

GIVE Trip Overview

Laos Excursion



Growth International Volunteer Excursions

The Roots of Change

GIVE Laos Overview

Get ready! Your GIVE Laos Excursion is coming up soon, so prepare to be immersed in the fascinating culture and environment of Northern Laos, broaden your perspectives of the world, and meet your new GIVE family. Your Laos journey will take you from the UNESCO World Heritage City of Luang Prabang to the rugged landscapes and rural riverside villages of Sop Chem and Nongkiaw. Here you will be directly involved in locally led volunteer projects, authentic cultural experiences, and off-the-beaten-path adventures that empower local people and preserve local ecosystems.

This Excursion Overview includes important information about your upcoming trip. Some of this material may appear familiar, but please read the entire overview as some information may have changed, and all of the information is important to making sure your experience is as enjoyable as it can possibly be.

(packing list included – refer to page 16)

Preparation Reminders Prior to Departure

Passport (required):

Don't forget to bring your passport and at least two color-copies of your passport to Laos. Our office should have already received a color copy of your passport, but it is important that you bring color copies when traveling abroad as well.

Make sure that your passport is valid and does not expire within 6 months of your return travel date. For example, if you return home on June 1, 2024, your passport expiration date cannot be prior to December 2, 2024. Also make sure that your passport has at least 2 empty pages for entry/exit stamps.

If you have not yet ordered or received your passport, please contact us immediately by phone at +1 (206) 973-7991 or email us at info@givevolunteers.org.

International Medical and Traveler's Insurance (Required):

GIVE requires all travelers to provide proof of traveler's insurance coverage. This ensures that you have coverage if unforeseen events arise such as baggage loss, travel delay, sickness, injury, etc.

For USA residents and Canadian Residents: you can purchase insurance from the GIVE website under "Travel Details" in the navigation. You can find it directly at this link: go to <https://www.givevolunteers.org/prepping-trip/travel-details/#insurance>

- **Departure & Return Dates:** Be sure to include all travel days (for example, if you're taking a red-eye home, the return date is the day you land back home)

- **Trip Cost:** This is the total amount that you are insuring, which should equal your GIVE trip at a minimum.
 - We *strongly* recommend covering both the cost of your flights and GIVE trip. If you have not purchased flights yet, you can still purchase insurance and either estimate cost of flights or increase your coverage later.

Non-US Residents: Must provide proof of international travel insurance meeting our requirements and insuring your total trip cost (and flight, if preferred).

If you'd like to purchase from a different provider, then you must confirm you are aware of our coverage requirements and that your policy meets those requirements. Note that your insurance coverage must include trip cancellation and interruption.

Visa:

A standard 30-day tourist visa will be sufficient for your time traveling with GIVE in Laos. We recommend that all volunteers simply apply for a Visa on Arrival, as it is a cheaper and much simpler process. You will be flying into Luang Prabang Airport (LPQ) and can easily apply for a visa upon arrival. Details of the process are listed below.

1. Visa On Arrival

Citizens from 150 countries are able to receive visas on arrival in Laos, such as citizens of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union, among others. Make sure to confirm that your country of citizenship is included in this list prior to departure:

<https://www.visalaos.com/>

You will need to pay a fee (in cash) for your Visa on Arrival of USD 40.

- Please make sure to have \$40 exact change with no tears or rips in the bills for the Visa fee. It is always a good idea to have back up bills just in case.
- To process your visa on arrival application, in addition to the \$40 USD application fee, you must bring either 2 passport-size photos or \$1 USD to present to the Laos customs agent. Most pharmacies (CVS, Walgreens, etc.) can provide this passport photo service.

You will receive two immigration forms on the plane before landing in Luang Prabang: **Visa On Arrival Application** and **an Arrival Card**. Complete both forms to provide to a Laos customs agent upon your arrival.

1. **Visa on Arrival Application.** Here are the appropriate answers for important questions:

- Purpose of the trip: Tourist

- Duration of stay: 14 days (unless you will travel in Laos post-trip)
- Contact Person in Laos:
Name: Touyvilai Kommamaung (iPlanet Tours)
Address: Ban A. Phai, Phousii Rd., Luang Prabang, Lao PDR
Telephone: +856 20 567 83177
- Proposed Address in Laos: Merry Riverside Hotel, Ban ViSun, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

2. Arrival Card

- For the question: “Traveling in package tour?” Click the box, “Yes”
- If Immigration Officers ask the name of the tour, tell them iPlanet Tours and offer them Touyvilai’s contact information (see above).

*****Reminder: to process your visa on arrival application, in addition to the \$40 USD application fee, you must bring either 2 passport-size photos or \$1 USD to present to the Laos customs agent. You will also present customs agent with the arrival card and visa on arrival application that will be provided to you on the plane. Most pharmacies (CVS, Walgreens, etc.) can provide this passport photo service.***

2. Other

If you are not eligible for one of the above options, please check with your local Consulate to find out if you need a Laos tourist visa.

