



2012 Thailand & Laos Experience

14 days / 13 nights

Highlights

Bangkok, Grand Palace, Cooking class by the Chao Phraya, Kanchanaburi, River Kwai, Chiang Mai, Elephant Camp, Mekong River Journey, Pak Ou Caves, Luang Prabang, Kuang Si Falls, Vientiane

Taste of Thailand

Explore the most significant sites in Thailand, from bustling Bangkok to the quiet wilderness surrounding Kanchanaburi, from the waterways of the Chao Phraya to the walled city of Chiang Mai. Thailand has so much to offer its visitors.

Laos is a magical nation where you will meet devout monks and hilltribe villagers, enjoy lush tropical backgrounds and cascading waterfalls, and a night market full of fabrics, handicrafts and delicious local snacks. Travelling down the mighty Mekong on a private boat is a truly unique experience.

All road travel is in comfortable minibuses or mid-sized coaches. Your journey is escorted by both a Western tour leader, based on a minimum of seven travellers, and a local English-speaking guide in each location. Groups are never more than 16 travellers in size.

Tour grading - Moderate

Suitable for travellers with an average level of fitness and independent mobility. The tour involves plenty of walking, up to a few hours on some days and over uneven surfaces. There are also several boat rides, a raft, an elephant and samlors (Thai pedi-cab). You will need to be able to board and disembark boats independently, sometimes between muddy or slippery banks. While accommodation is three-star or best available, this is not 'sanitised' travel; by day you will walk through markets and villages, meet local people, and sample local food.

What's included

- 13 nights accommodation
- Breakfast daily, three lunches and two dinners
- All road transport in modern air-conditioned vehicles (touring in Luang Prabang by foot and tuk-tuk)
- All sightseeing as specified and entrance fees included
- Boat trip on the Mekong River
- Two domestic flights
- Expert Western tour leader (group size seven minimum) and Thai local guides throughout
- Tour arrival and departure transfers

Climate

Southern & Central Thailand are warm year-round. Expect warmest temperatures from March to May, and refreshing tropical afternoon showers nationwide from June to September. Northern Thailand experiences four seasons. The warmest time of year is March to May and the coolest from December to February (it can get quite cold at night).

Laos experiences two distinct seasons, wet and dry. The dry season generally runs from November to March and it's a bit cooler this time of year. The wet season, April to October, is a great time to experience lush countryside and occasional cooling afternoon showers which rarely affect travel. As with Thailand, bring a layer of warm clothing when travelling to the North between November and February.

Itinerary

DAY 1 - ARRIVE BANGKOK

Upon arrival in Bangkok you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Tonight meet your tour leader (or local guide) for welcome drinks and a tour briefing.

I-RESIDENCE - 2 nights

DAY 2 - BANGKOK

Absorb the energy of Bangkok as you explore the Grand Palace and everyday life on the famous Chao Phraya River.

DAY 3 - BANGKOK TO RIVER KWAI

Enjoy a Thai cooking class on the banks of the Chao Phraya River before arriving at our atmospheric resort accommodation located right on the River Kwai, where you will stay for the night.

RESOTEL - 1 night

DAY 4 - KANCHANABURI

From Hell Fire Pass, now the site of a moving museum, you will travel to Kanchanaburi by the 'Death Railway' train. Cross the infamous 'Bridge over the River Kwai', and explore poignant war-time cemeteries.

FELIX RIVER KWAI RESORT - 1 night

DAY 5 - CHIANG MAI

Return to Bangkok for your flight to the capital of Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai. Get a stunning view out over the city when you visit the Doi Suthep Monastery.

RIMPING VILLAGE - 2 nights

DAY 6 - CHIANG MAI

Get your bearings with a samlor tour to some colourful local markets before visiting the Mae Sa Elephant Camp. In the afternoon take some time to chat with a local monk and learn more about his life.

DAY 7 - CHIANG MAI TO CHIANG RAI

Spend today driving approximately 4-5 hours to Chiang Rai, a gateway to the infamous 'Golden Triangle' region, where Thailand, Laos and Myanmar (Burma) meet.

LALUNA RESORT - 1 night

DAY 8 - CHIANG RAI TO PAKBENG

Transfer to the Lao/Thai border to board a private slow boat and glide down the majestic Mekong River to the small town of Pakbeng. Witness the amazing scenery of this region along the way.

PHETSOKXAI - 1 night

DAY 9 - PAKBENG TO LUANG PRABANG

Continue your journey down the Mekong to the famous UNESCO-heritage listed city of Luang Prabang. On the way stop at Pak Ou (thousand Buddha) caves.

SALA PRABANG - 3 nights

DAY 10 - LUANG PRABANG

Take a trip to the spectacular National Museum, formally the royal residence, then visit the most beautiful of the town's wats to gain an appreciation for Buddhist culture. In the afternoon, finish off the day with a game of petanque and sunset drinks on the famous Mekong River.

DAY 11 - LUANG PRABANG

Rise early this morning to witness hundreds of monks perform the morning alms tradition. Visit a local market, the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre, then drive to the beautiful Kuang Si falls for swimming and a stop at a bear rescue centre. In the evening, participate in a fun and interactive Lao cooking class where you have the chance to taste your own creations!

DAY 12 - LUANG PRABANG TO VIENTIANE

Fly to the sleepy Laotian capital, Vientiane. Visit the National Museum and the golden That Luang.

