



LONG LAOS Freestyle Tour Itinerary

Thailand and Laos

Start: Chiang Mai

Finish: Don Det

Duration: 14 days/13 nights included*

* Passengers can hop on and hop off anywhere along the route

Venture off the beaten track in **Thailand and Laos** on a tour packed full of adventure, mind blowing scenery, local culture and history. Travel stress-free with accommodation, activities and transport all included, with a local Tour Leader to guide the way. As a bonus, you don't have to stick with the group the whole time - you can hop off anywhere along the route, spend longer in your favourite places and then hop back on the tour with the next group coming through. That's the beauty of 'Freestyle'!

Included with the Long Laos Freestyle Tour:

Accommodation:

+ 13 nights:

- 12 nights' accommodation in guesthouses, hostels and simple hotels as per itinerary (includes ensuite and air conditioned where possible)
- 1 Stray homestay (includes meals, activities and donations)

Meals:

+ Thailand: 2 breakfasts

+ Laos: 3 breakfast, 1 dinner

Activities & Entry Fees:

Thailand

+ Welcome Meeting with Stray Tour Leader and group

+ White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) fees, Chiang Rai

Laos

+ Private slow boat cruise, Mekong River

+ Remote village homestay, Mekong River

+ Pak Ou Caves, near Luang Prabang

+ Kuang Si Waterfall, Luang Prabang

+ City highlights of Vientiane

+ COPE centre entry, Vientiane

+ Wat Prabat Phonsone, near Kong Lor

+ Kong Lor Cave guided boat trip and Kong Lor National Park fee

+ Wat Ing Hang, near Savannakhet

+ Tad Ngeuang Waterfall, near Pakse

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Chiang Mai

Welcome to Stray! Your adventure kicks off in popular Chiang Mai, the largest city in Northern Thailand and an amazing place full of endless activity options, such as Thai cooking classes, bike tours or Muay Thai kickboxing to name a few. Once a kingdom unto itself, there are over 300 Buddhist temples to discover and it is worth visiting the old walled city to see the Tapae Gate. At 6pm you'll meet your Tour Leader and new travel mates for a Welcome Meeting introduction. We'll cover how Stray works and answer any questions you have about the upcoming trip. Afterwards, make the most of your first night by getting to know each other over a delicious Thai dinner and a few cold beverages.

Accommodation included: Guesthouse close to the city centre

Activity included: Welcome Meeting with Stray Tour Leader and group

Day 2: Chiang Mai

Seize the day by exploring this historically rich city or venturing outside the city to discover the natural beauty of northern Thailand. Chiang Mai is the perfect base for some of Thailand's best guided hikes and treks, as well as the top spot for adventure activities like mountain biking, abseiling and whitewater rafting. Tonight, enjoy dinner at one of the many great restaurants, then take in a ladyboy show, Muay Thai boxing or head out for a few drinks with friends.

Accommodation included: Guesthouse close to the city centre

Meals included: Breakfast

Optional paid activities: Elephant Nature Park, Thai cooking course, Muay Thai boxing, bike tour, trekking, kayaking, mountain biking, whitewater rafting, abseiling.

Day 3: Chiang Mai to Houay Xai

This morning we depart Chiang Mai to head for the Thailand-Laos border. We'll make a stop near Chiang Rai to check out the famous and intriguing White Temple (Wat Rong Khun). Wat Rong is a unique modern Buddhist temple that features some curious statues and murals that include images from Star Wars and The Matrix, Freddie Kruger's head hanging in the trees and a giant Predator emerging from the garden. We stop here long enough to grab a snack, stretch our legs and take a few photos before we continue on to cross the border into Laos. Once in Laos we take a short tuk-tuk ride to the small town of Houay Xai, our stop for the night.

