

Lao Lao Cycle Lao -Bangkok to Vientiane

Day	Description	Location	Meals	Km cycled
1	Arrival day.	Chiang Khong	D	
2	Boat – Mekong River	Pak Beng	BLD	
3	Cycle to Udomxai	Udomxai	BLD	80
4	Cycle to Nong Khiaw	Nong Khiaw	BLD	103
5	Cycle to Luang Prabang	Luang Prabang	BLD	70
6	Free day	Luang Prabang	B	
7	Day ride – Luang Prabang	Luang Prabang	BL	62
8	Cycle to Kiew Ka Cham	Kiew Ka Cham	BLD	78
9	Cycle to Kasi	Kasi	BLD	95
10	Cycle to Vang Vieng	Vang Vieng	B	58
11	Cycle to Vientiane	Vientiane	BLD	80
12	Departure Day	Vientiane	B	
			Total	626

A great trip with wonderful variety. 'Lao lao' is a rice wine distilled locally in villages and while we don't suggest you consume it while cycling it does give a good idea of this trip - local, fun and tasty. Tucked away between its bigger neighbours, Laos is the secret jewel of South East Asia. There is a unique charm to this country that shines through in her people, towns and village, mountains, jungles and the majestic Mekong River that she hugs for the length of the country.

To access Laos we use flight and minibuses in Thailand and then a classic riverboat journey down the Mekong River to Pak Beng. All that plus the cycling makes for a trip of perfect variety and balance.

Day 1 -Bangkok

We will meet up at Bangkok airport for a short flight to the northern city of Chaing Rai. From here it is about 2 hours drive to Chiang Khong, a small border town that sits along the banks of the Mekong River. Our rustic guesthouse has a great balcony that looks out over the Mekong and onto Laos. We will chat over dinner about the upcoming adventure. (D)

Day 2 – Pak Beng

After crossing the border in the morning comes the non-cycling highlight of the trip as you spend the day cruising down the Mekong River on a converted cargo boat. The perfect introduction to Laos, you'll quickly get a feel for the slower pace of life here in Laos. We overnight in the small town of Pak Beng in a new tourist class hotel. (BLD)

Day 3 – Udomxai – cycling 80km

Our first day on the bikes is also one of the best, taking us away from the Mekong River through a rolling landscape of small minority villages that grow corn and rice. This road is very new and carries very little traffic so you can enjoy the scenery and the kids who love to stand by the roadside and yell out "Sabaii Dii!" After approximately 80km we board the bus and drive to our accommodation. Udomxai is a medium sized trading town and our guesthouse here is simple but clean. (BLD)

Day 4 – Nong Khiaw – cycling 103km

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

Day 5 – Luang Prabang –cycling 70km

In the morning we board a small boat to cruise down the river for a couple of hours. Limestone cliffs compete with villages and farmland and makes for a relaxing river journey. Where the river and highway meet we get back on the bikes and ride to Luang Prabang. This is an undulating ride with the Nam Ou River as our companion for much of the way. In the afternoon we will ride into Luang Prabang, our home for 3 nights. It has been said that Luang Prabang is the most beautiful town in South East Asia, and we'd have to agree. With a combination of historic temples, French colonial architecture and its setting by the Mekong surrounded by mountains you won't want to leave. (BLD)

Day 6 -Luang Prabang

Enjoy a free day in Luang Prabang to explore the temples, learn Lao cooking, shop, explore the surrounding handicraft villages, ride an elephant, relax in a café -there is so much to do! (B)

Day 7 – Luang Prabang – cycling 62km

After a restful day we hit the bikes for a ride to the stunning Kuang Sii Waterfall. The ride is along a small road alongside the Mekong River passing through small villages, rice fields and forest. At the waterfall enjoy a swim, picnic lunch and a visit to the tiger and bear rescue centre before riding back to Luang Prabang. (B, L)

