

Gentle Walking Laos

Hill tribes, colonial cities and river trips; a thorough exploration of the highlights of northern Laos.



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Walking
Accommodation	Hotels, Guesthouses
Grade	Gentle
Duration	15 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	Walks on: 5 days
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leaders Laos
Land only	Joining in Bangkok, Thailand

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



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Departures

Group departures

2022 Dates:

Sat 05 Feb - sat 19 Feb

Sat 15 Oct - Sat 29 Oct

Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 4 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday.

If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

Your guide



Throughout the trip you will be accompanied by professionally trained English-speaking tour guides. The first Laotian guide will meet you on arrival in Luang Prabang and stay with you until you board your flight to Vientiane on Day 12. Arriving in the capital of Laos you will be met by your second guide who will be showing you the sights in Vientiane. Your main guide in Luang Nam Tha and Muang Sing will also be assisted by local trek guides supplied in each case by the local tourism office. We also supply professional guides for the transfers and sightseeing in Bangkok.

Your trip highlights

- Walk in off-the-beaten-track areas of northern Laos
- Meet fascinating hill tribes
- Cruise languid rivers to see cultural sights including the impressive Pak Ou Caves
- Enjoy a sunset stroll along the Mekong River in Vientiane
- Stay at 4 star hotels and comfortable lodges

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-2	Depart London. Fly to Bangkok.
Days 3-4	Fly to Luang Prabang. Walking tour and sightseeing.
Day 5	Visit Bang Chang pottery village. Village walk to Wat Chomphet and Xieng Mene.
Days 6-7	Travel from Luang Prabang to Pak Ou by boat. View Pak Ou caves, drive to Nong Khiaw. Visit Pathok caves. Drive to Luang Nam Tha.
Days 8-9	Walk in Nam Ha National Protected Area. Boat trip visiting Ban Mai, Ban Sopdut and Ban Sopsim. Drive to Muang Sing.
Days 10-11	Trek between Houyla and Houy khem villages. Return to Muang Sing. Sightseeing. Drive to Luang Nam Tha.
Days 12-13	Fly to Vientiane. Mekong sunset walk and sightseeing. Fly to Bangkok.
Days 14-15	Sightseeing in Bangkok. Fly back to the UK.

Trip summary

We are delighted to offer this unique walking holiday which focuses mainly on the towns, villages and hill regions in the north of the country. It combines a collection of interesting day walks with some sightseeing, fascinating boat trips on the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers and some leisure time to rest and soak up the special, 'dreamy' atmosphere that sets Laos apart from its other neighbours in Southeast Asia.

Your holiday starts in Luang Prabang situated at the confluence of two rivers and famed for its many temples, crumbling French colonial architecture and scenic setting. Your time here includes visits to night markets and tribal villages, a thorough walking tour of the old quarter and a pre-breakfast trip to see Buddhist monks receiving alms. A boat trip along the Mekong and Nam Ou Rivers, provides a wonderful collage of Laotian life as you observe villagers farming and fishing using time-honoured methods, water buffalo grazing on the banks and even, perhaps, locals panning for gold. You will stop at the sacred Pak Ou caves, filled with 1000s of statues of Buddha, and travel through an increasingly stunning landscape of cliffs and peaks until you arrive at the small town of Nong Khiaw, situated at the foot of breathtaking, karstic limestone mountains.

From here you head to the far north where you will spend time in the busy town of Luang Nam Tha, staying at the atmospheric Boat Landing Guest House. You will enjoy walks and a boat trip in the Nam Tha National Biodiversity Conservation Area home to numerous species of wildlife as well as fascinating villages where you will stop to discover more about the distinctive way of life of the different tribal groups of the area. You then drive on to visit the once square-walled city of Muang Sing. The tribes-people that you meet here wear extremely colourful costume and a great deal of silver in their head-dresses.

Having flown down to the capital, Vientiane, there is a sightseeing tour of some of the most important museums and temples, but there is also free time to explore and to enjoy a walk along the Mekong River at sunset. Finally you fly back to Bangkok where we have included a visit to Wat Arun, the Grand Palace and the nearby Amulet Market.

