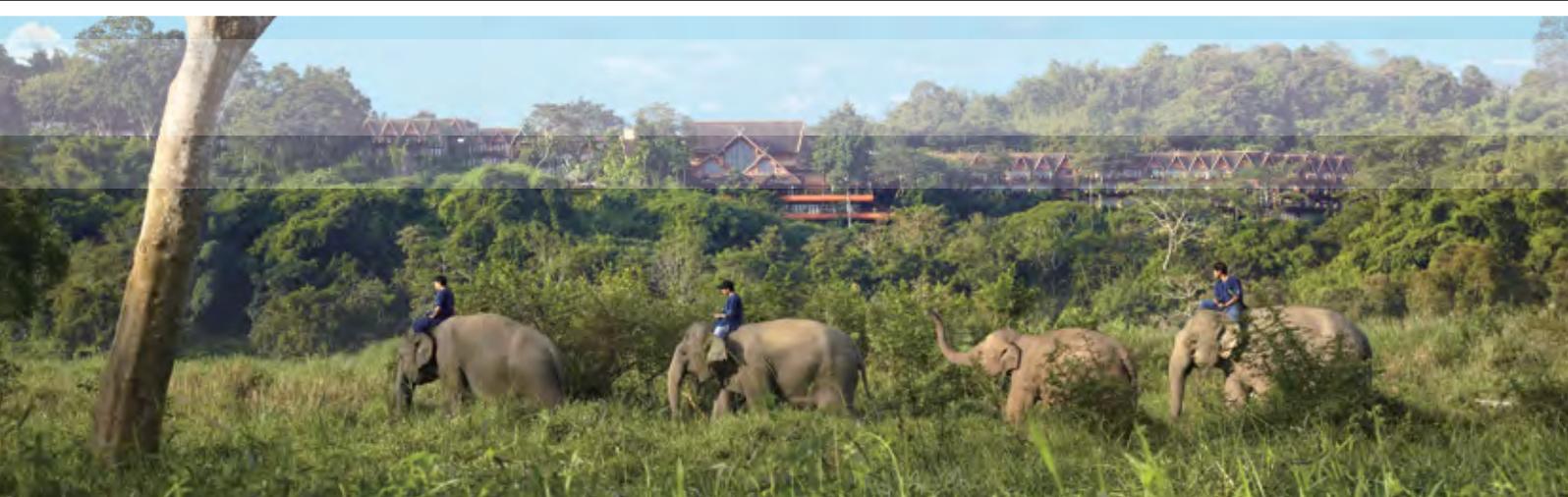


MOMENTS

on the road

Elephants and Parasols:
From Vientiane to the Golden Triangle
(9 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.

