

# Laos



## Laos Family Christmas Adventure Bike Tour

14 days Bangkok to Vientiane

Cycle the magical jewel of South East Asia with the kids

Christmas, the family and cycling in Laos. What more could you ask for on your holidays? Pack up the kids and join us for a fun and adventurous holiday in beautiful Laos.

We've taken the original Lao Lao tour and customised it to allow for Mum and Dad to get and and ride and for the kids to join them on the ride. There are also plenty of rest days, lots of swimming, and a day of elephant riding all in our favourite South East Asian destination!

Christmas Day will be in Thailand's capital Bangkok with the morning free to enjoy the surprises Santa brought and in the afternoon we will ride the back alleys and along side canals on our Bangkok Bike Tour. New Year's Day will find you in Luang Prabang in Laos. We'll take the kids on an elephant ride in the jungle and well yes, the adults can join in if they really want!



## Itinerary

### Dec 24 | Bangkok

Today is arrival day so you are free to fly in any time throughout the day. We will meet in the evening to talk about the tour and head out for a great Christmas Eve dinner. (D)

### Dec 25 | Bangkok | 15km

Merry Christmas! The morning will free to have time to check out what was left under the Christmas tree. In the afternoon we'll take a nice and easy ride around the quiet side of Bangkok. Sticking to the quiet back streets, alleyways and canal paths you'll be amazed that a quiet side of Bangkok does exist. (B)

### Dec 26 | Chiang Khong

We will transfer out to the Bangkok airport for a short flight to the northern city of Chiang Rai. From here it is about 2 hours drive to Chiang Khong, a small border town that sits along the banks of the Mekong River. Our rustic guesthouse has a great balcony that looks out over the Mekong and onto Laos. (B,D)

### Dec 27 | Pak Beng

After crossing the border in the morning (an experience in itself) comes the non-cycling highlight of the trip as you spend the day cruising down the Mekong River on a converted cargo boat. The perfect introduction to Laos, you'll quickly get a feel for the slower pace of life here in Laos. We overnight in the small town of Pak Beng in a new tourist class hotel. (B,L,D)

### Dec 28 | Pak Beng to Oudomxai | 80km

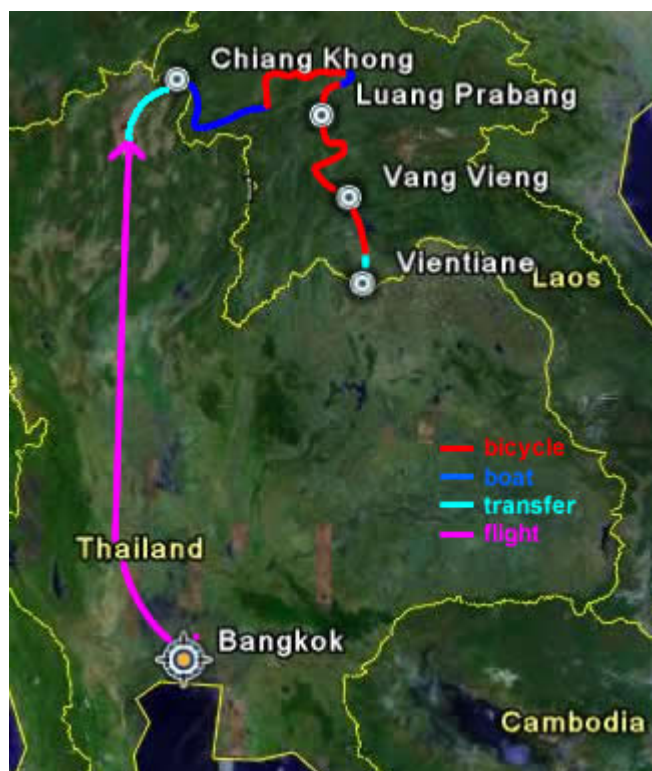
Our first day on the bikes is also one of the best, taking us away from the Mekong River through a rolling landscape of small minority villages that grow corn and rice. This road is very new and carries very little traffic so you can enjoy the scenery and the kids who love to stand by the roadside and yell out "Sabaii Dii!". After everyone has had enough of the cycling we board the bus and drive to our accommodation. Oudomxai is a medium sized trading town and our guesthouse here is simple but clean. (B,L,D)

### Dec 29 | Oudomxai to Nong Khiaw | 103km

Today is a long ride with two mountain passes to climb. For those looking for an easier ride we will transport you to the top of the hill. The landscape is mixed forest and slash and burn farming which is still practiced by the local H'Mong people who live in small villages which hug the mountain sides. Nong Khiaw is a beautiful little town sitting on the banks of the Nam Ou River, a major tributary of the Mekong. We stay overnight in a simple guesthouse looking out over the river. (B,L,D)