Day 8 – Luang Prabang to Kiew Ka Cham – cycling 78km

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

Day 9 – Kiew Ka Cham to Kasi – cycling 95km

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

Day 10 – Kasi to Vang Vieng – cycling 58km

The ride to Vang Vieng is a relatively easy day travelling through the lush green of rice fields. Vang Vieng is set in a prime location. Surrounded by limestone peaks, caves and rivers this town see its fair share of travellers but for good reason. We should arrive before lunch so the afternoon is free to go caving, tubing on the river or relaxing in one of the many restaurants. (B)

Day 11 -Vang Vieng to Vientiane – cycling 80km

Into the flatter land now we ride away from the mountains towards Vientiane, Lao's quiet capital city, and the end of the ride. The roads will become busier as the day goes on but Vientiane is nothing like other capital cities of Asia. In the evening we will head out for a nice dinner and celebrate the last night of the tour. (B, L, D)

Day 12

Today is departure day. You are free to leave any time today.

Inclusions

11 nights accommodation
Mekong boat trip, Ou River boat trip, Kuang Sii Waterfall.
Support vehicle
Local guide
Tour leader
Bike / bike tools
Meals: 11 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 8 dinners
Water and snacks on cycling days

Bike Asia Travel style

We think cycling through a region for the first time with a group of like-minded people is a great way to travel in Asia. Our aim is to provide you with the opportunity to meet new people, learn about new cultures, and experience different landscapes and most all to have some fun. Cycling is a major part of our trips – they are cycle tours after all. We have designed our trips so that they are accessible to people with a reasonable level of fitness. Different trips will require varying degrees of physical ability. Each trip dossier has specific details on terrain, cycling conditions; distances covered each day and an altitude profile. All of our trips are fully supported, so should you want or need to take a rest, there will be a seat for you in the support vehicle and a place to put your bike. Our trips are also designed to allow you the opportunities and time to appreciate the environment, scenery and culture around you, and to participate in any activities that may be on offer.

Ethical travel

An integral part of travelling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities which we visit.

Dress Laos is still quite a conservative country. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not appropriate so if you wish to

cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you, on the bike, to put on over the top (long loose shorts or a skirt/sarong). When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Singlet tops are not acceptable in temples.

Phrase Book A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak English but away from these areas you should learn a few words of Lao. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book.

Donations Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving away anything to local people can create an expectation that visiting foreigner equals free give-aways. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to us and we will then pass them on to development organizations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed to those really in need by those working in the communities.

Poverty In Laos there is poverty which you may see. If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. There are organizations which are working to alleviate this poverty and may be able to do more good with donations that you make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

Support Organizations There are a number of organizations which we hope you can support in one way or another. Your Tour Leader will provide more information on these as you travel.

Group size

Minimum 3

Maximum 14

Accommodation

6 nights comfortable hotel, 4 nights local guesthouse (all have private bathroom), 1 night basic guesthouse. Due the nature of cycling trips we stay in some towns where the general standard of accommodation is quite low. In these places we have chosen the best possible place to stay -trust us there's nothing better!

Transport

All transport listed is included in the trip price. For the cycling days we will have the backup support of a large songtaew (local style truck for transporting people) which will carry our luggage, snacks and water, and anybody not cycling. We also use boats, minibuses anything else that you might see coming.

Bikes

Bikes are included in the trip cost (however there is a discount for bringing your own bike – see below). Our mountain bikes are well-maintained Giant Boulder. We keep them well-maintained and we travel with all necessary tools and spare parts. The bikes have the following specifications:

Hard tail (front suspension)
Shimano Alivio 21 speed gears
Shimano Alivio v-brakes
Off road tyres
One bottle cage
Ergonomic seat
A range of sizes

You may wish to bring your own pedals, clips, seat and handle extensions, as we can easily fit them to our bikes.

You are of course welcome to bring your own bike and we offer a \$100 USD discount on this trip if you do. Keep in mind though, that while we offer maintenance and spares for the bikes we provide, we can't guarantee that we can cater to your particular bicycle needs so it would be best to bring your own. If you are unsure we recommend that you speak to your local bike shop about what parts to bring.