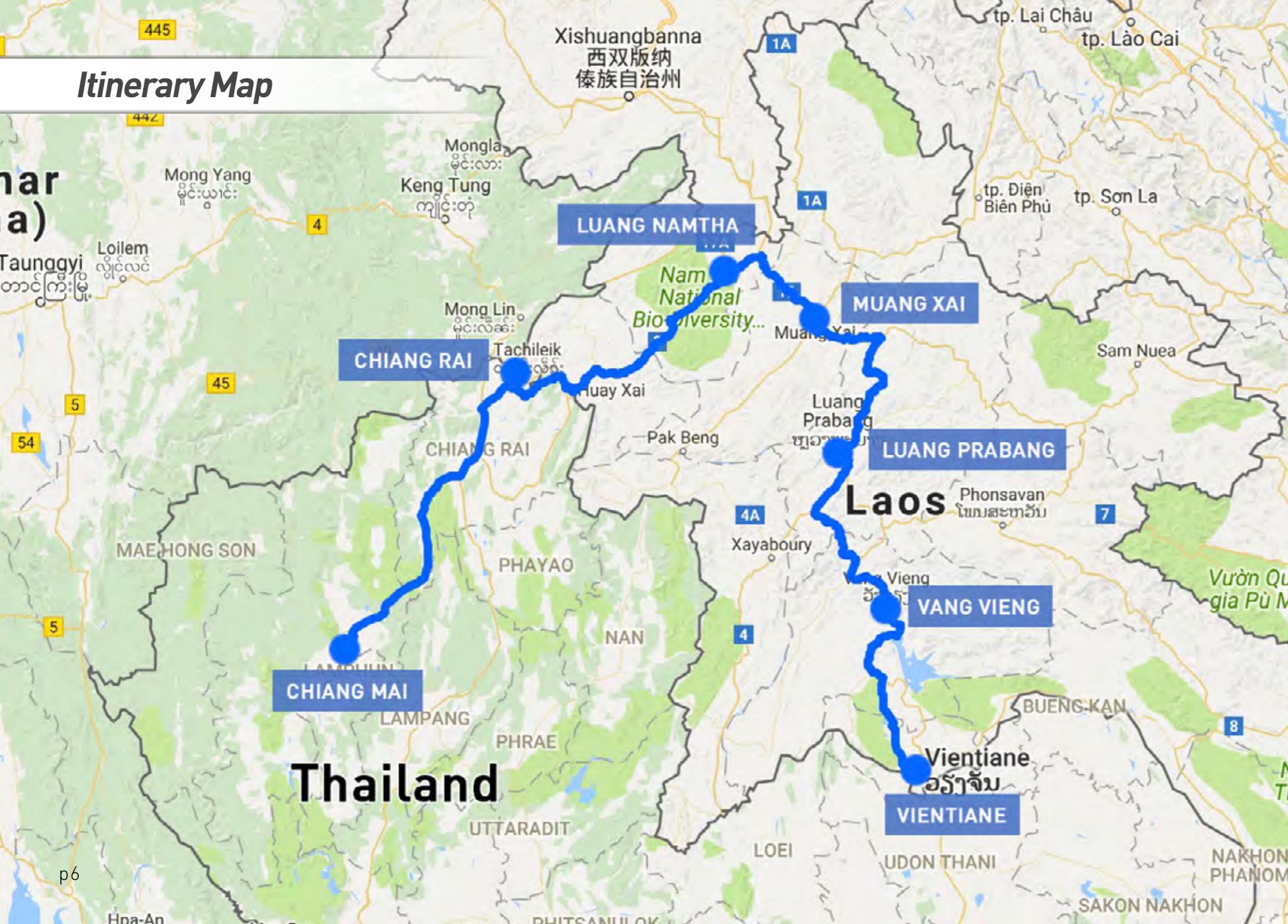
On the Road Experiences is all about sharing with like-minded travelers just how beautiful a road journey in these varied lands can be. Now turn the page to find out what we've come to love so much...



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Itinerary Map



Day-by-Day

Day1
Arrive in Vientiane –
Welcome to Laos! Preparing for your journey

Day2
Vientiane to Vang Vien –
Into the limestone hills

Day3
Vang Vien to Luang Prabang –
To the Land of Wats and Villas

Day4
Luang Prabang to Muang Xai –
From old-world romance to rural idyll

Day5
Muang Xai to Luang Namtha –
Continue through the hills

Day6
Luang Namtha to Chiang Saen –
To the Golden Triangle

Day7
Around the Golden Triangle –
Relax at the Anatara or explore the Myanmar border area

Day8
Golden Triangle to Chiang Mai –
To the heart of the Lanna Kingdom

Day9
Chiang Mai –
Farewell! Thailand, unless you're able to stay 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!

Elephants and Parasols: From Vientiane to Chiang Mai is a discovery of beautiful landscapes, natural splendour and local culture.

Your journey takes you from Vientiane, Laos' capital, through the countryside of northern Laos to Vang Vieng, Luang Prabang, Muang Xai and Luang Namtha before crossing the Mekong into Thailand. Enjoy a day near the Golden Triangle and end your journey in the former capital of the Lanna Kingdom – Chiang Mai.

Don't come here looking for big shopping centres, cinema complexes, skyscrapers, crowded streets or fancy nightlife. Laos is an ideal destination if you are after a breathtaking getaway, being close to nature, enjoying a relaxing, peaceful journey and meeting friendly people everywhere you turn. The laidback atmosphere and the relative lack of modern development make Laos among the most authentic and unspoiled of the Southeast Asia's nations. Wherever you go here, you'll encounter the delectable Lao cuisine: a little bit French, a lot Southeast Asian, and perfect washed down with a bottle of Beer Lao.

All along this exciting route you will enjoy the best accommodation available – staying in some of the region's loveliest hotels – and travel through an area steeped in the cultures of many different ethnic minorities and through beautiful countryside.

On the Road in China 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 without any of the logistical headaches that typically accompany such journeys...



