prabang**
  A visit to Kuang Si Waterfall near Luang Prabang, Laos. Its turquoise pools and forest trails offer refreshing swimming and scenic views.
- **Explore Kuang Si Butterfly Park in Luang Prabang**
  A stop at the Kuang Si Butterfly Park in Laos to learn about butterflies and local flora. This educational site sits beside the forest trail.
- **Phousi Hill Sunset in Luang Prabang**
  A climb up Phousi Hill in Luang Prabang, Laos for panoramic sunset views. The hill overlooks the Mekong River and the old town.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Sunrise Garden House or similar in Luang Prabang	Breakfast

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. You 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. The 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'.

ACTIVITIES

- **Morning Alms Giving in Luang Prabang**
  An early morning alms ceremony in Luang Prabang, Laos. Monks collect offerings from local residents in a centuries-old tradition.
- **Explore Luang Prabang Morning Market**
  A visit to the morning market in Luang Prabang, Laos. Local villagers trade fresh produce gathered from surrounding rural areas.
- **MandaLao Elephant Conservation Experience in Luang Prabang**
  A guided, ethical elephant conservation experience near Luang Prabang, Laos. You walk alongside elephants in forested landscapes.
- **Explore Kuang Si Waterfall in Luang Prabang**
  A visit to Kuang Si Waterfall near Luang Prabang, Laos. Its turquoise pools and forest trails offer refreshing swimming and scenic views.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Sunrise Garden House or similar in Luang Prabang	Breakfast,Lunch

DAY 6 Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang

This overland journey travels from Luang Prabang into the mountainous landscapes of Xieng Khouang Province, revealing a more remote side of Laos. Scenic stops along the route include viewpoints overlooking forested valleys and visits to rural villages that reflect traditional highland life. A stop at a Hmong market introduces local trade and regional produce at an important crossroads. The journey continues to a cave site associated with local belief and history, adding cultural depth to the drive. Together, the day combines long distance travel with meaningful encounters across Laos’s upland regions.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang**
  A long scenic drive from Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang in central Laos. The route passes minority villages and mountainous terrain.
- **Explore Ban Kiew Nya Viewpoint**
  A stop at Ban Kiew Nya viewpoint in Laos for mountain panoramas. The village sits amid Hmong and Khmu communities.
- **Explore Ban Phoudam Village**
  A visit to Ban Phoudam, Laos where Hmong and Khmu people live side by side. It offers insight into rural life and traditions.
- **Explore Hmong Market in Phoukhoun Junction**
  A stop at the Hmong market near Phoukhoun, Laos. The roadside market sells local produce and handmade items.

- **Explore Tham Pra Cave**

  A visit to Tham Pra cave in Laos, once used as a military hospital. The cave reflects unique historical significance from wartime.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Vansana Plain Of Jars hotel or similar in Xieng Khuang	Breakfast

DAY 7 Xieng Khouang, Plain of Jars & Muang Khoun

This day explores the archaeological and historical heart of Xieng Khouang Province in northern Laos. Visits to the Plain of Jars sites introduce one of Southeast Asia's most mysterious ancient landscapes, where large stone jars are scattered across open fields and hillsides. The journey continues to Muang Khoun, the former provincial capital, where remnants of temples and historic structures reflect the region's past importance. Together, the sites reveal layers of ancient ritual, colonial history, and resilience shaped by time and conflict. The experience offers a deeper understanding of Xieng Khouang's cultural and historical significance.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Plain of Jars Sites**

  A tour of the Plain of Jars archaeological sites in Xieng Khouang, Laos. The area features ancient stone jars scattered across the plateau.

- **Explore Muang Khoun Town**

  A visit to Muang Khoun in Laos, known for historic pagodas and a giant sitting Buddha. Some structures survived heavy bombing during the war.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Xieng Khouang hotel	Breakfast

DAY 8 Xieng Khouang to Vang Vieng

This travel day links the cultural highlands of Xieng Khouang with the river landscapes of Vang Vieng. A visit to a local silk farm offers insight into traditional weaving, natural dyes, and rural craft production that support community livelihoods. The journey then continues by road through mountainous scenery and valleys, marking a shift from historic uplands to the limestone landscapes of central Laos. The day focuses on transition, combining cultural context with scenic overland travel. It sets the stage for the next phase of the journey in Vang Vieng.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Mulberries Silk Farm in Xieng Khouang**

  A visit to the Mulberries Silk Farm in Xieng Khouang, Laos. You observe traditional sericulture and fair-trade silk production.