MERCURE VIENTIANE - 2 nights

DAY 13 - VIENTIANE

Continue exploring the capital's most famous landmarks with visits to Wat Si Saket, Haw Phra Kaew and the Patuxai Independence Monument. Also get the chance to visit the educational and interactive COPE visitors centre. COPE is an organisation dedicated to assisting Lao people in need of prosthetic limbs, often as a result of exploded ordinance.

DAY 14 - VIENTIANE

Today you will be transferred to the airport for your onward journey.

Hotel brief

Chiang Rai - LALUNA RESORT

This collection of bungalow rooms with a large, palm-fringed swimming pool makes for a charming tropical retreat.

Pakbeng - PHETSOKXAI

The Phetsokxai Lodge in Pakbeng is basic but contains all the necessary facilities for a night's stay. Due to the geographical isolation of Pakbeng, quality accommodation big enough to take groups is limited. We have chosen the Phetsokxai Lodge because - although simple in style - it is clean and comfortable, has private bathrooms, and is able to take our small groups. We do ask you to understand in advance that your stay in this accommodation will be noticeably 'simpler' than at other properties used on this journey.

Luang Prabang - SALA PRABANG

Not a hotel per se, but a converted series of historic houses with rustic charm, clustered together in the heart of Luang Prabang. Rooms do not have extra amenities such as television, phone, or mini-bar, but with its restored original buildings, this accommodation has great character and is unbeatable in terms of location and atmosphere.

Vientiane - MERCURE VIENTIANE

Comfortable, well-maintained 3.5-star hotel with excellent facilities and 24 hour service. Nice pool, gym and bar area.

Bangkok - I-RESIDENCE

Superbly located in the heart of Silom shopping and entertainment district, I residence is stylish and funky with superb facilities and traditional Thai service. Skytrain station across the road making it easy to access all points of interest throughout Bangkok.

River Kwai - RESOTEL

Set on the banks of the River Kwai, this property's bungalows offer a comfortable, natural retreat. Enjoy a Thai massage, relax by the pool and take advantage of the warm hospitality.

Kanchanaburi - FELIX RIVER KWAI RESORT

Modern, comfortable hotel located on the river with two pools, lovely gardens, excellent facilities and spacious rooms.

Chiang Mai - RIMPING VILLAGE

Set in a quiet, secluded location within walking distance of the famous night market, Rimping Village offers comfortable rooms, a wonderful courtyard swimming pool and welcoming staff

Visa requirements

Of all the countries in which we operate tours, Thailand is perhaps the most visitor-friendly in terms of arrival. Holders of passports from Australia, New Zealand, the USA, UK and Canada do not need visas for stays of up to 30 days in Thailand. All foreign tourists to Laos must possess a valid visa. Visas for most nationalities can be issued on arrival at the border crossing from Thailand to Laos in Huay Xai, where the process is straightforward. Visas are valid for 30 days and cost between 30 USD and 42 USD depending on nationality. More detailed visa information is available in our pre-departure information. It is your responsibility to make sure that visa requirements are fulfilled.

Health issues

We recommend you consult with your local doctor or a specialist travel medical centre for up to date health information on vaccinations and medicine for your trip, at least one month prior to departure.

Travel insurance

You must be comprehensively insured as a condition of travelling with Travel Indochina. Insurance should include cover for personal accident and medical expenses, evacuation and repatriation, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of your holiday. Your booking will not be confirmed if you cannot confirm possession of appropriate insurance, and our ground operations have the right to prevent you from travelling in the event that you cannot present your insurance details at the start of the tour. Your travel agent can organise travel insurance for you.

Recommended reading

- The Gentleman in the Parlour - by Somerset Maugham
- Mai Pen Rai Means Never Mind - Carol Hollinger
- Travels in Siam, Cambodia and Laos - Henri Mouhot
- Bridge on the River Kwai - Pierre Boulle
- Letters from Thailand - translated by Susan Fulop Kepner
- Thailand: A Short History - Joseph Wright Jr
- Bamboo Palace - Chris Kremmer
- Ant Egg Soup - Natacha du Pont de Bie
- The Ravens: Pilots of the Secret War - Christopher Robbins
- Shooting at the Moon - Robert Wagner
- A Brief History of Laos - Grant Evans

A responsible Travel Indochina

Travel Indochina practices a thorough, realistic responsible travel policy, full details of which can be found on our website. Our policy includes our downloadable 'Tread Lightly' booklet, full of useful pointers which will make you a more 'responsible' traveller in Asia.

Pre and post tour arrangements

If you would like to book pre or post tour hotel arrangements or are interested in doing additional quality touring before or after your Small Group Journey, either contact Travel Indochina or your local travel agent.

What next

Once your booking has been confirmed and you have paid in full you will receive a detailed itinerary for this tour, detailing day by day arrangements, as well as a pre-departure guide containing valuable information designed to help you get the most out of your holiday.

About Travel Indochina

Travel Indochina has been operating Small Group Journeys to Asia since 1993. Based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, our idea is simple - escape the tourist traps to explore the essence of Asia's history, culture, natural beauty and most importantly, Asia's people. Another feature is the quality, character and location of our accommodation. Our travellers enjoy the combination of well thought out itineraries, tasteful accommodation, insightful Western and local leaders, value for money, and our experience and base in the region.

Disclaimer

Information in this document was correct at the time of its preparation. Travel Indochina reserves the right to make itinerary changes as operational or other circumstances require.