Laos Heritage & Mekong Cruise: Vientiane to Houai Xai – 7 Days

7D / 6N	Easy	Private	USD 779 / pax
Duration	Difficulty	Tour Type	Starting From

Explore Laos on a 7-day adventure from the capital, Vientiane, to the northern border town of Houai Xai. Discover ancient sites, vibrant markets, and serene temples before embarking on a two-day Mekong River cruise.

DESTINATIONS & ROUTE

Vientiane → Luang Prabang

TOUR OVERVIEW

This comprehensive tour offers an in-depth exploration of Laos's rich cultural heritage and stunning natural landscapes. Beginning in Vientiane, the charming capital, you will delve into its unique blend of French colonial architecture and traditional Lao temples. The journey continues to Phonsavan, home to the enigmatic Plain of Jars, an archaeological marvel shrouded in mystery. A scenic drive through mountainous terrain leads to Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its spiritual ambiance and historical treasures.

In Luang Prabang, experience the daily alms giving ceremony, explore ancient royal palaces, and visit revered temples like Wat Xiengthong. Venture out to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfall for a refreshing swim and discover local craft villages. The tour culminates with a memorable two-day slow boat cruise along the majestic Mekong River, offering glimpses into riverside life and stopping at the sacred Pak Ou Caves before reaching Houai Xai.

This itinerary is crafted for travelers seeking a balance of cultural immersion, historical insight, and scenic beauty. It provides opportunities to interact with diverse ethnic communities, witness traditional crafts, and appreciate the serene pace of life in Laos.

Who This Tour Suits

This tour is ideal for all travelers interested in cultural exploration, historical sites, and natural beauty. It includes a mix of city tours, archaeological visits, scenic drives, and a relaxing river cruise, catering to a wide range of interests and activity levels.

Practical Information

The tour involves domestic flights and several long drives, particularly between Phonsavan and Luang Prabang. Accommodation is provided in hotels and a riverside lodge. Daily meals are included as specified in the itinerary, ensuring a comfortable and well-supported travel experience through Laos.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

* Explore the intriguing Plain of Jars, an ancient archaeological site in Phonsavan.
* Witness the daily alms giving ceremony to Buddhist monks in Luang Prabang.
* Cruise the Mekong River for two days, observing rural life and scenic landscapes.
* Discover the sacred Pak Ou Caves, filled with thousands of Buddha images.
* Swim in the turquoise pools of the multi-tiered Kuang Si Waterfall.
* Wander through the historic Old Quarter of Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

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* Visit Vientiane's iconic landmarks, including That Luang Stupa and Patuxay Monument.
* Experience local markets and interact with ethnic hill tribe communities.
* Sample traditional Lao rice wine at a local village near Luang Prabang.
* Ascend Mount Phousi for panoramic views of Luang Prabang and the Mekong.

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 — Vientiane Arrival & City Orientation

Meals: D | Stay: Vientiane hotel | Transport: Private transfer

Upon your arrival in Vientiane, a representative will greet you and provide a transfer to your luxurious city-center hotel for check-in. After settling in and taking some time to rest, you will embark on a brief introductory tour of the capital. Despite its ongoing development, Vientiane maintains a relaxed and tranquil atmosphere.

During the orientation, you will have the opportunity to observe the city's diverse architectural styles, reflecting its history and cultural influences. As evening approaches, find a scenic spot to witness the stunning sunset over the Mekong River, a truly picturesque experience. The day concludes with a welcome dinner at a deluxe restaurant, offering a taste of local cuisine in a refined setting.

Activities:
Airport greeting and hotel transfer
Hotel check-in and rest
Short city orientation tour
Observe Vientiane's architecture
Watch sunset over the Mekong River
Welcome dinner at a deluxe restaurant

Day 2 — Vientiane Market & Plain of Jars Flight

Meals: B,L,D | Stay: Phonsavanh hotel | Transport: Private vehicle, domestic flight

Your day begins with breakfast at the hotel before heading to Talat Sao, also known as the Morning Market, Vientiane's primary marketplace. Here, you can explore a wide array of Lao handicrafts and souvenirs, including intricately hand-woven textiles, fine silks, silver and gold jewelry, detailed carvings, and rattan products, perfect for finding unique mementos.

Following your market visit, a city tour will take you to significant landmarks. You'll see the Patuxay Monument, often referred to as the Victory Gate, an impressive structure reminiscent of the Arc de Triomphe. Next, you'll visit the revered That Luang Stupa, a magnificent golden stupa that is a national symbol of Laos. Afterwards, prepare for your short domestic flight to Phonsavan, where you will be transferred to your hotel upon arrival.

