



## The Southeast Asia Specialists

### Laos & Vietnam – ‘Mountains and hill-tribes’

All year round 15D, 14N ex London or 14D, 13N Luang Prabang to Hanoi

A 15 day Laos and Vietnam tour. This superb voyage through some of Southeast Asia's most remote but spectacular regions begins in the ancient Lao capital and now World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang before taking you through the dramatic mountains and jungles of Northern Lao and Vietnam. Discover the myriad traditional 'hill-tribe' peoples; the enigmatic Plain of Jars, spectacular limestone landscapes of Sam Neua, the famous Vieng Xai Pathet Lao caves and the old French Hill station of Sapa from where we'll continue by train to our final destination, Hanoi. A 2 day extension also allows you to include the fabulous, and also World Heritage, scenery of Vietnam's Halong Bay.

**Day 1** Depart London Heathrow Airport.

**Day 2** Morning arrival in Luang Prabang. Nestled in the mountains, long isolated from the outside world, we'll discover UNESCO World Heritage Site, Luang Prabang's fabulous temples, French colonial architecture and taste Lao delicacies (and the famous Lao beer!) in riverside cafes. Morning is at leisure to allow you to wander the quiet, picturesque lanes or check out the hill-tribe handicraft market and an afternoon walking tour of the town including the National Museum & former king's palace, Wat Xiengthong and the Fine Arts School to see how traditional Lao arts and handicrafts are being preserved with perhaps a sunset visit to Phu Si Hill Temple.

**Day 3** Day trip through the surrounding hills to visit the spectacular Kuang Si Waterfalls and to discover the fascinating, traditional village life of some of the local peoples.

**Day 4** Early departure for a drive along scenic mountain roads to Phonsavan Town in Xieng Khouang province – location of the famous and mysterious 'Plain of Jars'. Stops on the way include Khmu and Hmong villages as well as a reminder that this region played a major part during the Vietnam War as we visit a hidden cave temple that served as an army hospital during the combat. Late afternoon arrival in Phonsavan and atmospheric dusk visit to one of the famous jar sites.

**Day 5** Morning visit to the [Mines Action Group](#) or MAG office to learn about the work they do in clearing land mines and unexploded ordnance in the area. We then travel out to the picturesque Jar Site 2, and begin our 1 hour trek along the ridge to the impressive Jar Site 3, consisting of over around 150 jars located on top of a hill and offering great views over the surrounding countryside. Lunch in Phonsavan before an afternoon visit to the atmospheric ruins of the ancient city of Xieng Khouang, now known as Mouang Khoun.

**Day 6** Departure to the remote town of Sam Neua in the far northeast of Laos. Our drive will be broken up with visits to Hmong and Khmu settlements, a Tai Phong weaving village, as well as photo stops for the breathtaking scenery. We'll also visit the unusual [Hintang menhirs](#), (standing stones), about which practically nothing is known. Overnight in the small town of Sam Neua.

**Day 7** We begin the day with a short tour around Sam Neua town, including a walk along the river to visit the local wet market, before setting off on the short 45 minutes drive to Vieng Xai Caves. This is where the Pathet Lao leaders lived during the 'Secret War'. The fascinating tour includes a visit to the 'Kaysone Phomvihane Cave', (the leader of the Lao communist movement), and the 'Prince Soupanouvong, (the 'Red Prince') Cave'. We'll finish with the 'Artillery Cave' offering stunning views over the surrounding countryside. In the afternoon an easy walk brings us to some of the lesser visited cave sites plus an opportunity to view more of the area's beautiful limestone karst scenery.

**Day 8** Early morning departure through more spectacular countryside and past traditional Black Tai villages to the nearby border crossing at Nam Meo from where we'll head into the stunning scenery of Vietnam's Pu Luong National Park. A hike through the forest and overnight as guests of a White Tai village.

**Day 9** On to Mai Chau and across the Da River to Nghia Lo district. This is a rugged mountainous and sparsely inhabited region of northern Vietnam where most of the local people you will see are from either the various Tai or H'Mong minorities. Overnight in the small town of Nghia Lo.

**Day 10** We'll continue a leisurely drive northwards to Tu Le passing through more glorious mountain scenery and a region settled predominantly by the Dzao ethnic group. We'll also have the chance to visit the rice terraces at Mu Cang Chai - reputed to be the country's most spectacular. Overnight in the small town of Tam Uyen.

**Day 11** Our next leg takes us over the high mountain ranges along the Chinese border to our destination of [Sapa](#). This picturesque old French hill-station overlooking a spectacular valley, lies in the shadow of the mist shrouded Fansipan Mountain – at over 9,500 ft the highest summit in mainland Southeast Asia.

**Day 12** Day hike through the area's incredible scenery – known to the French as the Tonkinese Alps – terraced rice paddies, bamboo forest, towering peaks and crystal clear streams.

**Day 13** Morning at leisure to explore the town, roam the bustling hill-tribe market or simply sit back on the hotel balcony and admire the view. Late afternoon transfer to nearby Lao Cai town for the night sleeper train to Hanoi.

**Day 14** Arrival in Hanoi and check-in to a downtown hotel. Afternoon tour of the city: including Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum, the 11<sup>th</sup> century University, Hoan Kiem Lake and a walking tour of the narrow streets of Hanoi's bustling old commercial quarter. In the evening catch a performance of the highly original water-puppets.

**Day 15** Morning departure for London, via Bangkok and evening arrival.\*

\*(Note a 2 day/1 night extension to explore the incredible scenery of World Heritage [Halong Bay](#) is available.)

**Note:** this tour is offered with or without return flights from London. Persons not wishing to take up the flight option will join the tour on day 2 in Luang Prabang and depart in Hanoi on day 15.

**Highlights:** temples and colonial architecture of World Heritage Luang Prabang, Plain of Jars, Sam Neua and Pathet Lao caves of Vieng Xai, Sapa hill-station, Hanoi, spectacular mountain scenery, rarely visited destinations, local food

**Fitness:** easy to moderate, maximum hiking – 4-5 hrs on day 12

**Accommodation:** hotel, guesthouse/homestay in White Tai village, night sleeper train

**Transport:** minibus, boat, tuk-tuk, train

**Meals:** full board throughout except lunch on days; 2 & 13 and dinner on days: 3 & 12



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