- **Drive from Xieng Khouang to Vang Vieng**
  A drive from Xieng Khouang to Vang Vieng in central Laos. The route transitions from highland plains to limestone river landscapes.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Faraway Suites or similar in Vang Vieng	Breakfast

DAY 9 Vang Vieng to Vientiane

This day connects the limestone landscapes of Vang Vieng with the capital region of Laos. Exploration begins at a local cave site that reflects the area's dramatic geology and historic use as shelter. A gentle boat ride along the Nam Song River offers views of riverside life and karst scenery from the water. The journey then continues by road toward Vientiane, marking a shift from rural adventure to the capital's outskirts. A visit to traditional salt mines provides insight into long standing production methods and local livelihoods before arrival.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Tham Jang Caves in Vang Vieng**
  A visit to Tham Jang caves in Vang Vieng, Laos. The caves sit above the Nam Song River and feature impressive rock formations.
- **Nam Song River Boat Ride on Vang Vieng**
  A short boat ride along the Nam Song River in Vang Vieng, Laos. It offers views of dramatic limestone karsts.
- **Drive from Vang Vieng to Vientiane**
  A road transfer from Vang Vieng to Vientiane, the capital of Laos. The journey includes a visit to Ban Kheun salt mines en route.
- **Explore Ban Kheun Salt Mines**
  A tour of the Ban Kheun salt mines in Laos. You observe traditional salt-producing methods still used today.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Aaron Hotel or similar in Vientiane	Breakfast

DAY 10 Vientiane, half day city tour

This relaxed city experience introduces you to the capital of Laos through a guided exploration of its key landmarks, followed by time to enjoy the city at your own pace. The journey blends historical and cultural discovery with moments of unstructured leisure. You gain insight into Vientiane's role as the political and cultural heart of the country while experiencing its calm riverside atmosphere. The day balances organised sightseeing with flexibility, allowing space to explore cafés, markets, or quiet streets. It offers a well-rounded impression of daily life and heritage in Laos' understated capital.

ACTIVITIES

- **City Tour of Vientiane**

  A half-day city tour of Vientiane, Laos visiting major temples and monuments. Sites include Wat Sisaket, Wat Prakeo, Patuxay and That Luang Stupa.

- **Free Time in Vientiane**

  Free time in Vientiane, Laos to explore the riverside or local markets. A relaxing break before traveling south.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Aaron Hotel or similar in Vientiane	Breakfast

DAY 11 — Vientiane fly to Pakse, drive to Paksong

This journey traces a scenic transition from the capital to the lush highlands of southern Laos. After flying south to Pakse, the route continues by road into the cooler Paksong Plateau, known for its waterfalls, fertile landscapes, and rural communities. The experience blends natural exploration with cultural insight, highlighting the region's volcanic soils, flowing rivers, and village life. Visits along the way reveal the slower pace and traditions of southern Laos. The day connects geography, nature, and local culture into a cohesive highland travel experience.

ACTIVITIES

- **Travel from Flight Vientiane to Pakse**

  A domestic flight from Vientiane to Pakse in southern Laos. This connects you to the Bolaven Plateau region.

- **Drive from Pakse to Paksong**

  A scenic road transfer from Pakse toward Paksong on the Bolaven Plateau. The route passes hill tribe villages and lush farmland.

- **Explore Tad Lo Waterfalls in Paksong**

  A visit to Tad Lo Waterfalls in southern Laos. These cascades sit among forested landscapes and small villages.

- **Explore Ban Houay Houn Village in Paksong**

  A cultural stop at Ban Houay Houn village in Laos, known for Katu weaving. Local artisans demonstrate textile techniques.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Sinouk Coffee Resort or similar in Paksong	Breakfast

