



## Thailand and Laos Adventure Dossier Immerse Yourself Tour | 15 Days | Moderate

Bangkok – Chiang Mai - Chiang Rai – Pak Beng – Luang Prabang - Vientiane

Perfectly combined to create an unforgettable experience, venture off the beaten track to discover the colourful hilltribe cultures of Thailand's northern highlands. Explore the tranquil treasures and rich culture of beautiful Laos.

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Admire the Grand Palace
- Discover Chiang Mai
- Stay in a hilltribe lodge
- Drift along the Mekong
- See Luang Prabang's temples
- Explore Vientiane



## Thailand and Laos Adventure tour inclusions

- Return international flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- 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 Immerse Yourself 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

## Moderate

'Thailand & Laos Adventure' is a **moderate** tour. This means that the itinerary requires a good level of fitness.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time
- You will be required to get on and off small boats without assistance
- You will travel on an overnight train between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, in a second class sleeper section. Trains in Thailand do not have cabins, rather each carriage consists of train seats during the day and at night the train seats convert into one bed and a top bunk pulls out from the wall with curtains for privacy at night.

Of course, 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: Thailand and Laos

**Thailand**- Thailand is a beautiful country, offering travellers stunning scenery from fertile rice fields in the central plains, rising mountains and valleys in the north, to sandy white beaches at famous island destinations such as Phuket in the south. Thailand has an ancient history shaped by war and imperialism, as well as an immersion of culture and faith.

**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 and the spectacular multi-tiered Kuang Si Waterfalls. Journey by boat along the mighty Mekong River and 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 15 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 14 in Vientiane. 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:

- Replaced Chiang Dao Elephant camp with Thai Elephant care centre in Mae Rim on day six as we have removed completely all elephant shows & elephant riding.

## 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 Bangkok office on **+84 138 6228 (24 hours)** 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 Bangkok. 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 Bangkok 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.

## Thailand & Laos Adventure Itinerary

### DAY 1: FLY TO BANGKOK

You will be met at Bangkok airport in the arrivals hall by your Local Guide or National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer approximately one hour to your hotel and check-in to your room. There is no sightseeing today.

*Meals included: Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Bangkok** - Bangkok has been Thailand's dominant city since the 18<sup>th</sup> 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. Bangkok's dazzling neon signs, charming architecture, spicy Thai cuisine and colourful markets make for an exciting first few days of our tour.

### DAY 2: BANGKOK

Enjoy a sightseeing tour of the city today. Tour the Grand Palace, Wat Pho and Chinatown before taking a cruise down Chao Phraya River on a longboat to Pak Khlong Talaat Flower Market, while enjoying an alternative view of the city. Sightseeing involves around five hours on foot today and involves hopping on and off the boats, often on unsteady and sometimes slippery surfaces, without handrails or assistance. This evening, have a delicious Thai meal for dinner and enjoy a performance of traditional Thai dancing.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Wat Pho** - One of Bangkok's largest temples. Experience the monk's chant as you explore the grounds of Wat Pho,

which is over eight hectares. The largest reclining Buddha and the largest collection of Buddha images in Thailand are housed here.

**Grand Palace** - The Grand Palace is the city's most famous landmark. Built in 1782, for 150 years it was the home to the Thai King, the royal court and administrative seat of government. Within the Palace are several impressive buildings, including the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

**Pak Khlong Talaat Flower Market** - The biggest wholesale and retail fresh flower market in Bangkok.

**Chinatown** - Teeming with market stalls and side street restaurants, Chinatown is a not to be missed experience in Bangkok.

### **DAY 3: BANGKOK TO CHIANG MAI**

Explore the Maeklong Railway Market, a market that makes it home right on the tracks. Drive to Damnoen Saduak Floating Market where you will travel by a motorised or paddle wooden boats through the canals. Sightseeing involves hopping on and off the boats, often on unsteady and sometimes slippery surfaces, without handrails or assistance. Return to Bangkok and enjoy the afternoon at leisure to freshen up and do some last-minute shopping.