Vaccinations:

Since we are not medical professionals, GIVE is legally unable to provide you with a list of recommended vaccinations for traveling in Laos. Vaccinations and medical precautions are your discretion with the recommendations of your doctor or travel clinic. We recommend that you contact your doctor or visit an immunization clinic to discuss vaccinations as soon as possible, as some vaccinations take time to take effect, or require a course of multiple vaccinations. Inform your doctor that you are traveling to Laos and the activities you plan to participate in so they can provide proper guidance.

To learn about vaccination recommendations or to find a travel clinic near you, visit Centers for Disease Control at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.htm>

Medications:

You are responsible for providing your own over the counter or prescription medications throughout your trip. Please discuss any specific medical questions or concerns with your doctor before your trip. If you have asthma (even mild), please do not forget to bring your inhaler.

If any changes to your health occur, it is critical that you update your Traveler Information in your GIVE Profile as soon as possible. You can login to your GIVE Profile from our website at www.givevolunteers.org. If you make any changes within 15 days of your excursion, please notify us by email at info@givevolunteers.org. If you plan to take medications on the trip, please bring the medication name and description to provide to your guides when you arrive, if necessary.

Safety and General Health Concerns:

There is inherent risk involved with GIVE's programs, but we maintain a culture of comprehensive risk mitigation throughout our trips. We aim to minimize risk by employing proactive safety measures and established emergency protocols. Our goal is to facilitate a life-changing experience that is safe, fun, and impactful.

In large part, the international crime warnings surrounding travel in Laos become an issue when traveling alone or with one other person in unfamiliar large cities. Most of your Laos trip takes place in rural areas, where you will always be with a group of fellow travelers and GIVE guides with training in Wilderness First Aid, Risk Management, Emergency Response, Mental Health First Aid, and Outdoor Leadership.

This is a group trip, where each traveler will be following our planned itinerary throughout the duration of their trip. Furthermore, we have forged strong relationships with local leaders, community members and emergency services over the last decade. Additionally, we take necessary precautions and are prepared with adequate resources, such as medical supplies and routes to local hospitals or clinics. We are prepared with a comprehensive risk management plan to respond to any incident(s).

To protect your general health in Laos, it is important that you take good care of your body, and that you are physically prepared to participate in the GIVE Laos itinerary. We work outdoors daily engaging in strenuous physical activities in a tropical environment. This means that you must always be aware of your hydration, sun protection, and nutrition. If you do become ill or need to seek medical attention, we can arrange for you to visit a local clinic or nearby hospital to receive care.

Luggage:

We encourage you to pack as light as possible (see packing list on pg. 16) It is required that you bring a travel backpack or duffle bag instead of a hard cover suitcase. **Hard cover or rolling suitcases are NOT suitable for the areas we'll be traveling.** Here's what we recommend:

- Your carry-on bag: ONE small backpack to use as your day pack for volunteer work, hikes and to carry your smaller items throughout the day.
- Your checked bag: ONE travel backpack or duffle bag is recommended. **NO HARD COVER OR ROLLING SUITCASES.**

Also, be sure to check with your airline for baggage requirements and fees. Please be aware that if you plan on purchasing souvenirs, airline weight restrictions may incur extra charges when you return home.

Important Note Regarding Valuables:

When packing your luggage do not put anything valuable in your checked bag. This includes electronics, copies of your passport, expensive jewelry, medications, etc. It is best to pack all valuables in your carry-on bag. Pack at least one change of clothes and a small pack of toiletries in your carry-on bag in case your luggage is delayed. Put luggage locks on your checked bag as a safety precaution.

Flights and Arrival in Laos (LPQ)

Flights:

If you have not already, contact our flight agents at StudentUniverse to book your flight itinerary to Luang Prabang (LPQ). You can find their contact information on our website under the "[Travel Details](#)" section of our menu.

Before departure, check your flight departure and arrival online to **ensure that your flight information has not changed**. If it has changed, contact GIVE immediately to provide us with the updated flight information.

Your flight will land at the LPQ airport **on the start date** of your trip. Note: if you're traveling internationally, you may be traveling the day(s) before your excursion start date. You need to **be in Laos on your trip start date**.

For your departure, you will depart **on your trip end date**. GIVE's flight agents can provide details regarding preferred itineraries.

GIVE group flight itineraries include routes and layovers through specific airports so that you and other GIVE travelers departing from the same region can potentially meet each other during your layover(s) or on the plane. You will be invited to join a group WhatsApp chat prior to your trip, where you can coordinate with other travelers about meeting up enroute to Laos.

