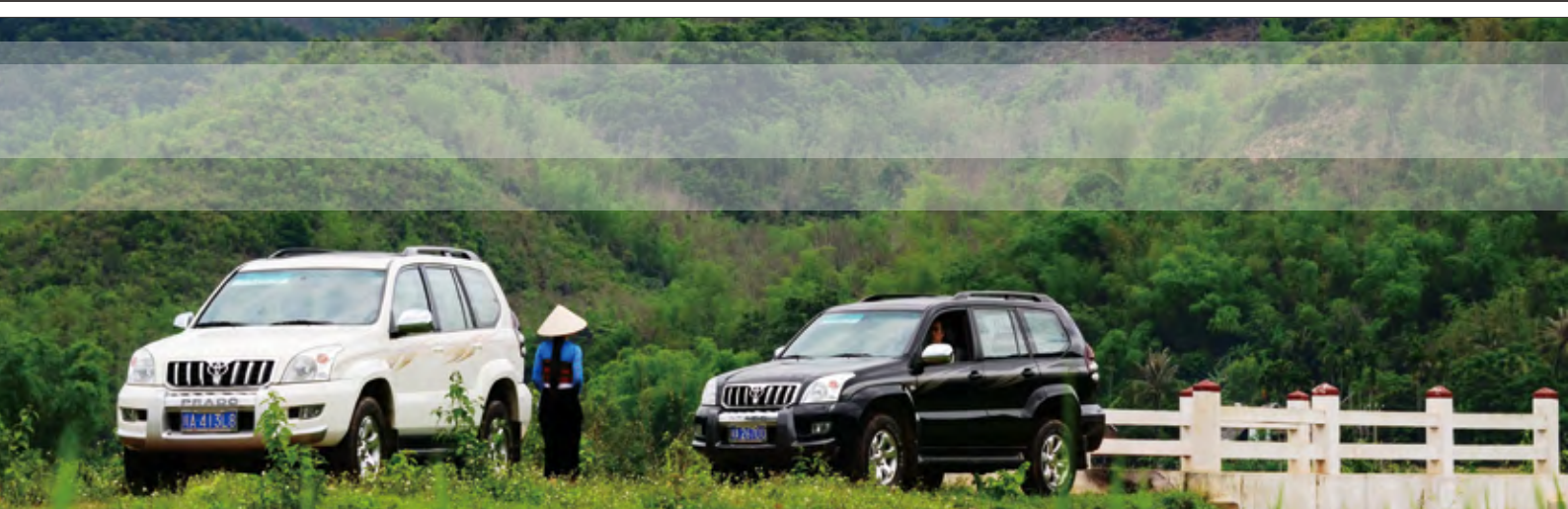


MOMENTS on the road

Asian Borderlands - Yunnan - Laos - Vietnam
(9 or 10 Days)





ON THE ROAD EXPERIENCES

BACK ROADS | HIDDEN GEMS

We love road journeys. They are by far our favourite way of traveling. We think the world of western China and the countries that border on this region – think Vietnam, Lao, Thailand, Myanmar, for example.

On the Road Experiences is all about sharing with like-minded travelers just how beautiful a road journey in these varied lands can be. Now turn the page to find out what we've come to love so much...

