

THAILAND AND LAOS
16th February – 1st March 2016

BANGKOK – KHAO YAI – CHAIYAPHUM – LOEI- NONG KHAI – VIENTIANE – LUANG PRABANG
15 DAYS / 14 NIGHTS TREASURES OF ANGKOR & MEKONG RIVER

DAY 1: TUESDAY 16TH FEBRUARY **LONDON – BANGKOK**

Depart London.

DAY 2: WEDNESDAY 17TH FEBRUARY **ARRIVE BANGKOK** **(D)**

On arrival at Bangkok Airport, you will be met by your local English speaking tour guide and transfer to your hotel (arrival flight details TBA).

The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Optional excursion: Grand Palace, Wat Pho, National Museum

Optional:

Relax & chill at Chakrabongse Villas prior to dinner time.

Note: Swimming pool & freshen up facilities available

Dinner at Chakrabongse Villa

Overnight in Bangkok

DAY 3: THURSDAY 18TH FEBRUARY **BANGKOK** **(B)**

Free at leisure.

Optional excursion: Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall

The Arts of the Kingdom VI is the latest exhibition opened recently in the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall (Dusit Palace, Uthong Nai Rd; 02-283-9411). It showcases metal-based arts and crafts during the reign of King Rama IX. The pieces were produced by the Sirikit Institute, which enrolls children from poor families in arts and crafts training programmes in order to promote skills and preserve ancient crafts.

Reception at British Embassy

The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Overnight in Bangkok

DAY 4: FRIDAY 19TH FEBRUARY **Bangkok – Vineyard Trails – Khao Yai** **(B/L/D)**

Breakfast at the hotel. Leave Bangkok in the morning and drive in the direction of North-eastern Thailand heading to Khao Yai. Khao Yai National Park established in 1962 as Thailand's first national park, it is the third largest national park in Thailand. The park covers an area of 2,168 square kilometres, including rain/evergreen forests and grasslands. 1,351 m high Khao Rom is the highest mountain within the park. The average altitude of the national park ranges from 400 to 1000 m above the sea level. The national park is home to around 300 residents and migratory birds and has one of Thailand's largest populations of hornbills and some common mammals include elephants, bears, gaurs, barking deer, gibbons and macaques. There are number of waterfalls in the park, most of them easily accessible by vehicles combined with a short walk. Haew Nerok Waterfall in Khao Yai is one of the highest and most impressive waterfalls in the country.



Then we continue to vineyard tour. Khao Yai Winery sits amidst a lush 320- Hectare plantation, of which 80 hectares (500 Rai) is dedicated to growing grapes. Now with two decades of operation, the winery has become the birthplace of Thailand's premium wines. Today, the PB Valley Khao Yai Winery employs 2 fully accredited Thai winemakers. With its professional, large-scale wine Operation featuring state-of-the-art technology, it strives to produce world class wines for Thais, as well as for export, and is the leading winery in Thailand and Southeast Asia. Here you'll find a wide selection of light to medium bodied wines to go with home-made cookies and other products. After a little more sampling, PB's expansive sun drenched hillside vineyard is a great place to snap a few more shots of grapes on the vine.

Lunch at local restaurant.

Check in at the hotel & afternoon free at leisure.

Optional: natures walk tour, game drive.

Dinner at PB Valley and free at leisure.

After dinner; - **optional night safari tour.**

Overnight in Khao Yai

DAY 5: SATURDAY 20TH FEBRUARY **Khao Yai** **(B)**

Free at leisure.

Optional Excursion available;

Elephant riding, golfing, spa, birdwatching, mountain biking, trekking and nature walk. Separate details and cost to follow.

Overnight in Khao Yai

DAY 6: SUNDAY 21ST FEBRUARY **Khao Yai – Phimai – Chaiyaphum** **(B/L/D)**

After breakfast, we head northwards to the Phimai Historical Park Visit Prasat Hin Phimai, the largest sandstone Khmer temple Pak. Prasat Hin Phimai situated in the center of the ancient city of Phimai. Its architectural style closely resembles Angkorean buildings, and it was built before Angkor Wat. Some believed that it may have been the model for Angkor Wat.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant. After lunch then we will drive into Chaiyaphum and check in at our hotel.
Dinner at hotel.

Overnight in Chaiyaphum

DAY 7: MONDAY 22ND FEBRUARY **CHAIYAPHUM – Dan Sai** **(B/L/D)**

Check out from the hotel after breakfast. This morning visit to Ban Khwao Silk Weaving Village; is famous for high quality silk. Ban Kwao Silk Promotion Center was constructed to promote the Thai silk industry. At the centre, local people weave mud-mee silk in various patterns, including khom-ha, khom-kao, mang-mum, duang, kanok and gled-tao. They also weave plain silk and these villages also produce silk dyed with natural dyes. Mud-mee is woven in Nong Bua Ra Hew and Kaeng Khro districts. Chaiyaphum is well-known for its mud-mee silk. It's a great place to learn about Thai Silk and local cultural heritage. Many other tourist attractions are located in the same area.