Accommodation included: Guesthouse with views across the Mekong River

Meals included: Breakfast

Activity included: White Temple (Wat Rong Khun)

Optional paid activities: Visit an ethnic lantern village near Chiang Rai (must hop off)

Day 4: Houay Xai to Mekong River Homestay

Leaving Houay Xai you'll board our private slow boat to cruise down the Mekong River to the secluded village that will host you for an overnight homestay experience. Sit back and soak up this incredible journey as you wind your way through lush farmland, thriving jungle and rugged mountain scenery, drifting past water buffalo, locals fishing, and kids splashing in the shallows. We arrive in the village in the late afternoon. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to become immersed in Lao culture, where you will get a taste of traditional Lao village life by staying with a family in their home and experience a special Baci (welcoming) Ceremony, a true highlight of the trip.

Accommodation included: Remote village homestay along the Mekong River

Meals included: Dinner

Activities included: Private slow boat cruise, village orientation walk, play a game of football with the kids, go fishing, traditional Baci Ceremony, try the local whiskey

See More moment: Experience a traditional Baci Ceremony performed to bring visitors to the village good luck and good health. This ancient ritual is said to protect you as you travel and is a heart-warming chance to connect across cultures.

Do More moment: Your contribution to the village funds annual projects to improve infrastructure and make a difference in this community.

Day 5: Mekong River Homestay to Luang Prabang

We wave goodbye to the village and jump back aboard our private boat to head downriver to the famous limestone Pak Ou Caves. Pak Ou is an important pilgrimage site for Lao people, and here you will see thousands of Buddhist images that have been placed throughout the caves over hundreds of years. Back on board our boat a short trip takes us to the UNESCO World Heritage town, Luang Prabang. Luang Prabang has an old world feel that gives you the sense you've stepped back in time into a picturesque postcard setting. The fusion of French Colonial architecture with traditional Lao design set against a backdrop of misty mountains and lush green jungle makes this a truly majestic place.

Accommodation included: Guesthouse with fan or AC private rooms close to night market

Meals included: Breakfast

Activity included: Pak Ou Caves

Day 6: Luang Prabang

Today you'll visit the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfalls, where the turquoise water and calm pools offer the perfect chance to cool off. The lower pools are especially perfect for a refreshing swim. If you're feeling fit, climb up to the very top of the falls to take in the view from the above. At the base of the falls, you'll also find a rescue centre for the native Asiatic moon bears where you can watch them happily living in a safe environment. If you're planning to hop off the bus, Luang Prabang is a great place to do so, with options to discover rural villages by cycling or trekking the area, take a traditional Lao cooking class, kayak the Mekong River, shop at the night market or, for culture buffs, visit one of the many beautiful temples.

Accommodation included: Guesthouse with fan or AC private rooms close to night market

Meals included: Breakfast

Activities included: Kuang Si waterfall tour

Optional paid activities: Rice Experience, cycling, trekking, traditional cooking class, kayak the river.

Day 7: Luang Prabang to Vang Vieng

It's an early start as we head south through mountainous terrain on one of the most scenic journeys you'll experience on the Laos travel route. Travel past hill-tribe villages, vast green valleys and rolling hills. Our journey today takes us to the little riverside town Vang Vieng, formerly known as the best place to take tubing trips down the Nam Song River to visit riverside bars and indulge in cheap booze.

These days you can still go tubing, but now you get to enjoy the beauty of Vang Vieng's landscape without the sound of pounding bass in the background.

Accommodation included: Family run guesthouse in the centre of the action

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 8: Vang Vieng

With its stunning natural scenery, Vang Vieng offers ample outdoor activities to choose from. We recommend hiring a bike to explore the town and visiting the Blue Lagoon, one of the best natural swimming holes in Laos. There are also great rock climbing and kayaking options. The fun doesn't stop after an adventure filled day either! This evening check out one of several international restaurants for a taste of home or head to one of the bars to really get the party started.

Accommodation included: Family run guesthouse in the centre of the action

Optional paid activities: River tubing, cycling, kayaking, rock climbing, caving, visit the Blue Lagoon.