### Dec 30 | Nong Khiaw to Luang Prabang | 70km

In the morning we board a small boat to cruise down the river for a couple of hours. Limestone cliffs compete with villages and farmland and makes for a relaxing river journey. Where the river and highway meet we get back on the bikes and ride to Luang Prabang. This is an undulating ride with the



Nam Ou River as our companion for much of the way. In the afternoon we will ride into Luang Prabang, our home for 3 nights. It has been said that Luang Prabang is the most beautiful town in South East Asia, and we'd have to agree. With a combination of historic temples, French colonial architecture and its setting by the Mekong surrounded by mountains you won't want to leave. (B,L,D)

### **Dec 31 | Luang Prabang | Free Day**

Enjoy a free day in Luang Prabang to explore the temples, learn Lao cooking, provide alms to the monks, shop, explore the surrounding handicraft, ride an elephant, relax in a café - there is so much to do! Luang Prabang was the royal capital on Laos and has retained all the charm of its former days. Now protected by its UNESCO World Heritage listing Luang Prabang is a sleepy delight. (B)

### **Jan 1 | Luang Prabang | Elephants**

Time for a slower mode of transport as we swap our bike for elephants and take a ride through the jungles and rivers outside Luang Prabang. Elephants were used in warfare in ancient times as the equivalent of tanks. You'll understand better when you are sitting high up on its back walking across all manner of terrain. Quite a start to the New Year! (B,L)

### **Jan 2 | Luang Prabang (Kuang Sii Waterfall) | 62km**

After a restful day we hit the bikes for a ride to the stunning Kuang Sii Waterfall. The ride is along a small road alongside the Mekong River passing through small villages, rice fields and forest. At the waterfall enjoy a swim, picnic lunch and a visit the bear rescue centre before transferring back to Luang Prabang. (B,L)

### **Jan 3 | Luang Prabang to Kasi | 70km**

We transfer out of Luang Prabang to get over some of the monster mountains of this region. In the afternoon you will start high in the mountains and descent down a great downhill along a valley to our overnight stop of Kasi. (B,L,D)



### **Jan 4 | Kasi to Vang Vieng | 57km**

The ride to Vang Vieng is a relatively easy day travelling through the lush green of rice fields. Vang Vieng is set in a prime location. Surrounded by limestone peaks, caves and rivers this town see its fair share of travellers but for good reason. We should arrive before lunch so the afternoon is free to go caving, tubing on the river or relaxing in one of the many restaurants. (B)

### **Jan 5 | Vang Vieng to Vientiane | 80km**

Into the flatter land now we ride away from the mountains towards Vientiane, Lao's quiet capital city, and the end of the ride. The roads will become busier as the day goes on but Vientiane is nothing like other capital cities of Asia. In the evening we will head out for a nice dinner and celebrate the last night of the tour. (B,L,D)

### **Jan 6 | end**

Today is the end of the tour. Check out time is midday. If you want to stay longer in Vientiane, need assistance with flight tickets to other destinations, or train tickets to Bangkok please let us know.



## Tour Details

### Style

Fully supported cycling tour

### Inclusions

Mekong boat trip, Ou River boat trip, Kuang Sii Waterfall, local guide, tour leader (Jason Williams), most meals, support vehicle.

### Group Size

Minimum 3, maximum 16.

### Accommodation

9 nights comfortable hotel, 4 nights local guesthouse (with private bathroom)

Due the nature of cycling trips we stay in some towns where the general standard of accommodation is quite low. In these places we have chosen the best possible place to stay - trust us there's nothing better!

### Extra accommodation

We can book additional accommodation before the tour in Bangkok or after the tour in Vientiane at competitive rates. Please book extra nights when you book your tour.

### Arrival Details

Meeting Point - This tour will start at a hotel to be advised. The hotel will be in the central part of Bangkok, close to banks, shops, restaurants and other tourist services.

### Food

Included meals: 13 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 8 dinners, plus water, fruit and biscuits on cycling days. You should consider bring some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

### Cycling Days & Distance

8 days, 480km

### Difficulty

Moderate - this trip is designed around the needs of families so on each day if everyone has had enough we will load up the bus and drive to our overnight destination. For adults and bigger kids looking for longer rides it will be possible on some days to ride longer distances.

