

Laos Volunteer Trip (25th November – 4th December 2017)



At a glance

This unique trip gives you the opportunity to make a genuine difference for Laotian children, whilst spending time in one of Asia's hidden gems.

Highlights

- Unique experience working to improve schools and communities
- A journey on the Baraka funded 'book boats'
- Make friends and work alongside the friendly Laotians
- Stay in the UNESCO World Heritage city of Luang Prabang
- Enjoy one night in the vibrant city of Bangkok
- Be part of some genuine Responsible Tourism projects.

Summary

This trip offers a real South East Asian experience; meeting the people, enjoying the cuisine and discovering the culture of Laos all while making a practical difference to the local community.

We will spend time working and engaging with a variety of Baraka projects which include rural communities, schools, a Learning Centre and both Baraka funded book boats.

We will get hands-on working on infrastructure at the projects but there will also be time to interact with the kids Baraka is supporting.

The trip takes in four different locations, starting in the wonderful city of Luang Prabang, where we are based for the first few nights. We depart Luang Prabang and head north for a couple of nights in the much quieter and spectacular setting of Non Kiaw. From here we make our way to Kamu Lodge via the Mekong book boat which you can see in action.

During our time at Kamu Lodge you will have some free time during which you may wish to take part in some of the many activities in the area such as visits to local villages to learn about local life or fishing or perhaps some trekking. We then travel back to Luang Prabang ready to fly to Bangkok, where your trip will be rounded off with an evening to dive into the wonders the bustling city of Bangkok has to offer.

Is this trip for you?

Baraka has been working in Laos for over 7 years, building classrooms, dormitories and kitchen facilities, and even facilitating some water and sanitation programmes. Baraka also runs three library 'book boats' where the enthusiastic staff provides books and educational sessions to villages inaccessible by road.

Working on the projects in our itinerary is not compulsory but a willingness to get stuck in is appreciated by the locals who find our efforts useful. No experience is required and if painting or manual work isn't for you, interaction with the local people, language sharing and sports activities are also valuable.

Please note there is a suggested donation of £70 per person to be paid via the Baraka online giving page. Any funds you raise or donate for the project will be match funded by a private donor.

Due to the nature of travelling in developing countries such as Laos, you should be prepared for a degree of flexibility in case of last minute changes of plan. Accommodation is in hotels that are en suite and comfortable.



Itinerary



Day 0: Depart for Luang Prabang

Depart from home for Laos. Flights to be booked yourself (contact us if you need help with this).

Meals: none

Day 1 (Sat 25 Nov): Luang Prabang

On arrival you will transfer to the Mekong Sunset View Hotel for your first night in Laos.

Meals: none

Days 2-3 (Sun 26 – Mon 27 Nov): Luang Prabang

The next two days will be spent working at a community project that Baraka supports in Ban Nasavanh in a rural setting north of the city. Last year Baraka built a new school dormitory and this year we hope to provide the village with a new running water system.

Meals: breakfast, lunch



Day 4 (Tue 28 Nov): Luang Prabang – Nong Kiaw

After a morning assisting at a different Baraka project we transfer directly to Nong Kiaw in the afternoon and check into our lodge overlooking the Ou river.

Meals: breakfast, lunch

Day 5 (Wed 29 Nov): Nong Kiaw

Today we enjoy a morning's outing on the Baraka Ou River Book Boat. The book boat cruises up and down the river with enthusiastic staff delivering books and educational sessions to remote villages. The afternoon is free for you to use as you wish, but you may wish to join Andy and visit a Baraka funded school. In the evening we pay a visit to the Baraka funded Nong Kiaw Children's Learning Centre where we will enjoy a cultural show performed by the kids.

Meals: breakfast

Day 6: (Thu 30 Nov): Nong Kiaw – Kamu Lodge

We have an early transfer this morning to Pak Ou, where we pick up the Baraka Mekong Book Boat to travel to Kamu Lodge for a two-night stay. In the afternoon there will be an opportunity to visit a village school nearby to see the book boat programme in operation during one of their educational sessions.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner



Day 7 (Fri 1 Dec): Kamu Lodge

Today you have a free day where you may wish to take part in some of the optional activities in the area such as a guided walk or a visit to the local villages to learn about local life. You can also just relax in this idyllic environment and make use of the very reasonably priced spa and massage services.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8 (Sat 2 Dec): Kamu Lodge – Luang Prabang

This morning we return to Luang Prabang for a free afternoon and a final night at the Mekong Sunset View Hotel, before we depart for Thailand tomorrow.

