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## **Journey to the Heart of Laos Suggested Itinerary For Private Travel**

Intended as a starting point to begin the process of building your customized travel experience, this itinerary can be modified to suit your preferences.

### **Day 1 Arrival in Chang Rai**

Met at airport and transfer to Hotel Imperial Golden Triangle Resort.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we visit Wat Rong Khun also known as the "White Temple." Whereas most temples have a history going back many centuries, this magnificent place of worship was built only recently. It is the realization of a dream for Thailand's noted artist Mr. Chalermchai Kositpipat who designed and is supervising the construction of this beautiful white temple and its many statues of figures based on religious beliefs.

We continue to Wat Phra Keo which is the best known of the northern temples. It once housed the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's most important Buddha statue, discovered in 1444. The statue has been moved by various state rulers to be placed in their capitals including Lampang, Chiang Rai and Vientiane before finally being enshrined in Bangkok's Wat Phra Keo. There is now a green jade replica of the image on display here. The temple also houses a 700 year-old bronze statue of Phra Chao Lan Thong housed in the Chiang Saen style ubosot.

### **Day 2 Boat ride to Pakbeng /LuangSay Lodge (B,L,D)**

Early morning (730 am) transfer to Chiang Khong and take a boat across the Mekong River to Huay Xai (1.5 hr). Board the Northern Jewels Cruise (Luangsay Boat) from Huay Xai to Pakbeng. The Pak Ou boat leaves the pier at 9 am for a leisurely cruise down the Mekong. Delicious buffet lunch served on board. Several stops along the way at Lao, Hmong, Yao and K'Hmu villages offer the opportunity to sample rural life and marvel at just how little life has changed here over the centuries.

The boat will arrive at LuangSay Lodge before sunset. Dinner is served at terrace overlooking the Mekong River. Pakbeng is home to Hmong and Thai peoples and is perched over the Mekong. Evening and morning views from our simple lodge are sublime.

### **Day 3 Pakbeng to the Kamu Lodge (Luang Prabang Province) (B, L on board boat, D at hotel)**

Breakfast served on the terrace. After breakfast, visit the morning market of Pakbeng where the nearby villagers and hill tribes buy and exchange their goods.

Re-board our boat this morning for a 4-5 hour trip along the Mekong, through some of the prettiest scenery in Laos. We enjoy a buffet lunch on board with a brief stop at Ban Bao to observe the distilling of traditional rice alcohol, and the "jar-maker" village Ban Xang Hai. Arrive approx 3 pm at Kamu Lodge, an eco-adventure resort designed to give you an insight into one of Laos's ethnic minorities - the Kamu. In an isolated setting near the Mekong, take part in some 'typical' Kamu activities: rice planting and harvesting, gold panning or fishing. You may also like to walk to nearby waterfalls or a local minority village. Tonight you will stay in a private, tent-style lodging. Each tent is clean and comfortable and has a private bathroom with a toilet and solar-powered, hot water shower. Dinner at the lodge.

### **Day 4 Kamu Lodge to Luang Prabang (B, L at local restaurant, D at hotel)**

Morning visit the Kamu village, or simply relax in this peaceful setting. Late morning board Northern Jewels Cruise for the short journey along the Mekong River to Luang Prabang. On the approach to the capital of the north, visit the Pak Ou Caves: Tham Tinh and Tham Phum, underground sanctuaries that house thousands of old styles and sizes of Buddha images. Here, in a tradition that has lasted for centuries, local people add annually to a repository of Buddha effigies.

We arrive in Luang Prabang in time for lunch at local restaurant. Luang Prabang, the ancient capital city of the Lan Xang (million elephants) Kingdom until the mid-sixteenth century. It is famous for its historic temples and beautiful setting and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. Surrounded by mountainous forest and situated at the confluence of the Khan and Mekong Rivers, Luang Prabang has a tranquil, old-world charm. In colonial times it served as a provincial headquarters of the north. The legacy of the European presence here is well preserved. French architecture and careful street planning blends delightfully with more than thirty gilded Buddhist temples to create a town rich in atmosphere and history.

