



Highlights of Laos Dossier

Immerse Yourself Tour | 14 Days | Active

Bangkok - Luang Prabang - Phonsavan - Vang Vieng - Vientiane -
Khong Island - Pakse

Laos has remained the most pristine and culturally-intact country in Southeast Asia. Experience the old-fashioned charm of its cities, explore untouched landscapes, and meet the incredibly warm people who will bring a smile to your face with each interaction.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Experience Luang Prabang
- Witness the Takbat ceremony
- Explore quaint Vientiane
- Relax in Si Phan Don
- Investigate the mysteries of the Plain of Jars



Highlights of Laos tour inclusions

- Return international flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated on itinerary
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (If your group is 10 or more travellers)

Personal expenditures e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary are at your own expense.

Immerse Yourself Tour

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of Asia; our Discovery Tours include more cultural and active experiences. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts or Local Guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience. Our Immerse Yourself tours include:

- Cycling and walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

Active Tour

'Highlights of Laos' is an **active** tour. Active tours require a good level of fitness, as they are physically more demanding. They may involve hiking, and some travel to remote, high altitude areas where tourist facilities are less developed.

Our National Escort and Local Guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

Country Profile: Laos

Laos has only recently been discovered as a fascinating tourist destination. This delightful jewel is steeped in historical treasures, glorious colonial architecture, lush green jungles and magnificent mountainous terrain.

Discover the UNESCO World Heritage listed city of Luang Prabang, the spectacular multi-tiered Kuang Si Waterfalls and the mysterious Plain of Jars, regarded by some as 'Asia's Stonehenge'. Visit exquisite temples in the capital, Vientiane. Journey by boat along the mighty Mekong River and explore some of the 4,000 islands that make up the Si Phan Don area.

Be amazed by the stunning natural scenery and meet the beautiful, gentle people of Laos. Refreshingly, its long-established ways of life continue; to hurry is simply not the Lao way. This is a truly magical nation.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 14 days in duration including international flights.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on day one in Bangkok and end the tour on Day 13 in Pakse. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Itinerary Changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

Changes:

- Added a visit to the Khmer ruins of Wat Phou on Day 10 to enhance customer experience.
- Removed the visit to the evening market on day 12 in Pakse due to customer feedback

Important Information Regarding Itinerary Changes and Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our Thailand office on **+66 8413 86228** to urgently advise your arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in Thailand. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and ensure someone is at the airport to meet you on arrival.

If we are not advised of late changes and missed connections, Wendy Wu Tours cannot guarantee someone will be able to meet you upon arrival in Thailand as our local office will have no way of knowing which flight you will be arriving on. Wendy Wu Tours will not be responsible for providing reimbursement of transportation costs from the airport to your hotel in the event that our local office was not advised of changes to arrival time.

Highlights of Laos Itinerary

DAY 1: FLY TO BANGKOK

Fly to Bangkok where you will spend the night; you will not have a guide today, you will meet your guide tomorrow upon arrival in Luang Prabang. On arrival at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, make your way to level two and between exits three and four (inside the arrivals hall) you will find your hotel representative holding The Cottage Suvarnabhumi Hotel sign with your name on it. A complimentary shuttle bus will transfer you to the hotel which takes approximately 30 minutes. Upon arrival at the hotel please advise reception that you wish to take the complimentary shuttle bus back to the airport the following morning; the hotel will provide you with your flight ticket to Luang Prabang for the following day.

Meals Included: Dinner

If you have any issues finding the shuttle bus please contact our hotel representative on +66 87546-4334 or The Cottage Suvarnabhumi hotel directly on +66 2727-5858 extension.

Destination Information

Bangkok - Bangkok has been Thailand's dominant city since the 18th century. It was established as the capital after the former capital Ayutthaya was attacked by the Burmese and burned down. The emerging city, which was protected by a wall, was occupied by a large number of stilt and floating

houses built to adapt to common seasonal flooding. Up until the Thailand War, Bangkok was still largely undeveloped until it became a popular place of rest and relaxation for the American soldiers, which resulted in a boom of nightclubs, massage parlours and bars. However, in the 80's and 90's, Bangkok underwent rapid modernisation and exploded into the metropolis it is today; a city that is lined with skyscrapers and is full of life.

DAY 2: BANGKOK TO LUANG PRABANG

Return to the airport via the complimentary shuttle bus for your one hour and 40 minute flight to Luang Prabang. Upon arrival, you will be met by your National Escort or local guide and transferred to your hotel. Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure before taking an evening tour of the bustling night market and browse for colourful textiles and carvings.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Luang Prabang - The capital of Luang Prabang Province in northern Laos, lies in a valley at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers. It's known for its many Buddhist temples, including the gilded Wat Xieng Thong, dating to the 16th century, and Wat Mai, once the residence of the head of Laotian Buddhism.