Meals: breakfast

Day 9 (Sun 3 Dec): Luang Prabang – Bangkok

Transfer to the airport for the flight to Bangkok. On arrival transfer to the City Nuovo hotel to check in, before having the evening to explore this exciting and bustling city.

Meals: breakfast

Day 10 (Mon 4 Dec): Bangkok

Transfer back to the airport for your onward travel arrangements.

Meals: breakfast

Practical Information



Price

The total cost is £1,535 per person. You will pay a deposit of £150 at the time of booking and the final balance of £1,385 (plus any single supplements or extra arrangements) is due no later than 8 weeks prior to departure.

Note: £1535 is the maximum cost; this price may reduce subject to group numbers.

Flights

Flights are not included in the cost although can be organised upon request by contacting The Different Travel Company on info@different-travel.com.

If you require any further arrangements such as extra nights' accommodation, single rooms or anything else please let us know at the time of booking.

Airport Transfers

Airport transfers can be arranged on request, please get in touch for details.

What is included?

- ✓ All transfers and transport in Thailand and Laos
- ✓ One-way flight from Luang Prabang to Bangkok
- ✓ Accommodation in twin rooms throughout
- ✓ Meals as mentioned
- ✓ Full pre-departure support

What is excluded?

- ✗ International flights (can be arranged on request)
- ✗ Meals not mentioned
- ✗ Personal expenses (such as drinks, souvenirs etc.)
- ✗ Single room supplements
- ✗ Visas
- ✗ Vaccinations or anti-malaria medication
- ✗ Personal travel insurance
- ✗ Tips
- ✗ Optional activities

Local Time

GMT +7

Group, Staff and Support

The group will generally be between 6 and 14 people. Andy McKee is leading the tour on behalf of Baraka Community Partnerships. He will be assisted by Laotian colleagues and friends.

Minimum Age

The minimum age to participate in this trip is 14 years old (but under-18s must be accompanied by a parent or guardian).

Important information for all clients

Emergency contact numbers, details of how to reach the trip start point, and other important information will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure by email.

Trips like this Laos volunteering experience are sometimes subject to unexpected changes in order to meet the needs and requirements of the local project, to ensure your safety and greatest enjoyment; you should be prepared to be flexible where necessary.

Occasionally it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons - climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements that maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Travel Advice Service advises British tourists on the potential dangers they might experience when travelling overseas. We liaise closely with them and adhere to their travel advice. For up-to-date advice on all countries, please visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. Should there be any change to advice prior to or during travel, we may have to cancel or curtail a tour at short notice, or re-route an itinerary part way through.

Responsible Tourism

This trip is run in conjunction with Baraka Community Partnerships and will be led by Andy McKee Co-Founder of Baraka. Baraka has been working in Laos for over 7 years and has achieved a lot with volunteers at their various projects. To learn more about Baraka please go to: www.barakacommunity.com or find them on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/BarakaCommunityPartnerships>.

We are extremely environmentally conscious and aim to minimise our impact as much as possible. We encourage participants to travel responsibly and take care to leave as little impact as possible. We are well motivated towards eco-friendly practices and our aim is to help protect and preserve the environment for future generations to enjoy. For our full responsible tourism policy please visit:

<http://www.different-travel.com/responsible-tourism.php>.

Before You Go!

An A - Z of information on Laos

A is for Arrival. Visas for Laos are required for most nationalities. British Citizens can obtain a visa on arrival for around US\$35 (payable in US Dollars cash), or 1500 Thai Baht. Your passport must be valid for at least six months from your date of entry into Laos and you should bring two passport photos.

British citizens entering Thailand by air or land are permitted to stay in the country for up to 30 days. For longer stays a visa is required.

Please note the above is based on travel advice for British Citizens so this may vary for other nationalities. Please contact the Laos and Thailand Embassies in your country. The advice is correct at the time of writing.

A is also for Accommodation. You will stay in basic hotels on an en-suite basis. The Mekong Sunset View Hotel is situated on the banks of the Mekong River in Luang Prabang. Kamu Lodge is an eco-lodge in a small village on the banks of the Mekong. In Bangkok your hotel is close to the famous Khao San Road where visitors to the city flock to. The accommodation is on a twin-share basis but a single room may be available at a supplement.

B is for Begging. You may be asked for 'pennies', sweets or pencils from children but we ask you not to give gifts directly, particularly to people begging. Although it seems cruel to refuse such a small request, by giving items to beggars you are reinforcing the belief that tourists are the way to an easy income and can lead to some children purposely missing school in order to beg.

Giving sweets is a particular no-no because many children don't have access to proper dental care and rotting teeth can cause serious long-term problems.

