

IMTRAV: Beyond the Mekong 16 Days

Code: GTBM

Desde: \$1,345 usd por persona



Itinerary

Day 1 - Bangkok

Your trip starts today with your arrival in Bangkok. No activities are planned until your evening group meeting, so you may arrive at any time. Please check the noticeboard in the hotel lobby, located on the ground floor, for a notice containing details of your tour. This will advise you of your tour leader's name, telephone number and the time and location of your group meeting. Normally this meeting takes place around 6pm. Until your meeting we encourage you to get out and discover the delights that Bangkok has to offer, including Thailand's famous cuisine. Make sure that you take a hotel business card so that you will be able to find your way back to the hotel.

Day 2 - Bangkok

Bangkok is home to some of Asia's most elaborately adorned temples - and the modern city's sights and attractions are so numerous you won't know where to begin. So we'll give you a helping hand and introduce you to some of Bangkok's most famous sights, including a visit to the impressive Grand Palace and Emerald Buddha. Near our hotel we jump on board a klong (or local canal) boat,

before catching a public bus to Wat Po. This is a great way to introduce you to a couple of the more popular forms of local transport. The remainder of the day is free for us to further explore this vibrant city, and the new, elevated Skytrain service now makes it easier than ever to get around the city centre, by avoiding the nasty traffic snarls in the streets below. In the evening we board the overnight sleeper train to Chiang Mai (approximately 13 hours). (B)

Day 3 - Chiang Mai

We arrive in Chiang Mai early in the morning (as long as our train is on time!) and transfer to our centrally located guesthouse by local songthaew. The day is free to do as you wish, as there is much to see in this northern city, with over 120 temples in the centre alone. A visit to the Tribal Research Institute provides excellent background information on the cultures and customs of the various ethnic groups that inhabit the hill regions of northern and western Thailand and Laos. An excursion to the top of Doi Suthep offers fantastic views over the city and can be combined with a visit to the museum. It's best to visit Doi Suthep in the morning or late in the afternoon, to avoid the heat of the day, as there are over 300 steps to climb! You may also wish to get a traditional Thai massage before your trek, or even partake in a cooking class, beware - you eat what you cook! Your tour leader will be able to offer other suggestions for things to see and do during your free time. This evening the Night Bazaar beckons, a shoppers paradise and a great place to practice your bargaining skills.

Day 4 - Huay Xai

In the morning, we travel by local bus through the picturesque countryside to Chiang Rai (approximately 3½ hours), where we stop for lunch before boarding our next local bus (fan-cooled) for Chiang Khong (approximately 2½ hours). After completing border formalities, we take a small boat across the Mekong River to Huay Xai, our first stop in Laos. For centuries Huay Xai was a disembarkation point for Yunnanese caravans, led by the Chinese Muslims on their way to Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, in ancient Siam. Today, Huay Xai is a hustling ferry town on the banks of the Mekong River. There's time to wander around this small place and perhaps ascend the Naga stairs to Wat Jom Khao Manilat, a fascinating temple overlooking the river and town. There is also the opportunity in your free time to visit a nearby minority village, where they make rice whiskey, noodles and handicrafts.

Day 5 - Pakbeng

After breakfast we transfer to the pier where we board our slow boat for the trip down the Mekong River. The pace is very relaxed - a perfect way to observe the local lifestyle close up. We arrive in the late afternoon at Pakbeng; a colourful village situated at the junction of the Mekong River and the smaller Beng River, hence the town's name 'Pak' meaning 'mouth' in Lao. Hmong and tribal Thai's are frequently seen on the main street of Pakbeng, and small vendors along the street sell local textiles and handicrafts. We spend the night in a simple hostel. Please be warned that the accommodation standard is very basic, but also bear in mind that you are travelling in a remote area. Please have an open mind and come with an adventurous spirit!