To add to the enjoyment of this trip, you will stay in carefully chosen hotels and lodges that all have the 'wow factor' and will turn a good holiday into a great one.

Tribal groups in Laos

Ban Nam Hoi (Hmong):

These tribes are the most recent arrivals to Southeast Asia and the people originally came from southern China. The Hmong traditionally live in upland communities where they practice cultivating rice, corn and vegetables in addition to raising pigs and other small livestock. They practise a combination of Animism and ancestor worship. Inside village houses for instance, you will see a thin pole for the house spirit and a small wall-mounted altar for the ancestor spirits.

Thai Groups:

These tribes dominate the plains of Luang Nam Tha province. They include the Lao, Thai Yuan, Thai Lue, Thai Neua, Thai Dam, Thai Daeng and Thai Khao. The Thai are distinguished by their more advanced political organisation called a Muang. A Muang was a kind of principality ruled by a hereditary elite class and usually encompassing the land in one valley. Thai groups practise wet rice agriculture and like to eat sticky rice. All Thai women dress in a long tubular skirt and some weave in silk whilst others weave in cotton. Some of the Thai groups settled in Luang Nam Tha valley having moved from northern Thailand in the 16th Century and are Theravada Buddhist. Some sub-groups of the Thai tribes originate from northern Vietnam and practise a form of Animism or spirit worship.

The Akha Tribe:

Akha villages traditionally are built high on the slopes of mountains at altitudes over 600m and as high as 1,000 or 1,500m. They cultivate upland swidden fields, growing rice, corn and cotton as well as vegetables, peanuts, sesame and soya bean. They also supplement their diet by hunting animals and collecting plants in the forest. They like to trade rattan and cardamom and their home-made textiles in the market at Muang Sing. The Akha are a Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic group, found in China, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Their original homeland is China and they first appeared here in the mid 19th Century. You will notice also that their villages have a gate both at the front and the back of the village. These gates mark the boundary between the human world and the outside natural world. The gate is usually flanked by a pair of male and female wooden figures. The gates should not be touched. They have an ethical code sometimes called 'The Akha Zang' which includes all their traditional ceremonies and law and determines how they cultivate their fields, hunt animals, how they view and treat sickness and the manner in which they relate to one another and outsiders. They have an elaborate system of spirit worship and they have a strong respect for the natural environment which they believe is under the dominance of protected spirits.

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Fly London to Bangkok

Today you will take your overnight flight from London to Bangkok.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Bangkok. Group transfer to hotel.

You will be met on your arrival in Bangkok and transferred to your centrally located hotel.

Overnight: Furama Silom Hotel or Similar, Bangkok

Day 3: Fly to Luang Prabang. Afternoon at leisure.

You will be transferred to catch the flight to Luang Prabang. As the plane climbs out of Bangkok you initially see the snake-like river through the city and beyond a patchwork of green fields and intensive cultivation. The plane then climbs until the land below is an indistinct blur. When you descend again it is like entering a completely different world. As the plane drops down in between the foothills, you can see smoke rising from the tradition of slash and burn rotational cultivation in the jungles. You begin your approach to Luang Prabang through small mountains, mostly forested but with limestone low cliffs - a strange land, indefinable and already mysterious. Then there is the Mekong - twisting its way between hills with palm trees, houses and a temple on a hill before you touch down at the small airstrip. You will be met and transferred to your hotel.

The afternoon is at leisure. Your hotel is close to the town centre so you may wish to venture out for a little exploration.

Overnight: Villa Maydou or Similar, Luang Prabang (Meals: B)

Day 4: Full day sightseeing in Luang Prabang including alms giving to monks, Royal Palace visit and walking tour. Visit to the night market.

