

# EXPLORE!

## Mekong Adventures

15 days

Cambodia, Laos - Trip code QMA



## Mekong Adventures

This exciting journey, following the course of the Mekong River, takes us through some of the more remote regions of Laos and Cambodia. We visit Champassak in southern Laos, home to Khone Falls, South East Asia's largest waterfall, and the Si Phan Don Archipelago, otherwise known as the 4,000 islands. We experience village life and have the chance to search for the elusive and rare Irrawaddy River dolphin, as well as explore the cultural cities of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap - the gateway to the iconic temples of Angkor.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Luang Prabang** - Laid back French colonial riverside town with over 30 gilded temples
- ★ **Si Phan Don Archipelago** - Cruise the 4000 islands and see South East Asia's largest waterfall
- ★ **Village Stays** - Sample life in remote provincial and island villages
- ★ **Kratie** - Search for the rare Irrawaddy dolphin by boat
- ★ **Siem Reap** - Gateway to the iconic and awe-inspiring Khmer temple complex of Angkor

### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

#### Simple

These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, sometimes with en suite facilities.

**TRIP PACE:****Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

**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 tour in the Laos capital of Vientiane

Arrive in Vientiane and check-in at the hotel. The day is free to spend as you wish. A stroll along the banks of the Mekong River or an ice cold Beer Lao in hand at a riverside bar as the sun goes down is the best way to end the day.



**Accommodation: Manorum Boutique Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - In Vientiane, city sightseeing; free afternoon

This morning we explore some of the main sights of the Lao capital including the Victory Gate, locally known as Pituxai, built to resemble the Arc de Triomphe in Paris; That Luang, an impressive 45 metre high stupa covered in 500 kilos of gold leaf said to contain a bone of the Buddha; and Wat Sisaket, a 19th century Buddhist monastery home to over a 10,000 Buddha statues and images. The afternoon is left free with the option to visit the Buddha Park, a sculpture garden outside of the city containing over 200 Buddhas along with Hindu gods and demons. Alternatively, you may wish to spend the afternoon people watching and exploring the city further.



**Accommodation: Manorum Boutique Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available

## DAY 3 - Fly to Luang Prabang; free afternoon

This morning we fly north to Luang Prabang where the rest of the afternoon will be free to enjoy this lovely riverside town at your own pace. Home to the impressive Thad Makmo stupa (Buddhist shrine) and the beautifully ornate Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang has a wealth of architectural highlights that include both traditional Laotian style and French colonial buildings. This evening you could choose to end the day with 360 degree views of the sunset over the city from Mt Phousi, a sacred 100 metre high hill in the centre of town dominated by a 20 metre high stupa, reached by 328 steps.



**Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel** (or similar)

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Simple Hotel

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Single room available

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Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 4 - In Luang Prabang, free day with optional excursions

Your time over the next two days is free to discover more of what Luang Prabang has to offer. There's a great deal of flexibility and your Explore leader will be on hand to offer suggestions of sights and activities that you might be interested in such as a guided tour of the city or learning to cook traditional Laotian food.



**Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel** (or similar)

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Simple Hotel

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Single room available

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Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 5 - In Luang Prabang, free day with option to visit Kuang Si Waterfalls

Today is free for further exploration of Luang Prabang. There is also the opportunity to explore further afield with an excursion to Kuang Si Waterfalls, a stunning 3-tiered waterfall where you can take a refreshing swim; or take a cruise along the Mekong River to Pak Ou caves - a shrine crammed full of Buddha images of all sizes and styles.



**Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel** (or similar)

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Simple Hotel

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Single room available

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Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 6 - Fly to Pakse; visit Wat Phu Champassak; drive to Don Daeng Island

This morning we fly south to Pakse, from where we make our way to the ancient UNESCO World Heritage Site of Wat Phu Champassak on the west bank of the Mekong River. Originally built at the base of a sacred mountain as a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, this temple complex became a Buddhist shrine in later centuries and is considered to be one of the oldest archaeological sites in Laos, predating Angkor Wat in Cambodia. We explore these jungle ruins before continuing on to Don Daeng Island, where we stay overnight at a homestay with shared facilities.



**Accommodation: Don Daeng Island Homestay** (or similar)



Simple Homestay



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - On Don Daeng Island, free time to explore; afternoon travel to Don Khong Island

This morning is free on Don Daeng Island to explore either on foot or by bicycle observing the simple lifestyle of the local people. In the afternoon we make our way south, to Don Khong Island, the largest in the Si Phan Don Archipelago - also known as the 4,000 islands region. We find ourselves on an island with a largely forested mountainous interior that is dedicated to rice cultivation. We spend two nights on the east coast in Muang Khong, one of two villages on this sleepy island.