Food

Food is a very important part of any travel experience. Most of the meals on this trip are included in the trip cost, with a few exceptions like free days. To see which meals are included, read the itinerary table. Vegetarians and vegans are well catered for and should you have any other dietary restrictions, you just need to inform us.

Money

You will need to bring money on the trip to pay for the following: some meals, drinks, activities in the free time, departure tax and of course shopping.

The official currency of Thailand is the Baht (THB) which should be used for all transactions. Thailand has a modern banking system with ATMs and money changers in everywhere. When coming to Thailand it is possible to use Visa/Mastercard or Cirrus/Maestro cards to access cash with an ATM. You should, however, carry travellers' cheques as a backup. Most international currencies can be exchanged so it is not necessary to bring only US dollars - AUD, EUR, CAD, NZD are all accepted at banks in major centres. To give you an indication of prices;

Beer would cost around 60
Dinner at local restaurant 100
Dinner at foreign restaurant 200

The official currency of Laos is the Kip (LAK), however, the US dollar serves as a second currency and can be used for larger purchases. If going to Laos it is best to bring some small denomination US dollars cash along with traveller's cheques as your main form of money. Thai Baht can also be changed easily. Credit cards can are not those useful in Laos. To give you an indication of prices;

Beer would cost 6,000 – 10,000

Dinner at local restaurant 10,000

Dinner at foreign restaurant 30,000

Exchange rates at the time of writing are;

Laos Kip FK rates	Thai Baht FX rates
1 AUD = 7,900	1 AUD = 27
1 USD = 9,650	1 USD = 33
1 EUR = 13,100	1 EUR = 44
1 GBP = 19,200	1 GBP = 65
1 CAD = 8,700	1 CAD = 29
1 NZD = 7.100	1 NZD = 24

Whilst cycling, there will be very few opportunities to spend money so most of your shopping will need to be done in Bangkok, Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

We also recommend that you bring US \$100 in emergency funds, to be used when circumstances beyond the control of Bike Asia necessitate a change in itinerary.

Insurance

Obtaining your own travel insurance is required in order to participate on a Bike Asia trip. It will need to include a minimum coverage of medical expenses with emergency evacuation. Your group leader will need to see a copy of your insurance at the group meeting on the first day.

Some recommended insurance companies are;

World Nomads;

www.worldnomads.com

Covermore;

<http://www.covermore.com>

Joining point instructions

Meeting Point –the group will meet at the Bangkok Airport for a short flight to the northern city of Chaing Rai. All flights into Bangkok now arrive at the new Suvarnabumi Airport.

Pre/post trip accommodation

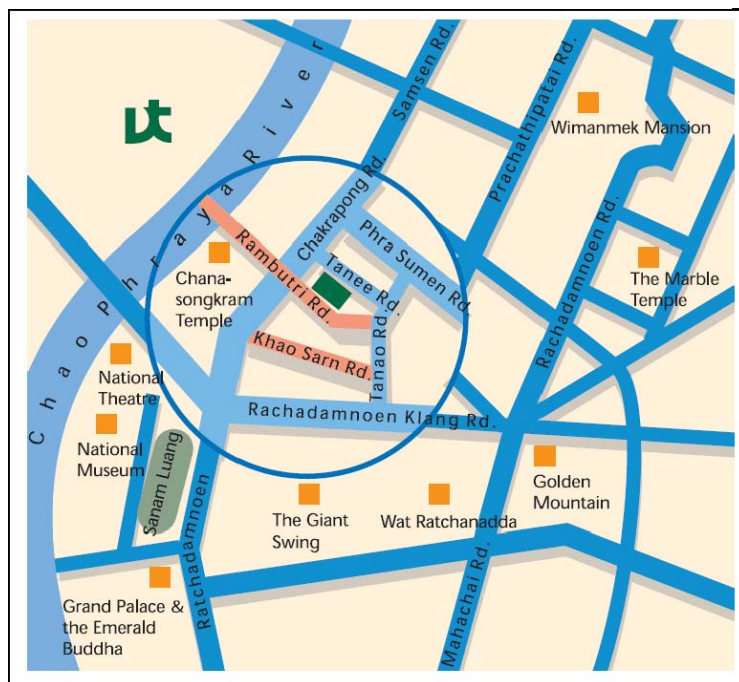
If you would like us to organise some extra nights accommodation either before or after the trip at our starting or finishing point hotel, just let us know when you book the trip.