Afternoon we begin with a sample of Luang Prabang's exquisite temples: WAT XIENG THONG: built in 1560 and situated on the banks of the Mekong River, is the most beautiful monastery in Luang Prabang and shows the typical Lao art style with old religious artifacts and some ancient masterpieces of Lao art.

Wat Wisunalat (Vat Visoun): built in 1513 during the reign of Chao Wisunalat, is the oldest operating temple in Luang Prabang with a collection of gilded wooden Buddhas from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Wat Mai: Constructed in 1821 during the reign of King Manthatourath, was once the residence of Phra Sangkharaj (the Patriarch of the Buddhist clergy). This temple was spared by the Chinese Black Haws in the late nineteenth century, supposedly because of its beauty and stunning design.

Overnight at Les 3 Nagas, a UNESCO World Heritage historic property. The building has been restored with great respect to the original Lao character: wooden floors, traditional torchis walls and clay tile roof combine to give an authentic and charming look to the rooms. The rooms, studio-like and of an average area of 50 sq m (450 sq ft) all include a stylish bathroom, sofa and a private veranda or terrace. The decoration is inspired by Lao traditions, using exotic woods, silk and traditional weavings. Each is equipped with all the modern facilities necessary for your comfort: soundproof environment, room service, mini-bar, air conditioning and ceiling fans, phone, work area with desk, mosquito nets, king size

beds and wireless broadband internet access.

#### Day 5 Luang Prabang-Kuang Si Falls -Luang Prabang (B, D)

Rise early this morning and see robed Buddhist monks collecting alms, following a centuries-old ritual. After breakfast, travel by boat to visit minority village of Ban Muang Khai, a Hmong hill tribe village, one of the most significant ethnic minorities in Indochina. Like most minority groups in Laos, the Hmong originally migrated from China. Continue by car to Kuang Si Waterfall, located in a perfect natural setting near Luang Prabang, this multi-tiered waterfall tumbles over limestone formations into a series of turquoise pools. Enjoy swimming in the clear water or just relaxing in the natural environment. Continue to Ban Tha Pene, a nearby Khmu village, before returning to Luang Prabang by vehicle.

Return to Luang Prabang for lunch on your own. Afternoon explore the Pho Si market and more of the town's golden temples at leisure. Evening attend Royal Ballet Theater of Phralak Phralam which gives traditional Lao performance, 6 pm. Dinner at local restaurant after performance.

#### Day 6 Luang Prabang Villages (B)

Early morning give alms to the monks. Late morning start for day excursion to nearby villages to experience peaceful Lao village life. Travel north through scenic countryside to BAN SONG CHA, a village of the ethnic Hmong. Walk through the village to explore. After lunch, continue onwards to BAN NA YANG, a village of the Thai Lue people, known for their cotton weaving.

#### Day 7 Luang Prabang- Phonsavan (Xieng Khuang/The Plain of Jars) (B)

Travel by road to the Plain of Jars. A slow journey along mountain roads with stunning views of the forested mountains, lush valleys and karst formations. Stop at MUANG SUI, visiting WAT BAN PHONG, the second oldest temple in the province; the scenic Nong Tang Lake, which is rimmed with limestone cliffs; and the extensive cave network of Pha Cave. Only discovered recently, this cave contains a 5m high Buddha image dating from 777 AD, surrounded by gold and wooden statues of smaller size. The journey will take approximately seven hours, arriving in Phonsavan town late afternoon.

The Plain of Jars is one of Asia's most unusual sites. The jars you will see are thought to be over 2,000 years old, though their origin remains a mystery. Archaeologists speculate that the jars were funerary urns, but discoveries in recent times have uncovered nearby unusual treasures of statues and precious artifacts.