Day 9: Vang Vieng to Vientiane

Today we cruise through to the capital of Laos. On arrival in Vientiane your Tour Leader will point out the city's main attractions, including Putaxai, Pha That Luang, That Dam, the Presidential Palace, and the COPE centre – a non-profit organisation that educates visitors and raises awareness for victims of UXO (Unexploded Ordinance) and the Secret War. After check-in at our centrally located accommodation, you are free to explore the city, get a massage, go shopping or people watch at one of the local restaurants by the river.

Accommodation included: Modern hotel

Activity included: City highlights with your Tour Leader, COPE centre

Day 10: Vientiane to Kong Lor

An early escape this morning takes us away from the crowds and south to Kong Lor in the Phu Hin Bun National Park. About an hour into the journey we visit Wat Prabat Phonsone, the 'Buddha's Footprint,' a popular and important pilgrimage site for local communities. Arriving in remote Kong Lor with the afternoon sun, you'll feel a sense of peace as you drive through the sleepy rural villages lined with crop fields and rice paddies and surrounded by stunning limestone karst mountains. Relax after the drive by popping down to the river for an afternoon swim, swinging in a hammock at your accommodation or sampling a delicious Lao meal at one of the little restaurants in the village.

Accommodation included: Comfortable garden view bungalows with spectacular views and a short drive from the cave

Activity included: Wat Prabat Phonsone

Day 11: Kong Lor

Today, you'll get the chance to explore the underground river that winds its way through a mountain, venturing deep into the abyss of the stunning 7km long Kong Lor Cave on a motorised canoe! Discover impressive columns, stalagmites and stalactites illuminated and protruding from the limestone rock as you travel by motorboat through this colossal cave system. This area is also a photographer's paradise and a great place to get out and go trekking or just kick back to soak up the views over a cold Beer Lao.

Accommodation included: Comfortable garden view bungalows with spectacular views and a short drive from the cave

Activity included: Guided Kong Lor boat trip

See More moment: Stray are the only ones who'll take you off the beaten track to experience Kong Lor Cave - one of the natural wonders of Laos.

Day 12: Kong Lor to Savannakhet

We'll break up the drive today by stopping in the small town of Thakhek, where there's time to grab some lunch before we continue south. Before arriving in Savannakhet, we'll stop to visit the Buddhist holy site Wat Ing Hang, reportedly built in the 16th century to honour Buddha's visit to the area and housing one of Buddha's bones. Set on the Mekong River as a border town with neighbouring Thailand, Savannakhet historically served as a key transit and trading post and is now the largest town in Southern Laos. The best things to do are wander along the waterfront and check out the fossil collection at the odd but intriguing Dinosaur Museum, then settle in a nice riverside restaurant for dinner.

Accommodation included: Comfortable hotel

Activity included: Wat Ing Hang

Day 13: Savannakhet to Pakse

Driving south this morning we head first for Pakse, then carry on to explore the refreshingly cool climate of the Bolaven Plateau. The Plateau features a lush green landscape, fertile coffee and tea plantations, and many spectacular waterfalls, including the stunning Tad Ngeuang Waterfall where you can go for a swim. Pakse sits where the mighty Mekong River and Se Don River meet, so take advantage of the many restaurants along the riverfront for a meal served up with unbeatable river views.

Accommodation included: Guesthouse in centre of town

Activity included: Tad Ngeuang waterfall

Day 14: Pakse to Don Det (4000 Islands)

From Pakse, we'll carry on south to the backpacker mecca of Si Phan Don, otherwise known as the 4000 Islands. Here you can experience the laidback lifestyle and impressive natural beauty of Laos's landlocked islands. The island of Don Det serves as a great base to hire a kayak or tube for floating down the river, taking a boat trip to spot rare Irrawaddy dolphins, cycling across to the neighbouring Don Khone Island to discover the remnants of the only steam engine railway in Laos, and marveling at the thunderous Li Phi waterfall. Your Stray journey officially ends here - we hope you had a blast!

Optional Paid Activities: Bicycle or tube hire, boat trip to spot Irrawaddy dolphins, fishing.

Itineraries are seasonal and subject to change. For timetables and full terms and conditions please ask your travel agent or visit www.straytravel.asia.