**Accommodation: Rattanasing Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - On Don Khong Island; cruise 4,000 islands; explore Don Khone Island

We spend the day cruising around the Si Phan Don Archipelago, where we see the mighty Khone Papheng Falls, South East Asia's largest. These waterfalls reach 21 metres at its highest point and make up 9.7 kilometres of rapids along the river and are the reason why the Mekong River is not navigable into China. Along the way we make a stop at Don Khone Island where you can explore on foot or hire bicycles, following the route of the old railway past old French colonial buildings to Liphi Waterfalls.



**Accommodation: Rattanasing Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Journey over Cambodian border; take Irrawaddy dolphin safari by boat; travel to Sala Koh Trong Island

Returning back to the mainland this morning we head south by road to cross the border into neighbouring Cambodia. From here we continue up to Kampi, just north of the town of Kratie. The site is home to a deep-water pool where rare freshwater Irrawaddy dolphins gather to feed. We head up the river by boat to see if we can spot these elusive creatures, before continuing on to Sala Koh Trong Island by public ferry. Once settled in our homestay we can take an exploratory walk around the island.



**Accommodation: Koh Trong Homestay** (or similar)



Simple Homestay



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Drive to Phnom Penh via Kompong Cham and Skuon

Departing the island this morning by public ferry we head to Kratie for breakfast. We then travel further south to the provincial capital of Kompong Cham. The journey takes us through rubber country, past vast plantations that were originally established by the French. Stopping to learn a little more about the rubber making process, we also visit the 11th century sandstone temple of Wat Nokor and pass through the town of Skuon, famed for its deep fried tarantulas (try one if you dare!) before finally arriving in the lively Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh.



**Accommodation: Silver River Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - In Phnom Penh, free day with option to visit the 'Killing Fields'

An engaging mix of tree lined boulevards, colonial villas and vibrant city streets; Phnom Penh is the riverside capital of Cambodia and a fascinating reflection of the country's ancient and colonial past. You could pay a visit to the National Museum, with its impressive collection of Angkor statues, or perhaps the grand French-built Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda Complex. Another option is the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the 'Killing Fields' of Choeung Ek, chilling testaments to life under the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot. Of course you may just prefer to soak up the atmosphere of the city from one of its old colonial riverfront bars or browse through one of the many busy markets.



**Accommodation: Silver River Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - Drive through provincial towns and villages to Siem Reap

This morning we drive to the small city of Siem Reap, gateway to the renowned treasures of the Angkor Empire. The city provides us with an interesting base for our next couple of days as we have the opportunity to explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Angkor Archaeological Park - probably one of the most important ancient sites anywhere in South East Asia. On arrival we will take a short walking tour of Siem Reap itself.



**Accommodation: Angkor Panoramic Boutique Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - From Siem Reap, visit Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and Ta Prohm

Today we explore a selection of our favourite temples by tuk-tuk, locally known as 'remorque'. Angkor was actually a series of cities, built between the 9th and the 13th centuries by the Khmer kings, with a population of 750,000 in its heyday. The Angkor temple complex is spread out over some 155 square kilometres, scattered with magnificent carved stone temples, elegant sculptures and incredible bas reliefs. We explore Angkor Wat, the most well-known and best preserved of the temples, learning about the history and art of the ancient city. We then make our way to the fortified city of Angkor Thom, where we find the serene smiling carved faces of The Bayon. And we end the day at the wonderfully atmospheric collection of overgrown towers and courtyards of Ta Prohm - the temple made famous by the film 'Lara Croft'.



**Accommodation: Angkor Panoramic Boutique Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 14 - In Siem Reap, free day with option to take boat on Tonle Sap Lake

Today is left free for you to explore further. The temples are certainly worth another visit as there are many more to discover. However, other possibilities include taking to the waters of the Great Lake of Tonle Sap to visit the floating villages and the flooded forest. Alternatively, take an excursion out of the city to see to the fascinating Landmine Museum, just south of the exquisitely

carved Banteay Srei Temple.