For the schools we visit, pens, books (suitable for young children) and notebooks are appreciated as are vitamin pills and first aid supplies (in date, in undamaged packaging), educational and sporting supplies and kit etc. These items will be collected by Andy and distributed responsibly. Doing this will make a much more valuable difference. Please speak to Andy for advice on this.

B is also for Books. Lonely Planet Laos (Jun 2017) ISBN: 978-1786575319. £14.99

B is also for Bottle. You will need to a one-litre bottle **with your name written on it in permanent marker**. Bottled mineral water is available for purchase or you can purify the tap water to drink (you must provide your own purification to do this). See W is for Water.

C is also for Cobber. A recommended item is a body cooling neck wrap called a 'Cobber'. When this neck wrap is submerged in water for 30 minutes the poly-crystals absorb it making them swell and turn cold. You wrap it around your neck to cool your carotid arteries and keep your body

temperature down. One 30 minute submersion in water keeps the crystals cool and moist for three days before they start to dry out – perfect for hot days at the project! You can read more about it here: <http://www.cobbercooler.com/>

C is also for Communications. There is also a widespread mobile phone network across the country. It is quite likely that your mobile phone will work. Remember your charger and to switch to the international roaming option with your phone provider (but don't forget to turn off data to avoid unexpected charges!). While in the cities you may have some access the internet and e-mail; cyber cafes have also sprung up all over major towns and cities.

C is also for Clothing. During the project please bring lightweight neutral coloured clothes you don't mind getting dirty but that will protect you from sunburn and mosquito bites (long sleeves and legs are recommended). Clothes can be left behind as they will be gratefully received.

D is also for Dehydration. This is a potential problem caused by the exertions of the day or from diarrhoea or vomiting. Daytime temperatures can rise above 30°C so you should consume at least three litres of water to avoid the risk of dehydration, plus additional fluids such as tea and coffee. You should bring a small supply of rehydration salts such as Dioralyte with you and you may wish to bring electrolyte tablets (e.g. Nuun or High5) which you add to your drinking water to help prevent depletion of the body's important minerals, salts and sugars through sweating. These tablets are flavoured so are also a great addition for those people who find it unpalatable to drink plain water. Electrolyte tablets can be purchased at any outdoors stores and online for around £6 for 12 tablets. See also W is for Water.

D is also for Dietary requirements. Please ensure that you notify us of any dietary requirements at the time of booking. Dietary requests may not be possible to cater for without advance arrangement. The majority of special diets, such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc., can be catered for but please note that we cannot guarantee that food preparation will have taken place in a contamination free environment.

D is also for Discount. Nomad Travel have kindly offered a 10% discount against any purchase of kit and equipment online or in-store and 10% discount off vaccinations at their travel clinics. Also Cotswold Outdoor are offering our clients 15% discount for use at their stores or online. Please contact us for a voucher.

E is for Electricity. Power is 220v/50Hz and uses European and US plug sockets.

E is also for Expenses. You will need to bring some spending money with you to Laos and Thailand for meals not included, drinks, personal spending money, tips, souvenirs etc. There are ATMs in Luang Prabang and Bangkok if you wish to withdraw cash, but be aware that your bank may charge for overseas withdrawals and transactions so please

inform them in advance. A £70 suggested donation is payable online before departure via a Baraka online giving page. Funds will go directly to Baraka Community Partnerships, and are used to buy supplies in advance for our project work at the schools and clinic.

Please allow approximately £100-£150 (approximately US\$150) to cover meals not included and other general expenses. Large souvenirs or expensive purchases should be budgeted for separately. See also M is for Money.

F is for First Aid kit. You should have a small first aid kit of essential items which is for your own personal use. You must ensure you have access to your own first aid kit in your daypack. Suggested items to include: anti-malaria medicine, painkillers, plasters, insect repellent (containing 50% DEET), anti-histamine tablets, Imodium (Loperamide), rehydration sachets, lip balm with SPF, antiseptic cream etc. Please see kit list below.

F is for Food. Food is provided as specified in the itinerary above. Please inform us of any special dietary requirements (e.g. vegetarian or allergies), so we can advise the local operators.

H is for Haggling. When shopping for gifts in market places where there are no price tags on items it is expected that you will haggle. The first price is sometimes three times more than the value of the item, but remember that you should engage with the vendor to encourage rapport before haggling then only pay what you think is a good price for the item, not trying to get the price as low as possible.