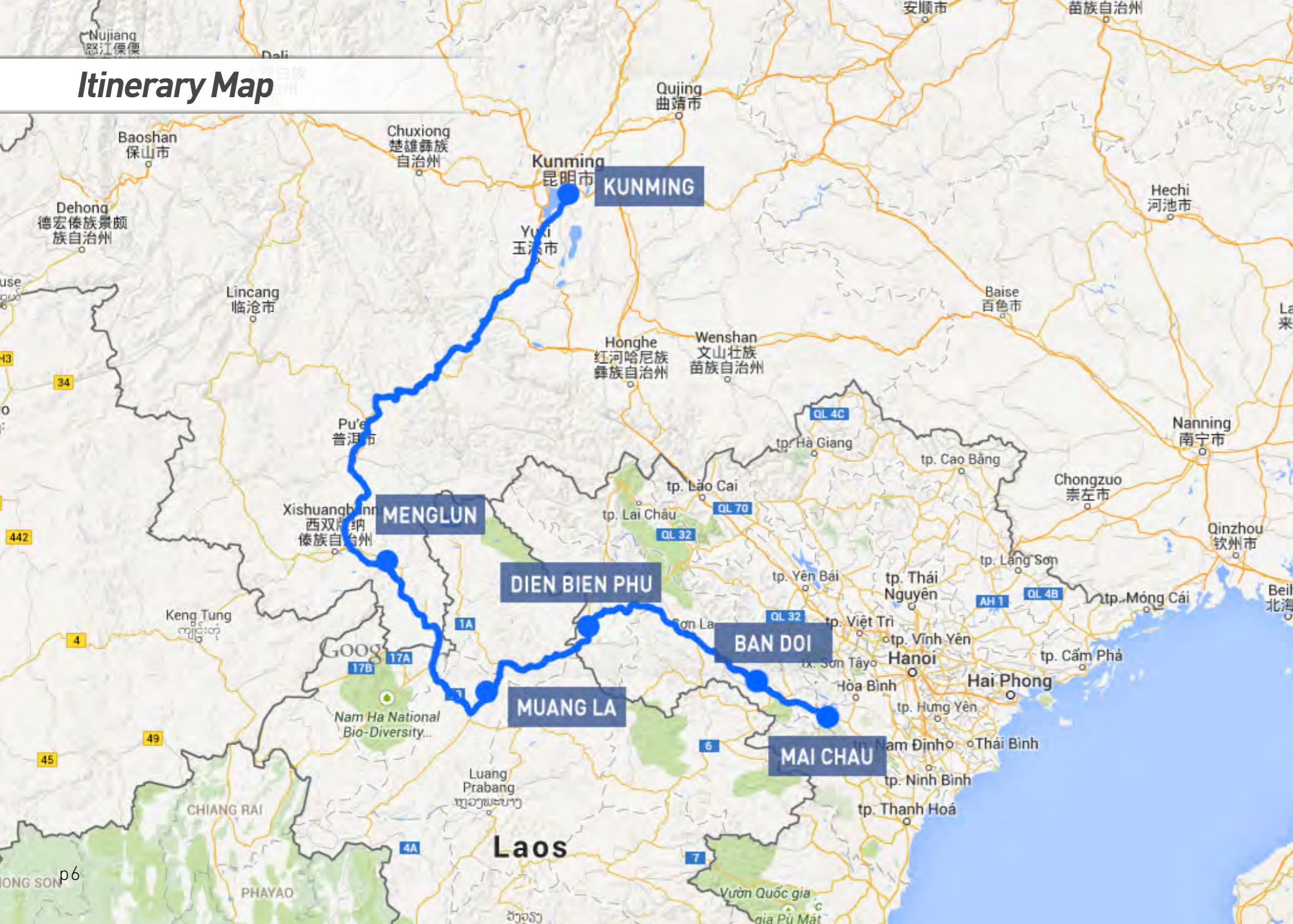


Table of contents

Itinerary Map ...where you will travel...	p. 006
Yes, it is possible...	p. 008
Journey of Discovery...	p. 010
Day-by-day...	p. 046
<hr/>	
In closing...	
Any car you like, so long as it is an SUV...	p. 063
Adventures and discoveries in local cuisines	p. 064
What's included/Best Months to Go...	p. 066
Photo credits	p. 069



Itinerary Map



Day-by-Day

Day1

Arrival in Kunming –
Preparing for your journey

Day2

Kunming to Menglun –
Into Xishuangbanna, where China
and Southeast Asia meet

Day3

In and around Xishuangbanna –
Of tropical botanical gardens, the
Dai minority and tea

Day4

Menglun to Muang La –
Crossing the border into northern
Lao

Day5

Muang La –
Explore northern Lao

Day6

Muang La to Dien Bien Phu –
Through tropical forests to Vietnam

Day7

Dien Bien Phu to Ban Doi –
On winding roads to the Moc Chau
Plateau

Day8

Ban Doi to Mai Chau –
Wonderful roads & vistas on the
way to Mai Chau

Day9

Core itinerary:
In and around Mai Chau

Short itinerary:

Goodbye Vietnam, see day 10

Day10

Goodbye Vietnam –
Life must go on....

Yes, it is possible...

A driving holiday in this part of the world is indeed possible. We take care of everything. All you need to do is come, drive and enjoy a rare adventure!


This beautiful itinerary is unique in the world. It will take you from Kunming, Yunnan to the North of Lao and to the beautiful countryside in northern Vietnam. A driving journey along this route counts among the finest in the world: along winding roads, some of Asia's best highways and Lao and Vietnam's back roads. All along this superb itinerary you will enjoy the best accommodation available – staying in some of Asia's loveliest hotels – and travel through an area steeped in the cultures of many different ethnic minorities and through some of the region's most stunningly beautiful countryside.

