



TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

ESSENTIAL LAOS

11 days



Countries visited

Laos

Tour Highlights

- Wat Xieng Thong monastery
- Explore the Pak Ou Caves

- Patouxai Lao Victory Monument
- Xieng Khouan Buddha Park
- The ancient Wat Sisaket temple
- Scenic waterfalls on the Bolaven Plateau
- Encounter the Katou people
- The mountain temple of Wat Phou
- Spot Irrawaddy dolphins at Khone Pha Pheng Waterfall
- Explore the 4000 Islands

Places visited

Luang Prabang • Wat Xieng Thong • Wat Mai • Ban Khomkhuang • Mekong River • Vientiane • Pak Ou Caves • Patouxai Lao Victory Monument • Wat That Luang • Xieng Khouan Buddha Park • Mai Savanh Lao • Wat Sisaket • Ho Pha Keo • Pakse • Bolaven Plateau • Tad Fane Waterfall • Tad Yeaung Waterfall • Phasuum Waterfall • Jhai Coffee House • Wat Phou • Champassak • Khone Pha Pheng Waterfall • Ban Nakasang • 4000 Islands • Done Xang • Done Pueay • Don Khone Island • Lphi Waterfall

What's included

- Arrival & departure transfers
- Ground transport with driver
- Domestic flights
- Accommodation
- Meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
- English-speaking guides
- Entrance fees to sites & parks

What's not included

- Meals not mentioned in itinerary
- Drinks
- Visa fees
- Tipping
- Camera / video camera fees
- Personal items (laundry, telephone, etc.)
- Medical expenses
- Any services not mentioned in itinerary

All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.

Your Itinerary Map



Your Itinerary Explained

| Date | Place visited | Meals |
|------|--|--|
| | <p>The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>The part of the day's text in italics (and comes after the three dashes "---") is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.</i></p> | <p>B: Breakfast</p> <p>L: Lunch</p> <p>D: Dinner</p> |

Tour Itinerary

| Day 1 | Arrival into Luang Prabang | Meals |
|---|---|-------|
|  <p>Flight</p> | <p>Arrive at Luang Prabang, where you will meet your local guide and transfer to your hotel. Overnight stay in Luang Prabang.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Overnight in Satri House, Luang Prabang</i></p> | N/A |
| Day 2 | Luang Prabang | Meals |
|  <p>Luang Prabang National Museum</p> | <p>Rise early to witness monks practicing sacred Sai Bath rituals. Spend the rest of the day exploring Luang Prabang. Begin with a visit to the lively morning markets, before touring the temples of Wat Xieng Thong and Wat Mai and later visiting the National Museum of Luang Prabang. Following this, travel to the village of Ban Khomkuang, where you will learn of local customs and skills. Enjoy a traditional Baci ceremony in the home of a villager before transferring back to Luang Prabang for overnight stay.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Located at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, Luang Prabang was the royal capital and seat of the government until the Communist takeover in 1975. Like the Vientiane, the city contains many Buddhist temples, the most well-known being Wat Xeing Thong. The city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of its most famous landmarks is Wat Chom Si, a temple that sits on a large steep hill overlooking the city.</i></p> | B |

Wat Xieng Thong, also known as the Golden City Monastery, can be found near to the Mekong River in Luang Prabang. This historic monastery was built in 1560 by King Setthathilat and stands today as one of the highest symbols of Buddhism in Laos. The roof of the temple sweeps to almost reach the ground, which, along with its ornate detail both inside and outside, provides an example of classic Luang Prabang architectural style. The monastery of Wat Xieng Thong has been the site of coronation of Lao kings along with many annual Buddhist festivals.

Wat Mai, meaning 'new temple', is one of the most grand and extravagant monasteries in Luang Prabang. Both its interior and exterior are ornately decorated with red and black lacquer and gold leaf. Located next to the Royal Palace, the Wat Mai was the temple used by Laos royalty. The temple is built in the traditional Luang Prabang style and was one of the only ones of its kind that was spared from destruction by Chinese invaders in 1887.

The National Museum in Luang Prabang, formerly known as Haw Kham, was once Laos' Royal Palace. The palace was originally built in 1904 for King Sisavang Vong and his family and later converted into a national museum that opened to the public in 1995. The grounds include many outer buildings, including the royal barge shelter, along with gardens and a statue of the King Sisavong Vong. Visitors can see many religious artifacts within the palace, along with the ornate Haw Pha Bang pavillion in the palace gardens.

