

Silk Steps

EXPLORE AND EXPERIENCE



Laos

Surrounded on all sides by steamy forests and paddy fields, Laos lies hidden from the minds of many in the West. Few know much about this beautiful and fascinating backwater, other than it is near Vietnam.

During the American War the country suffered saturation bombing along its border with neighbouring Vietnam. However, those days are gone and once again over 80% of the people of Laos make a peaceful living from traditional agriculture, fishing and forestry, sharing an unchanged friendliness towards all visitors.

WEATHER

The monsoon rains are from May to October with temperatures around 30°C, however it is cooler in the mountainous areas. From November to April the average temperature is 23°C with temperatures increasing with the advent of the monsoon.



WHEN IN LAOS WHY NOT...?

Travel on a converted rice barge on the Mekong River. The Mekong River dominates much of life in Laos and the best way to sample river life is to spend 2 nights on the Vat Phou. The cruise leaves from Pakse and takes in pre-Angkorian Wat Phu Temple, the main town on Khong Island, Muang Khong and the roaring waterfalls of the 4,000 islands. If you are lucky you will even see the endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins.

Travel from the Thai border to Luang Prabang by boat. A great way to travel in northern Laos to appreciate the dramatic beauty of the landscape, is by traditional boat from the Thai/Lao border at Houayxay to Luang Prabang. This leisurely way to start a visit to Laos gives ample time to stop at villages and spend one night en route at Pakbeng, a village located on a hillside overlooking the river.

Go off the beaten track. Trek for three days through northern Laos in the territory of the Akha people. Discover a little-visited region in the remote north east where life is pretty much unchanged and the hill tribes, with unique customs, traditional dress and animist religions eke out a living by subsistence farming, fishing and hunting. Start in Muang Sing and spend two days trekking through the forest, visiting Akha tribe villages and bird watching. Spend two nights in villages before ending up in Luang Namtha.

Overnight at Kamu Lodge. Tented lodges are generally associated with African safaris, but this one can be found in northern Laos, just 3 hours upstream from Luang Prabang. Get away from it all and try your hand at traditional fishing, rice farming, weaving and even panning for gold under the watchful eye of the Kamu people who will find your attempts most entertaining.



Suggested Itineraries

Nights stay at:	
1	Vientiane
2	Vang Vieng
3	Luang Prabang
4	
5	Phonsavanh
6	Vientiane

DISCOVERING LAOS

Laos is still the least visited of the three countries of Indochina, and those who do visit are charmed by this sleepy country with its most welcoming of people.

This itinerary allows you to time to visit some of the highlights as well as travel overland in a country where road travel is limited. Vientiane, unlike any other capital city, has an unhurried atmosphere with its lack of traffic, distinctive temples and lovely location on the banks of the Mekong River facing Thailand. The drive north to Luang Prabang is via Vang Vieng, home to limestone grottoes and water-logged caverns, several of which are now accessible to visitors. Life in Luang Prabang has changed little and in the early morning a file of saffron-clad monks can still be seen collecting alms from locals. The town, surrounded by rugged mountains, is filled with ancient temples and the nearby Pak Ou caves, reached by boat, are crammed with thousands of Buddha statues.

Close to the Vietnamese border, Phonsavanh suffered from saturation bombing during the Vietnam War. You will be intrigued to see that bomb casings have been recycled to make fences or as the stands for stilt houses or rice barns. But the big attraction here is the ancient Plain of Jars, where hundreds of stone 'jars' are scattered across the plain, many measuring a metre or more in diameter. To this day little is known about their purpose or the people who crafted them.

Leave the backwater of Phonsavanh and return to Vientiane. From here you can travel to southern Laos or fly to Hanoi, Phnom Penh or cross into northern Thailand.

Cost per person (based on two people travelling in a twin/double room) **FROM £728**



Nights stay at:	
1	Pakbeng
2	Luang Prabang
3	
4	Vientiane
5	
6	Pakse
7	Khong Island
8	Pakse

LAOS IN DEPTH

Travelling by boat is a memorable way to start the journey through Laos. Board a traditional boat at the Thai/Lao border and cruise along the Mekong River to Pakbeng, a small riverine settlement. Here you can savour the peace and quiet and view the sun setting. Continue by boat to the former imperial capital of Luang Prabang, visiting Pak Ou caves en route, crammed with thousands of statues of Buddha. Nestled high up in the mountains, Luang Prabang is Laos' must see destination. In the early morning a file of saffron-clad monks can still be seen collecting alms from locals. The delightful temples, the warmth of the people and the beauty of the surroundings will entrance you.

The pace picks up slightly as you fly on to Vientiane, whose unhurried atmosphere is like no other Asian capital. Take in That Luang, the national shrine and stroll along the banks of the Mekong River facing Thailand before flying continuing south to Pakse.