The hotel in Bangkok is located close to Khao San Rd, a famous backpacker street with all services needed by travellers close at hand. The hotel address is:

Viengtai Hotel

42 Tanee Road, Banglamphoo Bangkok 10200

Tel: +66 (0) 2 280 5434 & 280 5392 Fax: +66 (0) 2 281 8153



โรงแรมเวียงใต้

42 ถนนตานี บางลำภู กรุงเทพฯ

Print out this trip dossier so that you have the address in Thai.

Fitness

You will need to a good level of fitness to participate in this trip. There are seven cycling days in total, with daily distance up to 107 km on sealed surfaces. The first two days are quite challenging but the following days tend downhill. Two of the days involve **a lot** of hill climbing – one day we have over 1700 metres of ascent.

Cycling conditions

Road conditions in Laos are good on the main highways which we will be using. Maintenance, however, is not always the best so you must expect random potholes, short sections of terrible road and road works. While this ride does lose altitude over its course, the two days out of Luang Prabang are very challenging with long hills to climb. Traffic is generally light but care must be taken with all those unexpected surprises like chickens, children and dogs running out in front of you. Stay alert.

Health

In order to make the most of your holiday, you need to be as healthy as possible! For a list of vaccinations we recommend that you seek advice at a travel clinic at least six weeks prior to departure. Our group leader will have Senior's Level first aid training and will travel with a first-aid kit, however it is also recommended that individual travellers have a basic first aid kit with any personal medical requirements. Our group leader is not authorised, for legal reasons, to administer any kind of drugs including pain relief tablets, antibiotics etc so be sure to pack a supply of your favourite painkillers. Pharmacy products vary in different countries and you may not be able to buy products that are widely available at home. Include the following: plasters, dressings, bandage, calamine lotion (a must for soothing sunburn), oral re-hydration treatment (in case of bouts of diarrhoea), insect repellent, insect sting relief, antiseptic cream and antiseptic wipes.

For more information on travel health, you can click on the links below:

Australia;

<http://www.tmvc.com.au/>

United States

<http://www.cdc.gov/page.do>

United Kingdom

<http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/>

Lonely Planet

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/health/>

Visas

In Thailand, 30 day single entry visas are free on arrival for many nationalities. If you want to stay longer than 30 days, 2 month visas are available from the Thai embassy in your country. Lao visas can easily be obtained on entry at the immigration point where we enter the country. Visas cost US\$30. Make sure that you have one passport photo available for your visa application form.

Luggage/Packing list (guide only) we strongly advise against using a hard shell suitcase for this trip. A **soft backpack** would be the most suitable, and the easiest to transfer in/out of the trucks in the morning and evening. Keep in mind when you are packing that often our local crew are lifting our bags before we cycle into camp, so try to pack as lightly as possible. Please check our climate charts to assess your clothing requirements, or contact us if you are unsure.

Personal	Travel	Bicycle
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Backpack• Long trousers• Shorts• Shirts• Hat• Sandals/Light Shoes• Swimming Costume• Sunglasses• Light Rain Coat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages• Passport photo• Travel Insurance details• Flight Tickets• Money - Travellers Checks/Cash/ Credit Card	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Something to carry your personal belongings in while cycling, eg. daypack, bumbag, handlebar bag.• Helmet• Cycling Gloves• Bicycle Water Bottle• Bike Shorts with something to put on over the top

Please note if travelling to Laos in December/January it can get very cold on the Mekong boat trip and in the mountains. You should bring a wind breaker and cold weather clothing.

