



## Itinerary

### 14 Day Journey Through the Mekong

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE:** Any extra nights, optional tours or other amendments, will not be visible on this itinerary.

#### Day 1: Arrive Chiang Rai, Thailand

Upon arrival at Chiang Rai Airport, you will be greeted by our driver (no guide) and transferred to Chiang Khong, located on the border of Laos and Thailand. Enjoy the rest of your day at leisure.

**MEALS:** Nil

**OVERNIGHT:** Chiangkhong Teak Garden, Chiang Khong

#### Day 2: Chiang Rai ~ Houayxay ~ Pakbeng, Laos

After breakfast, you will be picked up by a driver (no guide) and driven to the Chiang Khong border, a district in the northeastern part of Chiang Rai, to the Houayxay checkpoint. After passing through Thailand Immigration, take a shuttle bus from the Thailand side to the Laos side.

**NOTE:**

*The bus ticket costs 40 Baht per person and 45 Baht for each piece of luggage. This cost is not included, so please pay directly.*

Once through Laos immigration, you will cross the Mekong River to Houayxay in Laos, where your Lao guide will be waiting for you at the immigration point. After completing border formalities, you will board a traditional boat for the journey down the Mekong River. Serene and timeless, Laos is one of Asia's most unvisited and unchanged countries. The once-powerful kingdom known as Lane Xang (Million Elephants) was founded in the 14th century with the help of the Khmers and became one of the largest kingdoms in Southeast Asia until its decline in the late 19th century.

Bisected and bordered by the Mekong River, the omnipresent symbol of Indochina, Laos today is an amalgam of cultural influences: Theravada Buddhism, animism, France, and the socialist ideal. It is a peaceful place where the legendary hospitality, resilience, and friendliness of the Lao people are evident. Laos is Old Asia preserved. As you journey downriver, you will stop at several tribal minority villages, such as those of the Hmong, Yao, and Khmu.

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**OVERNIGHT:** Mekong Riverside Lodge, Pakbeng

#### Day 3: Pakbeng ~ Luang Prabang

After breakfast at your hotel, rejoin the Slow Boat for the second leg of your journey. As you sail downriver, you will pass through areas of unspoiled forest, with quaint villages dotting the riverbanks. Keep an eye out for elephants with their mahouts, a common sight in this region. Your journey includes visits to a traditional fishing village and a rice winemaking village, where you can sample the renowned Lao Rice wine. Another highlight of the day is exploring the Pak-Ou caves, which house thousands of Buddha statues, offering a glimpse into the spiritual heritage of Laos. As the day draws to a close, you will arrive in Luang Prabang around sunset, where a transfer will be waiting to take you to your hotel.

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**OVERNIGHT:** Sala Phabang, Luang Prabang

#### Day 4: Luang Prabang - Khouangsi Waterfall

An optional early start offers a fantastic opportunity to participate in the daily morning rituals of saffron-clad monks collecting offerings of Alms (ubiquitous sticky rice) from the faithful residents. This tradition is unique to Laos, the only Buddhist nation that still preserves this procession.

In the morning, visit Phosi Market, where you'll encounter diverse offerings such as dried buffalo skin, local tea, saltpetre, chickens, vegetables, and hill-tribe weavings. Laos is renowned for its traditional handicrafts. Today, you will also visit the villages of Ban Ouay and Ban Thapene, along with the weaving village of Ban Phanom, which are populated by Lao ethnic minority groups. Spend time at the stunning Khouangsi Waterfall, where you can splash around in the turquoise pools or walk along the forest paths.

In the afternoon, spend the rest of the day touring the Lao capital. Visit the impressive stupa of Wat Visoun and the shrines of Wat Aham and Wat Mai. Continue exploring Luang Prabang with a visit to the temple of Wat Xieng Thong, a magnificent piece of architecture nestled at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers. The temple structures are adorned with gilded stuccoes and intricate doorways, with the main sim featuring a marvellous 'tree of life' mosaic pattern on an outer wall. Climb to the top of Mount Phousi for an enjoyable exploration of the sacred, gilded stupa and take in the beautiful panoramic sunset over the ancient, once-royal city and the Mekong River. Finally, stroll around the Night Market, where you can find a delightful selection of textiles made by the locals and the hill tribe people surrounding Luang Prabang.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Sala Phabang, Luang Prabang