Overnight in Satri House, Luang Prabang

| Day 3 | Luang Prabang | Meals |
|-------|---------------|-------|
|-------|---------------|-------|



Luang Prabang

Start the day by learning about the ethnic minorities of Laos at the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre. Continue with a tour of some local villages, where you will meet the Lowland Lao, Khmu and Hmong people. Later, trek beside the Mekong River and its waterfalls, before visiting the Sun Bear Refuge. Overnight stay in Luang Prabang.

B L

 Luang Prabang's **Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre** is dedicated to preserving the ethnic groups of Laos, both in history and today. Exhibits include clothing, jewellery, photography and household objects - giving visitors a glimpse into the diverse cultural heritage of Laos.

The **Khmu** are an ethnic group indigenous to northern Laos - although communities can also be found in other countries, including Vietnam, Thailand and China. There is no one Khmu language, instead, the ethnic group has several different dialects. The Khmu are settled agriculturalists, who rely on agriculture and 'swidden farming', hunting and gathering for their existence. The oldest Khmu villages can be found on mountain ranges and tend to be populated entirely by Khmu. However, the more lowland Khmu settlements may also house people from other ethnic groups.

The **Sunbear Refuge** in Luang Prabang is situated beside the scenic Kwang Si Waterfall. The Sunbear is an endangered species who has come under great threat in Laos from poaching and hunting. The main aim of the Sunbear Refuge is in protecting and rehabilitating the rescued bears.

The **Mekong River** stretches from the Tibetan Plateau, through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam - making it the longest river in Southeast Asia. Although its many waterfalls impede on navigation along the river, it remains a major trade route between western China and Southeast Asia.

The **Lowland people** live on the banks of the Mekong River in Ban Sa-aat. The indigenous community speak Lao, which is said to be very closely related to the Thai language that is spoken today in Thailand.

Overnight in Satri House, Luang Prabang

| Day 4 | Luang Prabang | Meals |
|--|---|--|
|  <p data-bbox="89 922 300 954">Luang Prabang</p> | <p data-bbox="306 698 1423 779">Spend a free day in Luang Prabang. Relax and explore at your leisure. Overnight stay in Luang Prabang.</p> <p data-bbox="306 810 1423 846"><i>Overnight in Satri House, Luang Prabang</i></p> | <p data-bbox="1423 698 1522 734">B</p> |

| Day 5 | Luang Prabang - Vientiane | Meals |
|---|--|--|
|  <p data-bbox="89 1379 300 1415">Pak Ou Caves</p> | <p data-bbox="306 1155 1423 1272">Travel by boat along the Mekong River, stopping to tour the Pak Ou Caves. Later, transfer back to the airport in Luang Prabang and take a flight on to Vientiane. On arrival, visit the Patouxai Lao Victory Monument and Wat That Luang. Overnight in Vientiane.</p> <p data-bbox="306 1303 1423 1523"><i>Vientiane is the largest city in Laos. It became the country's capital in 1593 due to fears of a Siamese invasion. Although it is still a relatively small city, Vientiane contains many temples and monuments including Pha That Luang, Wat Si Muang, a temple built on the remains of a Hindu shrine, and the Patouxai, a memorial monument inspired by the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Energetic visitors can climb to the top of the monument and be rewarded with panoramic views of the city.</i></p> <p data-bbox="306 1554 1423 1747"><i>The Pak Ou Caves lie north of Luang Prabang at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers. Many caves are set within the limestone cliffs, including the most well known Tham Ting and Tham Phoum. These caves have been used for centuries to store Buddhist images and statues. During the Laos New Year, to this day, the residents of Luang Prabang travel by boat to bathe the Buddhas' within the caves.</i></p> <p data-bbox="306 1778 1423 1998"><i>Patouxai, translates to mean 'Victory Gate', and is a grand concrete monument in Vientiane. It was built during the 1960s as a tribute to those who gave their lives serving their country at war. It takes the shape of an archway - being inspired by the Arc de Triomphe in Paris - and contains Laos style ornaments and inscriptions. Visitors can climb the stairways to an observation platform, which gives a view across the town and the Mekong River.</i></p> | <p data-bbox="1423 1155 1522 1191">B</p> |

Wat That Luang is a gold-covered Buddhist stupa that lies at the heart of Vientiane. It was originally built as a Hindu temple in the 3rd century, and became a focal site for Buddhist missionaries from the Mauryan Empire. The Wat That Luang has been reconstructed and rebuilt on several occasions following its repeated destruction during times of war. Its grand architectural style focuses on traditional Laos culture and has become a real symbol of nationalism for the country.