DAY 3: LUANG PRABANG

Rise early this morning to witness the Buddhist ceremony of Takbat, when the monks of Luang Prabang's monastic communities collect alms from locals. These lines of silent saffron robe-clad monks will be an enduring image of your trip. See Wat Sene and the National Museum. Visit the traditional H'mong village of Ban Na Ounae, before walking to the cascading turquoise waters of delightful Kuang Si Waterfalls for a picnic lunch. It is possible to take a swim in the river near the falls and if you wish to do this, please remember to bring along your swimsuit and a towel. Changing rooms are available on site. Stop at Ock Pop Tok Weaving Centre on the return to Luang Prabang.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Wat Sene - A Buddhist temple (wat), located in Luang Prabang, Laos. It was built in 1718 by King Kitsarath with 100 000 stones from the Mekong River. It literally means 'Temple of a 100,000 treasures'. It was restored in 1957 commemorating the Buddha's birth 2,500 years earlier.

National Museum – Built in 1904 in the French colonial era, the original building was the Royal Palace but was later converted into a museum.

Kuang Si Waterfalls - A three tier waterfall about 29 kilometres south of Luang Prabang. The falls begin in shallow pools atop a steep hillside. These lead to the main fall with a 60 metres cascade. The falls are accessed via a trail to a left of the falls. Water collects in numerous turquoise blue pools as it flows downstream. The many cascades that result are typical of travertine waterfalls. There are walkways and bridges for your enjoyment. Most of the pools are open to swimming (changing room facilities are available here).

DAY 4: LUANG PRABANG

This morning visit Wat Xieng Thong before boarding a boat to cruise the mighty Mekong up to the sacred caves of Pak Ou, known for the hundreds of miniature Buddha sculptures that reside within. Return to Luang Prabang and visit the local villages of Thin Hong and Ban Xang Khong to witness the daily life of the local people and their cottage industries.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Wat Xieng Thong - A Buddhist temple (wat), located on the northern tip of the peninsula of Luang Prabang, Laos. Wat Xieng Thong is one of the most important of Lao monasteries and remains a significant monument to the spirit of religion, royalty and traditional art. There are over

twenty structures on the grounds including a sim, shrines, pavilions and residences, in addition to its gardens of various flowers, ornamental shrubs and trees.

Pak Ou Caves – Near Pak Ou (mouth of the Ou river) the Tham Ting (lower cave) and the Tham Theung (upper cave) are caves overlooking the Mekong River, 25km to the north of Luang Prabang, Laos. They are a group of two caves on the west side of the Mekong River, about two hours upstream from the centre of Luang Prabang. The caves are noted for their miniature Buddha sculptures. Hundreds of very small and mostly damaged wooden Buddhist figures are laid out over the wall shelves. They take many different positions, including meditation, teaching, peace, rain, and reclining (nirvana).

DAY 5: LUANG PRABANG

This morning, explore many of the former royal capital's cultural highlights. Climb to the top of Phousi Hill and enjoy panoramic views of the city and Wat Mai, with its beautiful gilded façade. Later visit Wat Visoun, one of the oldest temples in the city, followed by Wat Aham. Enjoy an afternoon at leisure.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Phousi Hill - A 100m high hill in the centre of the old town of Luang Prabang. It lies in the heart of the old town peninsula and is bordered on one side by the Mekong River and on the other side by the Nam Khan River. The hill is a local religious site, and houses several Buddhist shrines. Halfway up the hill, overlooking the Nam Khan is Wat Tham Phou Si, a Buddhist temple. At the summit of the hill, overlooking the town and surrounding countryside, is Wat Chom Si, which is also a Buddhist temple and is a tourist highlight of Luang Prabang.

Wat Visoun – Rebuilt in 1898 following fire due to Black flag Haw raiders, restoration commenced to rebuild the once oldest wooden temple in Luang Prabang from more sturdy bricks and stucco. The highlight here is a 34.5 metre tall Lotus Stupa.

DAY 6: LUANG PRABANG TO PHONSAVAN

Drive three and a half hours over scenic, mountainous and windy roads to Phoukhoun for a market visit and lunch. From here continue driving for another five hours, making stops at Tham Phra Cave, for a 30 minute visit and Nong Tang Lake to see local villagers fishing for approximately one hour. Arrive in Phonsavan in the late afternoon.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Phonsavan - The capital of Xiangkhoang Province - the name stands for 'hills of paradise'. Phonsavan is the provincial capital of Xiangkhouang Province. The countryside is dominated by green hills and pine forests. Villages consist of colourful wooden houses. Cattle raising is one of the main agricultural activities and H'mong cowboys with brown and violet cowboy hats are a common sight. Phonsavan was built in the late 1970s and replaced the old Xiangkhouang (today: Muang Khoun) which had been destroyed during the Second South East Asia War. Phonsavan's most famous attraction is the nearby Plain of Jars, which has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status.