This morning your guide will pick you up just before dawn to make a pre-breakfast trip into town to see the monks collecting their alms from the local people. In the quiet of the early morning it is a memorable sight to see more than 100 monks walking through the streets, past the temples and shops, to collect their packets of rice and other foodstuffs for the day, from local residents who line the roadside. You will then return to your hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast you will visit the Royal Palace, which stands on the edge of the Mekong and is now a museum. It was built in 1904 for King Sisavang Vong. Whenever official visitors came to Luang Prabang, they came up river and the king would meet them at the riverside entrance to his palace. His son was prevented from taking the throne by the 1975 revolution and he and his wife were exiled to a cave in northern Laos where they died from starvation. The museum is full of the most precious works of art collected by the royal family over many generations. There are many items in the collection that were gifts from early explorers or diplomats.



Right opposite the Royal Palace is the Hill of Phousi. This is the temple on the hill that you would have seen on the flight in and it is well worth the 20 or 30 minute climb, and is especially breathtaking at sunset.

After visiting the palace you will have a comprehensive walking tour of the old quarter of Luang Prabang. In 1995, Luang Prabang was voted a World Heritage city, and your tour you will see the best parts including Vat Xiengthong, Vat Vixoun, Vat Sene, and Vat Mai. You will either have lunch in town or return to your hotel for a bite to eat.

In the evening your guide will take you to the night market. This will come as quite a surprise as virtually the whole of the main street is closed off to traffic and stalls are erected up and down the street selling anything and everything. It's a great opportunity for some souvenir hunting.

Overnight: Villa Maydou or Similar, Luang Prabang (Meals: B L)

Day 5: Cross the river to visit Pottery Village. Continue to Wat Long Khoune, walk to Wat Chomphet and Xieng Mene Village.

Today you will cross the Mekong river to see village life in the quiet villages on the opposite bank away from the hurly burly of Luang Prabang. Firstly you visit the village of Bang Chang, where the locals are famed for their skills in pottery making. It is interesting to watch the local master craftsmen at work and especially interesting to see their huge and impressive outdoor kiln. You will also see some of the many types of pots they make here. Most of their products are rather too large to be bought for souvenirs.

You will then travel on to visit Wat Long Khoune near the village of Chompet. Wat Long Khoune is important in the history of Laos as in ancient times it was customary for a new king to spend three days in retreat here before being crowned - a retreat involving ritual baths, meditation and reflection. Near here is a large limestone cave complex containing many old statues of the Buddha.

From Wat Long Khoune you climb steeply up steps to the ridge above, where the pretty village of Wat Chomphet is situated. At the top of the steps is a small temple and two stupas that house the bones of the wives of one of the former kings of Laos. There are excellent views from here over the river and back towards Luang Prabang.

From here you walk to the village of Xieng Mene, a sleepy but rather beautiful village full of traditional houses and said to date back to the 14th century. The temple at Xieng Mene was extensively rebuilt in 1927, though it still retains its beautifully carved doors. This temple is considered particularly important, as it once housed one of the main treasures that now resides in the Royal Palace, a golden Buddha statue that was twice taken out of the country to Thailand. The statue was kept in this village on its way back to Luang Prabang from Vientiane in 1867.

You will have lunch in a restaurant back in Luang Prabang and the rest of the day will be at leisure.

Overnight: Villa Maydou or Similar, Luang Prabang (Meals: B L)

Day 6: Boat trip from Luang Prabang to Pak Ou. Visit Pak Ou Caves. Drive to Nong Khiaw. Walking tour of village.

Today after breakfast you will drive to the river port and board your traditional river boat to travel upstream along the Mekong River through beautiful scenery. You will see plenty of life going on along the river banks - vegetables are grown in gardens down to the water's edge, water buffalo graze and people fish both with nets from canoes and with static bamboo fish traps. You may also see people panning for gold. After about 2 hours you reach the confluence of the Nam Ou River with the Mekong River. You will have lunch in the restaurant which overlooks this stunning spot and then visit the sacred Pak Ou Caves which are situated just at this confluence. These caves are set in massive limestone cliffs and house thousands of statues of Buddha. There are two caves, a lower and an upper one, both of which are worth visiting. The king and his entourage used, in the olden days, to row up river once a year to make an overnight pilgrimage. It was the king who first started the tradition of placing Buddhas of all shapes and sizes in the caves. Now there are over 2,000 Buddha images in Pak Ou caves. There is also an enjoyable short walk around the back of the caves to visit the village of Ban Moug Keo. You will notice here locals selling caged birds - you may buy these to release for good karma, but be warned they will soon either return to their captor or be caught again!