Later this afternoon you will be transferred to the railway station to board your overnight express soft sleeper train to Chiang Mai. Dinner this evening will be basic, served in a packed box on board the train. You will sleep in a second-class sleeper cabin with other travellers; there are no doors to the cabins, just curtains for privacy. During the day, there are normal train seats, then at night the top bunks pull out from the wall for sleeping and baggage is stored outside the cabins.

This journey usually takes 12 hours (700km). Wear comfortable clothes on-board to sleep in and take snacks as they may not be readily available on-board the train.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Maeklong Railway Market** – As the train rolls slowly through eight times a day, inches away from the goods for sale, this market makes for an unusual spectacle and an interesting place to walk and shop on the tracks.

**Damnoen Saduak Floating Market** - Step back in time to experience the traditional way farmers would trade their produce. The canals are lined with boats that are paddled by local women and piled high with vegetables, fruit and even souvenirs for the tourists. Sit back and soak up the atmosphere as the locals go about their daily life and entertain with their haggling techniques.

**Chiang Mai** - Located among tall mountains, Chiang Mai is the largest and most culturally significant city in northern Thailand. The city was founded in 1296 and was the capital of the Lanna Kingdom, which was eventually occupied by the Burmese. For the next 200 years Chiang Mai was virtually abandoned until it was again taken over by Siam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chiang Mai became a thriving centre for handicraft pottery, weaving, silverwork and woodcarving; however, tourism took over in the 1960's as the main source of income. Today, Chiang Mai is famous for its hilltribes, tea plantations and elephants.

### **DAY 4: CHIANG MAI**

Arrive into Chiang Mai station this morning and transfer to your hotel for breakfast before taking a cyclo tour of the city. Then you will visit Flok Life Museum, Wat Chedi Luang and Wat Prah Singh before enjoying lunch at a local restaurant. This afternoon ascent to Wat Doi Suthep offering a panoramic view of Chiang Mai, you will have the option to climb the Naga staircase or catch the cable car to visit the exquisite Golden Pagoda. This evening we will enjoy a typical Thai (Kantoke) dinner while watching a performance of ancient dances and songs from northern Thailand by various hill tribes. Afterwards we will have an opportunity to visit the colourful Chiang Mai Night Market.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Flok Life Museum** – The museum recreates traditional Lanna village life inside a former Thai Colonial-style provincial court.

**Wat Chedi Luang** – This famous ruined temple is where the 'Emerald Buddha' was once enshrined.

**Wat Phra Singh** – A Buddhist temple, Wat Phra Singh was founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to enshrine the ashes of King Kam Fu.

**Wat Doi Suthep** - One of Thailand's most sacred temples. Tucked away in the mountains at 1,056 metres above sea level, it offers a panoramic view of Chiang Mai. Here we can climb the Naga staircase or catch the cable car to visit the exquisite golden pagoda.

### **DAY 5: CHIANG RAI – H'MONG HILLTRIBE LODGE**

This morning, visit the local yoga centre, and enjoy a meditation session. Later this morning journey into the hills surrounding Chiang Mai. Transfer approximately one and a half hours by minivan, crossing the countryside, passing forests, farms and villages reaching the village where you will spend the night in a traditional Hmong

Hilltribe Lodge. The H'mong Hilltribe Lodge is made up of ten individual houses, each comprising of four separate rooms with private bathrooms, arranged around a central communal area. Optional activities this afternoon include a short hike to the village, hire a bike, have a massage or relax by the pool. You also have the chance to join in a meditation or yoga session (depending on availability). This evening, enjoy a barbecue and a cultural show.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Hilltribes** - Northern Thailand is home to various tribal people who migrated from China and Tibet over the past few centuries. They now inhabit the remote border areas between northern Thailand, Laos and Myanmar (Burma). The six major hill tribes within Thailand are the Akha, Lahu, Karen, Hmong, Mien and Lisu, each with a distinct language and culture.

