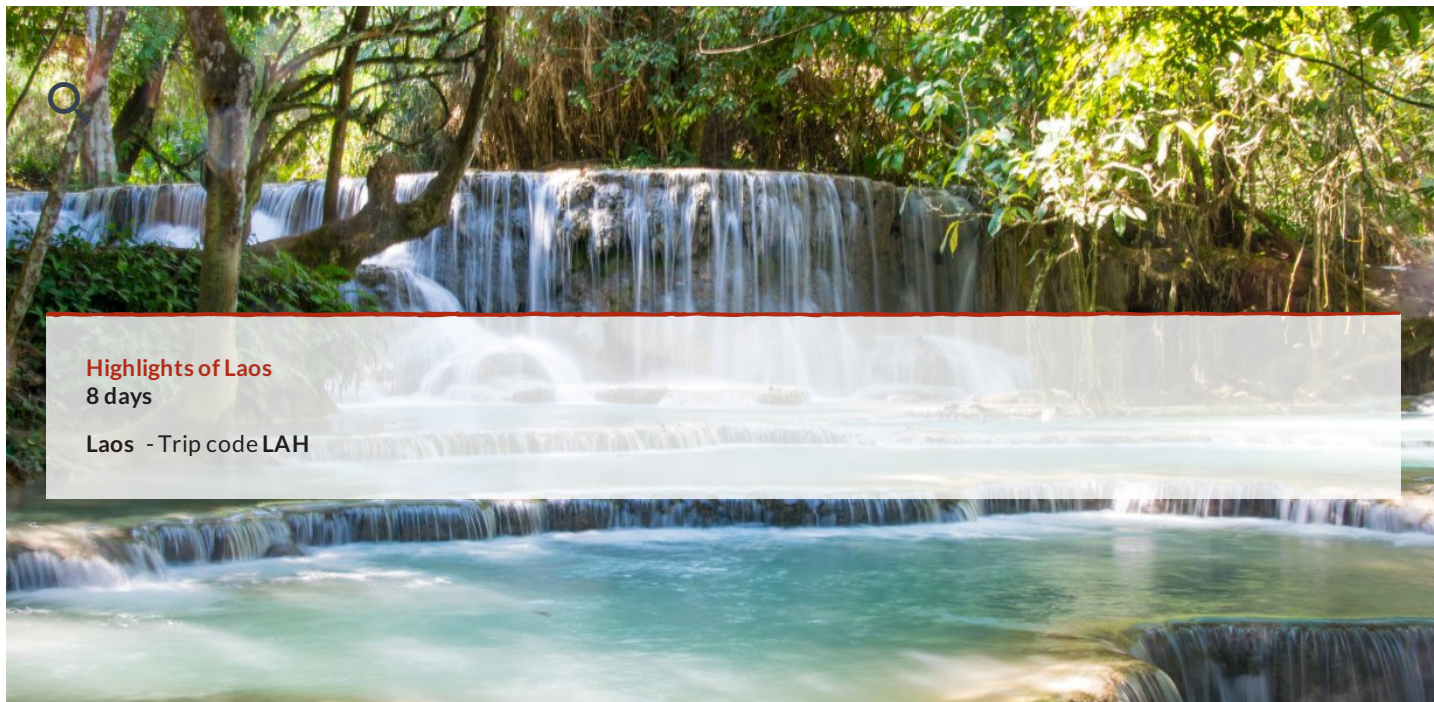


EXPLORE!



Highlights of Laos
8 days

Laos - Trip code LAH

Highlights of Laos

This short trip takes us from the sleepy Laotian capital of Vientiane, to the river side town of Vang Vieng set to the backdrop of towering limestone cliffs, to the UNESCO world heritage city of Luang Prabang. We visit glittering temples, explore vast caves and underground caverns, witness monks collecting alms at sunrise and discover natural blue waterfalls, all in 8 days. This trip can also be combined with our Inside Vietnam and Cambodia Highlights trip, for a comprehensive tour of Indochina.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Vientiane** - Discover the golden temples and moving museums in the sleepy Laotian capital
- ★ **Vang Vieng** - Explore caves, cycle past rice paddies or kayak along the gentle Nam Song River
- ★ **Luang Prabang** - Witness hundreds of monks collecting alms at sunrise and sip French coffee whilst soaking up the atmosphere of this UNESCO World Heritage City
- ★ **Kuang Si Waterfalls** - Visit the impressive cascading falls, known for their incredible deep-turquoise hue.

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:**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 trip in Vientiane

Arrive into Vientiane and check-in at the hotel. Located on the banks of the Mekong River, the Laos capital is a friendly town where we find weathered French Colonial mansions, stunning temples and steaming noodle stalls. A Beer Lao by the river at sunset is the best way to end the day, start your adventure and meet your fellow explorers.



Accommodation: Avalon Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - In Vientiane, explore the capital; free afternoon

This morning we include a sightseeing tour around the city. This is a low-built, red roofed attractive capital city, with a French feel and a relaxed atmosphere. We explore some of the best sights including the Victory Gate which is a Triumphal Arch with good views of the town, the That Luang stupa which is said to contain a hair of the Buddha, and Wat Sisaket, a beautiful temple packed with fine Buddha images.

