

EXPLORE!

Spirit of Laos
16 days

Laos, Thailand - Trip code LA



Spirit of Laos

An exciting adventure that moves through the length and breadth of the most charming country in South East Asia. Cruise along the Mekong River in traditional slowboats, passing jagged limestone peaks as we travel to the ancient capital Luang Prabang. We visit the capital Vientiane, meet friendly hilltribe villagers and discover the mysterious Plain of Jars. Ending in the deep south we explore the inland Mekong Delta and raging waterfalls.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Nong Khiaw** - Small rustic town on the Ou River, surrounded by limestone hills
- ★ **Luang Prabang** - Sleepy French Colonial riverside town with over 30 gilded temples
- ★ **Plain of Jars** - Mysterious and remote site of huge 2,000 year-old huge stone jars
- ★ **Don Khong Island** - Explore the 4,000 islands region of southern Laos

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Vientiane

Arrive in Vientiane and check in to the hotel, where the rest of the day is free at leisure. You may choose to visit the COPE museum, a not-for-profit organisation set up to provide prosthetic limbs to the many victims that have fallen victim to the unexploded ordinance (UXO) left behind from the Vietnam war. The museum does an excellent job of giving some of the background to the bombing campaign, along with showcasing the important work the COPE foundation is doing. Most report it to be a sobering, emotive but rewarding experience that enhances one's understanding of this fascinating country.



Accommodation: New Rose Boutique Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - In Vientiane, sightseeing in the Lao Capital; afternoon visit to Buddha Park

This morning we explore some of the main sights including the Victory Gate, the That Luang stupa (said to contain a bone of Buddha) and Wat Sisaket which is packed with fine Buddha images. This afternoon we head out to Buddha Park, a curious green expanse just 30 minutes from the city that houses a beguiling selection of Buddhist and Hindu statues.



Accommodation: New Rose Boutique Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Fly to Phonsavan, discover the ancient capital of Muang Khong

We make our way to the airport this morning, leaving the Lao capital behind on our short flight to Phonsavan. This region saw heavy and sustained aerial bombardment during the so-called 'Secret War', a campaign that left Laos as the highest bombed nation, per capita in the world. After lunch we head out to the old capital, Muang Khong, passing mainly Hmong and Black Thai villages on the way. Lots of military paraphernalia cluster the villages such as old mine casings and bomb shells which have been turned into flower pots or cattle troughs. Xieng Khouang town was rebuilt in 1975, but we can still see the remains of temples, stupas and French colonial buildings.



Accommodation: Anoulack Khen Lao Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - In Phonsavan, explore the mystical Plain of Jars

Today we will explore the 3 sites that make up the Plain Of Jars. Nobody knows how long the jars have actually been here or what they were used for; some speculate they are funeral urns dating back some 2000 years. Another theory says that they were probably made to contain and transport 'Lao Lao', a glutinous wet rice which is boiled with yeast and left to ferment in large jars. It is believed that they were prepared for a huge celebration, which, for some reason was disrupted whilst the jars were being transported, as other jars in smaller quantities can be found on two other sites close by. Despite being one of the most strategic battlegrounds of the Indochina War, most jars were unharmed and remain a complete mystery even today. We spend time discovering the plain of undulating green fields where the 300 giant stones jars are scattered, the largest of them weighing six tons and measuring four metres high. Later in the afternoon we transfer back to Phonsavan, where the rest of the afternoon at leisure.



Accommodation: Anoulack Khen Lao Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Scenic drive along mountain roads to Luang Prabang

Today is set aside for the long drive west to Luang Prabang. We make our way along winding mountainous roads reaching an altitude of 1500 m at the highest point. We aim to break up the journey with short stops along the way at local villages. The total journey time will be approximately seven hours, depending on local conditions.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - In Luang Prabang, walking tour of temples; free afternoon

All the main sights of interest are close together, so this morning we walk around the various wats including Wat Xieng Thong (the Golden Temple built in 1559) which is strikingly decorated in brilliant red and gold designs, with an imposing tiled roof and mosaic dragon motifs. We also include Wat Visoun site of the impressive Thad Makmo Stupa. The afternoon is free and you may like to climb to the small temple on top of Mount Phousi and enjoy the sunset and fine views over the town.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - From Luang Prabang visit Kuang Si waterfalls; free afternoon