H is also for Health. You should seek medical advice at least eight weeks before travelling from your own travel health specialist or nurse and your local surgery to ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up-to-date. The Different Travel Company regrets that we cannot offer medical advice specific to you. For general information on health you should visit www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk. **Malaria occurs all over Laos so you must discuss malaria prophylaxis with your GP.** Whichever tablets are prescribed, follow the instructions carefully as these often require you to start the course prior to your departure. There is no single anti-malarial that you can take to offer you complete protection, so it is very important that you wear long sleeve shirts and loose trousers especially during the evenings, use 50% DEET mosquito repellent and sleep under a permethrin treated mosquito net (provided). Upon your return you should mention to your doctor that you have been to a malarial area if you develop any symptoms (fever, fatigue).

I is for Insect repellent. Malaria occurs in Laos and you must take repellent with you. 50% DEET is the most effective repellent available; as recommended by The Department of Health. Do not bring 100% DEET as this is not suitable for use on your skin, but is intended for use on clothing (e.g. mosquito repellent wrist bands etc.) Be aware that DEET can melt plastic, stain clothes and remove dye so be careful when using any DEET product and apply it as recommended on the bottle.

I is also for Insurance. The Different Travel Company will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip however unexpected things can occur such as your cancellation, delays, medical problems and baggage loss etc. Thus, the purchase of travel insurance for our expeditions, such as a policy from Campbell Irvine Direct, is mandatory and you are advised to organise this at the time of booking to ensure you are covered immediately. Travel insurance is a cost-effective way to protect yourself and your equipment. Please ensure that your policy covers community project activities.

<http://www.campbellirvinedirect.com/differenttravel>

Please note: most travel insurance policies protect you before departure too so it is advised to buy insurance as close to booking as possible to protect the loss of your registration fee as a result of cancellation due to injury, illness etc.

K is for Keeping cool. By covering your head and skin you will keep the sun off and keep you cool. A hat or bandana is essential as well as drinking plenty of water which will keep your body temperature moderated. See also 'C is for Cobber' for an accessory that keeps you cool.

L is for Language. The language of Laos is Lao. Here are a few useful phrases and numbers in the local language:

English	Lao
Hello	Sábaai-dji
Goodbye	Sôhk dii der
How are you?	Sábaai-dji baw?
I am fine	Dee, kop-jai
Thank you	Khàwp jai

M is for Money. The Laos currency is the Kip (LAK). At the time of writing there are 9,884 Kip to the Pound and 7,976 Kip to the US Dollar.

US Dollars and British Pounds can be exchanged to Kip in Laos. Scottish and Channel Islands notes will not be accepted for exchange. ATMs are widespread but are subject to local conditions such as power cuts and breakdowns so should not be relied upon. If you intend to use ATMs you must inform your bank of your travel plans. ATMs are less reliable than those you use at home so you are advised to bring enough cash as a backup. US Dollars and Thai Baht are also accepted for payment for goods and services in Laos although this is often at inflated rates. You should bring US\$ for your Laos visa on arrival.

Please note: Laotian Kip is a closed currency which means it cannot be exchanged outside of Laos. Please change back unused local currency before departing.

The Thai currency is the Baht (THB). At the time of writing there are 43 Baht to the Pound and 35 Baht to the US Dollar. US Dollars and British Pounds can be exchanged to Baht in both Laos and Thailand but Scottish and Channel Islands notes will not be accepted for exchange. ATMs are widespread and generally fairly reliable. If you intend to use

ATMs you must inform your bank of your travel plans. You can buy Thai Baht from bureau de changes in your country before arrival, and exchange it back if you have leftover currency after departure.

P is for Photocopies. Before departure ensure you photocopy all your documents (passport, visa, credit cards, passport photos, driving licence etc.) and leave a copy with a reliable person. You should also scan and email these to yourself so you have a copy online if you need it.

P is for Photography. When taking photographs of the local people, it is polite to ask their permission first. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission, especially in rural areas, can cause offence. In contrast, taking photographs of someone you have become friendly with is usually very welcome. If someone offers to have their photo taken with you, ask how much it will cost first, as many locals expect payment for photographs and it is wise to agree on a price first.

P is also for Poverty. Poverty in Laos can be distressing. It is important not to underestimate the psychological impact of viewing poverty and a sense of helplessness and guilt that often comes from it. Some people respond to such sights by feeling they must do everything they can to help everyone they can. The risk with this is that it leads to disappointment and disillusionment as no one person can do everything. The secret here is to recognise the signs (raised levels of stress, feeling emotional, guilty, frustrated and angry), and to set realistic goals about what you can and cannot do. We also recommend that you avoid acting on impulse – especially when it comes to giving away money. People may seem genuine, but very many people still regard tourists as ‘cash cows’ and act dishonestly and unethically. Please see B is for Begging.