At this confluence you leave the Mekong River to drive up the valley of the Nam Ou River through an increasingly stunning landscape of limestone cliffs and peaks. The scenery along the way is absolutely delightful - a string of forested mountains like Chinese paintings, some of course with smouldering fires.

You arrive at the small town of Nong Khiaw, situated at the foot of breathtaking, karstic limestone mountains next to the Nam Ou River, and after checking in at your hotel, there will be time for a walk around the village.

Overnight: Nong Khiaw Riverside or Sunset Bungalow or Similar, Nong Khiaw (Meals: BL)

Day 7: Drive Nong Khiaw to Luang Nam Tha - 7 hours.

Before you set off today you should have time to make a quick visit, just a short distance away from Nong Khiaw, to see the limestone cave of Pathok, once used for shelter during the Indo-China War. These caves are situated at the foot of some quite impressive limestone cliffs. Some of the original rickety bamboo ladders by which they were originally reached still remain although nowadays there is a more sturdy metal staircase as well. The caves do not open till later so you will probably only be able to see them from outside, but it is a delightful stroll to reach them. You will then set off for the drive to Luang Nam Tha. You will reach the town of Oudomxai, a cross roads for trade through the region, and will probably have lunch in a local restaurant there. From Oudomxai the scenery is beautiful and you should arrive at Luang Nam Tha around sunset, ending your day at the eco-friendly Boat Landing Guest House. This lodge first opened in 1999, initially being the brain child of Bill Tuffin, an American development worker, but now owned and run by local people. The lodge is situated just outside town on the banks of the Nam Tha River, within a small wildlife reserve, so you should see a few birds here.

Overnight: Boat Landing Guest House (Eco Lodge) or Similar, Luang Nam Tha (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Tuk-tuk ride to Nam Ha National Protected Area. Nature walk through jungle terrain to Ban Chalernsouk Village - 5-6 hours. Return to Luang Namtha.

Today begins with a tuk-tuk ride out of Luang Namtha. Your first stop will be to collect some supplies from a local market before continuing to Phieng Ngam Village. Here you can see an array of handicrafts being produced by the local craftspeople.

Around mid morning you will arrive at the start of your walking trail and being to gradually ascend the densely forested hills. During the walk, you will make frequent stops so that your expert guide can identify the plants and trees that you encounter and tell you how they are used by the local, indigenous people. At lunchtime, your guide will look for a suitable location to stop and prepare a delicious Lao picnic lunch using both the supplies you collected earlier and the natural resources of the jungle. It will be a unique experience.

After lunch, you continue on the trail, immersed deep in wild primary jungle which, before long opens into a rich mosaic of cultivated lands. Around mid-afternoon you reach the end of your hike at Ban Chalernsouk, a remote highland village of the Khmu people. You will have time to explore before taking a tuk-tuk ride back to Luang Namtha.

Overnight: Boat Landing Guest House (Eco Lodge) or Similar, Luang Nam Tha (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Boat trip visiting Ban Mai and Ban Sopdut. Drive to Muang Sing - approximately 1½ hours.

Again a local guide will take you on a trip up the Nam Tha river to enter the Nam Tha National Bio-diversity Conservation Area. The Nam Tha National Bio-diversity Conservation Area is one of twenty-one conservation areas around the country established in 1993 and approximately 12% of the nation's land is encompassed by these national areas. Each area has a plan for forestry management and preservation of wildlife. The area is home to a variety of animals, plants and birds including tigers, the beautiful clouded leopard, macaques, pangolins, wild Asian elephants, Asiatic black bears, Malayan sun bears, gaur and wild boar and though you may see scat and footprints along the trail, sightings of the larger mammals are rare.