Tipping

One of the reasons that our trips run so well, and are so much fun is the effort and energy put in by our local crew. On this trip, we will have drivers, cooks and a local guide. Their mix of professionalism, enthusiasm and sense of fun are infectious. We recognise that the wages in an economically developing country are vastly different to ours and ask that if you are satisfied with the service you show your appreciation with a tip. Your group leader will collect this at the end of the trip and organise a small thank you presentation. As an indication only, we recommend you allocate USD 20. Tipping is **NOT** compulsory and it is meant to be a reward for good service.

Safety

Our cycling tour leader has the authority to change or cancel all or part of this trip if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns. This decision would not be taken lightly, and where possible it would be made in consultation with our local crew, local operator and Bike Asia management. Your leader will be present on all included activities, staying at all the same hotels, guesthouses and of course cycling with you. During free time, should you choose to participate in any optional activities that are not part of our itinerary, please note that we cannot give any representations or guarantees about the safety of the activity, the standard of the operators running them or the equipment that they use.

In the group meeting, the cycling leader will run a session on cycling safety. Whilst some travellers will have years of touring experience, for others, this might be their first cycling trip ever. We need to cater for a range of abilities and experience and it is in everyone's interest to learn about the particulars of cycling in this region from someone who has already done it. It goes without saying that by running and participating in a cycling trip, both parties accept an inherent level of risk. However, we take the safety of our passengers very seriously and we ask that you cycle in a safe and responsible manner and that you look out for the well-being of your fellow travellers. Cycling helmets must be worn by all cyclists at all times whilst cycling.

Most national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest information before departure. The links for some major travel advisories and updates are listed below;

Australia;

<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au>

Britain;

<http://www.fco.gov.uk>

Canada;

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/consular_home-en.asp

New Zealand;

<http://www.mfat.govt.nz/travel/>

United States;

<http://travel.state.gov>

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling in the cities, for the safe keeping of your passport, money, credit cards and traveller's cheques. Utilise the hotel's safety boxes or safe once you arrive.

Communication

In Bangkok, Luang Prabang and Vientiane you will be able to access email, phone, fax and post offices. Outside these cities there will be fewer chances to email so the main communication will be phone. You should leave your family or friends the Bike Asia contact details. Our office staff will be able to get in touch with us in an emergency.

Group Leader

Our leaders are passionate about Asia and cycling...phew! They love what they do and take their job seriously. They will make every effort to ensure you have a safe, enjoyable trip with as much fun as possible. They bring many qualities and skills to this role, knowledge of group cycling, safety, management and liaising between you and the local crew. In working for us, they have made a commitment to learning as much about the culture, language and customs of Laos as possible, and they are happy to share any of this knowledge with you. However, please keep in mind that they are not local and will not know everything.

Rules

We don't have many, but the ones we do have are important. We always abide by the laws of the country that we are travelling through. This means you are not to use any illegal drugs or use prostitutes. Any passenger who does so will be asked to leave the trip immediately.

Feedback

After you have completed the trip, we want to know what you thought about it. This is important to us, as it is through your feedback that we monitor our trips and make improvements for the future. Log on to our website and click on the feedback link. It will take you a minimum of 3 minutes, or should you feel like writing in more detail, then a little longer. If you fill in the feedback form, we'll give you an automatic 5% discount on any of our trips in any other region.

Photos

We are always looking for good photos of the regions we travel through. If you have some that you would like to send us, we would love to have a look.

Newsletter

Our quarterly email newsletter has information on events happening in Asia, travel stories, cycling stuff, last-minute deals on our trips, travel tips and more. If you would like to subscribe, just go to our homepage and click on the link to subscribe. Your email address will be kept confidential.