R is for Religion. The majority of the population practice Buddhism (around 98%) and the rest are a mixture of other religions and faiths.

S is for Safety. The central areas of the larger cities are hotspots for thieves and pickpockets. Do not carry more cash than required, and divide it among your wallet; hidden pockets and concealed money belt (only access these hidden pockets in privacy!). Avoid wearing jewellery and don't carry a lot of camera equipment especially in the major

cities.

S is also for Sleeping. Ear plugs are strongly recommended for a peaceful night. Bedding and mosquito nets are provided in the hotels so you will not need to bring this with you.

T is also for Tipping. Tipping your guides and driver is appreciated but not compulsory in Laos. Most drivers and local guides rely on tipping as part of their wages, however the quality of service determines the amount, if at all. To take the hassle away, Andy may organise a tip kitty during your stay and we recommend about £25-£30 (US\$40-45) for this.

T is also for Transport. Transport is by private bus – the size will depend on group numbers, or by book boat. We travel on a mixture of tarmac roads and uneven bumpy dirt tracks. We will fly to Bangkok.

W is also for Water. Tap water in Laos and Thailand is not safe to drink; this includes the tap water at the hotels. **You must not brush your teeth or rinse your mouth with the tap water**, only use bottled or purified water.

You may wish to bring water purification so you can refill your bottle at the tap and purify it, to minimise your use of plastic bottles. If you wish to do this, a highly recommended purification is ‘Biox Aqua’ tablets which contains chlorine dioxide; these chemicals kill 99.9% of all known bacteria plus cysts such as cryptosporidium and giardia and doesn't leave water tasting too strongly of chemicals.

You may also wish to consider powdered fruit juice or electrolyte tables such as Nuun or High5, as this will make the purified water taste better. See also D for Dehydration.

W is for Weather. Late November to December is in the dry season so it is usually dry and warm with minimal chances of rain showers. The daily highs are up to 28C, hovering around 24C on average each day but dropping to 15C at night. The waterways are in full flow at this time of year promising some of the best conditions for river journeys.

All information correct as of March 2017

Suggested Kit List

Clothing & Footwear

Casual footwear	<input type="checkbox"/>
T-shirt or shirt	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lightweight trousers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knee/calf-length shorts or skirt	<input type="checkbox"/>
Underwear	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warm clothes for evenings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lightweight clothes for project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sun hat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buff or bandana	<input type="checkbox"/>
Swimwear	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfortable travel clothes	<input type="checkbox"/>

Essentials

Passport with 6 months validity	<input type="checkbox"/>
Laos visa (or US\$35 cash for visa on arrival)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cash and credit/debit cards	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel insurance documents	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flight e-tickets	<input type="checkbox"/>
LED head torch + batteries	<input type="checkbox"/>
Copy of passport & other docs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Camera + spare battery	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sunglasses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel plug adaptor	<input type="checkbox"/>

First Aid Kit (Consult your doctor for advice)

Prescription medicine	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anti-malaria medication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paracetamol and Ibuprofen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plasters	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insect repellent (50% DEET)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anti-histamine tablets/cream	<input type="checkbox"/>
Imodium (Loperamide)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rehydration (e.g. Dioralyte)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lip balm with SPF protection	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scissors/ tweezers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blister plasters (e.g. Compeed)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spare glasses/contact lenses	<input type="checkbox"/>

Baggage

Small rucksack/ day-use bag	<input type="checkbox"/>
Duffel bag or small suitcase	<input type="checkbox"/>
Padlocks for luggage	<input type="checkbox"/>

Hygiene

Bio-degradable shampoo	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bio-degradable shower gel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toothbrush and toothpaste	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hair brush or comb	<input type="checkbox"/>
Antiperspirant deodorant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hand sanitizer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waterproof sunscreen SPF50+	<input type="checkbox"/>
After sun / body lotion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel towel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nail brush	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wet wipes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toilet paper (1-2 rolls)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flip flops for use when showering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feminine hygiene products	<input type="checkbox"/>

Eating and Drinking

1-litre water bottle with name on	<input type="checkbox"/>
Energy snacks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electrolyte tablets (e.g. Nuun)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Optional

iPod or MP3 player	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mobile phone + charger	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video camera + charger	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book/pack of cards	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sewing/repair kit	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sleeping

Pyjamas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ear plugs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eye mask (optional)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project equipment

Protective gloves and goggles	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boots or sturdy closed shoes	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please note: this kit list is just a suggestion and is not exhaustive.

Please adjust according to your personal needs and preferences.