This afternoon is left free for further exploration. It is possible to visit nearby Buddha Park, a vast green expanse just 30 minutes from the city that houses a beguiling selection of Buddhist and Hindu statues. Alternatively you may choose to visit the COPE Museum, a not-for-profit organisation set up to provide prosthetic limbs to the many victims of 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: Avalon Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Drive to Vang Vieng, afternoon at leisure

This morning we make the short three to four hour drive to Vang Vieng. There are some interesting stops to be made en route, including visiting the Sa paper project where traditional paper is made from the bark of a Mulberry Tree. Upon arrival in Vang Vieng, the afternoon has been left free to explore our new surroundings.

We recommend a short stroll down to the riverbank this evening in time for sunset, where there are a number of areas to sit and take in dramatic scenery. Watch people float down the river as the sun starts to dip behind the mountains and the sky turns a deep burnt-orange, just be sure to bring a camera to catch some sunset snaps.



Accommodation: Thavonsouk Resort (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Free day in Vang Vieng. Optional visit to caves or kayaking on Nam Song River

Vang Vieng enjoys an idyllic setting. Perched on the banks of the Nam Song river it is surrounded by a patchwork of lush rice paddies and set to a backdrop of towering jagged limestone cliffs. Once known as a party-town for backpackers, present-day Vang Vieng has now re-invented itself as the home of adventure travel in Laos, where its setting lends itself to a host of activities for anybody from casual walkers to adrenaline thrill-seekers.

As there is plenty of choice available, today has been left free to choose from a number of optional excursions, such as a guided walk past rice paddies to nearby minority villages, a visit to the 2km underground cave network, zip wiring through the forest canopy or kayaking along the gentle Nam Song river.



Accommodation: Thavonsouk Resort (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Scenic drive to Luang Prabang crossing mountain passes. Sunset visit to Mount Phousi

Today we spend a full day driving north to Luang Prabang. The journey winds its way up into the mountainous region of central Laos, passing ramshackle villages that cling to the side of the mountain road, and driving over several high passes with stunning 360 degree views. There will be regular breaks to the drive, stopping for refreshments in a Hmong village and for photos on top of the high passes we drive over. We plan to arrive in Luang Prabang in the late afternoon.

Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Luang Prabang is nestled in a valley of lush rolling hills and sits at the confluence of two rivers, the Khan and the mighty Mekong. Influence from its French occupiers is peppered all over the city, with grand white-washed Indochinese villas lining its leafy streets, oddly complementing the golden-tipped wats (temples) found around almost every corner. Time moves so slowly here that it almost stands still, and a must-do is grabbing a Lao coffee, sitting down outside one of the many cafes and just watching the world go by, in traditional Lao-style.

This evening there is chance to walk to nearby Mount Phousi and climb its 328 steps in time for sunset, offering excellent panoramic views over this sleepy city and beyond.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Morning walking tour of Luang Prabang, Afternoon free

Today we'll really get to have a closer look at Luang Prabang. All the main sights of interest are close together and we'll have a chance to walk around the various wats (temples) including the splendid 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'll also visit Wat Sen and the Royal Palace Museum. Afterwards we will board a traditional long-tail boat for the short journey up the Mekong River to Pak Ou Caves. There a number of steps to climb here as we make our way 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. After returning to Luang Prabang, the rest of the afternoon is at leisure.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - From Luang Prabang, visit Kuang Si Waterfalls; optional afternoon cycle to Lao Loum village

This morning we travel by bus to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfalls, approximately 45 minutes from Luang Prabang. Passing forested hills and several ethnic minority villages we arrive at the limestone falls that cascade into several turquoise pools below. Returning to Luang Prabang, there is an opportunity to take an afternoon bicycle trip to the Lao Loum village at Ban Phanom. Approximately 6 km from Luang Prabang, the road gently undulates through cultivated scenery and arrives at a well-kept scenic village on the banks of the Nam Khan River. We will spend time meeting the locals and learning a little more about the everyday life of rural Lao before returning to Luang Prabang for a well-earned Beer Lao.



Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Trip ends in Luang Prabang

Your trip finishes in Luang Prabang this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

This trip is perfect for those who are short on time and want to experience a flavour of Laos. It works equally well added on to the beginning or end of other trips within the region, adding a real palpable contrast to its South East Asian neighbours. The trip has plenty of options for activity, including a number of walks, cycling and kayaking so is well-suited to active individuals, although it is important to note these activities are all optional.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

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



Accommodation

5 nights simple hotel
2 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

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.

Vientiane - Half day tour of Buddha Park: \$19USD per person
Vang Vieng - Half day excursion to Tham Jung Cave: \$19USD per person
Vang Vieng - Half day cycle to Tham Phoukham Cave: \$27 USD per person
Vang Vieng - Half day kayaking on Nam Song River: \$20 USD per person
Vang Vieng - Half day zip wiring experience: \$65 USD per person

Luang Prabang - Half day cycle to Lao Loum village: \$33 USD per person
Luang Prabang - Half day cookery class at Tamarind cookery school: \$50 USD including lunch
Luang Prabang - Half day visit to Ock Pop Tok living craft centre: \$16 USD per person

Please note prices are based on approximately 4- 6 participants and may vary up or down depending on group sizes.

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\$ 20.

Country Information

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

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.

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.

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.

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.
