

Laos

8 days in Luang Prabang

Holidays that make a difference to the communities of Luang Prabang

Laos...for many people it is the "Land of a million Elephants", "a small piece of paradise on earth".

The many visitors to Laos leave the country with fond impressions and memories of beautiful vistas, friendly locals, great food, wonderful temples and a totally relaxed lifestyle. But there is another side of life to this beautiful country. Laos is one of the poorest nations on earth. Only a small percentage of Lao live in towns and cities; the majority of the population survives by farming at subsistence levels, often having to travel many kilometres each day just to collect water.

This tour is the perfect opportunity for you to contribute to improving the lives of the people of Laos while also enjoying the beautiful sites and friendly people of this wonderful country.

Itinerary

Day 1 | Arrive in Luang Prabang

Arrive in Luang Prabang at any time and transfer to your guesthouse. Your airport transfer is included in the tour price. There are no planned activities this afternoon, so you are free until dinner to explore the sights of this vibrant town. Meet in the evening with other tour members for dinner and a tour briefing. (D)

Day 2 | English Teaching and Luang Prabang Sightseeing

The day starts with a morning visit to Big Brother Mouse, a project that publishes children's books and hosts a Children's Cultural Centre in Luang Prabang. We spend the morning speaking English with the children. In the afternoon we take a little time to visit some of the highlights of Luang Prabang's World Heritage old town area: the Royal Palace Museum and Wat Mai Temple. Finally we relax whilst watching sunset at Mt Phousi. (B, L, D)

Day 3 | Kuang Si Waterfall and Village Visit

This morning we travel by tuk-tuk to Kuang Si Waterfall where you can relax, trek up the waterfall, swim and say hello to the resident tiger and bears. These animals have been rescued from poachers and now live safely in the waterfall reserve. In the afternoon, we visit the village where we will be working on one of our volunteer projects to meet with the villagers and discuss their needs. We deliver English books and play with the village school children. (B, L, D)

Day 4 | Working in the Village

After a visit to the morning market to buy the necessary goods and materials, we travel to the village and spend the rest of the day working on the agreed projects. Volunteer activities will vary depending on the village needs and the



skills of the volunteers. This is a great chance to help poor community and also learn more about the daily lives of the villagers. (B, L, D)

Day 5 | Alms Giving and Feeding the Monks

Every morning in Luang Prabang hundreds of Buddhist monks walk the streets collecting alms (food offerings) from the local people. In the soft morning light it is a beautiful and calming experience. We rise early to take part in this ancient tradition. Afterwards we head off to the morning market to buy food in order to provide a meal to a local temple. As tourism increases in the old town of Luang Prabang there are now fewer locals living in the area. Therefore, the temples who rely on the locals to provide their food are finding it hard to survive. We help the local women cook at the temple, and then join the monks in their meal. The afternoon is spent practicing conversational English with novice monks. (B, L, D)

Day 6 | Pak Ou Caves and Luang Prabang Government Orphanage School

We visit the morning market and buy food to prepare a high

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protein dinner for the children at the Luang Prabang Government Orphanage School. The rest of the morning is then spent travelling by boat up the mighty Mekong River to the Pak Ou or 1000 Buddha Caves. Over the centuries people of the region have been placing Buddha images inside two caves that sit dramatically overlooking the Mekong River. On our return to Luang Prabang in the early afternoon, we go to the orphanage to play and speak English with the children, help prepare the evening meal and work on projects that have been identified by the orphanage Director. (B,L,D)

Day 7 | Red Cross and UXO Lao

Today is your last full day in Luang Prabang. We begin by visiting the Luang Prabang sector of the International Red Cross, where you may like to give blood or have a massage

as a way of donating to their efforts. We then visit UXO Lao, the Luang Prabang office of the Lao National Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) Program. You will learn about the ongoing process to clear the land of unexploded bombs, which are a sad result of the war fought here more than 30 years ago. Your afternoon is free to pack, catch up on last minute shopping, or further explore the sights of this vibrant town. In the evening we gather for our last night together after an eventful week. (B,L,D)

Day 8 | Depart Luang Prabang

There are no planned activities today, so you are free to leave Luang Prabang at anytime. Your airport transfer is included in the tour. (B)

Tour Details

Style

Fully inclusive volunteer program.

Inclusions

All materials and food required for project work, entry fees to the Royal Palace Museum, Wat Mai, Mount Phousi, Pak Ou Caves, and Kuang Sii Waterfall, local guide, all meals, twin share accommodation with private bathroom.

Group Size

Minimum 2, maximum 12.

Food

Included meals: 7 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 7 dinners, plus drinking water.

Accommodation

7 nights accommodation in comfortable fan-cooled rooms with

private bathroom. Air-conditioned rooms can be provided at an additional cost.

Single Room - US\$250

On Grasshopper Adventures tours, single travellers do not have to pay any extra to join our trips - we will match you up with another same sex, single traveller. However, should you wish to choose to take a single room we are happy to book a room for you for an extra charge. This single supplement is completely voluntary.

Arriving in Luang Prabang

Meeting Point - you will be met at the Luang Prabang Airport by a Grasshopper Adventures representative. Please advise your flight arrival time once you have your flight tickets.

Additional Accommodation

Should you require extra accommodation in Luang Prabang before or after the trip we can offer you competitive rates at our hotel. Please book extra nights when you book your trip.

Travel Details

Visas

In Laos, 30 day single entry visas are available on arrival for many nationalities. Prices vary depending on nationality and we can advise you of the cost for passports from every country.

To process your visa your passport must have at least 6 months validity remaining and at least one spare blank page. You will also need one passport photo.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be

checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

Flights

International flights to and from Luang Prabang are not included in the price of this tour. We can assist with the purchase of inter-Asia flights and provide advice if you are considering overland travel.