Twenty-five villages lie within the NPA and as well as using the forest for their daily subsistence needs, they also protect it, recognising the need to sustain it for future use.

Two villages are visited along the way, firstly the Khmu village of Ban Sopsim and later the Lanten village of Ban Sopdut. The Nam Tha River begins approximately 15 km north of Luang Nam Tha at the confluence of the Nam Luang and Nam Toung rivers. The first village down stream is Ban Mai. The people here are Thai Dam whose homeland is Dien Bein Phu in northern Vietnam. It is believed that they first came here during the 1890's in response to the marauding 'Black Banner', Chinese bandits from Yunnan. Boatmen sometimes stop here to take on local boatmen to help navigate the river. Silk is produced by some households on this river and look out for the bamboo baskets and trays containing worms and bright yellow cocoons under some of the houses.

After leaving the plains the river runs through forest covered hills and passes several Lanten villages. They are sometimes also referred to as Lao Huay. The Lanten are a more reserved, shy people who look more akin to Tibetans than Chinese. They are recognised by their dark indigo clothing which is woven and dyed in the village and by the striking silver jewellery of the women. At the end of childhood, Lanten women shave their eyebrows. The male elders continue to read and write a Lanten script based on Chinese characters. Again, they follow Animism and ancestor worship. Lantens sometimes use wooden masks in their rituals. They often make paper in frames to dry by the river banks of their villages.

At the end of the day you will make the drive to Muang Sing. This takes about an hour and a half. It is a scenic drive on a twisting road in the mountains, in places almost gorge-like. Eventually you emerge out of the hills and descend towards a large plain covered in paddy fields to arrive at Muang Sing.

Overnight: Phou lu Lodge or Similar, Muang Sing (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Walk between Houyla and Houy Khem villages - approximately 4 hours.

At one time the town of Muang Sing was enclosed by a large, high, square, fortified wall, made of compacted mud. This has largely disappeared now but parts of it can still be seen if you hunt around town. There is a market, a museum in what was the governor's house at one time, one hotel, a number of small guest houses, a police station and a tourist office. The morning market is very colourful and well worth getting up early to have a look at. The tourist office will supply a local guide today to take you on your walk. A visit into the tourist office is quite interesting - there are maps, diagrams, notice boards, photos and posters showing statistics of how many people have visited each year.



From Muang Sing you drive out for about half an hour to the start of the walk from the very lively and friendly village of Houyla. Here you are likely to see many cheerful ladies wearing full Akha costume and carrying their babies on their backs. They do their weaving, spinning and other chores out in the open air. Before you leave the village your guide may be able to arrange a visit to a local house. These houses are often quite spacious, with large and airy rooms, with a hearth for cooking at one end, living space or guest accommodation at the other and a separate room for the family to sleep in off this main room. At the hearth there may be two separate fires, one for cooking meals for the family and one for cooking up vegetables and mash for the family pig. These pigs may provide either valuable additional income for the family or the rare chance for the family to eat meat on festival occasions. The family may also own some nicely made tribal cooking pots, baskets for individual portions of sticky rice for use at festivals, wooden boards for the drying of sticky rice, chopping boards and various other utensils.

The walking today is mostly flat and quite easy. You take a path out, past a small lake and across a dam and then through cultivated fields of rubber trees. Before you reach the village of Houyna you pass one of the most elaborate spirit gates of the trip. It is decorated with knives, guns and even an American rocket, all to keep bad spirits out of the village. You then pass through the village of Houyna with its fancy Japanese funded school. You leave Houyna by a dirt road but soon take a footpath, again through fields, to the village of Nasay, a White Hmong village, which is differentiated from Akha villages by having its houses built directly on the ground and not on stilts. You then continue, through plantations of bananas to the Akha village of Houy Khem, arriving in time for lunch (possibly on the veranda of the house of the village headman) with typical provisions including bamboo shoots, fried pork, sticky rice, chilli dip and sweet potato in batter.