**Accommodation: Angkor Panoramic Boutique Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - Tour ends in Siem Reap

Our tour ends after breakfast. If you have time you can continue exploring Siem Reap - perhaps a visit to the market for some last minute souvenirs.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



## Why book this trip

This is an exciting trip for travellers who enjoy getting under the skin of a destination. You will journey through Laos and across the border into Cambodia, a route few take. We have included a good balance between guided sightseeing and free time so there will be plenty of exploration and adventure along the way! You even have the chance to spot fresh water dolphins and nibble on a deep fried tarantula - if you dare!

# What's included?



## Included meals

Breakfast: 14



## Transport

Bus  
Boat  
Ferry  
Flight



## Trip staff

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



## Accommodation

2 nights simple homestay  
7 nights simple hotel  
5 nights standard hotel

# Trip information

## Country information

### Cambodia

#### Climate

Cambodia is a hot and tropical country, being hottest in April and coolest in January (still high 20s). Although rainfall is at its maximum in October, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap receive very little rain compared to the coastal areas, and when it does rain it tends to be in the form of sporadic mid afternoon downpours. There is normally very little rain between December and March.

#### Time difference to GMT

+7

#### Plugs

2 Pin Round

#### Religion

Buddhism

#### Language

Khmer

### Laos

#### 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

# Budgeting and packing

## Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Luang Prabang: Walk up Mt Phousi US\$ 5; Half day city tour US\$ 26; Ock Pop Tok Living Craft Center US\$ 9 ; Living Land farming US\$ 38; Tamarind cooking class US\$ 45

Vang Vieng: Limestone caves US\$ 7

Siem Reap - One day Angkor Temples pass US\$ 37; Land Mines Museum US\$ 5; Half day cruise on Tonle Sap Lake US\$ 30; Blessing ceremony at local monastery US\$33

Phnom Penh - Royal Palace US\$ 10; National Museum US\$ 10; Visit to Tuol Sleng & the Killing Fields US\$ 15; Private blessing US\$34; Private cooking class US\$36; Koh Dach Island US\$78

The prices stated are based on a minimum number of participants (usually 5-6). Please be aware that the optional excursions can run with fewer people but the price may be higher. Likewise, a slightly reduced price may be applicable where the participation greater. The prices listed are generally only entrance fees and do not include the price of transport to and from the excursion, Your Explore Leader will quote this when you are on tour, as the price for transport will depend on the number of participants.

These excursions are generally run via our agent in the country. Local companies may offer similar excursions at a cheaper price. Should you want to use these companies please be aware that a lower price may mean that not all costs are included (entrance fees etc.) or services will not operate at the same safety and quality standards.

## Clothing

Days are hot and humid. Lightweight rainwear or an umbrella can be purchased cheaply if required locally. The northern region is cold at night during the winter (Dec - Feb). A fleece or coat is advisable during this period, in particular during our days on the Mekong. Laundry facilities available from Luang Prabang onwards. Please note that when visiting temples men and women will need to cover their shoulders (shawls over clothing are not accepted) and shorts are also not appropriate for either sex.

## Footwear

Comfy shoes, trainers & sandals.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

## Equipment

Bring a torch and a water bottle.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

Tour 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

### Cambodia

#### 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.

**Lunch price**

£6

**Dinner price**

£10.00 - 12.00

**Beer price**

£1.3

**Water price**

£0.6

#### Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**

Riel.

**Recommended Currency For Exchange**

In Cambodia, US\$ is the most commonly used currency (small denomination notes are easier to use).

**Where To Exchange**

Large towns.

**ATM Availability**

There are ATMs in most towns and cities.

**Credit Card Acceptance**

Credit cards are accepted in some large shops and restaurants in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

**Travellers Cheques**

They can be hard to change outside of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh; we recommend them for emergencies only.

### Laos

#### 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.

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Ferry, Flight

### Accommodation notes

**Booking a Single Room**

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

The homestay on Koh Trong island has shared facilities, which include sharing the sleeping area and bathroom. A pillow, mattress, blanket and mosquito net are provided (there is no Air-Con).

## 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.

### Price Guarantee

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 and Passport Information

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.

Cambodia: A single visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, USA & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival. A passport sized photograph for immigration will also be required. Alternatively you can now obtain an e-visa prior to departure from [www.mfaic.gov.kh](http://www.mfaic.gov.kh)

All visa information should be confirmed with the relevant consulate.

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](http://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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

## 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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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.

## Non refundable permits

## Cambodia

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, infectious hepatitis, tetanus, typhoid, diphtheria and polio. Consult your GP regarding tablets advised for malaria. Though not compulsory, travellers may wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to

change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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## Laos

### 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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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