While driving yourself in China is already rather special, when it comes to crossing these borders by car, driving yourself, into Lao and Vietnam – no one but us is making this possible. What's more, we've selected a route far away from busy roads. Enjoy driving as it is meant to be enjoyed...

On the Road Experiences has paved the way for you to cross borders in your own properly insured SUV, so that you can enjoy the romance of a classic overland journey – crossing the Mekong on a local car ferry, winding your way along lush country roads – without any of the logistical headaches that typically accompany such journeys...

Journey of discovery



A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a dirt path in a rubber tree plantation. The trees are tall and slender, with their trunks forming a natural archway over the path. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and some low-lying vegetation. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting. In the background, a person wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants is walking away, carrying a bag. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

“XISHUANGBANNA
is a
FERTILE land...”



“XISHUANGBANNA,
where TEA
thrives...”

“XISHUANGBANNA,
the home of
Yunnan’s
DAI MINORITY...”



Dai minority village in Xishuangbanna





“XISHUANGBANNA,
home as well to
MANY smaller
MINORITIES...”

Aini minority lady in Xishuangbanna

“ Golden-robed
MONKS in
XISHUANGBANNA
are a
commonplace”

A young monk in Xishuangbanna



“ Over TEN THOUSAND plant species are found here in this GARDEN...”

“Explore
MINORITY
villages along the
road sides...”



Laos, on the way to Muang La

“VIEW
from the
road side...”

“ A GEM
of a hotel in
the MIDDLE of
NOWHERE...”



“ One of many
MINORITIES
in Northern
Vietnam...”



Northern Vietnam, on the way South...



“ MARKET DAYS
are always a great
OPPORTUNITY to see
local life...”

One of many minorities in Northern Vietnam



“Your
COMPANION
on the road...”

Northern Vietnam, on the way South




“ Sleep in a
**TRADITIONAL STILT
HOUSE** located in the
heart of a black
Thai village”

An aerial photograph of the Mai Chau valley in Vietnam. The valley floor is filled with vibrant green terraced rice fields, some of which are partially flooded. A small village with colorful buildings is nestled in the middle of the valley. The surrounding mountains are lush with green forest and rise steeply on all sides, creating a dramatic and scenic landscape. The sky is clear and blue.

“ Mai Chau
LIES in a
beautiful VALLEY...”



“ Sol Bungalows,
a HIDDEN GEM
in the middle of
PADDY FIELDS...”



“ PADDY FIELDS
and the conical
Vietnamese
STRAW HATS
everywhere...”



“ ENJOY
an evening with
the LOCALS
and RICE WINE...”

A White Thai Village dinner

Day-by-day



Day 1 Arriving in Kunming and preparing for your journey

You will need to arrive in Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan province, before 2:30pm. After arrival, we will take you to the China Driving Licensing office. Don't worry, there are no medical tests, except for a simple eye test (which is easily passed), and then, within a few minutes, you will receive your temporary Chinese driving license.

In the afternoon you may want to go for a stroll along the city-

center Green Lake where many locals enjoy relaxing hours. The vicinity of the lake bustles with people young and old and throughout much of the year is lush green. Depending on the season, energetic migratory birds make the lake their temporary home.

In the evening, enjoy a group dinner together in a lovely, local restaurant near your hotel and attend our staff's safety briefing.

Dinner will be an opportunity to begin to acquaint yourself with the many flavours of Yunnan's cuisine and to meet your fellow travellers.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: NA

Duration: NA

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 1900m

Overnight: 1900m

Hotel

Green Lake Hotel,
Kunming(*****)

Day 2 Into Xishuangbanna, where China and South-East Asia meet

In the morning you will drive onto the Kunming – Jinghong highway. In the beginning, you will likely experience morning Kunming rush hour, but after an hour or so the traffic will become thinner, the air cleaner again and the highway better. In fact, the highway from Kunming to Jinghong is one of the nicest highways we've ever driven on.

The number of tunnels and bridges – including one of the tallest in the world – and the engineering that's gone into it is impressive. After approximately four hours of driving (and gradually losing altitude from Kunming's 1,800m), you will have lunch in a small town called Mojiang. Don't expect anything fancy, but it will have to do for the day...it's really the best en route this morning.

In the afternoon, you will continue driving on the Kunming – Jinghong highway for approximately 3.5 hours. The

air and vegetation will become more and more subtropical. The last part of today's drive will be on an excellent national road to the Anantara Hotel in Menglun, which lies right next to the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden.