### Cycling Conditions

Road conditions in Laos are good on the main highways which we will be using. Maintenance, however, is not always the best so you must expect random potholes, short sections of terrible road and road works. While this ride does lose altitude over its course, the two days out of Luang Prabang are very challenging with long hills to climb. Traffic is generally light but care must be taken with all those unexpected surprises like chickens, children and dogs running out in front

### Bikes

Bikes are included in the price of this tour. We provide well maintained Giant mountain bikes in various sizes from 13" to 22" and will be responsible for any maintenance required during the trip for these bikes. All bikes are fitted with one bottle cage. Pannier racks are not supplied. For added comfort you may consider bringing your own seat and pedals which we can easily fit to your rental bike. Please note, renters will be liable for any damage caused to rental bike which is a result of riding accidents.

We also have one child carrier seat which is appropriate for children up to 2 years old. For children



aged 5 to 8 have 2 tag-along bikes that can be fitted to the parent's bike. Please let us know in advance if you will need these for your children.

### Helmets

For safe cycling we strongly recommend wearing a helmet whilst cycling on our trips.

### Support Vehicles

For the cycling days we will have the backup support of a small bus that will carry our luggage, snacks, water, and anybody not cycling. You can use the support vehicle whenever you feel like no longer cycling.

## Travel Details

### Visas

Fifteen day single entry visas can be easily obtained upon entry to Laos. Visas at the border cost US\$30 to US\$42 depending on nationality (see below) and require one passport photo. You can obtain a visa in your own country if you wish. Before you travel check your passport to ensure that there is room for a visa and entry/exit stamps (at least 3 pages) and that it has at least 6 months validation remaining.

Visa prices by country:

- Australia - \$30
- Canada - \$42
- Eastern European countries - \$30
- Hong Kong - \$30
- India - \$40
- Japan - free
- New Zealand - \$30
- Western European countries - \$35
  - except for France \$30, Germany \$30, Sweden \$31
- USA - \$35

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

If you are looking for an insurer we can recommend World Nomads. [Click to see more details.](#)

### Flights

International flights to the starting point and from the finish point are not included in the price of this tour. We can assist with the purchase of inter-Asia flights and/or provide advice if you are considering overland travel. All domestic flights as per itinerary are included.

### Money

The official currency of Thailand is the baht which should be used for all transactions. Thailand has a modern banking system with ATMs and money changers in everywhere. When in Thailand it is possible to use Visa/Mastercard or Cirrus/Maestro cards to access cash with an ATM. You should, however, carry travelers cheques as a backup. Most international currencies can be exchanged so it is not necessary to bring only US dollars - AUD, EUR, CAD, NZD are all accepted at banks in major centres.

The official currency of Laos is the kip, however, the US dollar serves as a second currency and can be used for larger purchases. When going to Laos it is best to bring small denomination US dollars cash along with travellers cheques as your main form of money. Thai baht can also be easily changed. Credit cards can be used in a few major centres, however, they should not be relied on as



the main way you will access your money. There are now ATMs in Luang Prabang and Vientiane which dispense kip, however, this should not be relied on as your sole source of money.

For current exchange rates visit:

[www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com)

### Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$20 for food and general living costs per day while travelling. It is customary to tip the guide and support crew in Laos. You should allow approximately US\$30 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction. If you think your tour leader has done a good job you may also tip him/her. Again this is completely up to you.

### Health

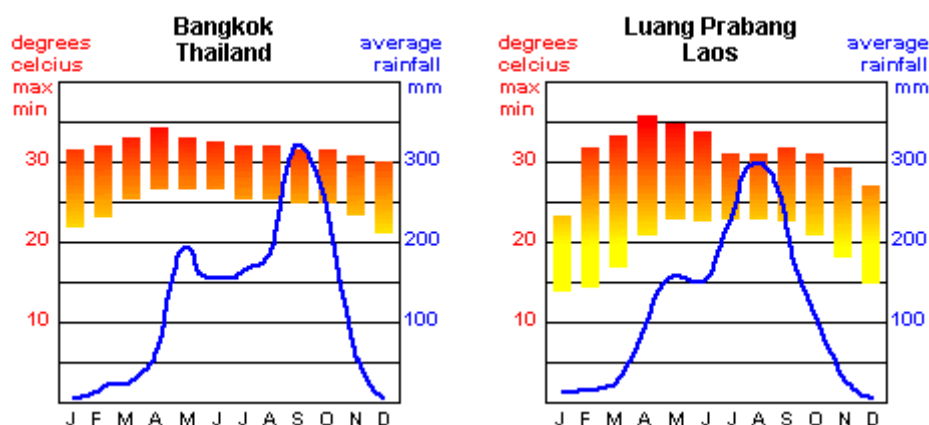
There are no specific health requirements for travelling in Laos, however, we recommend that you visit a travel medicine doctor before travelling. You should carry a well stocked first aid kit with you when you travel. All Grasshopper Adventures Group Leaders are first aid trained, however, they are not permitted to distribute any medications.