In the afternoon, the journey continues to the remarkable Plain of Jars. You will explore three primary archaeological sites, where hundreds of massive stone jars are mysteriously scattered across an expansive grassy plateau. The origins and purpose of these ancient jars remain a subject of ongoing debate among historians and archaeologists. The tour also includes a visit to Moung Khoun, the former capital of Xieng Khouang Province, a town that suffered extensive destruction from

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bombing during the Vietnam War, offering a poignant historical perspective.

Activities: Breakfast at hotel
Visit Talat Sao (Morning Market)
City tour of Vientiane
See Patuxay Monument (Victory Gate)
Explore That Luang Stupa
Transfer to airport for flight to Phonsavan
Hotel check-in in Phonsavan
Explore three main archaeological sites of the Plain of Jars
Visit Moung Khoun (old capital of Xieng Khouang Provence)

Day 3 Phonsavan Market, Villages & Luang Prabang Drive

Meals: B,L | Stay: Luang Prabang hotel | Transport: Private vehicle

Start your day with an early morning visit to the local market in Phonsavan. This bustling market is where ethnic hill tribe communities, dressed in their traditional attire, gather from surrounding areas to sell a variety of unusual animals and local herbs sourced from the forest, offering a vibrant cultural experience and unique photo opportunities.
After breakfast, the journey continues with a visit to a hill tribe village, providing insight into their distinct culture and colorful history. You will also see a village that was profoundly affected by the bombing campaigns during the Vietnam War, highlighting the region's challenging past. Following these visits, you will begin a scenic six to seven-hour drive towards Luang Prabang, traversing winding mountain roads.
En route, a stop is made at Tham Pha Cave, a historical site where hundreds of small Buddha statues were hidden centuries ago to protect them from Chinese Haw invasions. The drive offers breathtaking views as you climb higher into the mountains, showcasing spectacular vistas of the forests and peaks. There will be several opportunities to pause and photograph various Hmong and other ethnic villages along the way. A break will be taken at Sala Phoukhoun, a significant junction, before continuing the picturesque journey through the mountains to Luang Prabang.

Activities: Early morning walk through Phonsavan morning market
Breakfast
Visit a hill tribe village
Visit a village devastated by war bombing
Begin scenic drive to Luang Prabang
Stop at Tham Pha Cave
Observe Hmong and other ethnic villages
Enjoy mountain views and photo opportunities
Break at Sala Phoukhoun
Continue drive to Luang Prabang

Day 4 Luang Prabang Cultural Exploration & Mount Phousi Sunset

Meals: B,L | Stay: Luang Prabang hotel | Transport: Private vehicle, walking

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After breakfast, embark on a comprehensive tour of Luang Prabang, starting with the National Museum, housed in the former royal palace. Here, you will gain a deeper understanding of Lao history, from ancient leaders to the recent revolutionary era, through its extensive exhibits and artifacts. Next, explore the city's oldest temple, Wat Visoun, known for its unique architecture, followed by a visit to the magnificent Wat Xiengthong Temple, a prime example of traditional Luang Prabang temple design.
Following lunch, you will drive to the village of Ban Xanghai, renowned for its production of traditional Lao rice whiskey. Witness the distillation process firsthand and even have the chance to sample the local spirit. The afternoon continues with a climb up the numerous steps to the summit of Mount Phousi, where a sacred stupa awaits. From this vantage point, enjoy a breathtaking panoramic view of the city and its surrounding landscapes, especially beautiful as the sun begins to set.
As evening descends, immerse yourself in the vibrant atmosphere of the Night Market Street. This bustling market is an excellent place to find local handicrafts, textiles, and souvenirs, offering a perfect opportunity to browse for unique bargains and experience the local culture after dark.

Activities: Breakfast
Tour Luang Prabang city
Visit the National Museum (former royal palace)
Explore Wat Visoun (city's oldest temple)
Visit Wat Xiengthong Temple
Lunch
Drive to Ban Xanghai village
Observe and sample traditional Lao rice wine
Climb Mount Phousi and see the stupa
Enjoy panoramic city views
Explore Night Market Street

Day 5 Monks, Crafts & Kuang Si Waterfall

Meals: B,L | Stay: Luang Prabang hotel | Transport: Private vehicle

For an early start, you have the option to witness the daily morning procession of monks along Sisavangvong Road, where local residents line the streets to offer food, a deeply spiritual and moving cultural experience. After breakfast, a short drive takes you to the weaving village of Ban Xang Khong, where you can observe skilled artisans creating intricate patterns on traditional looms, showcasing their craftsmanship.
The tour continues to Ban Xiang Lek Village, where you will learn about the traditional process of making 'sa' paper. Brief stops will also be made at two more ethnic minority villages: Ban Na Oune, a Hmong village, and Ban Tha Pane, a Khmu village, offering insights into their distinct ways of life and cultures. From there, the journey proceeds to the stunning Kuang Si Waterfall, nestled within the lush green forest of a National Biodiversity Conservation Area.
At Kuang Si Waterfall, you can take a refreshing swim in its cool, clear turquoise pools or simply enjoy a leisurely walk through the surrounding forest scenery. In the late afternoon, you will return to Luang Prabang and visit Wat Siphouthabath, a temple where ancient footprints of Buddha are believed to be preserved, adding a spiritual conclusion to your day.

