



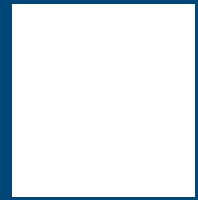
real life experiences.



Network Ten Laos Cycling Challenge

Trip notes

Be prepared to get well and truly off the beaten track with our cycling challenge and discover this beautiful region from handlebar height. We experience the very best of Laos as we cycle through the countryside, cruise down the Mekong River, visit the magnificent temples of Luang Prabang and the crumbling French architecture in the world's sleepest capital, Vientiane. This is one country in which you can truly discover the original culture and colour of the land and experience Asian atmosphere at its best.



Laos Cycling Challenge

Itinerary

Day 1 Meet at airport

Day 2 Vientiane

Group will be met by the Intrepid Leader in the arrivals hall of Vientiane airport and transferred by private bus to our start hotel.

Vientiane is one of the classic Indo Chinese cities that conjures up exotic images, with its intriguing mix of Lao, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, French, US and Soviet influences. Tree lined boulevards and old temples impart an atmosphere of timelessness, particularly in the older part of the town along the Mekong River. Don't miss Wat Si Saket, the oldest temple still standing in Vientiane. Built in the early Bangkok style, this temple contains almost 7000 Buddha images. Pha That Luang (the Great Sacred Stupa) is the most important national monument in Laos, a symbol of the Buddhist religion and Lao sovereignty

Meals included: dinner

Day 3 Cycle to Nam Ngum

A relatively easy start as we cycle north along mostly flat roads. After lunch we turn off Route 13 onto even quieter roads to Nam Ngum. This is a fantastic day introduce you to the Lao way of life before the climbing begins in earnest. Boats can be hired at our night stop to cruise around the many islands that dot the lake.

Distance cycled: 96 km

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 4 Cycle to Vang Vieng

An early start as we cycle back and turn right back onto route 13. The ride to Vang Vieng is a relatively easy day travelling through the verdant green of rice fields. Vang Vieng is a stunning town set on the Nam Song River with the impressive karst mountains as a backdrop.

Distance cycled: 107km

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 5 Cycle to Kasi

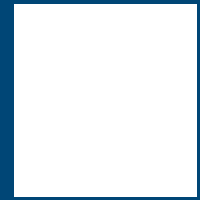
You will be high in the mountains for the first half of the day following a ridgeline up and down with peaks all around. In the afternoon it is time to relax a bit as the road is largely downhill along a valley to our overnight stop of Kasi.

Distance cycled: 57km

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 6 Cycle to Luang Prabang

The cycling today takes us into the more mountainous scenery of the deep heart of Laos. The scenery is quite breathtaking with the limestone peaks jutting out of the landscape. Enjoy the thrill of soaring along empty roads with villagers smiling and waving as we pass.



From Kiew Ka Cham we are rewarded with a long down hill towards Luang Prabang. (400m descent). The scenery in this area is quite spectacular with towering limestone mountain ranges and scenes of rural Laotian life. Children playing beside bamboo stilt houses come running to shout 'Saibaidee' as we pass and free ranging pigs and chickens scurry to get out of our way as we pass through villages.

Distance cycled: 78km

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 7 Free day in Luang Prabang

You are free to explore the World Heritage town of Luang Prabang. This beautiful town is endowed with a legacy of historic red-roofed temples and some of the county's most refined cuisine, multi-ethnic population and richest culture. Visit the many stunning temples. You will find the monks welcoming and eager to practice their English with you. You may choose to climb the 328 zigzag steps to the summit of Mount Phousi to watch the sun set over the town and river. The Royal Palace Museum is just across the road, where the royal family's quarters have been untouched since they left in 1975. There are many restaurants to try along the banks of the Mekong and an evening drink on the veranda of the wonderful colonial style Villa Santi Hotel is a nice way to spoil yourself.

Meals included: Breakfast only

Day 8 Cycle to Udomxai

We start our challenge riding on a remote road through the hills. Today's ride is a real adventure, going into areas seen by few other visitors. It is an amazing ride on quiet roads through mountain and jungle scenery. Given the remoteness of this area we will reach our overnight stop by bus towards the end of the day.