The Mekong River dominates so much of life in Laos and in Pakse it is no different. Pakse, a market town with many lovely examples of French architecture, is a jumping off point for many sights of interest including Wat Phu Temple, dating back over 1400 years, and the cool highlands of the Bolovens Plateau. From Pakse you take an overnight excursion to Khong Island, the largest of the 4,000 islands scattered across the Mekong River on the border with Cambodia and home to spectacular waterfalls and the endangered Irrawaddy Dolphins. Return to Pakse from where you can cross the border into Thailand.

Cost per person (based on two people travelling in a twin/double room)



FROM £988



Ecoprojects

Because of the lack of development in this unspoiled part of the world, Laos is set to become one of the top eco-tourism destinations in Asia. Several eco-resorts have now opened and there are many opportunities to trek, cycle, kayak or go caving and white-water rafting. Silk Steps is pleased to outline the following eco-resorts and eco-projects that you can enjoy, and support, during your stay in Laos.

Kamu Lodge, upstream from Luang Prabang. Spend 24 hours in an environment where villagers have maintained generations-old traditions and a modest way of life. Travel by boat and stay in solar-heated safari tents under thatched roofs with views of rice paddies. Swim in mountain streams and waterfalls, trek through the forest and sample typical Lao meals served in a restaurant set amongst green fields.

The Akha Experience. Learn about the Akha culture, the environment and be involved in a project which empowers and benefits the Akha people. Trek from Muang Sing in the very north east of Laos on a 3-day adventure where you overnight in the villages and meet the extraordinary Akha people and learn a little about their way of life.

Lao Spirit Resort. Around 15km outside Luang Prabang is the place to stay to absorb the peace and serenity of Laos. Here you can relax in style in one of the bungalows, hike, kayak and enjoy the spectacle of the daily elephant bath in the river. The project provides employment for the locals and its presence and opportunities helps them see that the environment should be protected so that they can benefit from tourism.

Kingfisher Ecolodge Champassak. Located in the southernmost province of Laos, Champassak, this is the place to get up close to nature as it is located by the wetlands of the Xe Pian Natural Biodiversity Conservation Area. The 4 stilted bungalows have spacious verandahs and were built with local labour using traditional building materials. The electricity and hot water is solar powered.

A Silk Steps inclusive holiday price includes:

- Private return transfers between airports and hotels (unless otherwise specified)
- The services of English-speaking guides and representatives at each stage of the tour.
- Between most places you will travel unescorted
- Accommodation in a standard room (shared twin) with private facilities (unless otherwise specified) with breakfast
- Government taxes and compulsory service charges
- All tours and sightseeing as specified, inclusive of entrance fees
- Economy class air travel within all countries on the scheduled services of the national or domestic carrier as specified in each tour
- The services of our local representative

Extras

- International flights - please contact us for up-to-date prices
- Travel insurance
- Meals - unless otherwise stated
- Optional sightseeing other than specified
- International airport departure tax payable overseas
- Visa fees
- Single supplement (on request)



Hotel Selection

The choice of hotels in Luang Prabang and Vientiane is endless and those detailed below are recommendations only. We can book most hotels throughout Laos, so please contact us if you would like alternative hotels.

VIENTIANE

Located on the banks of the Mekong River, visitors to the small **Interhotel** receive a friendly welcome. Within walking distance of many of the major sights, this simple boutique hotel has classical furniture and artefacts and several rooms have views of the river.

The **Settha Palace Hotel** is a glorious, renovated colonial hotel set in landscaped gardens around a swimming pool. The elegant rooms, just 29 of them, are decorated with French colonial pieces. Located at the heart of the city, it is within walking distance of many of the major sights and restaurants.

VANG VIENG

Enjoy stunning views of the mountain scenery from the **Vieng Sa May Eco Lodge**, traditional Lao village-style bungalows by the Nam Song River.

LUANG PRABANG

Located beside the Mekong River in landscaped gardens, the very popular **Villa Santi Resort** is an ideal place to stay. Formerly the residence of the wife of King Sisavang Vong, this stylish hotel has charming French-Lao architecture and is decorated with Lao art and antiques.

The deluxe 3 **Nagas Auberge** is a very comfortable boutique-style hotel in a restored traditional building with just 15 rooms. Located at the heart of Luang Prabang, the rooms are elegant with wooden floors and the hotel terrace is a great place to watch life on the streets.

PHONSAVANH

Located at the top of a hill in a comfortable natural setting with lovely views over the town. Here you can appreciate the marvelous scenery that the **Auberge de la Plaine des Jarres** offers. The rustic bungalows are simple but all have fireplaces for those cool mountain evenings.

PAKBENG

Located on the edge of the village on a hill overlooking the Mekong River, the local-style bungalows of the **Luang Say Lodge** are simple. The location of the lodge is superb and an ideal place to while away many hours just watching the activity on the river.

PAKSE

Located close to the Mekong River, the **Pakse Hotel** has comfortable rooms and a roof terrace with terrific views over the town.

KHONG ISLAND

The sister hotels of **Sala Done Khone** and **Sala Done Khong** offer a range of rooms including three in a stone-built former French dispensary.