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Beautiful. Peaceful. Charming. Untouched. Unforgettable. All words that spring to mind for any traveller to Laos.

The country features ornate temples, mistcovered mountains, rivers adorned with breathtaking limestone karsts, remote minority villages and the most welcoming people you are ever likely to encounter, offering a real insight into their lives and country.

While the rest of Asia is moving forward at a frightening pace, Laos has almost stood still, offering visitors a unique experience of a traditional Asia of old.

Top Destination in Laos : Vientiane

The capital city of Vientiane is often peoples first glimpse of Laos and it certainly creates a great first impression. Despite being the capital, Vientiane epitomises Laos perfectly, laid back, sleepy and charming. Close by are areas of impressive natural beauty, including the limestone karst region of Khammoune, and soft adventure options in the riverside town of Vang Vieng.

City Tour. With its tree lined boulevards, fading French colonial architecture and impressive National monuments and temples, a Vientiane city tour is a must. Our tours incorporate Wat Prakeo a former royal temple now housing the finest collection of Lao art in the country..., a local fresh market, Laos national icon, the beautiful golden That Luang Stupa and Vientianes very own Arc D'Triomphe, Patuxai which offers superb views of the city. The best way to finish the day is with a cool drink at one of the many bars overlooking a sunset over the Mekong River.

Buddha Park. Located about 30 mins outside the city centre, Buddha Park is a bizarre yet fascinating collection of Buddhist sculptures created by a local artist around 40 years ago. Some of the unique sculptures include.... This tour is an ideal half day excursion.



Nam Ngum Lake. A peaceful day trip to experience the countryside is to head north to the vast Nam Ngum, enjoyed by both locals and foreigners alike. This can be combined with a boat trip or short trek in nearby Phou Khao Khuay National Park.

Vang Vieng. Just 3 hours drive north of Vientiane, Vang Vieng is the ideal stop off point on the road journey to Luang Prabang. Vang Vieng itself is simply beautiful, offering dramatic limestone karst scenery amid a riverfront setting. One can enjoy a visit to the local caves and take a pleasant boat trip on the Nam Song River, but really this is the place to come for soft adventure, trekking, cycling, kayaking and rock climbing is all possible here.

Khammoune. Get on the road and travel 5 hours south of Vientiane and you will discover an undiscovered gem in Khammoune province. An excellent 3day 2 night extension tour from Vientiane would include a boat trip on the beautiful Hin Boun River to Kong Lor, a cave over 7km long that you can travel right through by boat. Time is also spent in the Mekong Riverside town of Thakek, displaying some fantastic faded French colonial architecture.

Luang Prabang

Located in the north of the country, this former royal capital has been a designated World Heritage site since 1995. Idyllically situated on the Mekong River, surrounded by beautiful green mountains, the town itself is picturesque, with a wonderful mix of ancient temples and French-Indochinese architecture. The pace of Luang Prabang, like much of Laos, is relaxed and compliments the visual charm of the town itself perfectly. Today Luang Prabang is still the cultural heart of Laos and a must for any first time visitor to the country.

What to see

Temples. Our city tours take in some of the most beautiful temples found in Southeast Asia including the magnificent Wat Xiengthong with its characteristic roof sweeping low to the ground. Our tours usually end with a climb up Mount Phousi which offers a stunning panoramic view of the city and a great sunset.

Kuang Si Waterfall. A stunning waterfall 45 minutes drive from Luang Prabang, Kuang Si features sublime turquoise pools amid a jungle setting. Our tours to Kuang Si often include a visit to a local fresh market as well as an in-depth village tour to a Hmong village we sponsor, experiencing their way of life and actually giving them a hand with the cooking! Money goes back to the village in order to build a toilets and a water supply.

Pak Ou Caves. Take a private boat 1 hour up the Mekong River to visit Pak Ou Caves, housing thousands of ornate Buddhas. Still a place of pilgrimage for many Lao people, the trip offers a picturesque boat ride and a fascinating insight into Lao culture.

Baci Ceremony. An important facet of Lao culture, a baci ceremony incorporates animist beliefs. The tying of strings to ones wrists aims to keep bad spirits away and bring good luck. Every visitor to Laos should experience this and we can organise a ceremony in the traditional sense – in a local village with local people.

Alms giving. The giving of alms by the Buddhist locals to the monks in Luang Prabang is an age old tradition, and one that is unique to Laos. The procession of saffron robed monks in the morning is a spectacular sight. Taking place around dawn we can provide a pre breakfast excursion to any tour for a wonderfully serene cultural experience.

Elephants. No trip to Laos would be complete without a glimpse of them. Why not try our exclusive '2 day multi sport' programme, taking in a mountain bike trail through the countryside, an Elephant ride around the Khan River, overnighing in luxury lodge accommodation. The next day enjoy a 'fair trek' to a local village, then a gentle kayak back to Luang Prabang town. All in all the perfect soft adventure tour!