#### Day 8 The Plain of Jars (B)

We will visit two of the most interesting sites, Site 1 (Thong Hai Hin) and Site 3 (Hai Hin Lat Kai). Site 3 is possibly the most beautiful jars site and is set atop a small rise surrounded by pretty but bomb-scarred rice paddies. Also this morning we will make the short trip to Mouang Khoun town, once an important trading center in the Plain of Jars area. The ancient capital founded by Chao Noi Muang and was a stronghold for the Xieng Khouang royal family was destroyed during the Indochina War. The town was rebuilt after 1975 with rows of wooden Lao houses and a market area.

#### Day 9 Drive to Vientiane (8 hrs) /Green Park Boutiue Hotel (B, D)

We'll stop for lunch enroute, pay directly. On arrival at the capital transfer to your hotel. Located on the Mekong River and with a population of 600,000, Vientiane is both Laos's capital and its largest city. Despite new developments, Vientiane retains an 'old world' feel quite unlike other Asian cities. Tonight, traditional Lao dinner at Kua Lao Restaurant overlooking the Mekong, with a performance of song and dance. Overnight at Green Park Boutiue Hotel, a Lao style decor combined with the finest contemporary architecture of Laos in a glorious setting.

#### Day 10 Vientiane /Green Park Boutiue Hotel (B)

The capital city and seat of government sits in a bend of the Mekong River amidst fertile alluvial plains. Vientiane (pronounced 'Wieng Chan' by the locals) is a laid-back city with interesting wats and lively markets. Enjoy a short walking tour of some of the key monasteries along Settathilat Road. Tour the highlights of the city, including Pha That Luang, a gleaming, golden stupa which is perhaps the most important national monument in Laos; Ho Pha Keo, the former royal temple, now a museum with beautiful examples of Buddhist sculpture; Wat Si Saket; and Patuxai, a monumental arch inspired by the Arc de Triomphe, but executed with Lao motifs.

Morning visit: National Museum, housed in an old French colonial building.

The exquisite Wat Si Saket, Vientiane's oldest original temple (constructed in 1818 by King Anouvong in the early Bangkok style) and the only one to survive the Thai invasion of 1828 by the Siamese. Small niches carved in its interior walls contain more than 2,000 silver and ceramic Buddha images.

Ho Pha Keo, the former royal temple of the Lao Monarchy, built in 1565 by King Setthathirat and now converted into a museum containing some of the best examples of Buddhist sculptures found in Laos.

Pha That Luang, (Great Sacred Reliquary or Great Stupa): built between the 11th and 13th centuries AD, it is the most important national monument in Laos and a symbol of the Buddhist religion as well as the monarchy.

The Grand Patuxai Monument, reminiscent of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. This huge arch at the end of Thanon Lan Xang has a stairway that leads to the top levels of the monument, providing a good view of the city. It was built following World War II but before the takeover of the communists to commemorate the fallen Lao soldiers of various wars.

Lunch on your own. There are many recommended restaurants nearby.

Afternoon excursion to WAT XIENG KHUAN (BUDDHA PARK): a collection of Buddhist and Hindu sculptures along the Mekong River, 24 kilometers south of the center of Vientiane.

For those interested: visit Talaat Sao, the Morning Market - actually open all day selling a wide range of fabrics, jewelry and electronic goods.

#### Day 11 Drive to Savannakhet (6 hours) /Daosavanh Resort & Spa (B, D)

Enroute visit Wat Phabat: 70 km east of Vientiane, best known for its large Phabat (Buddha footprint) shrine and monastery, an important pilgrimage place for lowland Lao from Bolikhamsai and Vientiane. Wat Phonsan: located on the Mekong Riverside and 2 km away from Wat Phabat. The Wats are linked by their legend. This is the reason why people called these 2 Wats by one name, Wat Phabatphonsan.

The provincial capital city of Savannakhet is situated just across the Mekong River from Mukdahan, Thailand. Savannakhet has become a major point of trade and a lumber center and has a number of French colonial and Franco-Chinese buildings mainly in the small business district. Sightseeing points of interest below as time permits.

