

## **Insiders Asia**

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## **LAOS – INDOCHINA’S LAST FRONTIER**

### **DAY 1: ARRIVAL – VIENTIANE**

Meet on arrival at **Wattay International Airport** and transfer to your hotel. Unpack and relax before kicking off your visit to **Vientiane**, the charming and laid-back capital of Laos. Depending on your arrival time we could schedule visit to **Wat Sisaket**, the oldest temple still standing in Vientiane. This beautiful structure features remarkable frescoes and some 6,840 Buddha images. Nearby is **Ho Phra Keo**, once the royal temple of Lao monarchy. Built in 1565, Ho Phra Keo has been used as a museum since 1970 and contains some of the finest Buddhist sculptures and artifacts in the country. The main structure originally housed the famous **Emerald Buddha** that now resides in Bangkok’s Wat Phra Keo. After dinner at the hotel, take a stroll along the Mekong and relax in a cafe by the riverfront. **Lao Plaza Hotel** (D)

### **DAY 2: VIENTIANE - LUANG NAMTHA**

Start your morning visits with the central market in Vientiane. Continue by car to see Laos’ national icon, **That Luang Stupa** and **Patouxai**. This imposing monument standing in Lane Xang Avenue is well known as Vientiane’s own version of **Arc de Triomphe**. After lunch, board a flight bound for northern Laos. Arrive to **Luang Namtha** mid-afternoon. To balance the day, no activities are planned so you can stroll around the town or just relax at the riverside retreat. After dinner, meet up with the guide in the lobby for a briefing on your exciting visits to the hill tribe villages the next day. **The Boat Landing Guesthouse** (B/L/D)

### **DAY 3: LUANG NAMTHA - HILL TRIBE VISIT**

This morning set off your exciting exploration in **Luang Namtha**, a land of rugged mountains, lush forests and rich river plain. This mountainous region is sharing the border with China and Burma and home to over 20 ethnic groups, making it the most ethnically diverse provinces in Laos. We make stops along the way to visit the **Akha** minority village at Ban Nadee, **Thaidam** at Ban Pasak, and **Thailou** at Ban Napoung (famous for Lao Lao sticky rice wine). Return to town for lunch. Afternoon visit takes you to Ban Xongchai to visit the **Yao** (or Mien) minority people. Although the Yao do not produce their own silk or cotton, they are masters in the art of dyeing, embroidering and sewing their distinctive costumes. Note that the fine needlework seen on an authentic Yao woman’s colorful pants, tunic and turban may take her up to one year to complete. **The Boat Landing Guesthouse** (B, L, D)

#### DAY 4: LUANG NAMTHA - MOUNG SINH

Following breakfast, we head north to Moung Sing, a small town near Laos-China border. Moung Sinh is home to many ethnic groups, predominantly the Hmong, Akha, Tai Lue and Tai Dam. During this breathtaking scenic drive, we'll stop along the way to visit the hill tribe people such as the **Akha, Lantan** and **Khmu**. After lunch, visit Muong Sing Exhibition in town. There is an excellent collection of traditional tools from the major ethnic groups in the area along with an interesting variety of valuable 18th-19th century historic and religious pieces, preserved by the people of Muong Sing. **Phou lu Hotel**(B/L/D)

#### DAY 5: MOUNG SINH - AKHA HILL TRIBE

Today, your expedition takes you to remote villages and tranquil hamlets of the **Akha, Yao** and **Lantan** hill tribe people on the mountain. After lunch break, take a short trekking through the paddy rice field to the hill tribe villages of **Thaidam, Lou** and **Ikor** ethnic minorities. During those visits, you will learn more about the traditional way of rural life as well as the hill tribe fascinating culture. Proceed to the border between Laos and China for a visit before returning to **Moung Sinh**. You've had a full day and deserve some rest! **Phou lu Hotel** (B/L/D)

#### DAY 6: MOUNG SINH - OUDOMXAY

**Moung Sing** is known for its morning market where the various tribal communities gather on the edge of the town for commerce and wearing their colorful attires. Visit the market and continue your journey south to **Oudomxay**. Arrive to Oudomxay in late afternoon and transfer to the hotel. **Charming Lao Hotel** (B/L/D)

#### DAY 7: OUDOMXAY - NONG KHIAW

Spend the morning to explore Oudomxay and its surrounding ethnic villages before heading off to our next destination, **Nong Khiaw**. Here is the town's best description: *"Resting at the foot of a striking red-faced cliff, amid towering blue-green limestone escarpments, the dusty town of Nong Khiaw on the banks of the Nam Ou River lies smack in the middle of some of the most dramatic scenery in Indochina."* (Rough Guide) Such is the backdrop of your stunning scenic drive to explore the **Ban Songja** village and **Khmu** at Ban Mai village. **Nong Kiang Riverside Resort** (B/L/D)

#### DAY 8: NONG KHIAW - LUANG BRABANG - RIVER CRUISE

Today we will take a slow boat cruising down the **Nam Ou River** to **Luang Prabang**. Enjoy this spectacular boat ride through lush green forest and dramatic limestone karst landscape. We'll make stop for visits to remote hamlets and tranquil villages which can only be accessed by boat. The 4-hour slow boat ride takes you to **Pak Ou Caves** (or Buddha caves). The two linked caves are crammed with thousands of gold lacquered Buddha statues of various shapes and sizes brought there by devoted villagers. We continue our trip down the river to the **UNESCO World Heritage City** of **Luang Prabang**, one of the most charming towns in Southeast Asia. Arrive late in the afternoon and transfer to your hotel. Tonight, take a stroll in the old part of the town, along the Mekong and visit the night market. **Villa Santi Hotel** (B/L/D)

#### DAY 9: LUANG BRABANG - KAUNGI WATER FALL

Laos is also known for its traditional crafts, and today you will visit the **Hmong** at **Ban Ouay**, and the **Khmu** at **Ban Ou, Laoloum** and **Ban Thapene** villages to learn about their specialties. From here,

we'll go to the beautiful **Khuangsi Waterfall** where you can cool off with a refreshing swim in the pools or take a walk along the forest trails. Return to Luang Prabang for lunch at the most famous restaurant in town, **Elephant**.

Afternoon visits include the **Royal Palace Museum**, which hosts a range of interesting artifacts of Laos' history, and the magnificent **Wat Xiengthong** with its roofs sweeping low to the ground, a classical Laotian architectural style. We also have time to visit the impressive **stupa of Wat Visoun** and the shrines of **Wat Aham** and **Wat Mai**. Late afternoon, take a (slow) climb to the top of Mt. Phousi to admire the dramatic view of Luang Prabang and the Mekong River at sunset. **Villa Santi Hotel** (B/L)

#### DAY10: LUANG PRABANG - DEPARTURE

This morning capture one of the most quintessential images of **Luang Prabang**, the alms-giving procession or **Tak Bat**. The procession takes place every morning at dawn as kneeling locals place sticky rice into baskets of the passing saffron-robed monks through the streets of the old city. Your guide will provide you a set of strict rules to observe during this solemn and beautiful ceremony. Return to your hotel for breakfast. Then, take a short walk along the King's road along the Mekong and the Nam Khan. Soak in the morning air and peaceful landscape of this atmospheric town, the "last paradise on earth." Free leisure time until transfer to the airport for your departing flight. (B)