Gecko Cliff (NEW). Our new tour takes you off the main tourist trail in style. Our tour includes a luxury private boat cruise down the Mekong, a short trek, then a gentle cycle ride to an undiscovered waterfall.

Nong Khiaw. Just a 4 hour drive north of Luang Prabang is the hidden gem of Nong Khiaw, an idyllic riverside village located on the Ou River. Overnight in comfortable lodge accommodation before returning the next day via private boat down the Ou River, one of Asia's best kept secrets, quite simply one of the most beautiful river journeys around. For those with time on their hands this tour can be extended by a couple of nights to include trekking and homestay options.

Pakse

Pakse is the gateway to southern Laos, and with regular flights from Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Bangkok and Siem Reap it is more accessible than ever. Generally regarded as the most peaceful and laid back region of Laos, the area includes a whole host of attractions all within a relatively short drive or boat ride.

What to see

Wat Phou is a dramatically situated temple sat atop a hill overlooking the surrounding countryside. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Wat Phou is a must see. Our Wat Phou excursion includes a fantastic private boat cruise down the Mekong River from Pakse to the old town of Champasak.

4000 Islands or Si Phan Don is a river archipelago situated in the heart of the Mekong. While Laos is a landlocked country, the 4000 Islands offers the perfect relaxing end to any tour. The area exemplifies the laid back peaceful qualities of the country. Our tours of the area often include a private boat tour of the many islands, including a detailed exploration of Khone Island, an idyllic palm fringed island with friendly fishing villages and beautiful waterfalls. For nature lovers, a boat trip to visit the rare Mekong freshwater dolphins is a must.

Bolaven Plateau is a refreshing highland area just 45 minutes from Pakse. The plateau features beautiful waterfalls, including the breathtaking twin waterfall of Tad Fan, and the remote spot of Tad Lo, a unique place where you can overnight at a lodge directly overlooking the falls. It's a great place to escape the heat, being around 700m above sea level. The plateau is also famous for its tea and coffee plantations, indeed the coffee here is of such good reputation it is exported around the world, providing a valuable income for the many minority villages that inhabit the area.

Xi Phan is a National Park, a natural wetland area, great for trekking, including overnighing at a local village, Elephant riding and nature trekking, taking in the diverse birdlife that is found within the wetlands.

VISA CONDITION AND FEES

Visitors to Laos can obtain a 15 days tourist visa from the Lao Embassy or consulate office abroad and upon arrival at the Vientiane Wattay Airport, Luang Prabang Airport, Pakse Airport and at the following international border check points:

China-Laos : Yunan-Luang Namtha via Boten

Vietnam-Laos: Vinh-Lak Xao, via Nam Phao kuangchi- Dansavanh at Lao Bao Quang Tri to Xieghkhouang at Nam Kane.

Thailand-Laos: Chiangkhong(Thailand) -Bokeo province at Houeisy Nong Khai-Vientiane at Friendship Bridge Nakhonphanom-Thakhek Mukdahane-Savannakhet Ubon Ratchathani-Champassak via Chongmek & Vang Tao

A valid passport must be presented along with payment of US\$ 30 fee (in USD cash only) and 2 passport size color photos. Visitors who wish to cross Cambodia-Laos border (Steung Treng – Vernkham), will need to have visa ready prior to arrival at the border.

CURRENCY

Lao currency is the Kip. The exchange rate as of May 2006 was approximately 10,000 Kip to one US dollar. Thai Baht and US dollars are widely accepted, especially for the purchase of more expensive goods. Credit card such as VISA., American Express and Master card are accepted in major hotels and more up-market establishments only. Traveler's checks are only accepted by major banks, which charge a commission of 3% per check.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Laos has a hot humid tropical climate. Hot season: March and April, with the temperature often exceeding 35°C. Rainy season:

May to September, with the temperature around 30°C. Cool season: October to February, with the temperature varying from 10°C to 20°C. The northern region of Laos is mostly mountainous, where the temperature at night can drop as low as the freezing point. It is advisable to bring a jacket along if visiting Xiang Khuang, Luang Prabang, Sam Neua, Phonsaly, Udomxai, Luang Namtha and Houei Xay during these months. The cool season is recommended as the best time to visit Laos.

GETTING TO LAOS

Direct flights to Vientiane are available from Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Ho Chi Minh City, Kunming, Chiang Mai, and Hanoi. Airlines currently operating to and from Vientiane are: Lao Airlines, Vietnam Airlines and Thai Airways International. Bangkok Airways operates direct flight daily between Luang Prabang and Bangkok and PB Air one flight per week. Thai Airways operates 3 flights per week from Chiang Mai to Luang Prabang. There is also direct flights between Pakse and Siem Reap operated by Lao Airlines.

COMMUNICATION

Postal service in Laos is generally reliable and inexpensive, but there is no guarantee of speedy delivery to destination. Most hotels in the main cities have an IDD line but calls are expensive. Internet service is available only in major cities, such as Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse.

AIRPORT TAX

The departure tax for international flight is US \$10, payable in that currency. The departure tax for domestic flights is 5,000 Kip.