After this long day, you can enjoy the extensive facilities of this beautiful hotel.

We propose dinner for you at a local restaurant that offers Dai minority cuisine dishes that are a fascinating blend between Thai and Chinese. But if you've had enough Asian dishes, the hotel offers good international fare as well.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 665 km

Duration: 8 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 1900m

Overnight: 580m

Hotel

Anantara Xishuangbanna
(*****)



Day 3 Of tropical botanical gardens, the Dai minority and tea

Today you will have a big choice to make: enjoy the environs and facilities of the Anantara or go on an exploration of Xishuangbanna?

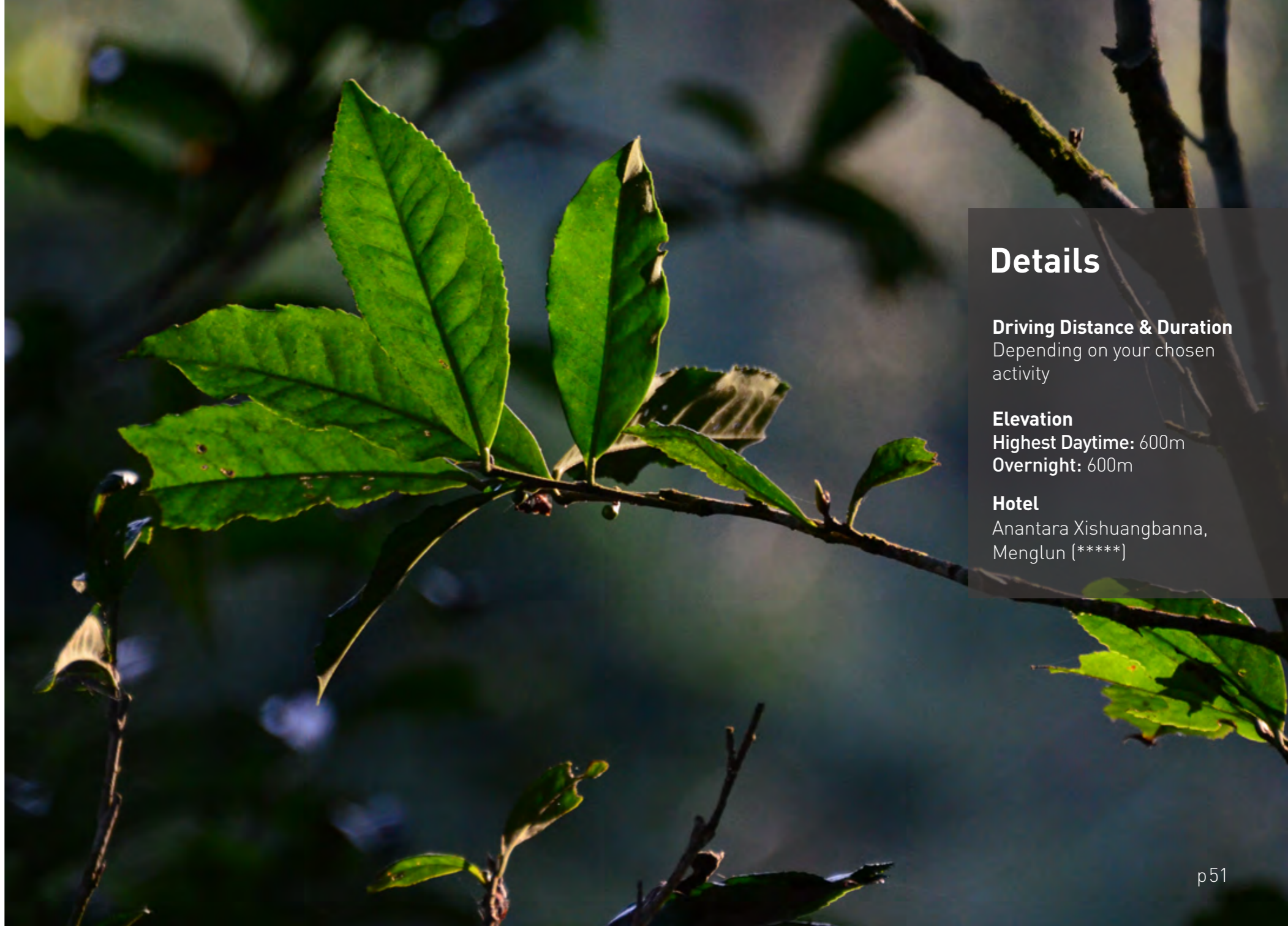
If you opt for the latter, there are a number of attractions. One, for sure, is the nearby tropical botanical garden where, depending on your interest in botany, you can spend an hour or a day.