#### **DAY 6: H'MONG HILLTRIBE LODGE TO CHIANG RAI**

This morning, visit the Thai Elephant Care Centre in Mae Rim. The centre is located in the beautiful Mesa valley and is the peaceful final resting place for old elephants. You will be met by one of the local caretakers at the gate and he will guide you through the centre, explaining about the centre and its inhabitants, and you will of course have a look at the impressive beasts and their lifelong caretakers.

Continue one and half hours to Thanton, a small town by the Mae Kok River and board your long tail motor boat for your cruise to Baan Pha Tai. Upon arrival drive a further two hours to Chiang Rai and take a walk around the night market.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Thai Elephant Care Centre** – A care centre dedicated to looking after elderly elephants in their final stage of life.

**Chiang Rai** – The northern-most province of Thailand sharing borders with Myanmar and Laos, and also one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in Thailand. The province is abundant with natural scenery; lush rice terraces, hills scattered with orchids and the mountains of Myanmar and Laos are visible in the distance.

#### **DAY 7: CHIANG RAI**

Today take a peek into some of the hidden artistic gems of Chiang Rai with a visit to Wat Rong Kun, also known as the White Temple. After lunch visit a tea plantation on Doi Mae Salong to taste the local tea.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**White Temple** - One of the most recognisable temples in Thailand, the White Temple is a contemporary Buddhist and Hindu temple designed by Thai artist Chalermchai Kositpipat in 1997.

**Mae Salong** - Once known as a centre for opium trade in the golden triangle, Mae Salong is now associated with tribal villages and for the production of excellent local tea.

#### **DAY 8: CHIANG RAI TO PAK BENG**

Rise early to reach the border into Laos and join your Mekong cruise to Pak Beng. The boat is a local wooden slow boat with a roof and toilet. You will be travelling for approximately six to seven hours today, depending on the water level and will be served lunch on board your cruise. Stop along the way to observe rural life visiting Ban Ban Houei Lumpene village, arrive in Pak Beng before sunset to check in to your hotel.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

*You will need to pack a smaller overnight bag for your trip to Pak Beng. Main luggage will be left in safe storage on the boat and picked up on arrival in Luang Prabang.*

#### **Destination Information**

**Pak Beng** – A traditional village on the Mekong River, Pak Beng is the first stop in Laos for travellers crossing the border by slow boat.

#### **DAY 9: PAK BENG TO LUANG PRABANG**

After breakfast, board the boat for the second leg of the cruise. Continue to Pak Ou village at the mouth of the Nam Ou River, where you visit the Pak Ou Caves of a Thousand Buddha's. Arrive in Luang Prabang and check in to your hotel.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Pak Ou Caves** - 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).

**Luang Prabang** - The capital of the province of the same name, Luang Prabang lies in a valley at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers. It is known for its many Buddhist temples, including the gilded Wat Xieng Thong, dating to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Wat Mai, once the residence of the head of Laotian Buddhism.

## **DAY 10: LUANG PRABANG**

Visit Ban Xang Khong Craft Village, where you can see a Paper and local handcraft production. Later visit Wat Xieng Thong, the finest example of Luang Prabang architecture, and Wat Visoun. Talk with local monks and young people at a local temple.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **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.

## **DAY 11: LUANG PRABANG**

Rise early this morning to view Takbat, a Buddhist ceremony before visiting the Phousi Temple and the National Museum. Drive one hour to Kuang Si Waterfalls, visiting a local market en route. Sightseeing at the waterfalls will involve around one hour of light walking and on the way up to the waterfalls you follow a bush walking track which has a slight upward gradient. Return to Luang Prabang stopping at Ock Pop Tok Weaving Centre.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**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 metre cascade. The falls are accessed via the 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 12: LUANG PRABANG TO VIENTIANE**

Enjoy a day at leisure until your 45 minute flight to Vientiane. On arrival check in to your hotel.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Vientiane** - Vientiane, Laos' laid-back capital, mixes French colonial architecture with Buddhist temples such as the golden, 16<sup>th</sup>-century Pha That Luang, a national symbol. Along broad boulevards and tree-lined streets are notable shrines including Wat Si Saket, which features thousands of Buddha images, and Wat Si Muang, built on a Hindu shrine. Many bakeries, cafes and villas seem straight out of 19<sup>th</sup> - century Paris.