#### Day 12 Drive to Tad Lo (4-5 hrs) / Tad Lo Resort (B, L, D)

Stop for lunch in local restaurant. Afternoon explore the surrounding area. Tad Lo falls offer a good opportunity for a swim. Overnight at the Tad Lo Resort/rustic spacious bungalows, atmospheric rooms with thatch walls, located adjacent to the falls.

#### Day 13 Drive to Pakse (2-3 hrs) /Champa Palace Hotel (B, D)

Journey across the Bolaven Plateau, today an important coffee growing area of both Arabica and Robusta coffee beans. This area is largely inhabited by the Laven tribe. Enroute, visit Katu & Alak Villages, distinctive for the face tattoos of their women, a custom that is slowly dying out. We'll stop at markets, wild coffee and cardamom plantations, and fruit groves and local restaurant for lunch (pay on your own) along the way. We will visit Tad Yuang and Tad Fane Waterfalls, two of the highest and most dramatic falls in the province, and stop for refreshments at Tad Fane Resort. Upon arrival and check-in, a brief tour of Wat Luang and the old market.

Overnight at Champa Palace Hotel, 3 stars, a low rise, modern building in a quiet neighborhood next to the Champasak Museum and evening markets. The hotel is considered one of the most luxurious hotels in town.

#### Day 14 Drive to Don Khong Island (approx 3 hours) Vist Wat Phou / Villa Muong Khong (B,D)

Journey south in Champasak Province along the east bank of the Mekong River. Champasak, a small riverside village of inauspicious houses and old French mansions, was once the center of a far-reaching empire. Until the 1860s, Champasak was the major town of southern Laos, when it was supplanted by French-built Pakse as the area's commercial hub. The nearby Wat Phou World Heritage temple site is all that remains of one of Southeast Asia's most mysterious and least understood kingdoms.

After lunch at local restaurant (pay on your own) and a rest, either cycle (optional) the gentle ten kilometers to Wat Phou, or travel by vehicle. The Hindu-influenced Wat Phou ruins are the finest example of Khmer temple ruins outside Cambodia, and have changed little since French explorers first visited them in the late 1800s. The Khmer temple site is spread over the lower slopes of Phu Pasak and its name means 'Mountain Temple'. The surviving structures date from as early as the Chenla Kingdom (6th to 8th centuries).

Haw Nang Stupa: south of Wat Phu, a pile of sandstone and laterite rubble that may have served as a hospital for Angkor pilgrims. Hawng Thaan Tao: south of Wat Phu, another rubble pile referred to as the 'Lord Turtle Room' and said to have been a Vishnu shrine built under King Jayavarman VII in the 13th century. Ban That Village: near the village are three Khmer stupas reminiscent of similar tripartite monuments in Thailand's towns of Lopburi and Sukhothai.

Continue to Don Khong across the Mekong by road and ferry. Overnight at Villa Muong Khong, a bungalow resort type facility with modern design and up-to-date facilities, centrally located in a tranquil rural area.

#### Day 15 Full day Cruising the Four Thousand Islands: Don Kong-Don Khone /Villa Muong Khong (B)

After breakfast, board a local boat and travel down to the last island, Khone. We visit the main village on Khone and see the remains of the sole railway built by the French during their time as colonial occupiers of Laos as well as other signs of their colonial past (the railway stopped operating 1945). Lunch at a local restaurant, pay on your own.

Next we visit Don Det Island & Don Khong Island. Near the Cambodian border south of Don Khong Island, the islands are connected by a former railway bridge. The larger island Don Det is famous throughout Laos for the cultivation of coconut, bamboo and kapok. We visit Ban Khon Village, main village on Don Khon Island with several old French villas. Also see Taat Somphamit (Li Phi Falls), a raging set of rapids at the western end of Don Khone Island. Return to Don Khong for overnight.