It is also very much worth visiting Ganlanba, one of the loveliest Dai minority villages in Xishuangbanna. The drive there and back and a leisurely visit of the village with its Thai-style architecture and temples, will take up a good half day.

If you want to venture further, you may want to drive up

to Nan Nuo Shan, a small mountain whose slopes are home to the King of Tea Trees which can be reached via a gentle, 30-45min walk.

Today's breakfast is included in the tour price, dinner, lunch and activities are entirely up to you.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Depending on your chosen activity

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 600m

Overnight: 600m

Hotel

Anantara Xishuangbanna,
Menglun {*****}

Day 4 Crossing the border into northern Lao

In the morning you will depart for the China-Lao border, which you will reach after about an hour and a half. We have prepared all the border formalities well in advance to make the border crossing as smooth as possible, but it will nonetheless take a bit of time: here in South-East Asia, crossing borders is still an

event where in much of Europe or America it has become a non-event. Crossing borders is not only an event; it is a romantic one...where nostalgia blends with adventure to deliver a powerful emotional mix.

Once in Laos, it's a 4 hour drive through subtropical forests and along villages to a hidden gem in the middle of nowhere: the Muang La Resort in Oudomxay Province, in the far north of Laos. Within the fertile

rainforest, the region is home to over 500 villages where traditional life still prevails, albeit in varying forms; there are 23 ethnic minorities who live in Oudomxay, and each have their own language and customs.

Equidistant from China and Vietnam, the resort is situated on the edge of a small traditional village with around 100 inhabitants. Surrounded by rain forest, on the banks of a river and

with only 5 wooden villas and 10 bedrooms, built following traditional architecture, the notion of a retreat assumes its full meaning.

Before dinner, why not enjoy the swimming pool? The pool lies on a small island in the middle of a river facing the resort, connected only via a bamboo bridge. Or try one of the bar's delicious drinks, for example one that is an icy mint cocktail? Very refreshing!

The cooking is fabulous and offers a menu with a mix of Lao and Thai flavours, but with distinct and different overtones. After dinner, continue with another drink and relax to the sound of crickets in the gardens – the perfect way to ease into the relaxed rhythms of South-East Asia...

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 240 km

Duration: 5-6 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 600m

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Muang La Resort, Oudomxay
[****]



Day 5 Relaxing in Muang La or discover Northern Lao minorities

Today is a day to relax and unwind in Lao. What might you be in the mood for?

Maybe you just want to stay at the resort, take a dip in the pool or enjoy a traditional massage?

The immediate surroundings of the resort also offer many opportunities for walking, cycling to the town, meeting local people or visiting the revered Buddha temple that overlooks the resort. Alternatively, you can explore the banks of the Nam Pak River – a rich testimony to the local lifestyle that can seem delightfully quaint. Or perhaps you would like to discover more of Northern Lao and visit a Khmu village or villages of the Ikhos people?