Day 6-8 - Luang Prabang

We continue on our private slow boat and stop to stretch our legs and explore the amazing Pak Ou Caves, which contain hundreds of Buddha statues, before arriving in Luang Prabang in the evening. We have time here to wander the streets and discover this beautiful town, with its gleaming temple roofs, fading French architecture and stunning mountain backdrop. Luang Prabang has been claimed by UNESCO to be 'the best preserved city in South East Asia'. A highlight of our three -

night stay is a visit to the beautiful Kuang Si Falls. We will trek to the waterfalls (approximately 3 hours), this is a great opportunity to stretch the legs after our two day boat ride and gives us a chance to do some physical activity.

Day 9-10 - Vang Vieng

On Sunday morning we transfer to a local bus (fan cooled) and make our way to the village of Vang Vieng, located on a beautiful bend in the Nam Song River (approximately 6-7 hours). During our stay we cross the river to explore the huge caves that line the West Bank. These caves are riddled with unexplored tunnels and caverns, and there is plenty of time to make our own discoveries or partake in a day-trip of kayaking (additional cost) along the Nam Song.

Day 11-12 - Vientiane

Travelling south by local fan cooled bus we continue to the Lao capital, located on the banks of the Mekong River (approximately 4 hours). Vientiane was originally one of the early Lao valley fiefdoms that were consolidated around the time that Europe was leaving the Dark Ages. Despite early prosperity, Vientiane lost its independence at various times during its history to Vietnamese, Burmese, Siamese and Khmers forces. When Laos became a French protectorate in the late 19th Century, Vientiane was named as its capital. It remains so today, under communist rule. The curious mix of Lao, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Soviet, French and US influences result in a somewhat exotic atmosphere. This small and laid-back capital is easily explored by bicycle or on foot. A walking orientation tour takes us to the oldest remaining temple in Vientiane, Wat Si Saket, which was constructed in 1818. During your free time, you can further explore Vientiane's other historical sites, including Haw Pha Kaew, the former royal temple of the Lao monarchy and home to some of the best examples of Buddhist sculptures found in Laos.

Day 13 - Lak Sao

We experience stunning mountain scenery, as we travel by private bus to the town of Lak Sao, situated on the border with Vietnam. Be aware that today we will be travelling some of the most remote country you will see in Laos, where conditions will be basic, but the day will be richly rewarding with opportunities to stop and take in the spectacular scenery including a Stone Forest (drive approximately 6-7 hours).

Day 14 - Vinh

Crossing the border into Vietnam we head for the port city of Vinh, birthplace of Ho Chi Minh. Following the wars with the French and the Americans, the city was so heavily bombed it was left with only two buildings intact! It has since been rebuilt with the help of former Eastern Block nations and today boasts a population of 500,000 people. Here we board the Reunification Express sleeper train for the 300-kilometre train journey to Hanoi. Please be warned that this is a local train of a fairly basic standard.

Day 15-16 - Hanoi

Although there has been a permanent settlement here since the 3rd Century AD, the city of Hanoi can trace its origins back to 1010 BC, when Emperor Le Thai To moved his capital from Hoa Lu to this site. From the 1880s to World War II, Hanoi was developed as the colonial capital of French Indochina and many of the old structures in the city were razed to make way for new French buildings. Today the people of Hanoi take a lot of pride in their grand old colonial buildings which, together with the wide spacious boulevards and tree-lined lakes, help make Hanoi one of most graceful and charming cities in South East Asia. We enjoy a half-day city sightseeing tour, taking in the infamous Hanoi Hilton (Hoa Lo Prison), One Pillar Pagoda and the Temple of Literature. Afterwards there is time to explore some of the many temples, pagodas and museums, or perhaps just relax beside a lake and take a stroll along a shaded boulevard. You may like to organise a visit to Halong Bay while you are in Hanoi. Your tour leader will be able to help you arrange this tour. Our overland journey finishes on the morning of Day 16 after breakfast. If you require additional accommodation, this can be arranged. (B)

Included

An experienced local leader, and there will be the services of local guides at some sites. All transportation, accommodation, meals and sightseeing as indicated.

Not included

International flights, arrival and departure transfers, departure and airport taxes, visas, all other meals, all optional tours or activities during free time, transfers outside of the tour program, travel insurance, tips and items of a personal nature.