DAY 7: PLAIN OF JARS

Drive half an hour to one of the most important prehistoric sites in Southeast Asia. These mysterious clusters of giant jars are thought to be about 2,000 years old. Sightseeing here will be a full day and involve walking over uneven terrain. You will visit Site one where there are over 200 jars, and Site two which also allows you to admire the beautiful scenery of the region. There will also be visits to Muang Khoune village, home of the H'mong minority group, and the office of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), an organisation that helps clear unexploded ordnance that are a remnant of American raids during the Vietnam War.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Plain of Jars - A megalithic archaeological landscape in Laos. It consists of thousands of stone jars scattered around the upland valleys and the lower foothills of the central plain of the Xieng Khouang plateau. The jars are mostly arranged in clusters ranging in number from one to several hundred.

The Xieng Khouang Plateau is located at the northern end of the Annamese Cordillera, the principal mountain range of South East Asia. A French researcher in the early 1930s concluded that the jars were associated with prehistoric burial practices. Excavation by Lao and Japanese archaeologists in the intervening years has supported this interpretation with the discovery of human remains, burial goods and ceramics around the jars. The Plain of Jars dates back to the Iron Age (500 BC to 500 AD) and is one of the most important prehistoric sites in Southeast Asia.

DAY 8: PHONSAVAN TO VANG VIENG

Drive approximately seven hours to Vang Vieng, stopping en route for about one hour at Pathang Village to admire the spectacular views over karst mountain landscapes.

Spend the afternoon exploring the magnificent Tham Chang Cave which involves one hour on foot over uneven surfaces, and climbing steps to reach the cave.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Vang Vieng - A town in Vientiane Province about four hours bus ride north of the capital. The town lies on the Nam Song River. The most notable feature of the area is the karst hill landscape surrounding the town.

Tham Chang Cave - Tham Chang is a cave just to the southwest of Vang Vieng, Laos. The cave is reached by crossing a bridge that spans across the Nam Song River. You will need to then climb a long flight of steps to the entrance. A spring is located about 50m inside the cave. The cave was used as a bunker in the early 19th century during the Chinese-Ho invasion.

DAY 9: VANG VIENG TO VIENTIANE

Continue driving three and half hours south to Vientiane, Laos' capital. Nestled in a languid bend in the Mekong, Vientiane is a delightfully quaint city, more a friendlier backwater than the chaotic capital. Spend the rest of the day exploring with visits to Wat Si Saket, Wat Phra Keo, That Luang Stupa, and the Patuxai Victory Monument, resembling Paris' Arc de Triomphe. Sightseeing today involves around two to three hours on foot.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Wat Si Saket - Wat Si Saket is a Buddhist wat built in 1818 on the order of King Anouvong (Sethathirath V.) Wat Si Saket was built in the 'Siamese style' of Buddhist architecture, with a surrounding terrace and an ornate five-tiered roof, rather than in the Lao style. This may have kept it safe, since the armies of Siam that sacked Vientiane following Anouvong's rebellion in 1827 used the compound as their headquarters and lodging place. It may be the oldest temple still standing in Vientiane. The French colonial government restored Wat Si Saket in 1924 and again in 1930. Wat Si Saket features a cloister wall with more than 2,000 ceramic and silver Buddha images.

That Luang Stupa - A gold-covered large Buddhist stupa in the centre of Vientiane. Since its initial establishment, suggested to be in the 3rd century, the stupa has undergone several reconstructions as recently as the 1930s due to foreign invasions of the area.

Patuxai Victory Monument - Patuxai means Victory Gate or Gate of Triumph. and, is a war monument in the centre of Vientiane. It was built between 1957 and 1968. The Patuxai

is dedicated to those who fought in the struggle for independence from France.

DAY 10: VIENTIANE TO KHONG ISLAND

Rise early for a morning flight to Pakse, the flight will be approximately one hour and 15 minutes. On arrival drive to Champassak to visit the World Heritage-listed Wat Phou, a ruined Khmer temple complex located in the incredibly beautiful landscapes of Mount Phu Kao. Continue to Khong Island, the largest island of the Si Phan Don archipelago in the Mekong River. The afternoon is at leisure.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Wat Phou - A ruined Khmer Hindu temple complex in southern Laos. It is located at the base of mount Phu Kao, some six kilometres from the Mekong River in Champassak province. There was a temple on the site as early as the 5th century, but the surviving structures date from the 11th to the 13th centuries. The temple has a unique structure, in which the elements lead to a shrine where a linga dedicated to Lord Shiva was bathed in water from a mountain spring. The site later became a centre of Theravada Buddhist worship.