#### Day 5: Luang Prabang – Free Day

You have a full day free to explore the city at your own pace. This is the perfect opportunity to immerse yourself in the local culture, visit additional sites of interest, or simply relax and enjoy the atmosphere. Whether you choose to wander through bustling markets, enjoy a leisurely meal at a local café, or discover hidden gems off the beaten path, the day is yours to tailor to your interests and preferences. Don't forget to take in the unique sights, sounds, and flavors that make this city special.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Sala Phabang, Luang Prabang

#### Day 6: Luang Prabang ~ Pakse ~ Don Khone

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before meeting your guide and driver in the hotel lobby. You will then transfer to the airport for your flight to Pakse. Upon arrival in Pakse, you will be greeted by our guide and driver who will transfer you to Wat Phu Champasak. Here, you will visit the fascinating Pre-Angkorian ruins of Wat Phu, one of Southeast Asia's most dramatically situated temples. Perched at the base of Mount Phu Kao, these intriguing Khmer ruins offer a glimpse into ancient history.

Wat Phu is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, a distinction it received in 2001. This remarkable archaeological site of Khmer civilization dates back to the 5th century, predating the famous Angkor Wat in Cambodia. You will have time to explore and appreciate the historical significance and architectural beauty of Wat Phu.

After exploring Wat Phu, we will continue our journey to Khong Island, the largest island in the South Mekong River region, known as the 4000 islands. This area is one of the most scenic in Laos, offering breathtaking views and a serene atmosphere. Enjoy the natural beauty and tranquillity of Khong Island as you immerse yourself in one of the most picturesque regions in the country.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Senghloune Hotel, Don Khone

### Day 7: Don Khone ~ Stung Treng, Cambodia

After an early breakfast, we will embark on a slow motor boat journey down the Mekong River to Ban Khone (Khone Island). Here, you will encounter an array of relics from the French colonial era and retrace the old colonial past, including old French colonial buildings and the remnants of the first Lao railway with its locomotive.

We will continue to explore the 4000 islands area at our leisure by boat, visiting the breathtaking Lphi Waterfall, one of the most beautiful waterfalls marking the end of the Lao border with Cambodia, also known as the Samphamith.

Next, we will drive to the famous waterfalls of Khone Phapeng, the largest waterfall in Southeast Asia, often referred to as the "Niagara of the East." After taking in the majestic views, we will transfer to the Cambodia-Laos border.

At the border, you will say goodbye to your Lao guide and driver before crossing into Cambodia. Upon entering Cambodia, you will meet your Cambodian guide and continue your journey to Stung Treng.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Stung Treng Resort, Stung Treng

### Day 8: Stung Treng ~ Preah Vihear

We embark on a leisurely boat trip to explore the remote flooded forests of the Mekong River. This area stretches south from the Laos border to Stung Treng and is only accessible by boat. It is a haven for critically endangered mammals, birds, and fish, and features a unique riverine flooded forest system that is a photographer's dream. With only birdcalls announcing our presence, we manoeuvre our way leisurely downstream for a couple of hours before reaching the only village on that stretch of the river.

Our journey continues to Preah Vihear, navigating through jungle terrain and local villages. The path takes us along the northern border of the country, offering beautiful, wild scenery that is largely

unpublished. The journey provides a glimpse into some of the most untouched natural landscapes in the region.

We then drive up the hill in a 4x4 vehicle to visit the amazing Khmer temple Preah Vihear, which sits atop the Dangrek Mountains. Known as the Temple Mountain, Preah Vihear was built at the beginning of the 10th century as a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva. The site offers stunning views and a deep sense of history, making it a memorable highlight of our trip.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Preah Vihear Jaya Hotel, Preah Vihear

### Day 9: Preah Vihear ~ Siem Reap

After breakfast, we will visit Koh Ker, the former capital of the Khmer Empire between 928 and 944 A.D. This remote archaeological site, located in the jungle-filled region north of Siem Reap and Angkor, offers a peaceful and serene setting. The area is sparsely populated and only about two dozen monuments are accessible to tourists, as many sanctuaries remain hidden in the forest and the entire site is not yet fully demined. Enjoy a simple packed or local lunch near the temple and continue to explore the other ancient structures in this historic area.