Laos has a true mosaic of ethnic groups. It has 130

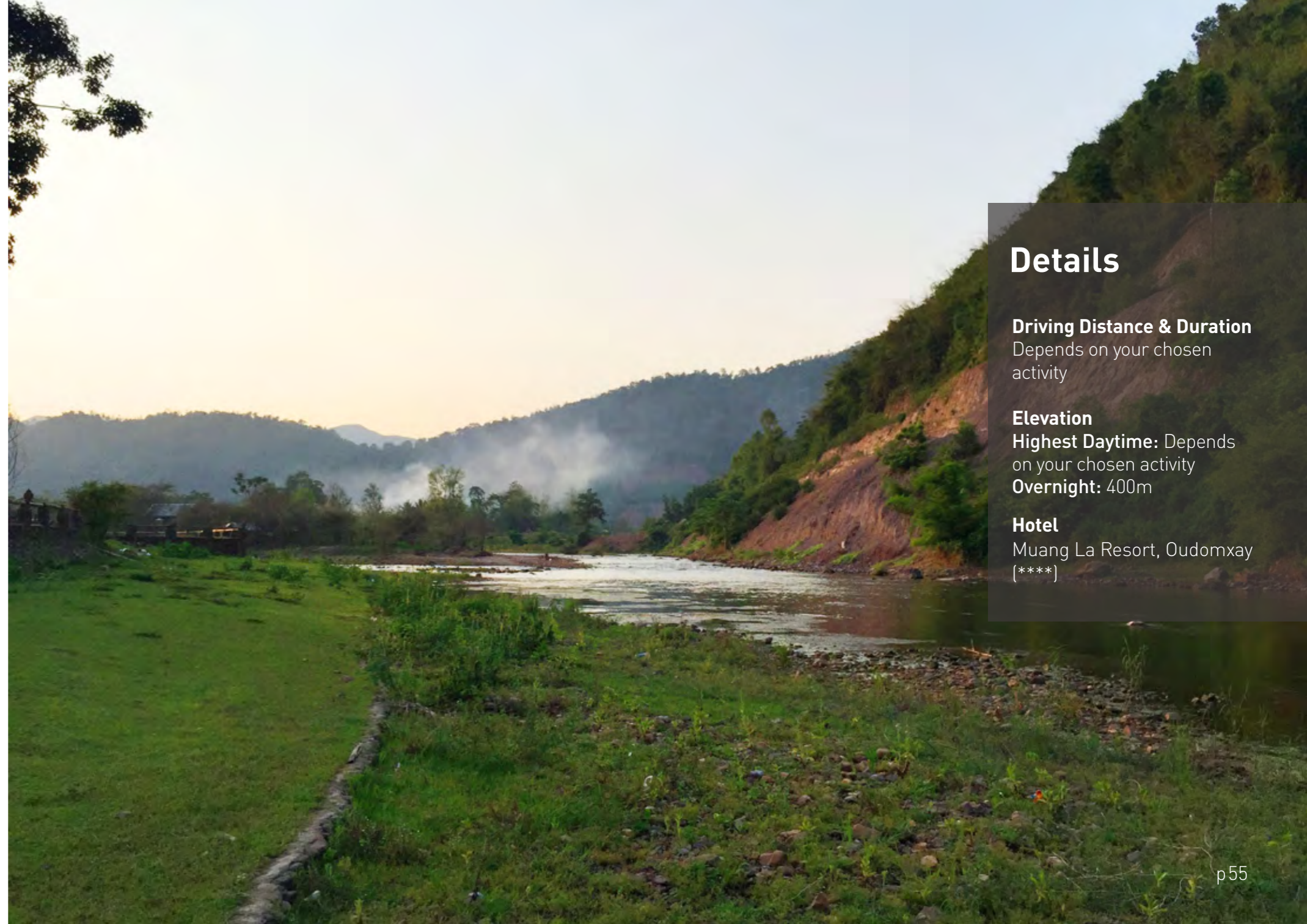
different ethnic tribes divided into four language groups. Some of the tribes may only have a few hundred members and are only found in Lao.

Today, there are around six million people spread across 16 provinces. The Lao government has tried to simplify the diversity of ethnic groups, by nominating three main groups determined by the altitude of where they live:

- The Lao of the Plain or “Lao Loum” living below an altitude of 400m above sea level
- The Lao of the Mountains “Lao Theung”, living between 400m and 900m
- The Lao of the High Mountains “Lao Sououng”, living above 900m

Now it is up to you to decide how to fill your day. We are happy to make all the arrangements for you.

Today's breakfast is included in the tour price, lunch, dinner and activities are entirely up to you.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Depends on your chosen activity

Elevation

Highest Daytime: Depends on your chosen activity

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Muang La Resort, Oudomxay
(****)

Day 6 Through tropical forest to Vietnam

Today you will continue your journey through Northern Lao toward Vietnam. After around 3 hours of driving on back roads through the rain forest, you will arrive at the Lao/Vietnam border. Again we have prepared all the border formalities for you and crossing the border into Vietnam should be quite straight forward.

Once in Vietnam, the landscape continues to be hilly and the roads rather winding, but largely very well paved. It is just a short drive from the border to Dien Bien Phu, your destination for the night. Once you arrive you can explore Dien Bien Phu's history as it is the site of the Vietnamese victory over the French in 1954. It is home to a range of wartime attractions along with a fascinating food market, which you will also have time to explore in the evening.

Dien Bien Phu offers not many choices for accommodations. We have chosen the best hotel available for you, but please note that the Muang Thanh Hotel is one of the two basic hotels along this itinerary.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 180 km

Duration: 4-5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 400m

Hotel

Muang Thanh Hotel, Dien Bien Phu (***)

Day 7 On winding roads to the Moc Chau Plateau

Today and the day after you will be driving through some of the most enjoyable country roads of northern Vietnam because this area is hardly ever visited by tourists and because the roads are virtually completely free of traffic. This remoteness also means that you will see and can come in contact with "hill tribes" – whose lives have changed very little, seemingly for centuries. You will encounter some people who are not encountered anywhere else and others which strike a close resemblance with minorities in China. Regardless of your interest in the details of these ethnic groups, one can't help

but be moved by how friendly they are.