Overnight in Ansara Hotel, Vientiane

| Day 6 | Vientiane | Meals |
|-------|-----------|-------|
|-------|-----------|-------|



Vientiane

In the morning, travel out to the Xieng Khouan Buddha Park. Afterwards, begin the journey back to Vientiane, stopping en route at Mai Savanh Lao and the Lao Disabled Women Development Centre. Later, visit Wat Sisaket and Ho Pha Keo, before learning of the Secret War at the COPE Visitor Centre. Overnight stay in Vientiane.

B

Xieng Khouan, meaning spirit city, is a sculpture park that contains hundreds of Hindu and Buddhist statues. This Buddha Park was created in 1958 by Luang Pu - a priest who integrated Hinduism and Buddhism. The ornate statues within the park are each very unique and take the form of humans, gods, animals and demons.

Mai Savanh Lao, meaning 'the silk from paradise, is a fair trade silk and tea company. The region is famed for its silk, and here, visitors can learn the process of silk weaving - from silk form, to rearing and the final product.

Wat Sisaket is a Buddhist temple in Vientiane. It was built between 1819 and 1824 by Chao Anou, on the orders of King Anouvong, and is thought to be the oldest surviving temple within the city. It is made up of a number of towers, including a drum tower, along with a cloister wall that displays over 2,000 Buddha images, and Jakata murals - which depict stories of the Buddha's past lives.

COPE, stands for 'Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise'. It was founded in 1977 with the aim of providing individuals with physical disabilities access to a free rehabilitation service. Together with assistance from the government, COPE has been fundraising and producing orthotic and prosthetic devices, along with providing the rehabilitation and therapy needed to support local individuals. Many of whom, who live in remote and rural locations, are reached through COPE's use of satellite rehabilitation services. In 2008, COPE opened its Visitor Centre, where visitors can learn about disability in Laos and of the work that is being done by the charity.

Located in Vientiane, the majestic **Ho Pha Keo temple** was originally built in 1565 as a royal chapel for the celebrated statue of the Emerald Buddha after it was taken from North Thailand in 1551. The statue remained in the temple for over 200 years until it was recaptured by the Thais in 1778 and returned to Bangkok, where it now sits in the Grand Palace. Ho Pha Keo has been rebuilt many times, first destroyed between 1828 and 1829 by Siamese armies before being rebuilt in 1936, and restored again in 1942 and 1993. Today it is used as a museum, exhibiting religious art, Khmer stone carvings and numerous Buddha statues. A 2000-year-old stone jar from Plain of Jars can also be found in the manicured garden.

Overnight in Ansara Hotel, Vientiane

| Day 7 | Pakse – Bolaven Plateau | Meals |
|---|--|----------|
|  <p>Pakse</p> | <p>Begin the day with a flight on to Pakse, where, on arrival you will travel on to see the many waterfalls of the Bolaven Plateau. These will include the scenic, Tad Fane, Tad Yeung and Phasuum waterfalls. Later, encounter the Katou people of Ban Phoung Cook and learn more of their heritage on a visit to the national ethno-cultural open air museum. Overnight in Bolaven Plateau.</p> <p>---</p> <p>The Bolaven Plateau is situated in southern Laos, on the site of an ancient volcano that erupted millions of years ago. It lies at an altitude of up to 1350 meters above sea level, remaining lush and green all year round and staying cooler than the rest of Laos and Thailand. The plateau is home to a number of scenic rivers and waterfalls, including the famous Tad Fane waterfall. The Bolaven Plateau region is also well known for its ethnic minorities, along with its coffee and tea production.</p> <p>The falls of Tad Fane can be found in the jungle of Dong Hua Sao. This striking waterfall has a drop of over 100 metres down steep cliffs into a gorge. Visitors can hike up to the top of the waterfall to enjoy scenic views of the surrounding rainforest.</p> <p>The Tad Yeung waterfall provides a picturesque spot on the Bolaven Plateau. Visitors can use a pathway that travels up towards the top of the waterfall - stopping at platforms along the way to take in the view before enjoying a swim in its pools.</p> <p>The Katou people are a small ethnic group who reside in southern Laos. The community is known for their contrasting red and black weaved textiles and intricate tapestries. The Katou people practice distinct cultural traditions, for instance, families carve unique wooden coffins meant to send their each of their family members into the next life. These are made by hand, well before their deaths and are then stored beneath their houses until they may be needed.</p> <p>The Phasuum waterfall is shaped in a distinct U shape, where the Housai Champi River cascades down across the Bolaven Plateau. Visitors can cross a wooden bridge that overlooks the waterfall, enjoying the picturesque views before taking a swim in the tranquil pools of the falls.</p> <p>Overnight in Falls View Resort (Formerly Tad E-Tu Resort), Bolaven Plateau</p> | <p>B</p> |

| Day 8 | Bolaven Plateau - Champassak | Meals |
|--|---|----------|
|  <p>Wat Phou</p> | <p>In the morning, visit the Jhai Coffee House to learn more about the coffee roasting process. Later, depart the Bolaven Plateau and travel on to Wat Phou. The rest of the afternoon will be free to spend at your leisure. Overnight in Champassak.</p> <p>---</p> | <p>B</p> |