#### Day 16 Return drive to Pakse, 3 hrs. (B, D)

South of Don Khong Island the Mekong River features a 13km stretch of powerful rapids with several sets of cascades. From Don Khong, we cross the Mekong by ferry and continue by vehicle to the spectacular Khon Phapheng Falls, the largest in Southeast Asia. It flows close to the eastern shore of the Mekong River near the village of Ban Thakho. Here, the entire Mekong with all its force cascades down curving stone outcroppings and tints the massive stones with rainbows. The falls had a profound effect on the planned use of the Mekong River as a French trade conduit connecting Vietnam with China, and resulted in the construction of the bypass railway joining Khone and Det islands. Continue north by vehicle to Pakse.

Elephant ride from Ban Khiat Ngong village (known for its unique textiles) to Phou Asa village (approximately 1.5 hours). Overnight in Pakse.

#### Day 17 Preah Vihear - Bangkok (B)

Drive to Chong Mek (Lao-Thai Border), 1-2 hrs. Meet our Thai guide and drive to Ubon Ratchathani. Ubon is a population hub in the Isan area of Thailand, an area largely populated by people of Lao descent. This eastern pocket of Thailand is also within striking distance of Cambodia and is home to some of the great Angkorian-era Khmer temples. **PENDING CURRENT REGULATIONS:** We will visit one of the most famous of these temples, magnificent Preah Vihear, two hours from Ubon. It sits right on the Thai - Cambodian border, on a sheer edge of the Dangrek escarpment. From the top of this ninth-century temple you will be able to gaze down to the plains of Cambodia and contemplate the link between this site and Wat Phou in Champasak. Following the descent, we visit the Maw I Daeng cliff carvings from where you will have a great view of Preah Vihear and rugged Cambodia. Note: this site is currently closed to visitors. If it remains closed by our tour dates, we will instead visit Pha Taem, an important historical park with pre-historic cave paintings. A presentation by Thailand's Fine Arts Department is included <http://www.finearts.go.th/en/index.php>

Drive to Ubon Ratchathani Airport for your departure flight to Bangkok, approx 8:20 pm, arr 9:30pm. Accommodation at Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel (deluxe room).

#### Day 18 Fly home or onward destination.

**Our Thai & Laotian Guides:** We will be accompanied by a professional Thai guide from Chiang Rai to Luang Prabang and again from Chong Meik (Laos/Thai border) to Ratchathani airport. Our Laotian guide accompanies us from Luang Prabang to Chong Meik.

**Price is based on number of people, number of days and hotel selections. Upon Request.**

**Includes:**

Accommodation at mentioned hotels or similar Professional accompanying escort Baggage handling at hotels and boat transfers Meals and cultural performances as mentioned in itinerary Boat ticket(s) according to itinerary

Ground transportation in private A/C vehicle (complimentary cold towels and drinking water). Service charge and current government tax

**Does Not Include:** international flight, insurance, international and domestic airport tax (international departure airport tax for Thailand current THB 700 p.p.), expenditures of a personal nature i.e. laundry, telephone bills, drinks, souvenirs

**Some Suggested Hotels (many other choices available)**

**Chiang Rai, Imperial Golden Triangle Resort, 4\* deluxe room**

The 73-room resort is situated above the Mekong and Ruak Rivers, providing a spectacular view of the borders of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. Room amenities include: ac, hair dryers, bathrobes, wireless internet access, bathtub and shower, balcony/terrace, satellite cable television. Hotel facilities include: pool, massage, two restaurants, coffee house and pub.

**Pakbeng, Luang Say Lodge 3-4\***

A kilometer upstream, on the left bank of the river, is Luang Say Lodge with the backdrop of forested mountains. The 16 large pavilions of solid wood all have balconies looking out onto the Mekong River and the mountains beyond. The traditional Laotian architecture provides accommodation of comfort and character, each pavilion equipped with a large private bathroom with hot shower and toilet. A central riverbank restaurant is reached by wooden walkways from the pavilions. Here you will enjoy fine food and choice of drinks from the well stocked bar, and the most attentive service.

**Kamu Lodge 3\***

Private, tent-style lodging. Each tent has a private bathroom with a toilet and solar-powered hot water shower.