This morning we include a trip to the nearby beautiful Kuang Si waterfalls. This afternoon is left free to explore the local area - perhaps by tuk tuk to the nearby blacksmiths village of Ban Hat Hien or the papermaking village of San Khong. Alternatively the craft shops, lively market and eclectic bars and restaurants of Luang Prabang itself are more than enough to occupy those wishing to spend more time in this most popular of Lao destinations. A coffee in a riverside bar watching the world go by can be the ideal way to spend an afternoon.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Drive to Nong Khiaw; afternoon is free to explore

Today we set off by road for the scenic town of Nong Khiaw. The condition of the roads in this part of the country is very much dependent on the weather and we should be prepared for some landslides and delays. The scenery however is spectacular - it's mostly forested with 'slash and burn' cultivation very much in evidence, along with the many hill tribe villages along the way. Slash and burn usually takes place in April and May, when rural fires can be witnessed and smoke can fill the air often drifting into nearby towns and creating a hazy sky. We plan to arrive in Nong Khiaw in the early afternoon where the rest of the day is free to spend at leisure in this sleepy river-side town.



Accommodation: Nong Kiau Riverside Resort (or similar)



Standard Bungalow



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - In Nong Khiaw, visit ethnic villages and kayak on the Nam Ou River

Nong Khiaw is a small settlement located upon the banks of the gentle Nam Ou River, overshadowed on all sides by towering limestone karsts and lush forested hills. This morning we take a longboat upriver to the remote village of Muang Ngoi Neu, where this we will be able to chat to the locals and learn a little about the traditional way of life in this rural part of Laos. We plan to have lunch beside a waterfall, where it's possible to take a refreshing dip in the natural pools there. After lunch we will take to the river again, but this time on kayaks as we paddle downstream back to Nong Khiaw. The total time kayaking will be approximately two hours, and those not wishing to kayak can return to Nong Khiaw by longboat.



Accommodation: Nong Kiau Riverside Resort (or similar)



Standard Bungalow



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Longboat down river to Luang Prabang

This morning we board boats for our journey further down the Nam Ou River - south towards Luang Prabang. The river journey is stunning, passing many villages and forests, with the backdrop of large rolling mountains. We must leave the boat at Dong Ngern in order to avoid the Nam Ou River dam, from here we continue by road to Luang Prabang. On arrival we board longtail boats on the Mekong River to visit the Pak Ou Caves, where we climb steps up the limestone cliffs to reach the sacred Buddhist shrine. Although now abandoned by the monks, there is an altar for incense burning, flower offerings and numerous rock shelves crammed with thousands of Buddha images of all shapes and sizes. We continue our journey to Luang Prabang, the country's former capital.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Fly to Pakse; visit Wat Phu Champassak; Journey by boat and road to Don Khong Island

Today we fly south to Pakse and then take a charter boat down the Mekong onto Champassak district and Don Daeng Island, where we aim to explore typical village life in this sleepy corner of Laos. This peaceful island is located inside the Champassak Cultural and Natural Heritage Landscape, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We then rejoin the mainland at Ban Muang where we change our transport to a charter bus to drive further south to Don Khong making a stop along the route at Oupmoung Temple.



Accommodation: Villa Muang Khong (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Explore 4,000 islands region; take dolphin boat safari and visit Khong Phapheng waterfalls

Don Khong is the largest island in the Khong district which is known as the 'Four Thousand Islands' of Southern Laos. It is here, almost on the Cambodian border that the Mekong splits to create a maze of channels and also where the great river reaches its widest point. Exploring by boat and on foot through the watery landscape, we visit some traditional villages of the Lao Loum to witness the daily life of these people. We will also visit parts of the Old French Railway, built at the turn of the century to avoid the treacherous rapids caused by the many channels. Our explorations will include visiting Don Khon Island where we take small boats for possible sightings of Irrawaddy river dolphins. Later in the afternoon we head back to the mainland to visit a part of the Khong Phapheng Waterfalls which is supposedly the widest in South East Asia.



Accommodation: Villa Muang Khong (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Drive to Tad Lo on Bolaven Plateau

This morning before heading north again to Tad Lo waterfalls, we travel through the western edge of the Bolaven plateau. On the way we stop to visit Wat Phou temple, an impressive Khmer temple dating back to the 6th century and considered to be one of the archaeological wonders of Laos. Originally built at the base of a sacred mountain - a symbol of Shiva to Hindus - Wat Phu became a Buddhist shrine in later centuries. Every February pilgrims from all over Thailand and Laos travel here in their thousands to celebrate the full moon festival and participate in various local competitions. At this time Wat Phu becomes decorated by offerings left to appease the earth spirit of Champassak. We plan to visit Tad Phasum waterfall before continuing onto Tad. Here the soil is very fertile and so cultivation of Arabica & Robusta coffee and tea is the most important trade, which is complimented by small scale agriculture of fruit, vegetables, cardamom and rattan. The area around Tad Lo is also the centre for several Mon- Khmer ethnic groups who live around the plateau, and you may like to walk through the forests here.