DAY 12 — Paksong to Khong Island via Wat Phou

Travel from the Bolaven Plateau towards Champasak with waterfall stops and cultural experiences linked to the area's Khmer and royal heritage. Scenic overland travel gradually brings you closer to the Mekong landscapes of southern Laos. The combination of waterfalls, regional history and river country shapes the progression towards the island region ahead.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Paksong to Champasak**
  A drive from Paksong to Champasak in southern Laos. Scenic viewpoints include Tad Fan waterfall and agricultural plantations.
- **Explore Tad Fan Waterfall in Paksong**
  A visit to Tad Fan Waterfall on the Bolaven Plateau in Laos. Twin cascades plunge into a deep jungle gorge.
- **Explore Wat Phou in Champasak**
  A guided visit to Wat Phou, a UNESCO pre-Angkorian temple in Champasak, Laos. The ancient terraces and shrines overlook rice fields.
- **Explore Champasak Town**
  A short exploration of Champasak town in southern Laos. It features remnants of French colonial architecture.
- **Drive from Champasak to Don Khong**
  A road transfer from Champasak to Don Khong in the 4,000 Islands region of Laos. This rural river landscape is known for peaceful scenery.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Pon Arena Hotel or similar in Don Khong	Breakfast

DAY 13

Khong Island, Khone Island & Don Daeng

This river journey explores the tranquil island region of southern Laos, where the Mekong breaks into a maze of channels and islands. A boat tour around Don Khone reveals remnants of colonial history and everyday life shaped by the river. The experience continues to the mighty Khone Phapheng Waterfall, the largest waterfall system in Southeast Asia, showcasing the raw power of the Mekong. Travel by boat reinforces the importance of waterways as transport links in the region. The day ends with a peaceful crossing to Don Daeng Island, offering a slower rhythm of island life along the river.

ACTIVITIES

- **Guided Tour of Don Khone Boat**
  A long-tail boat ride around Don Khone in Laos. The tour includes French colonial sites and the dramatic Liphi Waterfall.
- **Explore Khone Phapheng Waterfall**
  A visit to Khone Phapheng Waterfall, the largest waterfall by volume in Southeast Asia. Wildlife thrives along this river section.
- **Boat Transfer to Don Daeng Island**
  A boat ride from the mainland to Don Daeng Island in Laos. The island is known for peaceful landscapes and traditional life.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
La Folie Lodge or similar in Don Daeng	Breakfast

DAY 14

Don Daeng, free day

Enjoy an unstructured day on Don Daeng Island with no included transfers, sightseeing or organised activities. Walking village paths, relaxing and taking in Mekong views are independent possibilities mentioned by the source rather than scheduled experiences. No cycling, boat trip, meal or community visit should be added unless separately confirmed elsewhere in the itinerary.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Don Daeng**
  Free time to relax on Don Daeng Island in southern Laos. Scenic river views and rural surroundings offer a quiet retreat.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
La Folie Lodge or similar in Don Daeng	Breakfast

DAY 15

Don Daeng , return to Pakse for flight home

Leave Don Daeng Island and travel back towards Pakse Airport, moving from the quiet rural landscapes of the Mekong region to the transport hub serving southern Laos. The road journey offers a final look at countryside shaped by river life, farming and small communities before the organised trip comes to an end. The day remains focused on the practical transfer from the island area to the airport for onward travel.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Don Daeng to Pakse Airport**
  A road transfer from Don Daeng to Pakse Airport in Laos. This concludes the journey through southern Laos.
- **Depart from Pakse International Airport**
  Departure from Pakse International Airport in Laos. This marks the end of the journey through the country.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
N/A	Breakfast	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, get a quote here)
- 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.

Tour 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 additional options available for this tour.

Important Notes

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 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 (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.

6 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.

7 Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.
We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel’s insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see our website or booking conditions for more information.

8 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).

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9 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

https://x.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

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10 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).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? World Nomads Travel Insurance offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or 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.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

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11 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.

travel aware
gov.uk/travelaware

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12 Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can’t fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon’s efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you’ll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

13 Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please contact us.

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14 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.

We do also sometimes advertise flight inclusive packages from selected airports. Where these are shown on our website, prices are correct at the time of quoting, but are subject to continued availability of the fare used. Prices will be reconfirmed at the time of booking, and we will also provide the flight times and airline details before tickets are issued.

Flight inclusive prices are based on the cheapest Economy ticket class available which is generally non-refundable and non-changeable unless the flight is cancelled for reasons such as Covid-19, in which case the airlines are more flexible. More flexible ticket options, as well as Premium Economy and Business Class tickets are available on request for an additional supplement. Any changes made to flight inclusive bookings will be subject to the airline rules on your ticket.

Flight CO2 Emissions:

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do

publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

15 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.

16 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.

17 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 vacinnation 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 this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. 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.

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18 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.

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19 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.

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20 Time

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

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21 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

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22 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.

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23 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.

24 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 responsibliity of the traveller.