The **Jhai Coffee House** can be found in Paksong, on the Bolaven Plateau - the heart of Laos coffee production. Jhai is a philanthropic organisation, which educates farmers on speciality coffee, before buying coffee from these farmers and investing all of its profits into achieving hygiene solutions and clean water for schools within the region. Visitors can take tours of the Jhai Coffee House to learn about local coffee farming, along with the impact this organisation is having within the community.

Wat Phou, meaning 'mountain temple', is a UNESCO-listed Kher temple that lies at the foot of mount Phu Kao. Ancient stone inscriptions at the ruins of this Hindu temple speak of how it was originally built during the 5th century. It was later restored and enlarged during the 11th, 12th and 13th century. Following the collapse of Khmer power, Buddhism then became the dominant religion of Southeast Asia, leading to changes of Wat Phou temple that would better serve Buddhist practices. The preserved ruins include many interesting features, such as reflection pools and statues of ruling kings of the time. Atop Phou Asa mountain, visitors can enjoy unspoilt views of the Xe Pian forests, Kiet Ngong wetlands and the waterfalls of the Bolaven Plateau.

Overnight in River Resort, Champassak

Day 9

Champassak

Meals



Champassak

Enjoy a free day in Champassak, relaxing and exploring the area at your leisure. Overnight stay in Champassak.

Champassak is a small town in southern Laos, which lies on the banks of the Mekong River. This town is the capital of the Champassak province, and is famed for its many temples which symbolise its rich cultural history. The famous Wat Phou temple ruins lie nearby the town of Champassak.

Overnight in River Resort, Champassak

B

Day 10

Champassak - 4000 Islands

Meals



Khone Pha Pheng Waterfall

Begin the day visiting the famous Pha Peng Waterfalls. Continue on to Ban Nakasang, boarding a boat that will take you on a cruise through the 4000 islands. Cycle around Don Khone island, see the Liphie Waterfall and look out for the freshwater, Irrawaddy dolphins. Later, enjoy a sunset cruise along the Mekong River, stopping to visit the Done Xang, Done Pueau and Don Som. Return to Don Khone Island for overnight stay.

The **Khone Pha Pheng Waterfall** can be found in Si Phan Don, in the Champassak province of southern Laos. These are the largest and most dramatic waterfalls anywhere along the Mekong River. It is here that the river broadens out to the area known as 4000 islands, famed as the home of rare Irrawaddy dolphins. Visitors to the Khone Pha Pheng Waterfalls can climb to a viewpoint, enjoying panoramic views of the falls, along with the many islands below.

B

The 4000 islands lie along the widest section of the Mekong River in the southern region of Laos. Also known as Si Phan Don, these islands sit between the shallow networked waterways of the river. Some of these islands are so small that they disappear beneath the waters surface during the rainy seasons. These small islands can only be reached by boat - some of the most famous include Don Khone and Don Som.

Don Khone is one of the many islands that makes up the 4000 islands of the Mekong River. Kher era temples and ruins can be found on the island, suggesting that has been inhabited for around 1000 years. This idyllic island also serves as a reminder of Laos colonial history, being home to former French ports and buildings. Small villages are dotted across the island, giving an indication of a traditional way of life in Laos. From Don Khone, visitors can see the impressive Li Phi Waterfalls and search the river for Irrawaddy dolphins.

Li Phi Waterfall, also known as 'Taot Somphamit Waterfalls', can be found between Don Sanlat and Don Khon islands along the Mekong River. It is made up of a series of rapids and cascades, measuring as the widest and longest waterfall complex in the world. 'Li Phi' is said to mean 'spirit trap' - the waterfall is believed, as told by ancient Lao mythology, to catch wayward spirits and ghosts. The Li Phi waterfall leads to a much calmer section of the river, which forms a perfect habitat for endangered fresh water dolphins - the Irrawaddy. Its pools are an ideal spot to relax and swim, in search of this rare dolphin.

Overnight in Sala Don Khone, Don Khone Island

| Day 11 | Departure from Pakse | Meals |
|--|---|--|
|  <p data-bbox="150 1361 225 1393">Flight</p> | <p data-bbox="312 1144 1406 1211">After breakfast, check out and transfer to Pakse for your departure flight and onward journey.</p> <p data-bbox="312 1227 341 1249">---</p> | <p data-bbox="1469 1144 1490 1173">B</p> |