### Climate

Laos has a tropical climate with generally warm to hot days and warm nights, however, in the north it can get quite cold during the cool season.

The coolest months are November to January - during this time you should expect very

cold mornings down to 5 degrees Celsius. During the wet season (May-Oct) it does rain most days but the rain generally falls in the late afternoon or night - after we have finished our cycling. The wet season is actually a fantastic time to visit Laos as the rain brings the fields and country to life. Endless green rice fields are a feature of this time of year.



### Electricity

Thailand and Laos work on a 220 volt system and uses American/Asian 2 flat pin plugs. For more on plug types visit the [World Electric Guide](#). You can easily buy an adapter in Thailand or Laos for much cheaper than in your home country.

### Packing

While we do have a support vehicle to carry your luggage during the cycling days, you will be required to carry your own luggage at times. Luggage will need to be loaded on and off buses and up and down stairs at hotels. For this reason we recommend that you pack as lightly as possible in a backpack or small wheeled bag. If traveling to Laos in December/January it is quite cold at night and in the early morning. You should bring a wind breaker and cold weather clothing.

You should consider bringing the following items:

<p><b>Personal Items</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backpack or small sized wheelie bag (some of the guesthouses we have do not have lifts so you may need to carry your luggage up some flights of stairs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camera</li> <li>• Alarm Clock</li> <li>• Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages</li> <li>• Passport photo</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long trousers</li> <li>• Shorts</li> <li>• Shirts</li> <li>• Hat</li> <li>• Sandles/light shoes</li> <li>• Swimming costume</li> <li>• Sunglasses</li> <li>• Light rain jacket</li> <li>• Warm weather clothing for cold mornings and on the boat (woolly hat, warm jacket, long trousers)</li> <li>• Toiletries</li> <li>• Small towel</li> <li>• Sunscreen</li> <li>• First Aid Kit</li> <li>• Mosquito repellent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel insurance details</li> <li>• Flight tickets</li> <li>• Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques</li> <li>• Phrase book</li> </ul> <p>Cycling Gear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicycle</li> <li>• <i>if renting</i> - your own seat &amp; pedals (optional)</li> <li>• Something to carry your personal belongings in while cycling, eg. day pack, bum bag, handlebar bag</li> <li>• Helmet</li> <li>• Cycling gloves</li> <li>• Bicycle water bottle</li> <li>• Bike shorts with something to put on over the top while off the bike</li> </ul>
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Note: on the domestic flight to Chiang Rai on day 1 there is a strict checked luggage allowance of 15 kilograms per person. If you exceed this limit you will be charged approx US\$2.50 per kilogram over the weight limit.

## Positive Impact

An integral part of traveling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

### Dress

Laos is still quite a conservative country. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not appropriate so if you wish to cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you on the bike to put on over the top such as long loose shorts or a skirt/sarong. A good solution to this is 'shy shorts' which combine cycling shorts with loose long shorts over the top. When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Sleeveless tops are not acceptable in temples.

### Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people that you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak English but away from these areas it is great to learn a few words of Lao. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book.

### Donations

Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving items away to local people can create an expectation that a visiting foreigner equals free give away's. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to Grasshopper Adventures which we will then pass on to development organisations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed by those working in the communities who understand better the local needs.

### Poverty

There is an enormous amount of poverty in Laos which you will see, particularly in tourist areas. If you



choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. Many beggars can earn more than those who work unskilled jobs. There are organisations in Laos who are working to alleviate this poverty issue and may be able to do more good with donations that you might like to make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

### **Big Brother Mouse**

In Laos we choose to support the Big Brother Mouse organization. Big Brother Mouse is a Lao-based, Lao-owned project. They publish books that make it fun and easy for kids to learn to read; and books that will provide older readers with access to the information, ideas, and pleasure - something people in many countries take for granted.

Until now, few books were published in the Lao language. Many Lao people never saw a book. Children in most villages had nothing to read except textbooks, and often not even that. Big Brother Mouse has already begun to change that.

We ask our travelers to donate a small amount of money so that we can buy a collection of books to donate to a school. At some stage during the tour we will stop in a village to donate the books to a needy school. In this way we can act as a distribution network for children's books in Laos. It is our dream that one day we will have delivered books to every school that we cycle past!

More on Big Brother Mouse can be seen at [www.bigbrothermouse.com](http://www.bigbrothermouse.com)

#### **Important**

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.