Afterward we are back on the road heading to Loei. Sharing a Mekong River border with Laos, Loei province is in many ways more similar to the north of Thailand than to the rest of Isan, even earning the nickname “the Mae Hong Son of the northeast.” Loei is an up-and-coming ecotourism region surrounded by undulating mountain ranges, abundant with various kinds of flora and capped with fog enshrouded summits. The most majestic mountains are Phu Kradueng, Phu Luang and Phu Ruea. However, while Loei features



numerous outdoor activities and fascinating cultural attractions, tourism is relatively new to the province and the area is greatly unspoiled. The temperature in Loei is generally cool thanks to the mountains and rivers it contains, but can get surprisingly cold in the winter and unbearably hot in the summer.

Stop on route for lunch at local restaurant.

Afternoon we stop & visit Phi Ta Khon Mask Museum (Dansai). Set in the Wat Phon Chai compound, the Phi Ta Khon Museum displays the best of the area's signature freaky costumes while explaining the traditions and beliefs that drive the Phi Ta Khon and Bun Luang festivities. When combined with two tranquil hilltop temples, the museum makes a stop in Dan Sai worthwhile at any time. A substantial collection of Phi Ta Khon masks and costume are set up to look just like they would when strolling around the festival, making it easy to snap a selfie next to the ghoulishly grinning goblins.

You will have opportunity to learn how to make Phi Ta Khon Mask at the local Phi Ta Khon Museum. The Phi Ta Khon mask is a unique traditional folk craft of Dan Sai district. Although subject to the maker's imagination and creative interpretation, each mask adheres to the traditional Phi Ta Khon style. The Phi Ta Khon mask consists of three major components: the hat, the face and the nose. The hat is made from a traditional bamboo container used for steaming glutinous (sticky) rice known as huad. The huad is folded up like a hat so it fits on the head. The face element of the mask is made from a coconut leaf sheath with small openings cut for the eyes. The nose is made from soft wood. In the past, the nose was relatively simple. However over the years, it has evolved and features elaborate shapes and details. Occasionally two horns made from dried coconut lobes are also added to the mask. The various elements are assembled together with the use of strings and nails. The mask is then painted in elaborate designs and striking colours. To complete each mask, narrow shoulder-length strips of cloth are sewn together and glued to the back of the mask. The Phi Ta Khon Mask is the one of world renowned local festival of Thailand.

Dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Chiang Khan

DAY 8: TUESDAY 23RD FEBRUARY

CHIANG KHAN – KAENG KHUT KHU – CHIANG KHAN

(B/L/D)

Morning free until 11 am; depart Chiang Khan by boat enjoy magnificent views along the river to Mekong Villas (Khun Ying Narisa's villa) for lunch.

Afterward visit Kaeng Khut Khu Rapids, a large craggy islet standing in the middle of the wild area of Mekong River. The rapids are created by an islet in the middle of the Mekong River which forces the water around and thus increasing the speed of the river. Kaeng Khut Khu is well known for its colourful boulders that can be seen when the water levels are low and while you are here, on the opposite bank of the River, you can see 'Chana Kham', in the Vientiane District of Laos.

Perhaps you may like to try out the local speciality "Kung Den" tiny live shrimp that dance around your plate and "Kung Tod" the same shrimp but deep fried and crunchy.

Later we stop at Tai Dam Village, learn about the traditions and culture of Thai Dum (Thai people that wear black), whose ancestors had migrated from Laos in 1905. Conservative and traditional, their culture has been well preserved in the forms of their folk houses and lifestyle. You can observe the process of the traditional weaving process being demonstrated as well as shop for local produces.

Transfer back to Chiang Khan.

This evening enjoy a sunset dinner in Chiang Khan.

Overnight in Chiang Khan



DAY 9: WEDNESDAY 24TH FEBRUARY CHIANG KHAN - Nong Khai – Vientiane (B/L)

After breakfast check out from the hotel, depart Chiang Khan to Nong Khai. Visit to Sadet market and lunch at “Daeng Namnueng” restaurant before we continue to the Friendship Bridge.

The First Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge is a bridge over the Mekong, connecting Nong Khai province and the city of Nong Khai in Thailand with Vientiane Prefecture in Laos - the city of Vientiane is approximately 20 km from the bridge Thailand/Laos border check-point. Then continue our journey to Vientiane. Up on arrival Vientiane Capital; welcome to Vientiane. Transfer to hotel for check-in and free at leisure.

Overnight in Vientiane

DAY 10: THURSDAY 25TH FEBRUARY Vientiane (B/L)

This morning we take a sightseeing tour of Vientiane, to visit religious museums of **Wat Sisaket**, the oldest temple to have been survived from the Siamese war of 1828 and its cloister contains more than 8000 Buddha statues; **Wat Ho Prakeo**, the former home-temple of the Emerald Buddha statue or Pra Keo, but today it contains a collection of Buddha statues, antiques and all artifacts found in around Vientiane; **That Luang Stupa**, Symbol of Lao nation the single most important monument in Laos, which was built to cover the original small stupa containing a piece of the chest bone of Buddha; **Patouxay** (Arch de Triumph), built quite recently in commemoration of those who died during the wars in the past and it is today as the land-mark of Vientiane.