On our way, we will make a stop to visit the sprawling jungle temple of Beng Mealea. This Hindu temple, which also features carvings depicting Buddhist motifs, is primarily constructed from sandstone. Unlike many other sites, Beng Mealea is largely unrestored, allowing nature to thrive amidst its towers and courtyards. Trees and thick brush grow abundantly, with many of the temple's stones lying in great heaps. Today, the temple is largely overrun by vegetation and the stone walls are crumbling, adding a unique charm to its ancient and mysterious atmosphere. This blend of natural and historical beauty makes Beng Mealea a fascinating stop on our journey.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Ladear Angkor Hotel, Siem Reap

### Day 10: Siem Reap - Angkor Highlight

We start our day very early in the morning to capture the iconic pre-dawn photo facing Angkor Wat temple. Sunrise at Angkor Wat is a spectacular sight and can be a busy venue, especially during the months of December, January, February, and March.

After sunrise, we will explore the vast and rich architecture of Angkor Wat temple. We will take pictures from various angles, playing with light and shadows to capture the most beautiful devatas carved in sandstone.

Our next destination is the famous Ta Prohm, known for its appearance in the movie "Tomb Raider." Ta Prohm has been left abandoned to the elements, serving as a poignant reminder that while empires rise and fall, nature's power marches on, oblivious to the dramas of human history. Discovered by French explorer Henri Mouhot in 1860, the temple is now entwined with tentacle-like tree roots that slowly strangle the surviving stones, symbolizing the eternal struggle between man and nature.

As the day progresses, we will visit the impressive Bayon temple during the Golden Hour. With its 54 towers and 216 faces, Bayon temple offers stunning views overlooking the ancient city of Angkor Thom.

Our final stop will be at one of the gates of Angkor Thom, where we will capture the sunset over the moat, ending our day with another breathtaking view.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Ladear Angkor Hotel, Siem Reap

### Day 11: Siem Reap - Free Day

You have a full day free to explore at your own pace. Your Angkor Temple Pass remains valid, allowing you to revisit your favourite temples or discover new ones within the Angkor complex. Take this opportunity to delve deeper into the rich history and stunning architecture of the temples, or simply relax and enjoy the serene atmosphere. Whether you choose to wander through the ancient ruins, visit nearby markets, or enjoy a leisurely meal at a local restaurant, the day is yours to enjoy as you wish.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Ladear Angkor Hotel, Siem Reap

### Day 12: Siem Reap ~ Phnom Penh

Take a bus from Siem Reap down to Phnom Penh, enjoying the scenic views along the way. The journey will provide a glimpse into the diverse landscapes of Cambodia, from rural countryside to bustling urban areas. Upon arrival in Phnom Penh, you will be greeted by your driver who will transfer you to your hotel. Settle into your accommodations and take some time to relax or explore the nearby attractions at your leisure. This marks the beginning of your adventure in Cambodia's vibrant capital city.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Mettavary Hotel, Phnom Penh

### Day 13: Phnom Penh - City Tour

After breakfast, we meet our guide and hop on a Cyclo, an original means of transport in Phnom Penh and a fun way to explore this vibrant city. Our first stop is Wat Phnom, a Buddhist temple located in the centre of Phnom Penh. Built in 1373, it stands 27 meters above the ground and is a significant historical and religious site.

Next, we visit the Royal Palace compound, built in 1866 by the predecessors of King Norodom. This site features impressive and colourful Khmer-style palaces. Nearby is the Silver Pagoda, also known as the Emerald Buddha Temple, which displays numerous Buddha statues decorated with diamonds, emeralds, gold, and silver.

We then continue our tour with a visit to the National Museum. This distinctive red building, showcasing beautiful Khmer architecture, was built in 1917. It houses over 5000 art objects made of sandstone, bronze, silver, copper, wood, and other materials.

Our journey proceeds to the Independence Monument, constructed in 1954 to commemorate Cambodia's independence from French colonial rule.

We will stop at the Central Market, located in the heart of Phnom Penh. Known locally as Phsar Thmei, which translates to "new market," this market was built in 1937 during the French colonial period in an Art Deco style and painted bright ochre.

Finally, we will enjoy a one-hour sunset cruise on the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. Situated at the "Four Arms" where the Mekong meets the Tonle Sap River before splitting into two branches, Phnom Penh offers the ideal location to discover the majestic Mekong. This scenic cruise will provide stunning views and a relaxing end to our day of exploration.

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**OVERNIGHT:** Mettavy Hotel, Phnom Penh

### Day 14: Depart Phnom Penh

Your driver will pick you up and transfer you to Phnom Penh Airport for your departure to your next destination. As we conclude your journey, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude for choosing to travel with us. It has been a pleasure to share this adventure with you, and we hope you have enjoyed every moment. We warmly welcome you to visit us again in the future. Safe travels, and we look forward to seeing you again soon.

**MEALS:** Breakfast