You rendezvous with your transport to take you back to Muang Sing. This evening there is the added treat of a visit to a local sauna for a herbal massage.

Overnight: Phou lu Lodge or Similar, Muang Sing (Meals: BLD)

Day 11: Morning in Muang Sing. Drive to Luang Nam Tha - 2 hours.

This morning you will have time for exploration of Muang Sing before you leave for Luang Nam Tha. Muang Sing was formerly a garrison town under the French and you can still see remains of the old garrison buildings not far from the hotel. In addition you can still see the remains of the old town walls and not far away is also the old French cemetery, now almost reclaimed by the jungle. It is interesting to see how quickly the old walls and cemetery are being swallowed by jungle.

If you are up and about early you may visit the local market while later you may visit one of several local temples. For instance at the end of the high street there is a large Buddhist temple, Wat Xieng Jai, quite different to the temples you will already have been to in Luang Prabang. The temple has a very high roof and hanging down, are large, colourful streamers which the people believe the spirits use to climb to heaven. Very often there are offerings to the spirits made from cane lying on the ground outside the temple.

The local tribal museum is also well worth a visit. This museum, just along the street from the tourist office, is set in a former mansion and is surprisingly good and informative. There are excellent displays of tribal costumes and artefacts and it all gives you a good introduction to some of the tribal people you will have met out in the villages.

In the afternoon you will drive to Luang Nam Tha, approximately 2 hours.

Overnight: Boat Landing Guest House (Eco Lodge) or Similar, Luang Nam Tha (Meals: BLD)

Day 12: Free time in Luang Nam Tha. Fly to Vientiane.

You will have some welcome free time this morning when you can watch the world go by on the river bank, or spend some time bird watching.

After lunch you will be transferred to the airport for your flight to Vientiane. In Vientiane you will have time for a short orientation tour before walking along the banks of the Mekong River for the sunset.

Overnight: Ansara Hotel or Similar, Vientiane (Meals: B L)

Day 13: Sightseeing in Vientiane. Evening flight to Bangkok.

Today you will have a half day sightseeing of Vientiane, including the morning market, Wat Sisaket, Ho Phra Keo Museum and That Luang Stupa as well as the Victory Arch which you pass on the way to That Luang Stupa. The capital of Laos used to be Luang Prabang but was moved to Vientiane, by the French. Vientiane with a population of approximately 200,000, is a much larger, more cosmopolitan city than Luang Prabang but it is still hard to believe that this laid back place is a capital city. It retains a small town feel and has some very fine French colonial architecture as well as many large, elaborate temples. Strangely, much of the city is built in straight lines and in between the wonderful temples there is third world, low rise, concrete shops, flats and offices alongside plenty of greenery. It is also well worth driving or walking along the river front - the other side, is Thailand.



Later you will be transferred to the airport for the flight to Bangkok. Here you will be met and taken to your hotel.

Overnight: Furama Silom Hotel or Similar, Bangkok (Meals: B)

Day 14: Sightseeing in Bangkok. Group transfer to the airport for your evening flight back to London.

You will get up early for a morning trip in a long tailed boat to view a remote river market. There are many canals in Bangkok known as 'Klongs' and within a reasonably short time one can escape the confines of the city to experience the life of people living on the canals. You will then ride down the river for a short distance to view Wat Arun, one of the main temples of Bangkok. The 'Temple of Dawn' is as tall as a 20-storey-high building and dates back to the 16th century. It used to house the famous Emerald Buddha but when this was moved to the Grand Palace, Rama I compensated the monks for their loss by instructing his son to make the temple 'more glorious than the others'.