Journey of discovery





“Mountain ranges encircle the Luang Prabang city in lush greenery...”

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



“VIEW
from the
road side...”

“ Off the beaten path
in Lao... where
VISTORS are...
as RARE as UFOs...”



A small village in northern Lao

“Where CHILDREN
are as LOVEABLE
and UNSPOILED
as anywhere on
the PLANET...”

In a small village in northern Lao

“ELEPHANT encounters
with KINDLY CARED
FOR animals...one of
your CHOICES in the
GOLDEN TRIANGLE...”

In Thailand's Golden Triangle



“...or an OUTING
to the MYANMAR
border...or much
else besides...”

“KITCH or FLIGHT
OF FANCY? Never
mind, definitely
worth a VISIT...”



The 'White' temple on the way to Chiang Mai



“ A BEAUTIFUL HOTEL
right by Chiang Mai’s
NIGHT MARKET...
a wonderful way to
end the journey...”

Day-by-day



Day 1 Welcome to Laos! Preparing for your journey

Arrive in Vientiane according to your own arrangements. We will meet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel.

In the afternoon you have time to explore the capital of Laos. Despite being the country's largest city and the hub of commerce and administration, Vientiane is still refreshingly laidback. It lies on the banks

of the Mekong River where a city has stood since 1,000 AD. The charming boulevards of the historic old quarter are lined with frangipani and tamarind trees. Stop at one of the district's temples - Wat Si Saket was built in 1818 and is one of the oldest temples in Vientiane, featuring thousands of Buddha images.

In the evening, enjoy a group dinner together in a lovely restaurant and attend our staff's safety briefing. Dinner will be an opportunity to begin to acquaint yourself with the many flavours

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: NA

Duration: NA

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 174m

Overnight: 174m

Hotel

Greenpark Hotel, Vientiane (****)

of Lao cuisine and to meet your fellow travellers.

Day 2 Into the limestone hills

Today you start your journey through Laos with a leisurely drive on winding roads through rainforest and past sleepy villages. Today's destination, Vang Vieng, is set in dramatic surroundings, where a thick vein of limestone has been sculpted into karst hills and caves by the Nam Song River. Once little more than a bus stop on the long journey between Vientiane and the temples of Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng has recently become a destination in its own right. The town itself is nothing special, having grown up around a disused US airstrip, but the surrounding countryside draws adventurous travellers with its potential for caving, kayaking and climbing.

At sunset, even the most indolent of explorers can enjoy the ethereal scenery as the colours ebb from the hills – a vibrant palette of greens fading to a dreamy watercolour grey.

On the banks of the Nam Song River, a beautiful resort with charm and character awaits you. It is laid out around an inviting swimming pool, and offers stunning views of the lush, forest-clad landscape. Relax, swim and enjoy the sunset before meeting your fellow travellers for a local dinner.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 158 km

Duration: 4-5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 300m

Overnight: 296m

Hotel

Riverside Boutique Hotel (****)



Day 3 To the Land of Wats and Villas

While today's drive is longer than yesterday's, you will be rewarded with more beautiful scenery and a glimpse of Lao village life. The roads in northern Laos are winding and bumpy, so we will take the journey at a leisurely pace, giving you plenty of time to soak up your surroundings. Much of the route is lined with wooden village houses and market stalls, and all the life that goes with them. Women sell products from their farms, children play in the dust at the roadside, chasing plump puppies or harassed chickens.

Maybe a little dusty from this road adventure, we will eventually arrive in Luang Prabang. This northern town was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, due to its many gold-roofed wats and French colonial architecture. Considered by many to be the heart of Lao

culture, the small town is encircled by mountains and lies at the confluence of the Nam Khan and Mekong Rivers. Relax at the hotel pool or enjoy a walk through the town's charming streets before we meet for dinner.



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 183 km

Duration: 4-5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 400m

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Mekong Riverview, Luang Prabang (****)

Day 4 From old-world romance to rural idyll

In the morning you will have time to wander around old Luang Prabang, which has rightfully gained a reputation as one of the most alluring spots in Southeast Asia. Nowhere else can lay claim to the town's old-world romance of 33 gilded wats, saffron-clad monks, faded Indochinese villas and delicious local cuisine.

After lunch we continue our drive on the winding roads that lead north. Our first destination is Muang Xay, also known as Oudomxai, the capital of

Oudomxai Province. There are many ethnic minorities living in this region, each with their own language and customs.