After our lunch in Son La the road winds its way further through the northern hills to the splendidly scenic Moc Chau plateau, which is home to wonderful mountains and a variety of rich agriculture. We have chosen a special experience for the night, a homestay in a traditional stilt house in Ban Doi, a traditional black Thai village. Hosted by Mister Quiet and his family, you will have the chance to encounter the socio-cultural environment of this charming village and its people and making friends with the locals. For dinner at the homestay you will be able to try some of the best cuisine from the mountainous areas of North Vietnam.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 357 km

Duration: 7-8 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 800m

Overnight: 800m

Hotel

Moc Chau homestay, Ban Doi village (**)

Home made food, simple but delicious. Meals are served in the traditional way, a mix of several dishes served at once for the whole table and accompanied with steamed or glutinous rice.

Day 8 Wonderful roads & vistas on the way to Mai Chau

Today it is only a short drive on winding country roads from Ban Doi village to the Mai Chau valley. You will drive through some tiny, quaint villages... always good for a photo stop!

The timing depends on you. We can leave early or late morning from Ban Doi and you will still

have enough time to enjoy lovely Mai Chau.

Mai Chau is home to the Sol Bungalows, a gem of an inn surrounded by lush rice paddies, emerald mountains and bamboo trees. This lodge offers nicely appointed rooms and a wonderful swimming pool overlooking the paddy fields. Sol Bungalow will be your last stop on this journey and your home for the next two nights. Today's dinner will be at Sol Bungalows.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 90 km

Duration: 2 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 800m

Overnight: 220m

Hotel

Sol Bungalow, Mai Chau

(*****)

Day 9 Core itinerary: In and around Mai Chau Short itinerary: Good-bye Vietnam

Core itinerary: You've been on the road for quite some time and your last day on this journey is a day of leisure. How would you like to fill it? It can be as simple as settling in with a good book by the lodge's pool in the morning and enjoying a lazy brunch. Or you can fill it with any number of activities that range from short village walks to full-day treks, exploring Mai Chau by bike or kayak (combined with a river-side picnic), visiting the Mo Luong Cave or involving yourself hands-on in the making of handicraft if you want to acquire a taste of the techniques of weaving as practiced by the White Tai minority which migrated here from Yunnan's Xishuangbanna area many centuries ago.

If you are interested in a cooking class to learn some of Vietnam's famous dishes,

you can do so as well. We will guide you toward whatever will make this day most enjoyable for you.

For our farewell dinner we have a bit of a surprise in store for you...a dinner in a remote village of Thai people. What's on the menu we'll keep a secret for now!

Today's breakfast and dinner are included; lunch and the activities you choose will be up to you.

Short itinerary: Life must go on.... please see Day 10.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Depends on your chosen activity

Elevation

Highest Daytime: Depends on your chosen activity

Overnight: 220m

Hotel

Sol Bungalow, Mai Chau

(****)





Day 10
Core itinerary: Life must go on....

As it always happens on our journeys, you too, will likely feel that this journey has been far too short. Is this really the end? If you do have a few more days, why not stay on in Mai Chau for a few more days or visit buzzing Hanoi?

When you're ready to leave, we will take you to Hanoi airport and hope that you will return soon to join another journey.



Choice of Cars

We include in the package price an SUV we procure from Avis or Hertz or another reputable car rental company. Most of the SUVs are Toyotas, but on occasion Mitsubishi's or other brands may also make an appearance. For some itineraries, we are able to offer you an option to upgrade your car to the new models from Audi.

We wish the car rental markets of China would be more developed and we could give you more choice, but this is not so: since we want to provide well-maintained and well-insured cars, the choice is rather limited.

But SUVs are in fact the right choice for driving journeys in this part of the world because they are spacious enough to accommodate a lot of luggage, photography equipment, and

good-and-bad-weather gear. Also, they reinforce the feeling of adventure, exploration and discovery...which is, in the end, the mood of journeys in this region, no matter how comfortable or even luxurious the night's hotel may be.

What's more, they offer sufficient clearance when required and thus add a sense of safety and all-round ability. (4-wheel drive capability is hardly needed in China these days since all roads are either very well-paved or, with good gravel, offer solid support.)

And so SUVs from reputable brands are our car of choice!