**Luang Prabang, Boutique Hotel Les 3 Nagas 4\* Superior or deluxe room** (based on request and availability, Garden Building In the heart of Luang Prabang's historical peninsula, Les 3 Nagas welcomes you in their historical buildings protected by UNESCO World Heritage Organization. The building has been restored with great respect to the original Lao character: exotic wooden floors, silk and traditional weavings and clay tile roof all combine to give an authentic and charming look to the rooms. The rooms, studio-like and of an average area of 50 sq m (450 sq ft) all include a stylish bathroom, sofa and a private veranda or terrace. Each is equipped with all the modern facilities: soundproof environment, room service, mini-bar, air conditioning and ceiling fans, phone, working area with desk, mosquito nets, king size beds, sofa and wireless broadband internet access. Twin beds are only available in superior rooms. Superior rooms are all on ground floor and deluxe rooms are on upper level.  
<http://www.3nagas.com/>

**Phonsavanh, Vansana Plain of Jars Hotel 3\* executive suite**

The Vansana Hotel is a cozy first class hotel located on a hill in the heart of the city overlooking Phonsavanh town and conveniently located near the town center. Each of the 36 rooms are fairly spacious and feature a private balcony, the rooms are equipped with cable TV, telephone, air conditioning, minibar, hairdryer and tea and coffee making facilities. Hotel facilities include a business center, laundry service, restaurant and a small gift shop.

**Vientiane, Green Park Boutique Hotel 4-5\* deluxe room** <http://www.greenparkvientiane.com/>

Lao Green Park Boutique Hotel and Resort, finest contemporary architecture of Laos, offers a classic touch back in time to an era of elegant tradition where luxury abounds in the form of original antique furniture, rich art collections and exclusive nationally renowned beauty. Right next to the biggest park in the capital of Laos, Nong Chank Park and within walking distance to major tourist sites. In room amenities include: either king size bed or twin beds , private balcony or terrace with sitting area, individual controlled air conditioning, cable TV (Satellite TV), IDD telephone line, free wireless and cable internet access, hot shower in bath tub, hair dryer, electronic safe deposit box, coffee & tea making facilities, mini bar and refrigerator, writing desk.

**Savannakhet, Daosavanh Resort & Spa**

A boutique hotel located in town for easy walking to restaurants and markets.

**Tad Lo, Tadlo Lodge 3\* Bungalow**

The reception area for the Tad Lo Lodge is located about a kilometer from town along the road to Tad Suong, but the lodges themselves are actually on the other side of the river. We walk across the river via a bridge (300 meters) to get to the lodge. There are also lodges on the reception side of the river, though the ones across the bridge are nicer and quieter side. You will, however, hear the sound of the waterfall. If you do not want to walk, the hotel can transfer you by jeep. The lodge offers atmospheric rooms with thatch walls in spacious wooden lodges. The price reflects the location, right along the water, rather than the quality of rooms. Room amenities include: mosquito net, hammock, laundry facilities; hotel facilities include: bicycle rental, internet service, phone/fax.

**Pakse, Champa Palace Hotel 3\* superior room**

Champasak Palace Hotel is elegantly located in the heart of Pakse District, the capital city of Champasak Province. It was originally constructed to be a palace of Jao Boon Oum, the last king of life (Jao Ma Ha Chee Vit) in southern Laos. With its colonial architecture, the Champasak Palace Hotel has well-designed rooms and offers good levels of service.

**Khong Island, Villa Muong Khong 2-3\* superior room**

The Villa Muong Khong, Khong Island is situated in a peaceful rural area, near to Ban Xieng Wang and Tham Phu Khiaw. This is a bungalow resort style, with a low-rise main building. It has limited facilities but does provide a local style restaurant and good, relaxing views of the Mekong River. Room amenities include: individually controlled air condition, river view private balcony, internet access and telephone, hair dryers, tea and coffee making facilities, hot water showers,, mini-bar, safe deposit box.

**Bangkok, Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel (deluxe room)**