Muang Xay itself is a transport hub for trucks delivering goods to Vietnam, China, Thailand and Myanmar. We will pass through the town and continue to a more remote area where a small, luxurious hotel stands – almost in the middle of nowhere... The resort's design draws heavily on the region's architectural and cultural traditions, with beautiful, spacious rooms in an area of protected forest along the Nam Kat River. Enjoy the peaceful scenery while taking a dip in the pool or lay back with a book. Tonight's dinner will be a



Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 200 km

Duration: 5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 350m

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Namkat Yorlapa Resort, Muang Xay (****)

wonderful combination of local flavours, cooked using organic vegetables and herbs from the hotel garden, along with seafood and organic poultry.

Day 5 Continue through the hills

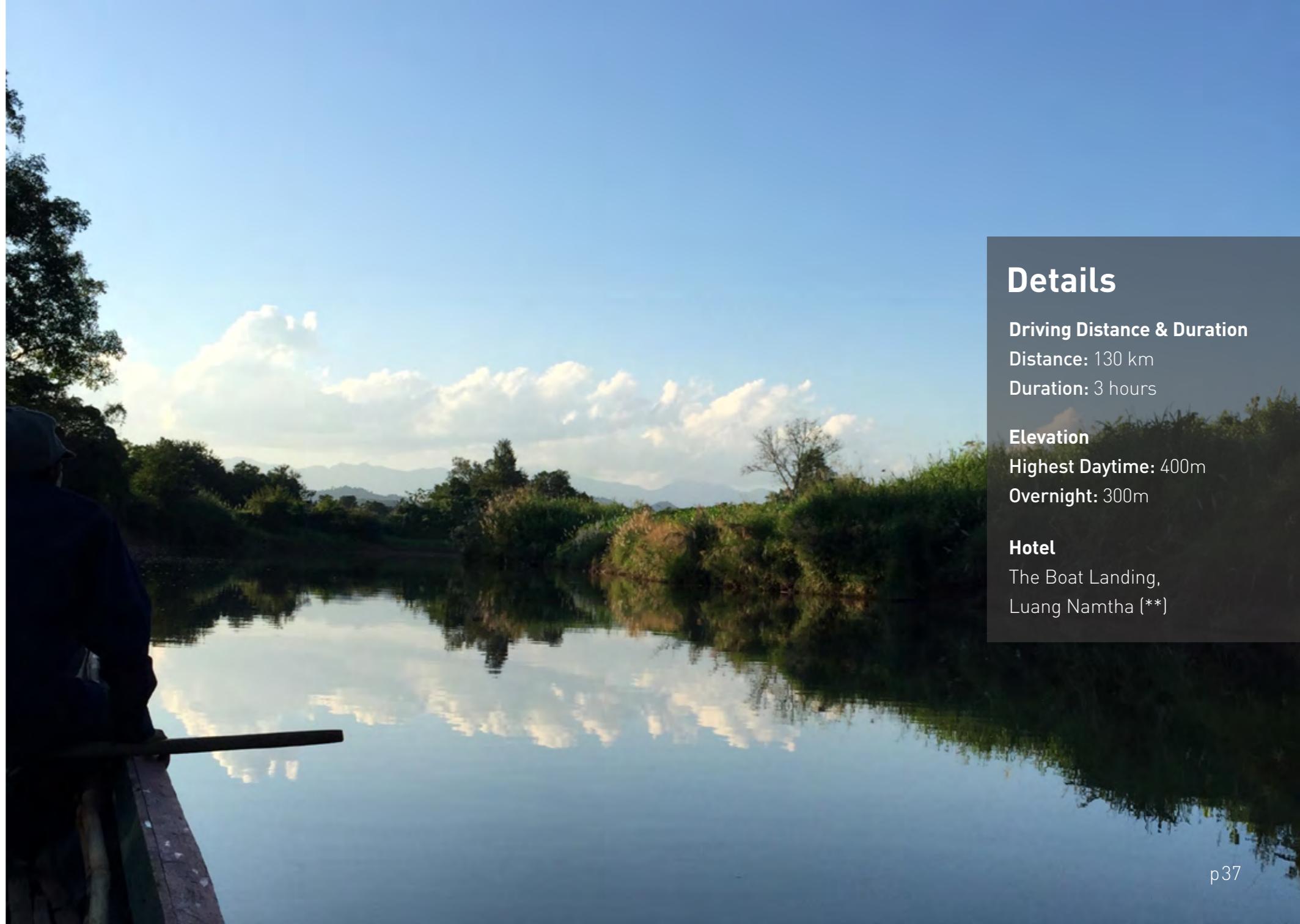
Today's drive will take you to Luang Namtha, a small town nestled in the hills of northern Laos – despite its diminutive size, this quiet little place is among Laos' most important. Luang Nam Tha Province is home to more than 20 ethnic groups, making it the most diverse province in Laos. The drive to Luang Namtha will take you on country roads through stretches of rainforest and palm-thatched villages.