Distance cycled: approx: 70km

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 9 Cycle to Muang Khua

Another adventurous day in an area little visited by tourists. The occasional local taxi or truck will pass but we mostly share it with water buffalo and other animals. We pass through traditional minority villages belonging to the Hmong people. This is rural Laos at its best where the pace of life is dictated by seasons and tradition. A local CARE rep will meet us at the guesthouse and talk through tomorrow's project visit.

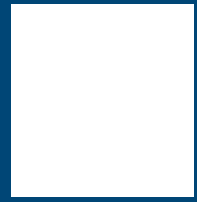
Distance cycled: 96km

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 10 Care project visit

We will be met by the CARE local representative and travel by bus/boat to the CARE project to see first hand the sustainable development work that is undertaken in this area. (more details to follow)

Meals included: Breakfast only



Day 11 Transfer to Luang Prabang

Early start as we transfer back to Luang Prabang by private bus. Time to celebrate our achievements on completing the challenge.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 12 Flight to Vientiane

Early morning flight back to the capital Vientiane. Transfer to base hotel where we have day rooms organised. Transfer to airport for evening flight to Bangkok.

Meals included: Breakfast only

Day 13 Arrive back in Australia

Arrival Complications

On arrival at Vientiane airport please collect your bags and head through into the arrivals hall where the leader will be waiting. He will be holding an "Intrepid Challenges" sign. From there you will be transferred by private bus to our start hotel.

Joining Point

Mali Namphu Guesthouse
114 Pangkham Road
Vientiane
Laos

Finishing Point

Mali Namphu Guesthouse
114 Pangkham Road
Vientiane
Laos

Finishing Point Instructions

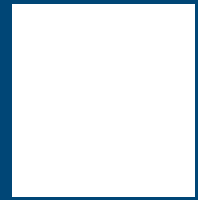
Once back in Vientiane participants are free to make their own arrangements to extend or return home with the group. We will book day rooms on the last day so that you have a base before the evening flight back to Australia.

Group Size

Maximum of 20 travellers per group

Accommodation

Hotels and guesthouses: The standard will vary according to where we are and we ask for your patience, as at times things do not work the way you are used to at home. Sometimes there may be no electricity, the plumbing may be temperamental, there is only a squat toilet.



Meal Inclusions

Most meals included - see itinerary.

Transport

Private vehicle, support truck, domestic flight & rice barge

Physical Rating

Be prepared for some serious physical activity as this trip is really off the beaten track in terms of cycling with some challenging terrain. The route is flat at first before we head into the hills with some testing up hill sections (of course the rewards are on the downhill to compensate). The fitter you are then the more you will enjoy your journey.

Culture Shock Rating

Laos is one of the poorer countries in Asia and while we book clean and hygienic accommodation it may not be the same standard as you would be used to at home. Occasionally there may be power cuts or you have the odd cold shower or have an encounter with a squat toilet. This is all part of the adventure

Important Notes

Bikes

The bikes that we provide are Giant Boulder, 24 gear mountain bikes with front suspension. There are no back racks or bar ends and all have a single water bottle cage. We have a variety of frame sizes to cater for the group.

Bringing your own Bike

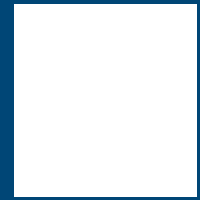
Not a problem but any extra charges for taking it on the train or plane are your responsibility. It is best to pack your bike in a bike box available from any bike shop. We can then carry the box in the truck. Please note that while every effort is made to maintain all the bikes in good condition on each trip, we cannot guarantee that some small damage such as scratching will not occur as a result of the daily loading and unloading of bikes into and out of the support vehicle.

Please note - If you are bringing your own bike and it has disc brakes, hydraulics, rear suspension, oil units or special pumps for adjusting the suspension pressure, please make sure that you bring the necessary spares and parts with you.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips.

We strongly recommend that you take out insurance the moment you register for a trip as you are then covered should you not be able to go in the event of illness or accident. Please send these details (name of insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number) to Intrepid Challenges prior to departure.



We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects.

When travelling on a group trip, you will not be permitted to join the group until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company's 24 hour emergency contact number has been seen by your leader. If you have credit card insurance your tour leader will require proof of purchase of the trip (a receipt of credit card statement) with a credit card in your name. Contact your bank for details of their participating insurer, the level of coverage and emergency contact telephone number.

