

Laos



Lao Lao Bike Tour

13 days Bangkok to Vientiane

Cycle the magical jewel of South East Asia

'Lao lao' is a rice wine distilled locally in villages and while we don't suggest you consume it while cycling it does give a good idea of this trip - local, fun and tasty with the potential for a little bit of pain the next day.

Laos is less well known than it's bigger neighbours and this makes it all the more special. With fewer visitors, a lightly populated jungle landscape and the friendliest people around we have never found a person who, after visiting Laos, doesn't love it!

This is a great trip with wonderful variety and the cycling is spectacular. We ride along back roads and quiet highways and along side rivers before climbing up into spectacular limestone mountains and descending for a number of days through H'Mong villages to Vang Vieng, a travellers hangout town, then onto the (not so) bustling capital Vientiane.



Itinerary

Day 1 | Chiang Khong

We will meet up at 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. We will chat over dinner about the upcoming adventure. (D)

Day 2 | Pak Beng

After crossing the border in the morning 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)

Day 3 | 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 approximately 80km 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)

Day 4 | Oudomxai to Nong Khiaw | 103km

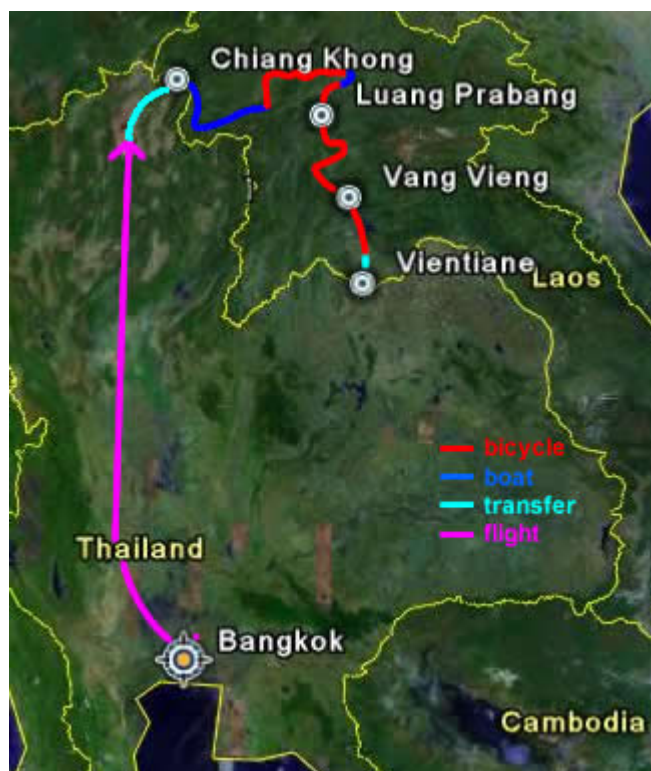
Today is a long ride with two mountain passes to climb. The landscape is mixed forest and slash and burn farming which is still practiced by the local H'Mong people who live in small villages which hug the mountain sides. Nong Khiaw is a beautiful little town sitting on the banks of the Nam Ou River,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

Day 5 | Nong Khiaw | Muang Ngoi Trekking

Today is a day off the bikes. We board a boat and travel up-stream to Muang Ngoi, a small village accessible only by river. Here we trek into the forest and pass through some of the most remote villages you can imagine. Mentioned by many as the highlight of their travels in Northern Laos, this is an amazing experience.. (BLD)

Day 6 | 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)

Day 7 | Luang Prabang

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! (B)

Day 8 | 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 to the bear rescue centre before riding back to Luang Prabang. (B,L)

Day 9 | Luang Prabang to Kiew Ka Cham | 78km

Cycling out of Luang Prabang we are faced with what is without doubt the most difficult day of cycling but also one of the most rewarding with two huge uphill climbs. We pass through lush forest and many small Hmong villages that sit dwarfed by the amazing landscape of limestone mountains that surround them. We stay the night in Kiew Ka Cham, a small village on top on the mountains. Few people stop here overnight so the accommodation is very simple. It is a special experience to stay in such a place. (B,L,D)

Day 10 | Kiew Ka Cham to Kasi | 94km

You will be high in the mountains for the first half of the day following a ridge line up and down with peaks all around. In the afternoon it is time to relax a bit as the road is largely downhill along a valley to our overnight stop of Kasi. (B,L,D)



Day 11 | 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)

Day 12 | 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)

Day 13 | 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, most meals, support vehicle.