After this you will cross the river and walk around a large amulet market. Thai people are very keen on amulets as they believe that these small images of Buddha will protect them in various ways and bring them good luck. The market is often crowded and noisy and gives a really interesting view of the way of life in Thailand. You will have lunch at a local restaurant (not included in holiday price) and afterwards spend the afternoon visiting the Grand Palace. This extraordinary complex of buildings covers a square mile and was the heart of the capital during the time of Rama I. It contains a vast labyrinth of stupas, royal residences, army barracks, royal

elephant stables, landscaped gardens and gilded spires. This city within a city contains some 50 temples, many of which are covered with dazzling sheets of gold leaf, covered with reflecting glass and in some cases even jewel-encrusted. Of course it contains the most important temple in Thailand housing the country's most sacred object - the Emerald Buddha. This is only 2ft high but made of green jade and believed to be over 1,000 years old. The king of Thailand changes the Buddha's robes three times a year. The Buddha is dressed in blue for the rainy season, gold for the cool season and diamond studded for the hot season.

In the evening you will transfer to the airport for your flight back to London.

Overnight: In flight (Meals: B)

Day 15: Arrive in London.

Our grading system

Gentle Walking Laos is graded as a Gentle walking holiday, as described below.

Gentle

Trips within this grade typically mix sightseeing with easy-paced half and/or full day walks. On these trips, walks will be on relatively low altitude trails, for a duration of around 4-6 hours. On all of our Gentle graded trips, some ascent and descent should be anticipated, and there may occasionally be a longer walking day. Holidays within this grade generally use hotels and comfortable lodges although a few do have some nights camping.

These holidays are suitable for people who enjoy easy-paced walks in the British countryside or exploring on foot rather than in a vehicle.

What the price includes

Mountain Kingdoms aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

What's included:

- ✓ English-speaking local guides, with assistance from local walking guides
- ✓ All internal flights and domestic airport transfers
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation (4 star) in Bangkok, Luang Prabang and Vientiane on twin share, bed and breakfast basis
- ✓ Best available hotels/lodges in outlying towns on full board basis
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ Single, timed group airport transfer for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle
- ✓ The opportunity to attend one of our pre-trip meets in the Cotswolds

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Visa fees
- ✗ Some lunches and evening meals in Bangkok, Luang Prabang and Vientiane
- ✗ Tips

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.



Furama Silom Hotel or Similar, Bangkok

The modern, 4* Furama Silom Hotel is centrally located in Bangkok and offers an excellent range of facilities. The rooftop pool and Sky Garden Restaurant with their fabulous views across Bangkok's skyline are its most alluring attractions but it also has an all day restaurant plus a gym and sauna. Rooms are large and light with floor-to-ceiling windows, contemporary furnishings and Wi-Fi.



Villa Maydou or Similar, Luang Prabang

Villa Maydou is an attractive boutique hotel situated near the historic centre of Luang Prabang and has a distinctly French ambience. The hotel began as two traditional heritage houses and, as further buildings were added, they were also in the same traditional Lao style. The hotel is set amidst a large, tropical garden with a swimming pool. Rooms are well appointed and comfortable and the staff are very friendly and helpful.



Nong Khiaw Riverside or Sunset Bungalow or Similar, Nong Khiaw

We use the Nong Khiaw Riverside or Sunset Bungalows for the overnight stay before the drive to Luang Nam Tha. These are simple but very pleasant lodges with views over the river.



Boat Landing Guest House (Eco Lodge) or Similar, Luang Nam Tha

We use the Boat Landing Guest House, a place of real character, built from local materials, and run on eco-tourism principles. Situated next to a river there is always interesting life to watch and as it has its own bird sanctuary there should be some good birds to spot. Accommodation is in individual bungalows along the banks of the river, rooms are pleasant with comfortable beds and good bathrooms and there is an open dining area serving good Lao food. If this guest house is not available there are a couple of other pleasant lodges in town where you may stay.



Phou lu Lodge or Similar, Muang Sing

We use the Phou lu Lodge. This is a very pleasant lodge near the centre of town with airy accommodation in individual bungalows, good bathrooms with hot water and verandas with seating. We feel this is the best accommodation in Muang Sing.



