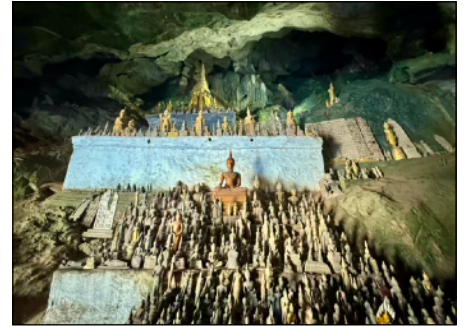


# LAOS

*Indochina's least visited country*



## ITINERARY: 13 days / 12 nights

This trip starts and ends in Bangkok



### **Day 1**

Meet at Bangkok Airport for our domestic flight to Ubon Ratchatani, on landing drive (2h) to the Chong Mek (Thailand) – Vang Tao (Laos) border crossing. Once through formalities we drive a further 1h to River Resort, our boutique accommodation overlooking the Mekong River at Champasak (4 nights). This small, quiet town, with a surprising architectural heritage, was a colonial trading post along the Mekong's most populated and widest stretch known as '4,000 islands'.

### **Day 2**

This morning we drive 30 minutes south along the Mekong's fertile plain to the UNESCO WHS Wat Phou. The ancient Khmer Temple predates Angkor Wat and was considered the local home of Shiva. When Susannah & I visited there were less than 10 other people! We explore the extensive site built on 3 levels and the small museum. Lunch at a local restaurant before returning to Champasak for a free afternoon.

### **Day 3**

Today we head into the nearby Bolaven Plateau, a fertile forested area formed by an ancient super-volcano, home to some of the country's most beautiful waterfalls,

coffee plantations and Lavan ethnic minority villages. We shall be driving in jeeps, stopping to swim at the secluded Tad Moun waterfall, having lunch at Mystic Mountain coffee estate and visiting a local village. A long but interesting day.

### **Day 4**

After breakfast a leisurely boat ride takes us to Wat Tomo, a beautiful hidden temple lost in time and taken over by forest. After exploring the site we enjoy a picnic set up for us. Wat Tomo was on the way to Wat Phou, which in turn was on a pilgrimage route to the Khmer capital of Siem Reap and Angkor Wat. Afternoon at leisure.

### **Day 5**

Late morning departure for Pakse Airport (45 mins) and our short flight to Vientiane, the country's capital. This afternoon we drive to Kao Liaw village where we board a boat to cross the Mekong for the island of Don Xin Xu; lunch will be served on the boat. Here time slows down and we experience life in rural Laos, including a stop at a local farm owned by friendly Mr Jork. Return to Vientiane later in the afternoon and check in at Souphattra Heritage, one of the country's best luxury hotels (2 nights).



### **Day 6**

Whole day exploring Vientiane. We start with a food tour, visiting a local fresh market, where we sample Lao coffee and freshly baked local cookies. The colourful, fresh produce is a revelation. We then visit many of the city's major sights, from Wat Sisaket, the only structure to survive the 1828 Siamese invasion, to Wat That Luang, with its central lotus-bud spire and 30 surrounding stupas. We make an obligatory stop at the COPE Visitor Centre for a moving insight into the Secret War (Part of the Vietnam War), which left Laos as the most heavily bombed country in history.

### **Day 7**

Today we travel to Vang Vieng by road. A 1h drive takes us to Nam Ngum reservoir, also known as 'the Sea of Laos'. We board a lunch cruise for a 3h trip that includes delicious food and a stop at a small island where one can swim. Once back on land we continue by road, 2h, to Vang Vieng and Riverside Boutique Resort, our lovely accommodation (2 nights). The area is renowned for karst mountains, a stunning landscape of vertical limestone blocks among forest and farmland.

### **Day 8**

We spend the day exploring the surrounding country and learning about local traditions. We start by visiting Tham Xang, 'Elephant cave', followed by a Hmong village. Then on to Khmu village for a traditional Lao lunch cooked for us by a local family. A post prandial walk along scenic paths through rice fields framed by dramatic limestone karst, greeting friendly villagers along the way, will help us digest. Finally you will have a chance to sample Lao Hai, the beloved Khmu rice wine.

### **Day 9**

We transfer from our hotel to the Chinese built High Speed Train station for our trip to Luang Prabang. The train connects Vientiane to China's Yunan province and was inaugurated in 2021. Once at our destination we drive to Satri House, our historic boutique hotel in a quiet area on the edge of town. Built in 1904 by an aristocratic family it was the childhood home of Prince Souphanouvong, Laos' first Prime Minister. It has been lovingly converted into a lovely hotel with extensive grounds and 35 colonial style rooms (4 nights). Rest of the day at leisure.

### **Day 10**

A full morning exploring the UNESCO Heritage listed Luang Prabang. The city is rightfully popular with tourists but still retains a local feel. We start the morning with a walking tour of the heritage neighbourhoods, including the 500 years old Wat Xieng Thong and the charming side streets and back alleys. The National Museum, the erstwhile Royal Palace, is next and for those feeling energetic the option to climb the 328 steps to Phousi Hill with its stunning

views over the town. We then drive for a delicious lunch at Ock Pop Tok, literally 'East meets West'.

This artisans' social enterprise and living craft centre was set up by Anglo-Laotian founders and after lunch we shall get a private tour explaining the journey from silkworm to textile, natural dyes and Laotian motifs. They of course have a lovely shop on site.

### **Day 11**

A full day at leisure. Lung Prabang is full of interesting nooks and crannies, the French colonial influence means there are excellent coffee shops, patisseries and bakeries, lovely boutiques selling local handicrafts and art, more temples should you need some and even some waterfalls in the surrounding countryside. Conversely one may just choose to make the most of our boutique hotel's lovely facilities and relax, you are on holiday after all! Susannah & I hired bicycles while in Luang Prabang but taxis and tuktoks (Laos' tuktuks) can be easily and cheaply hired.

### **Day 12**

This morning is dedicated to food: we are taken to a local fresh market where we meet Mrs Noy, our Chef and teacher for the day. After learning about local produce and ingredients we board a boat across the Mekong where we shall be greeted by friendly villagers and the family Noy for a simple, private cooking lesson at the family's home. After lunch our boat takes us upstream to visit Pak Ou Cave, where more than 3,000 Buddha images have been left by devotees over the centuries. Enjoy a sundowner on the boat as we return to Laung Prabang.

### **Day 13**

Transfer to Luang Prabang international Airport for our flight to Bangkok. The trip ends once we land at Bangkok Airport.