Our preferred insurance company is CoverMore as they provide an excellent service. You can apply on line directly by clicking on this link:

<https://b2c.covermore.com.au/index.jsp?alpha=AAV0231>

Visas

Please note that visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller.

The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. We keep the following information up to date as much as possible, but rules do change. It is important that you check for yourself.

Laos:

Visas can be obtained on arrival at Vientiane airport at approx. cost of US\$30 and are valid for 30 working days.

If you apply for a visa before you leave:

All nationalities require a visa to enter Laos. Passports must have at least 6 months validity.

The validity of your visa application will be 2 months so please do not apply too early.

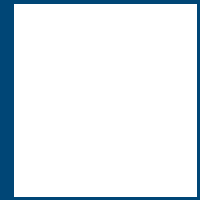
For both Australia and New Zealand residents send your application to:

Embassy of Laos,
1 Dalman Crescent,
O'Malley,
ACT, 2606.
Tel: (02) 6286 4595.

- Send 1 completed visa application forms
- passport
- 1 photo
- copy of itinerary (print off from website) and
- prepaid addressed envelope.
- Cost for single entry is AUD\$45. Bank cheques or money order only.

Allow 5 working days to process

Address in Laos: Laos Natural Travel, Vientiane



Port of entry: Vientiane

Health

All Intrepid travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our group leader, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, Intrepid reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund.

Please let us know of any medical conditions on the registration form and if you are currently taking prescription medicine as it is important that our leader is aware of your circumstances.

We therefore ask that you read the itinerary in these trip notes thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts.

There are no specific health requirements for entry into Laos. However, you should consult your doctor or travel clinic for up-to-date information and prescriptions for vaccinations and anti-malarial requirements. We would suggest that you are up to date with immunisation protection against *typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis*. These countries are also a low risk malarial area and we recommend that you take a course of suitable malarial prophylactics. As some vaccinations require a course over weeks or months, contact your doctor as early as possible prior to departure. Generally, six to eight weeks' notice is adequate.

We recommend that you carry a First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (such as a spare pair of prescription glasses). Please be aware that for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets/antibiotics etc.

Your first aid kit should include:

- *headache tablets*
- *diarrhoea treatment (both a blocker to bring relief from the symptoms and an antibiotic)*
- *band-aids*
- *antiseptic for cuts & scrapes*
- *lip balm*
- *insect repellent*
- *high factor sunscreen.*

Given the physical nature of this challenge we strongly advise bringing some sachets of an oral rehydration solution (available at chemists) as this aids recovery following activity and dehydration and also helps replace lost body salts should you suffer from 'gastro'. Just add a sachet to your water bottle each day. Please scroll down to the Special Safety Notes below for information on dehydration.

If you are 65 years or older a completed Medical Certificate is required. Please fax this through to 03 9597 0797 prior to departure.



Physical Preparation

In order to physically prepare yourself to cycle long hours in the saddle for up to 7 hours on successive days it is so important that you undertake a fitness program. Getting yourself fit is all part of the Challenge and one that you'll benefit from long after your trip is over. It is really worth putting in the effort before you go to condition the body (backside, neck, shoulders & leg muscles) as it means you'll enjoy the event rather than it being a struggle.

For a fitness program & advice click here: <http://intrepidchallenges.com/guide-to-cycling.php>

Build up your base endurance by long and frequent bike rides which will ensure that you are in peak condition for the challenge. You can also mix this up by taking other forms of regular exercise which you currently do such as yoga, spinning classes, walking and swimming.

Money Exchange

The local currency is '*Kip*'. Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: www.oanda.com.

It is advisable to take most of your money in US\$ cash or credit card. Major credit cards are accepted in cities only, but cash withdrawals are subject to a 3% to 4% service charge. We recommend that you don't use money changers on the street.

Spending Money

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping and tipping.

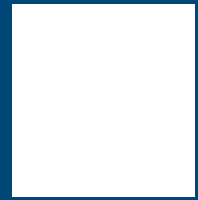
Any tip that you wish to give to your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated. We recommend approx. US\$30 to go into a kitty to be distributed to the local team at the end of the trip. Usually we do this on the last night at the celebration dinner.

Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional USD\$400, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (e.g. a natural disaster, or an outbreak of bird flu) necessitate a change to our planned route. This is a rare occurrence but it is well worth being prepared!

Keeping in touch - communication while on the road

If you need to be contacted while travelling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road. Email cafes are commonplace throughout the regions we visit. If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency we recommend that they refer to our Emergency contact. We don't recommend that family and friends try to contact you through hotels, as they are subject to change and the reception staff may not speak English.



Emergency Contact

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, Intrepid's Melbourne Office can be reached on Tel: +61 3 9597 0798. Outside of office hours please call 0410 290 544.

Your Fellow Travellers

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience.

Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

Group Leader

All Intrepid group trips are accompanied by one of our group leaders. The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. They will provide information on the places you are travelling through, offer suggestions for things to do and see, recommend great local eating venues and introduce you to our local friends.

While not being guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad general knowledge of the countries visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. We also use local guides where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting - we think it's the best of both worlds.

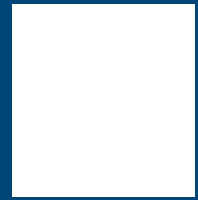
Responsible travel

We believe strongly in low impact or rather positive impact tourism. Broadly speaking this means that we try to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects.

When we are cycling children will ask you for pens, money etc. It is always hard to resist giving them small gift. However we ask you not to do this as it encourages a culture of begging and often parents will take their children out of school and get their children to prey on tourists. Ask your leader what is the best way to give. Alternatively support the Intrepid Foundation as each \$ is matched by Intrepid.

Please refer to our website at www.intrepidtravel.com/responsibletravel for further details and suggestions on how you can be a responsible traveller.

We have won a number of industry awards recently in recognition of our philosophy and practices. To find out more go to: <http://www.intrepidtravel.com/PATA>



A Couple Of Rules

Illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our trips. Possessing or using drugs not only contravenes the laws of the land but also puts the rest of the group at risk. Smoking marijuana and opium is a part of local culture in some parts of the world but is not acceptable for Intrepid travellers. Intrepid's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, and in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our group leader has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or if they use prostitutes.

The Intrepid Foundation

Since Intrepid Travel commenced operating in 1989 we have had a commitment to give something back to the communities we visit. One way has been through our support for local humanitarian, development and conservation projects. Many of our travellers want to contribute something too. To make things easier we established the Intrepid Foundation.

All donations to the Intrepid Foundation are matched dollar for dollar by Intrepid Travel and every cent gets there as they pay for all the administration costs. Donating is simple and secure. Please ask your group leader for information on the local grass root projects we support or go to our website: www.theintrepidfoundation.org

What To Take

You should pack as lightly as possible. Your main luggage will be transported for you on all cycling days in the support vehicle. You will only need a day pack to carry your personal items when cycling. You are expected to carry your own luggage on & off the bus and though you will not be required to walk long distances with your luggage we recommend keeping the weight under 12kg. Suitcases are not recommended.

Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags with wheels are acceptable, although we recommend your bag has carry straps as well. You will also need a day pack/bag to carry water and a camera etc for day walks and day trips.

Recommended Checklist

Travel Documents:

- Passport (take photocopies) and Laos visa
- Airline ticket
- Copy of travel insurance
- USD cash
- Credit card

**** Tip:** use a money belt for security (put documents inside a plastic bag)



Personal Items

- First Aid kit (see the health section)
- High factor sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent
- Sunglasses
- Toiletries (biodegradable)
- Watch or alarm clock
- Ear plugs (in case room mate snores!)
- Plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing
- Wet wipes or antiseptic hand gel

Clothing

- 3 T-shirts (lightweight quick drying fabric) / long sleeved T-shirt
- 2 pairs Cycling shorts (padded)
- 1 pair of comfortable shoes for cycling
- pair of sport sandals
- socks (for cycling)
- 1 pair of knee length shorts
- 1 pair lightweight long trousers
- Lightweight waterproof top
- Light sweater/fleece for evening
- Small towel and swim wear
- Sarong (useful for ladies unscheduled toilet stops / temple visits)
- Sun hat
- Clothes to relax in

