

# EXPLORE!



**Backroads from Hanoi to Bangkok**  
12 days

Laos, Thailand, Vietnam - Trip code QLT

## Backroads from Hanoi to Bangkok

This exciting journey takes us from bustling Hanoi and beautiful Halong Bay in the north of Vietnam to laid-back Luang Prabang in Laos; and by slow boat into northern Thailand. We journey through Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai before finding ourselves in Bangkok, one of Asia's most exciting cities. We get happily lost in Hanoi's Old Quarter, spend a night on a boat on Halong Bay and explore Chiang Mai's walled Old Town.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Hanoi** - Get lost in the bustling narrow streets of the Old Quarter
- ★ **Halong Bay** - Spend a night on a boat in one of South East Asia's most iconic sites
- ★ **Luang Prabang** - Chill out in this sleepy riverside town
- ★ **Mekong River** - Travel by boat through rural Laos to the Thai border
- ★ **Thailand** - Time to enjoy the night markets and night life of Chiang Mai and Bangkok

#### 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:****8 - 14**

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 Hanoi

Join tour in Hanoi. Later today there may be the option to see a performance of traditional water puppetry, a practice that dates back to the 15th century. Set on a flooded stage, the stories tell tales of legendary heroes and everyday life, with dragons and unicorns sharing the stage with ducks and frogs, and even fireworks and naval battles!



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



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Drive to Halong Bay; overnight on boat

We drive around 4 hours by charter bus to the incredible setting of Halong Bay, one of Vietnam's most spectacular natural attractions recently voted as one of the eight natural wonders of the world. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Halong Bay boasts hundreds of jungle-clad islands (over 1600 at the last count) that rise from the jade green waters of the bay like the scales of some great submerged dragon. Indeed Halong means 'where the dragon descends to the sea' and local legends tells of a time when this rugged landscape was created by the pounding tail of a mighty dragon as he ran from the mountains into the glittering waters of the bay below. On arrival we will board our shared junk boat and set sail, threading our way through a flotilla of boats, junks and wooden sampans as they ply their way across the gentle waters of the bay. There may be swimming opportunities so have swimming costumes to hand. We spend the night on the boat.



**Accommodation: Halong Bay Junk** (or similar)



Standard Junk



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 3 - In Halong Bay, morning cruise; Return to Hanoi; walk in Old Quarter

This morning we continue to enjoy the romantic scenery cruising amongst the islands as we return to the jetty. It is interesting to see the assortment of boats, junks and wooden sampans, their sails hoisted, gliding through waters. We then drive back to Hanoi where this afternoon we take a walk through the Old Quarter. This is a maze of narrow streets that are named after various crafts or specialties: Paper Street, Silk Street, Basket Street etc. The shops themselves have very narrow frontages but are actually quite deep; they are known locally as 'tube' shops. Street vendors tempt you with noodles, snacks and stir-fried delights from shoulder panniers, all adding to the charm of Hanoi's historic heart.



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



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Fly to Luang Prabang in Laos

This morning we fly to Luang Prabang. The remainder of the day is 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. Perhaps you would like to try your hand at Lao cooking or simply relax with a coffee or a Beer Lao in one of the riverside bars and watch the world go lazily by.



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



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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

Today is also free. There is opportunity to explore further afield with an excursion to Kuang Si Falls, a stunning three-tiered waterfall with the opportunity for swimming.



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



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Journey by boat on Mekong River; overnight in Pakbeng village

Today we board a slowboat to take us along the Mekong towards Thailand. Running from the Tibetan plateau, through Laos and Cambodia and finally meeting the sea through the Mekong Delta of Vietnam the Mekong River is the life blood of this region. By boat we can watch as the scenery changes, as we pass thick forested hills and riverine forests, along with glimpses of local life on the banks. We have the chance to stop off at Pak Ou caves, a shrine crammed full of Buddha images of all sizes and styles. We disembark to overnight in Pakbeng on the banks of the river.



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



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Continue by boat, cross Thai border; drive to Chiang Rai

We continue on our boat journey enjoying the landscape as we go. When we reach the Thai border at Chiang Khong we are met by a new tour leader. We drive around 2 hours to Chiang Rai in the far north of Thailand very close to both the Laos and Burmese borders, in the area known as The Golden Triangle. This evening we recommend a visit to the night market to discover some of Thailand's delicious street food.



**Accommodation: Diamond Park Inn Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Drive to Chiang Mai via The White Temple

Today we make the 3 hour journey to Chiang Mai visiting Wat Rong Khun, otherwise known as The White Temple, along the way. This is an unusual and quirky Buddhist temple as it is was designed by a contemporary artist who began construction in 1998. On arrival in Chiang Mai the remainder of the day is left free to make your first impressions of the city.



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



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - In Chiang Mai; orientation walk of Old Town

This morning we take an orientation walk of the Old Town and see some of the many temples and the ancient city walls, as well as visit the market. This afternoon there is the option to drive out to Doi Suthep temple, and enjoy great views of Chiang Mai from its vantage point on the hill. This evening we pay a visit to the night market and bazaar, where there is plenty of opportunity for shopping.



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



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - In Chiang Mai, free time for optional activities; sleeper train to Bangkok

Today is free to enjoy Chiang Mai further. There is the option to learn some of the culinary secrets of Thai cuisine when taking a cooking class, have a relaxing Thai massage at one of the city's many parlours, or just enjoy a leisurely stroll along Chiang Mai's quiet streets, taking in its many temples. This evening we board our overnight train back to Bangkok.