The Boat Landing, the most basic accommodation along this route and your

overnight stop for today is a charming inn that consists of small bungalows built in the traditional style of this region. It is peaceful and calm, reminiscent of a simpler life.

Before dinner, why not try one of the bar's delicious drinks, an icy mint-spiked cocktail, perhaps? Very refreshing!

The cooking is fabulous, and many dishes will be familiar to fans of northern Thai food, but presented here with a distinct local twist. 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: 130 km

Duration: 3 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 400m

Overnight: 300m

Hotel

The Boat Landing,
Luang Namtha (**)

Day 6 Into the Golden Triangle...

This morning you will drive across beautiful northern Laos to the Thai border, crossing the Nam Ha Eco-Park, a region of tiny villages and rolling, thickly forested hills. As you drive, you might feel as if you have gone back in time – the road dates from 2008, but life in the surrounding villages seems to have continued unchanged for centuries. This feeling will be re-enforced during a visit to a small village, just off the road,

where life continues relatively untouched by modernity.

After lunch in Houay Xai, on the Lao bank of the Mekong, you will cross the river on a newly built bridge; the border crossing is quite uncomplicated. While you eat lunch, our team will take care of the formalities.

Once in Thailand, you will have a short drive along the Mekong to the Golden Triangle and the luxurious Anantara Golden Triangle Hotel which is a gem in this part of the world – a hotel in the finest tradition of Thai hospitality and service.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 240 km

Duration: 4-5 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 600m

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Anantara Golden Triangle
Elephant Camp & Resort
[*****]

Day 7 Relax at the Anantara or explore the Myanmar border area

You may want to take a break from the road today – make an excursion into the rainforest on elephant-back, eat a leisurely lunch at a riverside restaurant, lounge by the hotel pool or visit the splendid Grand Hall of Opium, a modern museum where you can learn all about the poppies and opium for which the Golden Triangle gained notoriety in the past.

On the other hand, if you do feel like a bit more touring, we have an optional half-day driving excursion into the hills that run along the Thailand's border with Myanmar; you'll remain on the Thai side, but Myanmar is less than 5m away. From the hill crest you will descend toward a beautiful botanical garden. And then, after lunch, enjoy a beautifully brewed cup of local coffee, which is now grown instead of opium poppies. If you don't like coffee, excellent tea

and macadamia nuts are also grown locally!

Today's breakfast is included in the tour price, dinner, lunch and activities are as per your own arrangement.

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Depending on your chosen activity

