

Land of a Million Elephants

Thailand, Laos and Cambodia



DAY 1 Arrive Chiang Mai

On arrival we will be met by our representative and transferred to your hotel. Tonight we will join our fellow travellers and prepare for our journey towards the Mekong River.

Accommodation: Dusit Chiang Mai Princess

DAY 2 Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is a welcoming town and the second largest city in Thailand. It has a number of fine restaurants and outdoor eating areas and our hotel is well located at the entrance to the famous Chiang Mai night market. Today we will visit the Elephant Training Camp. This delightful excursion will take us into the hills surrounding Chiang Mai where we can see the elephants working in a natural environment, taking a bath in the nearby river and performing some tricks that they have learnt from their mahouts. There is an option to take a short ride on the elephant. We will continue for lunch then visit Wat Soi Thep, a magni cent pagoda that overlooks the valley of Chiang Mai.

Accommodation: Dusit Chiang Mai Princess

DAY 3 Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai

We head further north towards the border with Laos and our destination of Chiang Rai. Northern Thailand is a mountainous landscape, rice fields on the low lands and contour farming across the hillsides. We continue for Chiang Rai stopping for lunch at a local restaurant. Chiang Rai is deep in the 'Golden Triangle' with Myanmar to the west, China to the north and Laos to the east. It is a key trading town where manufactured goods, agricultural products, cigarettes and clothing pour across the borders to be distributed through Thailand and beyond. After checking into our hotel we will take a wander around the town and find some interesting Chiang Rai food!

Accommodation: The Wiang Inn Hotel

DAY 4 Chiang Rai to Pak Beng by long boat

We leave our hotel by 7am for the 2 hour drive to Chiang Kong, set on the Thai side of the Mekong River. The countryside changes as we head towards river valleys almost in the foothills of the great Himalayan range. The Mekong rises in Tibet and travels for 4,600 kilometres until it divides into nine tributaries in the Vietnamese delta and spills into the South China Sea. Its course takes it through seven south-east Asian countries, the world's eleventh longest river and in terms of water discharge it ranks tenth in the world. We cross to the Lao side and the small town of Ban Houey Say where our local guide will meet us. Here we must clear customs and immigration before boarding our slow boat for our journey south towards Pak Beng. We will pass small villages of bamboo huts, sometimes no more than seven or eight rough looking dwellings, small children playing by the water's edge, fishing, swimming or just sitting. We will stop and visit some local villages and lunch is included today on board.



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Our stop for the evening is the rustic village of Pak Beng, located on a bend of the Mekong in the middle of nowhere. This is almost civilisation, set amongst a green hillside; Pak Beng is the 'commercial centre' of the region, just a handful of wooden huts and modest guest houses. We will disembark and stroll up the hill to our guest house for the night. **Accommodation: Pak Beng Lodge**

DAY 5 Luang Prabang by Long Boat

By 8am, we set off again in our long boat down the Mekong to Luang Prabang. The landscape is shining, rich hillsides of green jungle, interspersed with cleared land for agriculture. It is amazing how the farmers can grow anything here on such steep hillsides; it seems all would just wash away with the first heavy downpour. The banks are speckled with thatched huts – small villages with populations of just 50 or perhaps up to 400, each village varying in its state of civilisation even though only small distances separate them. They like to keep to themselves, almost completely isolated but seemingly prosperous in their subsistence. We will stop at a Hmong village once again to stretch our legs, go for a walk and have a chat with the locals. We will continue down the river to reach the Tam Ting caves, and in particular the Pak Ou cave, said to be the home of the spirit of the Mekong and also home to hundreds of Buddha images. The caves are a spectacular sight; set against the right bank of the river with soaring limestone cliffs to the other side. Here the river is broad; further in the distance great mountain peaks rise, jagged and serene. The last stage of our river journey is in broad open water; here the river has expanded to twice its width. Gone are the swirling whirlpools and the rapids that race backwards. We near our destination, the former capital of Laos, Luang Prabang; our arrival is dramatic as the stupa at the summit of Mt Phousi comes into view, a sentinel standing over the city watching approaches from all directions. On arrival we will be transferred to our hotel. **Accommodation: Villa Maly Hotel**

DAY 6 Luang Prabang

You can hear the drums and gongs of Luang Prabang starting their rhythm around 5am every morning. The city is the spiritual home of Laos, a country predominantly Buddhist, and in this town there are many wats, monasteries and temples with hundreds of monks. Each morning as the sun rises the monks take the first of their two daily meals by calling for alms, their bowls tucked under their arms. They Indian file past the town's inhabitants accepting sticky rice, vegetables, fruit and meat, even the odd pack of cigarettes! We will take a walking tour of the old city and visit some wats and monasteries just to get everyone orientated. By lunchtime we will have seen the best parts of the old city and there is now two free days to explore this beautiful town at your own pace. There is fantastic shopping, endless handicrafts, the local Hmong market and plenty of cafes and restaurants. **Accommodation: Villa Maly Hotel**

DAY 7 Luang Prabang

We have free time once again, however, there will be an optional visit into the gravesite of French explorer Henri Mouhot. Mr Mouhot re-discovered the Angkor temples in 1860 and continued his explorations up the Mekong until he finally succumbed to fever and died an inglorious death by the banks of the Khong River (a tributary to the Mekong). He found his way here suspecting that this river led into Vietnam. His death is commemorated by a small tomb, constructed by the people from his village in France.