## **DAY 13: VIENTIANE**

This morning visit Talaat Sao - Vientiane's Morning Market. Then continue to Wat Si Saket, the oldest original temple in Vientiane. Head out of town to visit one of Laos' slightly stranger attractions - Xieng Khuan Buddha Park. En route take a look at the impressive Friendship Bridge which spans the Mekong River. This evening, enjoy dinner with some traditional Laos music and dance.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Wat Si Saket** - Wat Si Saket is a Buddhist wat built in 1818 on the order of King Anouvong (Sethathirath V.) 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.

**Xieng Khuan Buddha Park** - Built in 1958 this park on the banks of the Mekong River approximately 35 kilometres from the city is the site of a large collection of many kinds of Buddhist and Hindu Sculptures.

## **DAYS 14-15: VIENTIANE TO AUSTRALIA**

Enjoy a free morning in Vientiane, making the most of the leisurely pace of life before your flight to Australia, arriving home the same or following day.

*Meals included: Breakfast*

## THAILAND & LAOS ADVENTURE TRAVEL INFORMATION

### Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Laos and 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 issued with specific start and expiry dates which are based on the dates stated on the visa application form. Travel must be completed within those dates. 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.

Australian passport holders do not need a visa for Thailand if they are travelling for less than 30 days for tourist purposes

### 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 stated on the above itinerary (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive group. When dining in Thailand and Cambodia, 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's appropriate to use chopsticks, a fork 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 Thailand and some other countries in South East Asia, a fork and 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 Thailand and 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 and Thai 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 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 assure 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 Southeast 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 or Local Guide.

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

**Rail Journeys:** This trip involves an overnight train journey. Trains in Thailand do not have cabins, rather each carriage consists of train seats during the day and at night the train seats convert into one bed and a top bunk pulls out from the wall with curtains for privacy at night. Please refer to your Travel Guide for more information. We will always endeavour to keep group members together, however, there may be times where this is not possible. In this case, you may find yourself sharing with group members of the opposite gender and other travellers. Facilities on board are basic with both Western-style and Asian-style toilets. Some members of the group will be allocated a berth on the middle or top bed, so please be prepared to climb ladders in and out of bed.

## Development in Thailand and Laos

Although Thailand and Laos are developing quickly, they still lack the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. 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; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. 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, refer to notices and follow advice from you National Escort or Local Guides.

## Thailand and Laos Public Holidays

If you are travelling within the below Thailand and 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.

**Thailand :**Chakri Memorial Day - 6<sup>th</sup> April, Labour Day - 1<sup>st</sup> May, Coronation Day – 5<sup>th</sup> May, Songkran Festival 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> April, the Queen’s Birthday - 12<sup>th</sup> August, Chulalongkorn Day – 23<sup>rd</sup> October, the Kings Birthday - 5<sup>th</sup> December.

**Laos:** International Women’s Day - 8<sup>th</sup> March, Laos New Year Holiday 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 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 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](http://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

Australian Dollars can be easily exchanged in Thailand, 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 will remind you to do this before departure.

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling outside major cities in South East Asia. US Dollars are easily exchanged throughout South East Asia however other currencies such as Australian Dollars can generally be exchanged in hotels and airports provided notes are new and undamaged. US Dollars should be from the new series from the year 2003 onwards. Old series notes can be difficult to exchange. We suggest for your convenience that you ensure your US Dollars are from the new series to avoid any difficulties exchanging money during your trip.

We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort 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

Thailand and Laos have 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](http://www.travelvax.com.au)

### Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://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.

**Updated: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2017**