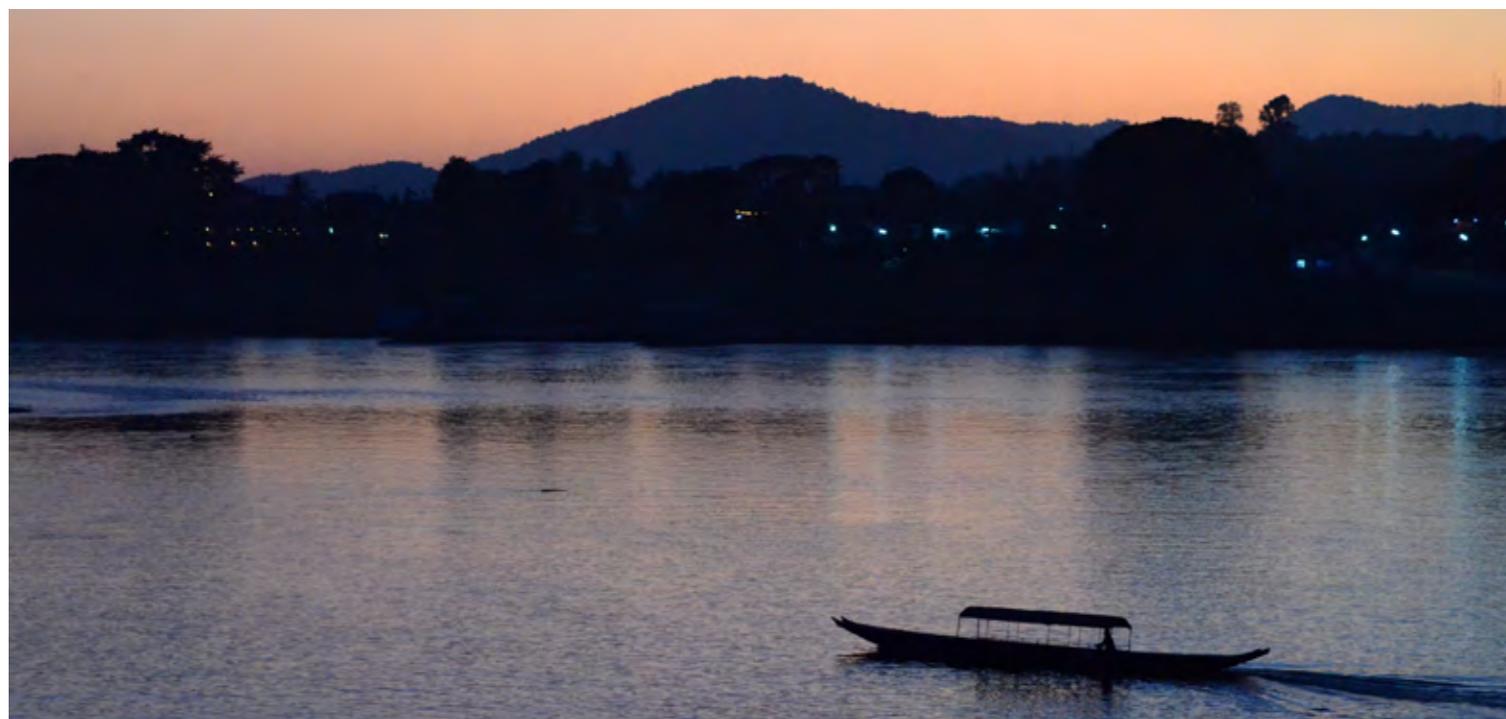
Elevation

Highest Daytime: 400m

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Anantara Golden Triangle
Elephant Camp & Resort
[*****]



Day 8 To the heart of the Lanna Kingdom

This is your last day of driving on this journey...and on wonderful roads it will be! In the morning we drive from the Golden Triangle to just south of Chiang Rai for a visit to the stunning, vivid white temple of Wat Rong Khun. This is followed by a lovely al fresco lunch at the *Le Meridien* hotel in Chiang Rai which is situated on the banks of the Mae Kok River, its grounds home to two enormous trees. The story

goes that the two trees, planted over a century ago, are the symbols of two lovers whose love was forbidden by their parents. When the hotel was built, it was discovered that the roots of the two trees are entwined...

In the afternoon you will drive the remaining few hours to Chiang Mai where you will be staying in one of the town's finest hotels before enjoying a farewell dinner in the evening... for which we have chosen a rather special location and culinary experience for you!

Details

Driving Distance & Duration

Distance: 260 km

Duration: 6-7 hours

Elevation

Highest Daytime: 400m

Overnight: 400m

Hotel

Anantara Chiang Mai Resort
[*****]



Day 9 Farewell Thailand, unless you're able to stay on?

Do you have to start your journey home today?

Or will you be tempted to fly south to relax on Thailand's gorgeous beaches? Or would you like to stay on in Chiang Mai for a few more days? We are happy to assist you with an extension of your stay.

Regardless of how your trip ends, we hope that you will leave us refreshed and with many new memories of your exotic journey through South-East Asia...



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 preorder 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 Chiang Mai to Laos is also included
- **International Journey Host, Guide and Support Vehicle** – you will be accompanied by a registered Chinese tour guide, an On the Road Experiences 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
- **Fuel & Tolls** – we provide petrol for the car throughout the journey and pay all tolls
- **Airport Transfers** – all airport transfers are included



Best months to go...

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

- **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** – 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 your flights to Kunming and back from Chiang Mai, your Laos and Thailand visa and personal purchases (e.g., gifts, souvenirs)



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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