Activities: Optional early morning monk alms giving procession
Breakfast
Drive to Ban Xang Khong weaving village

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Visit Ban Xiang Lek Village for 'sa' paper making
Make brief stops at Ban Na Oune (Hmong village) and Ban Tha Pane (Khmu village)
Continue to Kuangsi Waterfall
Swim in waterfall pools and enjoy forest scenery
Return to Luang Prabang
Visit Wat Siphouthabath (Buddha footprints)

Day 6 Mekong River Cruise to Pakbeng

Meals: B,L,D | Stay: Pakbeng Lodge | Transport: Boat cruise

After breakfast at your hotel, you will board a boat at Luang Prabang pier to begin a scenic cruise up the majestic Mekong River towards Pakbeng. This upstream journey offers continuous beautiful views of the Lao countryside, revealing serene landscapes and traditional riverside communities.

Along the way, the boat will make a stop at Pak-Ou village, located at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Ou Rivers. Here, you will visit the mysterious Pak Ou Cave, a sacred site filled with thousands of Buddha statues of various sizes and styles, left by pilgrims over centuries. After exploring the caves, you will return to the boat to enjoy a buffet lunch while continuing to observe the tranquil rural life unfolding along the riverbanks.

The cruise also includes additional stops at various riverside ethnic villages, providing opportunities to witness local customs and daily routines. Arrival in Pakbeng is scheduled before sunset, allowing you to check into the comfortable Luang Say Lodge. The day concludes with a delightful dinner served on the lodge's terrace, offering picturesque views overlooking the Mekong River.

Activities:
Breakfast
Board boat at Luang Prabang pier
Cruise up the Mekong River
Stop at Pak-Ou village
Visit Pak Ou Cave (thousand Buddha statues)
Enjoy buffet lunch on board
Visit riverside ethnic villages
Arrive in Pakbeng
Check into Luang Say Lodge
Dinner on the terrace overlooking the Mekong River

Day 7 Pakbeng Market & Final Mekong Cruise to Houai Xai

Meals: B,L | Transport: Boat cruise

Following a delicious breakfast at the resort, take some time to explore Pakbeng with a walk around the local market. This vibrant market serves as a hub where people from surrounding ethnic villages gather to trade their goods, offering a glimpse into local commerce and daily life.

After your market visit, re-board the cruise boat to continue your journey further up the Mekong River. The cruise maintains its leisurely pace, providing more opportunities to enjoy the tranquil riverside scenery. En route, the boat will make additional stops

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at various villages, allowing you to observe how local communities live and sustain themselves along the river.
A buffet lunch will be served on board, allowing you to relax and savor the bucolic views as you continue towards your final destination, Houai Xai. Upon arrival in Houai Xai, you have the option to cross the river to Chiang Khong on the Thai side, or you may choose to stay overnight in Houai Xai, concluding your memorable Lao adventure.

Activities: Breakfast at resort
Walk around Pakbeng and visit local market
Board cruise boat to continue up Mekong River
Stop at riverside villages
Enjoy buffet lunch on board
Relax and enjoy views during cruise
Arrive in Houai Xai
Option to cross to Chiang Khong (Thailand) or stay overnight in Houai Xai

WHAT'S INCLUDED

INCLUDED

- v English speaking guide (Other languages available on request)
- v Private transfer and transport in safe, clean, well maintained vehicles
- v Breakfast is in hotel, and other meals as noted in the itinerary in first-class restaurant
- v All entrance fees & permits during guided tours
- v Accommodation based on Double/Twin sharing room. Tax included.
- v Cruise: Luang Prabang - Pakbeng - Houai Xai
- v Domestic airport tax
- v Arrival and Departure transfers

NOT INCLUDED

- x Airfare and taxes not included in tour
- x Food and drink not noted in the itinerary
- x Visa fees (all visas must be obtained before the tour)
- x Entrance fees and permits not part of itinerary
- x Personal travel insurance (Compulsory for all travellers)
- x Personal expenses (ex. telephone, laundry charges, souvenirs, etc.)
- x Tips and gratuitie

PRICE INCLUDES

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- v All entrance fees & permits during guided tours
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CANCELLATION POLICY

Tour Code: IMP-3ED381FA0556