Money

The official currency of Laos is the kip. However, the US dollar serves as a second currency and can be used for larger purchases. When coming to Laos it is best to bring some small denomination US dollars cash along with travelers cheques as your main form of money. Thai Baht can also be changed easily. Credit cards are not that useful in Laos.

There are now a couple of ATMs in Luang Prabang, but do

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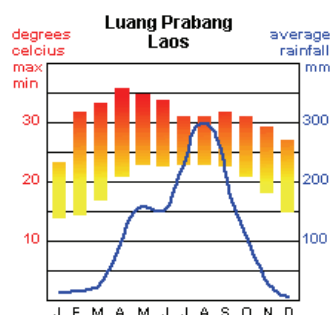


not rely on them for all of your money as they are sometimes out of order.

For current exchange rates visit:
www.oanda.com/convert/classic

Costs

It is customary to tip the guides and drivers in Laos. You should allow approximately US\$20 for tips. Note: this is a suggestion only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. Most other costs will be included in your tour programme.



Electricity

Laos works on a 220 volt system and uses two flat pin plugs which is standard in South East Asia. You can easily buy an adapter when you arrive in Luang Prabang (for much cheaper than home).

Plugs look like this: | |

Health

There are no specific health requirements for travelling in Laos. However, we recommend that you visit a travel medicine doctor before leaving your country. You should carry a well stocked first aid kit with you when you travel and bring along any required prescribed medication.

Climate

Laos has a tropical climate with generally warm to hot days and warm nights, however, in the north it can get quite cold during the cool season. The coolest months are November to

January - during this time you should expect very cold mornings down to 5 degrees Celsius. During the wet season (May-Oct) it does rain most days but the rain generally falls in the late afternoon or night. The wet season is actually a fantastic time to visit Laos as the rain brings the fields and country to life. Endless green rice fields are a feature of this time of year.

Packing

You should consider bringing the following items:

Personal

Backpack
Long trousers
Shorts (should be to the knee in length)
Shirts (not sleeveless)
Old clothes with no sentimental value for volunteer activities
Hat
Sandals/Light Shoes
Swimming Costume (preferably one piece or bring a sarong to wear over ia 2 piece)
Sunglasses
Light Rain Coat (if rainy season)
Toiletries
Small Towel
Sunscreen
First Aid Kit
Mosquito Repellent
Camera and Film/Memory
Alarm Clock

Travel

Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages
Passport photo
Travel insurance details
Flight tickets
Money - cash/credit cards/ travellers cheques
Phrase book

** Please note: If travelling to Laos in December/January it can get quite cold at night and in the early morning. You should bring a wind breaker and cold weather clothing.

Projects

The following projects will receive support as a part of your participation on this tour.

Big Brother Mouse

Big Brother Mouse is a Lao-based, Lao-owned project. They publish books that make it fun and easy for kids to learn to read; and books that provide older readers with access to information, ideas and pleasure. Something people in many countries take for granted.

Until now, few books were published in the Lao language. Many Lao people never saw a book. Children in most villages had nothing to read except textbooks, and often not even that. Big Brother Mouse has already begun to change that.

More information on Big Brother Mouse can be seen at:
www.bigbrothermouse.com

The Lao Red Cross

The vision of the Lao Red Cross is to prevent and alleviate human suffering, and to improve the living conditions at the

village level. Their programs include training of village volunteers in basic first-aid, construction of latrines and water systems, providing information about sexually-transmitted diseases and their prevention, providing humanitarian relief assistance to needy villagers and recruiting blood donors.

UXO Lao

The mission of UXO Lao is to reduce the number of civilian casualties caused by UXO and increase the amount of land available for cultivation.

Luang Prabang Government Orphanage School

Children are particularly vulnerable in the harsh, dangerous living conditions endured by so many Lao, and many are denied the most basic essentials. There are many children who have lost both parents (or their whole family) to disease or accidents.

The Luang Prabang Government Orphanage School is dedicated to providing a home and education for orphans and abandoned, underprivileged and needy children. It cares for nearly 400 children with very limited resources. It provides extremely basic accommodation, food and education.

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More information on the Orphanage school can be seen at:
www.lao-kids.org

The Language Project

The Language Project gives motivated people the resources and tools they need to study and help themselves. The Project creates and supports multi-lingual public libraries and resource centres to enable individuals to realise their dreams.

More information on the Language Project can be seen at www.thelanguageproject.org. If you click the 'participate' button, you will see an Amazon wishlist. Any books purchased from this list will be gratefully received and donated to the Library Project.

Positive Impact

An integral part of traveling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

Dress

Laos is still quite a conservative country. In rural areas and temples, overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in short shorts is not appropriate. When visiting temples, shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Sleeveless tops are also acceptable in temples. When swimming, women are encouraged not to wear skimpy swimsuits and to wrap in a sarong.

Donations

Often when coming on trips overseas, people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a great idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving items away to local people can create an expectation that a visiting foreigner equals free giveaways. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only

interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to Grasshopper Adventures. We will then pass the items on to development organisations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed by those working in the communities who understand better the local needs.

Poverty

There is an enormous amount of poverty in Laos which you will see, particularly in tourist areas. If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. Many beggars can earn more than those who work at unskilled jobs. There are organisations in Laos which are working to alleviate this poverty issue and may be able to do more good with donations that you might like to make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people that you meet. In the tourist areas, some people will speak English but away from these areas you should learn a few words of Lao. We will teach you some of the basics, but if you want to really interact, we recommend bringing a phrase book.

Important

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.

These notes last updated: 28 March 2008