Cycling Equipment

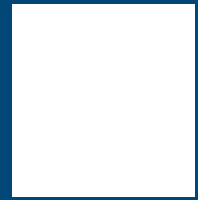
- Cycling helmet - (compulsory)
- 1 water bottle (min. 750 ml capacity recommended) or 'Camel Bak' hydration pack
- Handlebar bag / small day pack for carrying items when cycling
- Cycling gloves (recommended)

Optional:

- Multi-tool (allen keys) for minor adjustments to your bike
- Bar ends (to give more choice of riding positions)
- Your own saddle or gel seat cover
- Your own SPD pedals
- Mini bicycle pump
- Favourite snacks for cycling energy boost e.g. 'PowerBars', sports gel (a concentrated carbohydrate that delivers immediate energy when you feel tired or flat), dried fruit or nuts

Other Suggestions:

- Camera
- Adapter for recharging digital camera (American style with 2 parallel flat pins)



- Spare batteries
- Reading / writing material
- Penknife (put in main luggage at airport)
- Torch
- Small calculator (when out bargaining!)
- Photos of family or postcards of Australia (great way to have fun with locals you meet)
- Laotian phrase book, map and Lonely Planet guide
- Small padlock for securing your luggage during flights

Local Dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout Asia. Laos has an extremely conservative Buddhist culture and you should dress to respect this. Loose, lightweight, long clothing (covering shoulders & waist) is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Asian climate. As a general guideline shoulders and knees should be covered at all times. The wearing of shorts and halter tops away from the beach or swimming pools are not allowed as they will restrict your entry into buildings of a religious nature and family homes. Cycling shorts and tops are ideal, though we do insist that you cover up when coming off the bike or stopping in villages as local people will be shocked and sometimes offended by the sight of tight body hugging lycra!

So please be a good ambassador for your country.

Safety

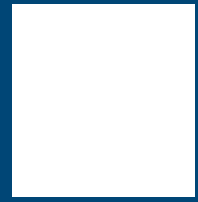
Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure.

We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling, for the safe-keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items. Leave your valuable jewellery at home - you won't need it while travelling.

Many of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. While your group leader will assist you with the available options in a given location, please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your Intrepid itinerary, and Intrepid makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment when selecting an activity in your free time.

A thorough cycling safety briefing will be given prior to setting off about the bikes (changing gears, braking etc), Laos road rules, cycling on the right hand side of the road, cycling in a group and general hazards to look out for.



Please also note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

Dehydration

Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical challenge such as cycling over undulating terrain. It is so important to be aware of your fluid intake especially at altitude and to constantly drink water throughout the day (even when you do not feel thirsty). Symptoms of mild dehydration include:

- *flushed face*
- *extreme thirst, more than normal or unable to drink*
- *dry, warm skin*
- *cannot pass urine or reduced amounts, dark, yellow*
- *dizziness made worse when you are standing - weakness - cramping in the arms and legs*
- *sleepy or irritable*
- *headaches*
- *dry mouth, dry tongue; with thick saliva*

The simplest way of monitoring your fluid intake is by checking the colour of your urine. If it is clear or slightly yellow you are well hydrated but once it is a dark yellow you are in the danger zone and need to increase your fluid intake immediately. Ensure that you bring some Gastrolyte sachets as these help your recovery both during and after cycling with the replacement of electrolytes. Gastrolyte is also the recommended treatment for dehydration caused by diarrhoea ('gastro').

Intrepid Challenges Newsletter

We have a free email newsletter full of travellers stories and experiences as well as news on new trips that we are running. Please send us an extract from your travel journal at the end of the trip.

We also have a travel blog ('Travels with a Purpose') at: <http://intrepidchallenges.wordpress.com> where we like to feature your stories. We would also love to receive any photos after the event as we are starting to build up a travellers album for each of our destinations on our website. We need resolution of around 1MB. Please could you send a CD to: *Intrepid Challenges Photo album, 2/24 Bay Road, Sandringham, VIC 3191.*

If you have any suggestions to add more information to our trip dossier that you think other travellers would find useful please email: adventure@rawtravel.com. And of course email us if you have any questions leading up to the event.

HAVE AN AMAZING ADVENTURE!

The information in this trip dossier has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Intrepid Challenges.