DAY 11: KHONG ISLAND

Around Si Phan Don, meaning '4,000 islands', the pace of life is slow and easy and the river views are gorgeous. See the magnificent Khone Phapheng and pop over to Khone Island to discover its charming colonial buildings and see Lippi Waterfall, nicknamed the Devil's Corridor. Depending on the season, you may see local fisherman in action. The rest of the day is at your leisure.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Khone Phapheng Waterfall - The largest in Southeast Asia and the main reason the Mekong is not fully navigable into China. The fall is characterised by thousands of islands and

countless waterways, giving the area its name Si Phan Don or 'The 4,000 islands'.

Lippi Waterfalls - A roaring collection of powerful falls spilling down at odd angles along a branch of the characteristically coffee-coloured Mekong River.

DAY 12: KHONG ISLAND TO PAKSE

Drive two hours from Khong Island to Pakse, stopping to admire Tad Yuan and Tad Fane waterfalls as you go. Tad Fane is a set of twin 120m-high waterfalls formed by the merging waters of the Champy and Pak Koot rivers. These impressive falls are situated on the edge of Dong Hua Sao protected wildlife area, 38km from Pakse. Continue on to the Bolaven Plateau to pay a visit to a coffee plantation and learn about the process of planting, harvesting and roasting the beans. This evening, enjoy a farewell dinner back in Pakse.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Bolaven Plateau - Located in an ancient volcano that erupted millions of years ago, the area spans 50km of southern Laos most vegetated area. From an altitude of 800 and 1350m it is green all year round and cooler than the rest of Laos and Thailand. Surrounding the plateau there are a number of protected national parks, dramatic waterfalls, remote hill tribes, dense jungle and a taste of some of the world's best coffee beans.

Pakse - The gateway to southern Laos, sits at the confluence of the Mekong River and the Se Don (Don River). The city retains fewer colonial-era buildings remain, but do look for the grandiose, Franco-Chinese-style Chinese Society building in the centre of town.

DAYS 13-14: FLY TO AUSTRALIA

Transfer to Pakse airport for your flight to Australia, arriving home the same or following day.

Meals Included: Breakfast

HIGHLIGHTS OF LAOS TRAVEL INFORMATION

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Laos and the Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork and submit the visa application on your behalf. Visas for Laos are valid for 90 days from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 30 days. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office **60 days prior to departure**; if received after this, urgent visa processing fees will apply. Also please note we do not accept passports and visa applications within 30 days prior to departure. Passports will be returned with your Final Documentation **four weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure**. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15AUD courier fee will apply.

Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

Eating in South East Asia

South East Asia is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in most local dishes. The food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics.

Your itinerary has been carefully crafted to introduce you to a range of local dishes and we hope that you enjoy the culinary adventure ahead. Meals as shown on the above itinerary (excluding drinks) are included in our group tours. When dining in Laos, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetisers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it is appropriate to use chopsticks, a forks or spoon can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Laos, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. In Laos and some other countries in South East Asia, a fork and a spoon are used for most dishes and chopsticks are typically provided to eat noodles. Usually chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Laos is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

Please refer to your travel guide for more information on Laos cuisine, including information for travellers with restricted diets.

Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the Australia and South East Asia. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide.

Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

Please note double bed requests can be made at time of booking but cannot be guaranteed.

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Roads in South East Asia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

Seatbelts: Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in South East Asia and therefore the local people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason, some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

Air: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-flight seat allocation is not available on international and internal flight sectors.

Development in Laos

Although Laos is developing quickly; they still lack the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. For example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade; concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia. However, all of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense as well as refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local guides.

Laos Public Holidays

If you are travelling within the below Laos Public Holidays please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. In Laos: International Women's Day is 8th March, Laos New Year Holiday is 14th – 16th April.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by both a National Escort/Local Guides. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of eight travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with Local Guides only.

Tipping Policy

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experience in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation.

Tipping is paid in US Dollars, MYR or other local currencies as specified. Any additional tipping on any our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

Packing List and Climate

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on www.weather.com

Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling outside major cities in Laos. Australian Dollars can be easily exchanged in Laos, provided notes are new and undamaged. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort/ Local Guide will remind you to do this before departure.

Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of AUD\$350 per person, per week should be sufficient; however for those that cannot resist a bargain, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

Cultural Difference

Laos has many religions, cultures and histories. Please be considerate of the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration.

Appropriate Dress

When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout South East Asia - for Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off, and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.travelvax.com.au

Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.smartraveller.gov.au as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

After Your Booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately four weeks prior to departure.

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