**Accommodation: Overnight Train from Chiang Mai to Bangkok**



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Arrive in Bangkok; free day with option to cruise on klongs (canals)

On arrival we transfer to the hotel. Your time in Bangkok is free. You may choose to take an optional cruise along the city's Klongs (canals) in a traditional longtail boat. This is the ideal way to explore Bangkok's network of meandering waterways that branch off from the main channel of the Chao Phraya River. The excursion will also include visits to the Royal Barge Museum and the iconic Wat Arun, the Temple of the Dawn, which was built to represent the towering slopes of Mount Meru, the home to the gods of Khmer mythology. Alternatively there is plenty of shopping and many bars and restaurants to enjoy.



Accommodation: Royal Princess Larn Luang Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 12 - Tour ends in Bangkok

Tour ends Bangkok. If you are staying on there is plenty to see and do in Bangkok, there are also some great beaches within easy reach, either by road or by plane.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



## Why book this trip

This exciting three country tour covers a lot in a short space of time giving a tantalising flavour of each destination visited. Ideal for travellers with less time who want to see a lot and who enjoy independent exploration as the tour has been designed with a lot of free time factored in to allow for flexibility. You will use a variety of transport, including planes, trains, buses and boats, giving a real taste of local travel as you journey from the tranquil waters of Halong Bay to the bright lights of Bangkok.

# What's included?



## Included meals

Breakfast: 10  
Lunch: 1  
Dinner: 1



## Transport

Bus  
Boat  
Flight  
Taxi  
Train



## Trip staff

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



## Accommodation

5 nights simple hotel  
3 nights standard hotel  
1 nights premium hotel  
1 nights standard junk  
1 nights simple overnight train

# 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

### Thailand

#### 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

## Vietnam

**Climate**

As Vietnam is a long, narrow country from north to south climate conditions vary considerably. The climate can be divided into three distinct patterns between the north, central and south regions. The climate in the north is generally humid and subtropical, although the winter months from November to March can be colder with temperatures from 10 - 15 degrees. Summer months, May to September can be quite hot with temperatures from 30 - 35 degrees. Meanwhile south Vietnam enjoys a tropical climate all year round, with little variation throughout the year (around 27 - 32 degrees), however May to November is the rainy season when short, heavy downpours are quite frequent. Central Vietnam lies somewhere in between. The coastal strip is usually dry and hotter from April to October while November to March is wetter and cooler. A light rain jacket and small umbrella are recommended year round.

**Time difference to GMT**

+7

**Plugs**

2 Pin Round

**Religion**

Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

**Language**

Vietnamese

## 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.

Hanoi - Water Puppets show from US\$ 6; Cyclo tour of Old Quarter US\$ 6; Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House US\$ 1.50; Museums US\$ 1.50; Half day city tour US\$ 18  
Luang Prabang - Khouangsi waterfall US\$ 23; Half day city tour US\$ 17;  
Chiang Mai - Thai Cooking class GBP 23; Wat Prathat Doi Suthep Temple GBP 12; Elephant Conservation Centre GBP 14  
Bangkok - Klong tour GBP 14

The prices stated are based on a minimum of 5-6 participants. 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 is 7 or more. Many of these excursions are operated by 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

### Clothing

Pack essentially for hot weather although December through to February warmer clothing is needed for the north of Vietnam. Days are hot and humid. Lightweight rainwear essential at all times.

### Footwear

Comfortable shoes and sandals/trainers for relaxing.

### 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

A torch, water bottle, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen are all essential, as are good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection. Don't forget your swim wear! An overnight bag is useful for the overnight train/bus.

## 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\$ 30.

## 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.

### Thailand

#### 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.

## Vietnam

### 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**

£9

**Beer price**

£2.00 - 4.00

**Water price**

£0.5

### Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**

Dong.

**Recommended Currency For Exchange**

Carry your money in US\$ Dollars cash. You can also take GBP but US\$ are easier to exchange. (Dollar bills can be used in some hotels and shops; change is often given in local currency).

**Where To Exchange**

Most towns.

**ATM Availability**

There are ATMs virtually everywhere in Vietnam and in Cambodia, though we also recommend bringing cash.

**Credit Card Acceptance**

Credit card's are widely accepted throughout Vietnam

**Travellers Cheques**

Travellers cheques are not recommended as they can be difficult to exchange

# Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Flight, Taxi, Train

## 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

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.

Vietnam: Until 30th June 2021 'British Citizen' passport holders can visit Vietnam for up to 15 days without a visa. A visa will be required if you enter after this date or if you wish to re-enter within 30 days of your departure.

For visits of up to 30 days, you can get an e-visa before you travel from <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>

For visits of longer than 30 days you must get a visa from the nearest Vietnamese embassy before travelling to Vietnam. If you want to make a second visit within 30 days of leaving Vietnam, you'll need to get a multiple entry visa to re-enter.

Please note that it is a pre-requisite for entry into Vietnam that your passport is valid for a minimum of 6 months from your date of entry

All visa related issues including information for other nationalities should be confirmed with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

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.

## 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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## Thailand

### 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. 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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## Vietnam

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on Malaria and Zika Virus. Although not compulsory travellers may also 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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