Ansara Hotel or Similar, Vientiane

Ansara Hotel is Vientiane's boutique destination that will delight the visitor at first sight. A unique visual treat in the heart of the capital, with just 24 rooms and 4 suites, the hotel combines quiet sophistication with genuine functionality. Serene and restful yet located right in the centre of the capital, Ansara Hotel is just a short stroll away from the legendary Mekong River and most major tourist attractions.

Meal arrangements

12 x breakfasts, 9 x lunches and 5 x dinners are included.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

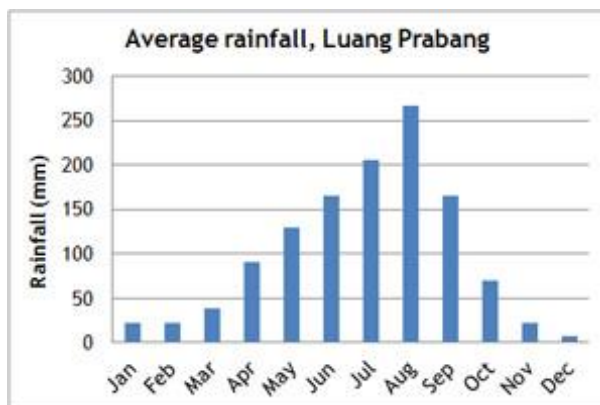
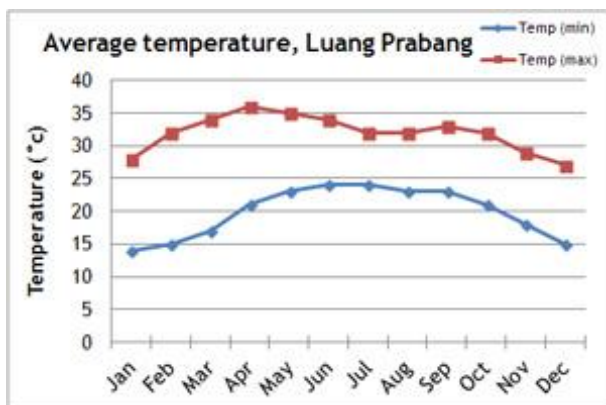
Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at www.mountainkingdoms.com.



Angkor Wat

We offer a four-day extension to explore the impressive ancient temple complex at Siem Reap in Cambodia - now a World Heritage Site. Along with time at Angkor Wat, you will also visit the atmospheric ruins at Ta Prohm.

Accommodation is in a boutique hotel and all flights, sightseeing, private transport and guides are included.

Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- Our unique itinerary gets off-the-beaten-track and focuses on the towns, villages and hill tribes of Northern Laos.
- This well-balanced and well-paced itinerary includes village walks, sightseeing on foot, boat trips and free time.
- We use good quality hotels and comfortable lodges of character throughout.
- In depth tours of Luang Prabang and Vientiane are included together with a cruise along the Mekong River.
- The holiday ends on a high with a sightseeing tour of Bangkok from a centrally located 4 star hotel.
- We use the best local guides who have excellent local knowledge and experience.
- We have a wealth of travel experience at Mountain Kingdoms with a team of friendly and knowledgeable travel experts. If you have any questions about any aspect of this holiday please don't hesitate to give us a call on 01453 844400 or email info@mountainkingdoms.com.
- Our maximum group size is 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group travel experience and helps reduce the negative aspects often associated with larger groups.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights team, for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

What our clients say



We had an excellent holiday, superb local cuisine; we loved the picnics on the treks. Mr Lay was a superb guide!

-Mr M, Kent

A very enjoyable trip, the food was very tasty, the guide was very helpful, and spoke good English which made our encounter all the better.

-Ms R, Ireland



Overall the trip was excellent and lived up to our expectations. The boat trips were a highlight. Stopping off in the local villages, mixing with the local people and children was also very good.

-Mr C, Portsmouth

A very enjoyable tour of Lao PDR with the same excellent level of organisation and customer service we experienced on our first Mountain Kingdoms holiday.

-Mr M S, Somerset

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit www.tourismdeclares.com

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

Will do:

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

Will do:

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