Accommodation: Tad Lo Lodge (or similar)



Standard Lodge



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Explore Tad Lo and the surround ethnic villages

The morning has been left free to relax and enjoy your picturesque surroundings. After lunch we plan to make a short walk out to some of the remote minority villages in the area, including Alak and Nge where the local villagers are keen to retain a very traditional way of life, with traditions that go back hundreds of years.



Accommodation: Tad Lo Lodge (or similar)



Standard Lodge



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Drive to Pakse and fly to Bangkok

We leave Laos behind this morning, driving first to Pakse before catching a flight into Thailand's capital, Bangkok. The afternoon has been left free for exploring this frenetic city, or perhaps for some last minute shopping for souvenirs at one of the city's many markets.



Accommodation: Royal Princess Larn Luang Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 16 - Trip ends in Bangkok

Trip ends this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

This fantastic tour is a real in-depth look at Laos, one of Indochina's most charming and least visited destinations. The tour is designed to take you beyond the main visited cities of Luang Prabang and Vientiane. You will see more remote parts of the country such as Phonsavan and the 4000 islands region deep in the south. The tour also gives you the chance to sample a little of Bangkok too.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 15



Transport

Bus
Boat
Flight



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Boat Crew
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

2 nights standard bungalow
6 nights simple hotel
4 nights standard hotel
1 nights premium hotel
2 nights standard lodge

Trip information

Country information

Laos Holidays & Tours

Climate

The area of Laos and Thailand is tropical 'cool' from November to February, (15 to 27 Degrees Centigrade); 'hot' from March to May (up to 38 Degrees); 'wet' from June to October (rainy, hot and muggy). Bangkok and lowland areas are sticky all year round, but the northern highlands (Luang Prabang) are more temperate with a drier heat. The so-called 'cool' season can get very cold in the uplands at night and in the morning, bring a fleece.

Time difference to GMT

+7

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Buddhist

Language

Lao

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Climate

Generally hot with high humidity. There is some rainfall from April to September with most days being hot (around 33 Degrees) and a light breeze on the islands. If it does rain, it will be more of a heavy tropical downpour that lasts a few hours. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>.

Time difference to GMT

+7

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Buddhism

Language

Thai

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Luang Prabang - Half day city tour (including the Royal Palace Museum and arts and Ethnology Centre) US\$ 43

Clothing

Lightweight rainwear is advisable all year. Bring a fleece to wear in the highlands as well as a hat and gloves in winter (Dec-Feb).

Footwear

Walking shoes, trainers & sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

Should consist of a main piece of baggage and a daypack (suitcases are not recommended).

Equipment

Bring a torch, insect repellent, a waterbottle, sun glasses, sun hat and high factor sun cream.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow US\$ 35.

Country Information

Laos Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£6

Beer price

£0.75

Water price

£0.75 - 1.50

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Kip.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

US\$ are the easiest to exchange in Laos.

Where To Exchange

All major currencies and travellers cheques are exchangeable in the main towns.

ATM Availability

ATMs are available in most major towns and cities including Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng and Savannekhet.

Credit Card Acceptance

There is very limited credit card use.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are exchangeable only in the main towns.

Thailand Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£4.00 - 8.00

Beer price

£1.5

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Thai Baht

Recommended Currency For Exchange

We recommend that you bring your money in GBP or US\$.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns and on the islands - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

ATMs are available in Bangkok but are limited on the islands.

Credit Card Acceptance

Major stores and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Can be exchanged at banks and exchange offices throughout the tour although rates may not be as favourable.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Flight

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Thailand: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens for a stay of less than 30 days. All passports must have at least 6 months validity remaining on entry to Thailand. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. Laos: A single visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival. The visa on arrival costs 30USD for New Zealand and Australian citizens, 35USD for UK & US citizens and 42USD for Canadian citizens. For other nationalities the price varies between US\$30-42. One passport sized photo is required to arrange this.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Laos Holidays & Tours

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Although not compulsory, travellers may wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

Thailand Holidays & Tours

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and infectious hepatitis. Although not compulsory, travellers may also wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on Malaria and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.