**“ ANY car,
as long as
it is an SUV”**



Adventures and Discoveries in Local Cuisines

While this itinerary is not one of our 'Foodie'-themed journeys, we do believe that each one of our journeys should introduce you not only to hidden gems of cultural and scenic beauty, but that sampling local cuisines is also a must.

Wherever you travel with us, we will order, with very few exceptions, dishes fresh and on location with an emphasis on local produce. It is not uncommon for our guides to venture into the kitchen to pick this, that or the other vegetable and to ask the cook to prepare them in the finest possible way. (On occasion we do pre-order a meal: this will normally be the case only for special occasions!)

Wine and beer is always included in our meals for you to enjoy. (When we travel into high-altitude, we suggest moderation!)

Finally, if you have special dietary requirements are particularly interested in the culinary aspect of one of our journeys, please let us know.

For private journeys, we can, of course, tailor the meal experience to your taste (and budget).



What's Included / Best Months to Go...

Generally speaking, our journey packages and prices are all-inclusive. Once you've paid and you arrive at the starting point, you really won't have to take out your wallet again.

- **Cars** – a modern SUV is provided for all driving days, expertly maintained and serviced by Avis, Hertz, or other reputable car rental companies, and covered by the best insurance available, and hire car return from Mai Chau to Kunming is also included
- **International Journey Host, Guide and Support Vehicle** – you will be accompanied by a registered Chinese tour guide, an On the Road in China host and a fully equipped lead car with a local support driver
- **Routes** – we provide an extensively researched and carefully designed itinerary and “state-of-the-art” satellite navigation system with a pre-programmed route for the journey. You will also receive a detailed pre-departure pack and route book for the journey
- **Driving License** – You will require an International Driving Permit for Lao and Vietnam. You will also need a temporary Chinese driving license for which all arrangements and fees are included.
- **Fuel & Tolls** – we provide petrol for the car throughout the journey and pay all tolls



Best months to go...

JAN FEB **MAR** **APR** **MAY** JUN
JUL AUG **SEPT** **OCT** **NOV** DEC

- **Airport Transfers** – all airport transfers are included
- **Permits and logistics** – all arrangements for the crossing of the China-Lao and Lao-Vietnam borders for travellers and cars
- **Hotels** – the best available or five-star accommodation is included in each overnight stop

- **Meals** – breakfast (a choice of Western and Local is provided), and lunch and dinner are included on all driving days, as are drinks. Meals on non-driving days as specified above. Prepare for a culinary adventure!
- **Goodies** – you will enjoy an On the Road Home-Away-from-Home Kit containing wet towels, anti-bacterial gel and basic toiletries, and a daily picnic basket containing fresh fruit, fruit juice, water, and a mixture of sweets and nibbles

- **Other Essentials** – we provide each car with walky-talkies
- **Travel Insurance** – including 24-hour medical assistance, evacuation and repatriation emergency service
- **Tips & Entrance Fees** – basic tips and entrance fees for jointly attended activities are included
- **Activities, Meals, Transport** during ‘free times’ as indicated in this Journey Dossier
- **Top-up Collision Damage Waiver** insurance

What's Not Included

The only items not included in our prices are flights to Kunming and from Hanoi, your China, Lao and Vietnam visas, and personal purchases (e.g., gifts, souvenirs).



Photo Credits

- © Joanna James - page 18
- © Mareen Windisch - pages 46, 55, 58, 59
- © Moc Chau Homestay - pages 36, 57
- © Muang La Hotel - pages 26, 28, 52-53
- © Peter Schindler - Front and Back Cover, pages 2, 4, 8, 10, 16, 22, 24, 30, 32, 34, 42, 44, 48, 51, 56, 60, 62, 67
- © Ron Yue - 12, 14, 20, 49, 68, 71
- © Sol Bungalow - 38, 40, 58
- Unknown - 64,-65

Contact Us

E-mail
contact@ontheroadexperiences.com

Main office

Telephone: +852 3106 4839
Fax: +852 3012 1251

Overseas

Taiwan: +886 978 317 465
+886 921 162 079
Australia: +61 2 8003 5317
Switzerland: +41 (44) 586 58 43
UK: +44 121 288 6879
Germany: +49 160 9622 2506

“ A picture is worth a thousand words. True, but when it comes to a road journey, moving images are priceless. Please visit : <http://www.ontheroadexperiences.com/en/video-gallery>”





ON THE ROAD EXPERIENCES

BACK ROADS | HIDDEN GEMS

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