Group Size

Minimum 2, maximum 14.

Accommodation

6 nights comfortable hotel, 5 nights local guesthouse (with private bathroom), 1 night basic guesthouse (share 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!

Single Room | US\$470

On Grasshopper Adventures tours single travellers do not have to pay any extra to join our trips - we will match you up with another same sex, single traveller. However, should you wish to choose to take a single room we are happy to book rooms for you for an extra charge. This single supplement is completely voluntary and only applies to hotel accommodation, on overnight train trips there are no single rooms available. We should point out that on occasion single rooms may not be available and in these instances you may need to share for a night or two - we will refund part of your single supplement in these cases.

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 - We will provide you will e-tickets for the flight to Chiang Rai on day 1. You will see your tour leader at the airport, on the plane or waiting for their luggage in Chiang Rai. Just look out for the green Grasshopper shirt!

Food

Included meals: 11 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, 626km

Difficulty

Moderate/Difficult - this trip involves some longer days over 80km and a couple of days with mountainous terrain. Riders should be of good cycling fitness. We have a support vehicle on hand at all times if you have difficulty with any sections.

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

You can bring your own bike for this trip. The best bike for conditions in Laos would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tyres to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before travelling to ensure that it is in good working order. While we do provide mechanical assistance and carry some spare parts during the trip you will need to bring spare parts (including tubes) for your bike as different bikes use different parts and we cannot guarantee that we will have a part to suit your bike.

Bike Hire | US\$160

If you don't have a bike or don't want to bring your own you can hire a bike from us for the entire trip. We provide well maintained Giant mountain bikes in various sizes 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.

Helmets

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

Transporting Your Bike

Most international airlines consider bicycles as part of your regular luggage weight allowance, so you will need to pack light. The best way to transport a bicycle is to package it in a bike box. Most bicycle stores are happy to give away boxes for free. You will need to remove the front wheel (and sometimes the rear wheel), handle bars, pedals and seat post. Tape any loose parts to the bike frame and pack a few extras in the box such as your helmet. You can keep your box until the end of the trip to pack it for the trip home.

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

Costs

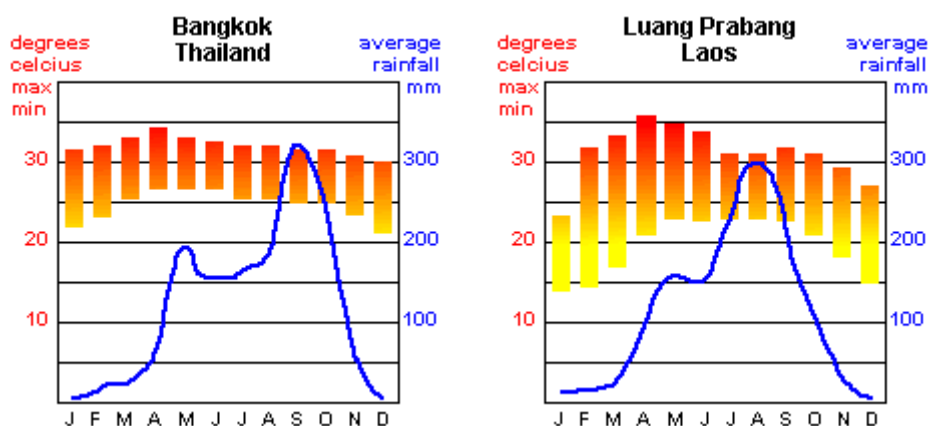
We recommend that you allow approximately US\$20 for food and general living costs per day while travelling. It is customary to tip the guide and support crew in Laos. You should allow approximately US\$30 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your 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>Personal Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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)• Long trousers• Shorts• Shirts• Hat• Sandles/light shoes• Swimming costume• Sunglasses• Light rain jacket• Toiletries• Small towel• Sunscreen• First Aid Kit• Mosquito repellent• Camera• Alarm Clock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages• Passport photo• Travel insurance details• Flight tickets• Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques• Phrase book <p>Cycling Gear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bicycle• <i>if renting</i> - your own seat & pedals (optional)• Something to carry your personal belongings in while cycling, eg. day pack, bum bag, handlebar bag• Helmet• Cycling gloves• Bicycle water bottle• Bike shorts with something to put on over the top while off the bike
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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

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.