Lunch is at the local restaurant.
Free at leisure.

Afternoon tea or reception at British Embassy (T.B.A).

Overnight in Vientiane.

DAY 11: FRIDAY 26TH FEBRUARY Vientiane → Xiengkhouang Plain of Jars (B/L)

Breakfast at hotel, visit to morning market in Vientiane or free at leisure until your short afternoon flight to Xiengkhouang QV401 13.20-13.50 Xiengkhouang was devastated by American bombing between 1964 and 1973. Upon arrival, we transfer out to visit the **Plain of Jars**, an impressive archaeological site where hundreds of large stone jars are littered all over the plateau. We also have time, this afternoon seeing the old capital of Muang Khoun Province and the nearby villages, home to the **Hmong hill tribe** and Tai Dam people. They have an interesting local culture and a colourful history. Later visit to the UXO Museum in Phonsavan showing the types of unexploded bombs found in Xieng Khoung. You will see examples of many different bombs including cluster bombs and mines. Today several countries are providing aid and technical expertise in locating and detonating UXOs. If time permit, we may be able to follow the Provincial Co-ordinator by road to view the detection and disposal techniques a few miles away.

Overnight in Xiengkhouang

DAY 12: SATURDAY 27TH FEBRUARY XIENKHOANG – LUANG PRABANG (B/L)

Early morning, we visit Central Market of Phonsavanh to watch different Hill Tribes to barter and exchange merchandises. Then heading out the this small town to Luang Prabang, on the way we stop off and see a site more than 200 years old Buddha images in **Thampra** and varied Hmong and varied hill tribe minority villages along the road. They are nice, friendly and welcome you to visit.

After a photo stop, we continue driving up hill, enjoying mountain splendid natural scenery, forest and landscape. After a tea or coffee break at Sala Phoukhoun, where the T-junction of bordering meets

Vientiane-Xiengkhouang-Luang Prabang. The journey will take us over mountainous region to Luang Prabang. The tranquility and charm of this town with its splendid natural scenery and cultural sights make it one of the most delightful places to visit in Laos. After checking into hotel, [if time permits] we start seeing the impressive stupa of **Wat Visoun**, the shrine of **Wat Aham, Wat Mai**, . From there, we explore Street



Night Bazaar, where you can find the lovely collection and handmade textile by local and hill tribe people surrounding Luang Prabang.

Overnight in Luang Prabang

DAY 13: SUNDAY 28TH FEBRUARY LUANG PRABANG – PAKOU CAVE (B/L)

We depart hotel to the boat landing, and take an excursion by boat upstream on the Mekong to visit **Pak Ou cave** in the side of a lime stone cliff and opposite of the mouth of the Mekong and Ou rivers. The sanctuaries at Pak Ou consist of two large caves, both repositories for thousands of Buddha images, which

range from mere centimeter to two meters in height. En route, Lao typical villages are barely visible behind a screen of foliage. Slender canoes bobbing by the shore, bamboo poles and floats mark the location of nets

and fish traps. Our first stop will be at **Ban Muangkeo**, a well-known village for Lao traditional rice whisky, namely Laoh-Khao to be distilled. We are welcome to taste it and also take away. Lunch is served at a riverside

restaurant. We arrive back at Luang Prabang in late afternoon, and then climb up to the top of **Phousi Mount** for an enjoyable exploration of the sacred, gilded stupa as well as a beautiful sunset view of the city and the Mekong River. From there, we explore Street Night Bazaar, where you can find the lovely collection and handmade textile by local and hill tribe people surrounding Luang Prabang.

Overnight in Luang Prabang

DAY 14: MONDAY 29TH FEBRUARY LUANG PRABANG – KUANGSI WATERFALL (B/L/D)

After breakfast, we depart hotel to visit the **National Museum**, the former Royal Palace which houses the collection of valuables including the famous Prabang Buddha statue, gifts received from foreign dignitaries...etc, before we take a drive (30 km South) to visit **Kuangsi Waterfall**, which, though not very high, is spectacular and really beautiful with its green surroundings as the preserved National park. We stop en-route, stop to visit a fresh produced market namely **Talad Phosi**, and also visit **Ban Na Oune**, a small village of a hill-tribe group “Hmong”, probably the best-known minority group in Laos. Just before arriving at Kuangsi waterfall, there is another village of Khmu minority group, namely **Ban Tha Pane** that we will visit. Our picnic lunch is served at the shady park nearby Kuangsi waterfall. There is plenty of time for relaxing and a swim in cool water, before we head back to Luang Prabang.

Farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Luang Prabang

DAY 15: TUESDAY 1ST MARCH LUANG PRABANG - DEPARTURE (B)

Breakfast in the hotel and free at leisure.

Transfer to Luang Prabang airport for departure to Bangkok, then on to your connecting flight back to London.

*** End of Service ***