Accommodation: Villa Maly Hotel



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DAY 8 Luang Prabang to Xieng Khouang

Our adventure continues as we drive from Luang Prabang over the mountains to the east and our destination of Phonsavan and the Plain of Jars. The journey will take most of the day and the road may be a little bumpy in sections. Today we will see local Lao people going about their business at markets, in the fields and tending their domestic animals around their simple homes. We will stop enroute for lunch at a local restaurant. A visit to the jars is a special travel experience. Little is known of these structures, as archaeologists have only recently been able to start their investigation. In the 1930s a French conservationist did some preliminary work which revealed that the jars were more than likely used for funeral purposes. Their composition remains a mystery with some theories suggesting the jars are made from sand and buffalo skin then red in a kiln. You will be able to come up with your own theories as we visit the Plain of Jars sites 1, 2 and 3. **Accommodation: Auberge Phouphadeng Hotel**

DAY 9 In Xieng Khouang on the Plain of Jars

This morning we will visit the old town of Muong Khong and the Plain of Jars Sites one and two. Mang Khong was the former capital of the area and a stronghold for the North Vietnamese during the war. The town was completely destroyed during the Vietnam War in 1968. Some burnt-out buildings remain along with the remains of various stupas. The town is attractive and quiet, the pace of life slow so we can wander around and visit a local Hmong village to meet the people and see what they are up to.

Accommodation: Auberge Phouphadeng Hotel

DAY 10 Plain of Jars and Vientiane

Depart from our hotel and a lovely drive to Plain of Jars site 3. Our aircraft is scheduled for later in the day (although times change without notice) so we will have a chance to visit the local market on the way where you will see an array of interesting foods and merchandise. The flight takes around one hour over some spectacular mountains until we descend to the plains of Vientiane and back once again to the Mekong River. On arrival we will meet our guide and transfer to our hotel, well located, by the banks of the river. **Accommodation: Beau Rivage Hotel**

DAY 11 Vientiane

This morning we have a sightseeing tour of the Location capital to include Vat Si Saket, Patousay and That Luang Stupa. The afternoon is free to explore in preparation for the next leg of our journey in Cambodia. **Accommodation: Beau Rivage Hotel**

DAY 12 Vientiane and Phnom Penh

Our flight is scheduled to depart at 1030 for Phnom Penh to arrive at 1230, so this morning is free time to head down to the day market and take a stroll through the streets of Vientiane. On arrival in Phnom Penh we will be met and transferred to our hotel. Phnom Penh is the capital city of Cambodia and has a distinctive charm that sets it apart from other south-east Asian cities. Established at the confluence of the Tonle, Basac and Mekong Rivers, Phnom Penh became the capital in the 17th century when three Buddha images were discovered at the foot of a small hill (Phnom). Here you will find the Royal Palace, home to the ubiquitous King Norodom Shianouk, the magnificent National Museum with its priceless collection of Angkor relics, and a reminder of the recent troubled history at the Pol Pot Genocide Museum. After the check in we will take a short walk to orientate ourselves with the inner city.

Accommodation: Amanjaya Pancam Hotel



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DAY 13 Phnom Penh

A full day sightseeing is in order as we visit the Royal Palace, National Museum and the Pol Pot Genocide Museum. There will be time later this afternoon to wander at your own pace before we meet for a drink at the Foreign Correspondents Club then move on for dinner. **Accommodation: Amanjaya Pancam Hotel**

Day 14 Phnom Penh to Siem Reap

An early start today as we head for Siem Reap by road on the northern side of the Tonle Sap and our time with the Angkor kings and temples. This is a most interesting drive (300 kilometres) and along the way you will see typical Khmer lifestyle, local villages and markets. We take a slight detour at the provincial town of Kampong Tom and the pre-Angkor temple complex at Sambor Pre Kuk. These temples date back to the 7th century and the area was once the capital of Cambodia. The architecture is completely different to Siem Reap, the area remote and quiet. We push on for Siem Reap after lunch crossing a bridge built by the Angkorian kings and dating back to the 12th century. We arrive at our hotel later this evening. We are able to see the temples of Angkor close up, a remarkable experience, the temples and monuments existing for over 1000 years and surely built by an extraordinary civilisation that dominated the south-east Asia region for 600 years. **Accommodation: Victoria Angkor Hotel**

Day 15 Siem Reap

There are few places in the world where the forces of culture, intelligence and vision come together so splendidly; the region of Angkor on the north-western edge of the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia is one of those special places. The two distinct seasons mean that for five months of the year torrential rains soak the sandstone temples promoting jungle growth all around the temple sites. Indeed when the French archaeologist, Mr Henri Mouhot, re-discovered the Angkor area in 1860 he must have been amazed to see massive sculptures, enormous city walls covered with jungle vines and enormous trees with their roots sometimes spilling over the temple rooves into the hallways and entrances like a giant octopus. Since the French discovery, many of the sites have been cleared and many are under restoration work with assistance from Japanese and French organisations. This afternoon we will visit the south gate of Angkor Thom, Bayon, Royal Enclosure, Phimeanakas, Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King. This evening we can see the sunset over Angkor Wat.

Accommodation: Victoria Angkor Hotel

DAY 16 Siem Reap

More touring today, as we visit the beautiful Banteay Srey Temple, just a 45 minute drive from our hotel. We will also visit Kraven, Ta Prohm Pre Kahn and eastern Pre Rup temples until sunset. Tonight is our farewell dinner at a local Siem Reap Restaurant.

Accommodation: Victoria Angkor Hotel

DAY 17 Departure

Farewell to Siem Reap and the Land of a Million Elephants. Continue your travels or return home.



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