Arrival in Laos:

You will receive two immigration forms on the airplane: **an Arrival Card and a Visa On Arrival Application**. Complete both forms and provide them to a Laos customs agent upon your arrival. The instructions on how to complete the forms are written previously under "Visa On Arrival" (page 5). Remember, the arrival card will ask if you are traveling in a package tour and you should respond "yes" to that question. If

Immigration Officers ask the name of the tour, tell them *iPlanet Tours* and provide Touyvilai's contact information (see page 5).

After you exit the plane, you will enter the airport into the Arrivals Hall. This is where you will go through Laos immigration with your Visa On Arrival Application and Arrival Card. **There is one line on the left-hand side for the Visa On Arrival, enter that line first and follow the instructions of immigration officers.** (*Make sure you bring US dollars to pay for visa fees*). Once you have received your Visa, line up at one of the multiple immigration counters on the right hand side to display your passport and Arrival Card to immigration officers.

After you pass through immigration, you will head over to baggage claim. Collect your baggage here and exit where your GIVE guide(s) will greet you in a green GIVE shirt just outside the airport doors. After the group collects their baggage and uses the ATM, you will take our transportation to our accommodations in Luang Prabang, which is approximately 15 minutes from the airport.

You will have the opportunity to exchange your money to Laos Kip or use an ATM nearby our guesthouse. If you'd like assistance withdrawing Laos Kip (exchange rate, how much to withdraw, etc.), your guides will be happy to help.

Airport Pickups:

If you don't immediately see your GIVE after exiting the baggage claim area, be sure to wait in the international arrivals hall until they arrive. You will receive an email a few days before your trip start outlining how to contact your guides directly if you cannot find them at the airport. **Do not leave the arrivals terminal, stay inside the airport and keep an eye out for your guides in a green GIVE shirt!**

Flight Delays or Cancellations:

When traveling, unforeseen events can occur and travel may not be exactly how you planned. Just remember, it's all part of the experience! If you experience flight delays, cancellations, or other travel-related issues on your trip, don't panic. You have several resources to help get you rebooked and on the next flight.

We will email you a few days before you depart with a list of resources and FAQ's to help you navigate any travel-related issues. Please print this document and/or save it to your phone to easily reference in the event of a travel-related issue.

In the event of flight cancellations, unexpected delays, or changes, here's what to do:

1. Go straight to the gate agent at the airport. They will be the best resource to assist you to rebook your flight. If you're not yet at the airport, skip to step 2.
2. While waiting to speak to the gate agent or if you're not at the airport, call your

booking agents or the airlines directly. If you booked through **StudentUniverse**, the numbers are below for after-hours assistance. Our agents may have access to alternative airlines not readily available to the gate agent at the airport.

StudentUniverse: +1-844-985-4117

*If there are other GIVE travelers with you, work together and choose one point person to speak with the agent to rebook flights.

3. **After your flight has been rebooked, e-mail your updated itinerary to GIVE.** Make sure to include the airline, number, arrival time, and names of other GIVE travelers with you.
4. Your guides will make alternative arrangements for your pickup – note that **delayed flights may incur additional pickup fees.**
5. If flight changes result in a layover of more than six hours or if you must pay additional fees for your delay, contact your Travel Insurance provider. They can assist you with alternate arrangements and explain how your insurance policy applies in your circumstances. **Make sure to keep all receipts for potential reimbursements!**

Talking to gate agents at the airport and calling your flight agents/the airlines are the best resources to rebook your ticket.

Late Flight Arrival:

If your flight is cancelled or delayed and you are unable to arrive to Luang Prabang Airport on your trip start date, don't panic. **Follow the above steps to contact your travel agent and rebook your flights.** Email your updated itinerary to GIVE at info@givevolunteers.org.

Note: In the case of a late arrival, you will be responsible for paying for transportation to our accommodations to meet the group. Depending on the circumstances, your Travelers Insurance may reimburse you for costs incurred because of your flight delay or cancellation. Make sure to keep receipts for reimbursement claims.

It's always a good idea to bring an extra change of clothes (ideally, culturally appropriate clothing that covers your knees and shoulders), all medications, important documents, and money **IN YOUR CARRY-ON LUGGAGE** in the case of a late arrival, lost luggage or any other unforeseen circumstances. Our guides will help you to obtain clothing and other necessities if your luggage is lost or delayed.

Lost or Delayed Baggage:

If your baggage does not arrive at the airport, don't panic. Go to the lost luggage counter

to make a lost luggage claim. Please give the representative your guide's name and phone number to contact when your luggage arrives (you will receive an email with your guide's contact information prior to departure). Keep the copy of your lost luggage claim. Depending on the circumstances, your Traveler's Insurance may reimburse you for each day that your bag is lost or delayed. Make sure to keep receipts for reimbursement claims.

Donations

Donations towards our education projects can always be accepted through our Students4Students campaign on our website, here:

<https://www.givevolunteers.org/fundraiser/>

We ask you to please avoid bringing physical donations from home and instead donate to the Students4Students fundraiser above. We will use your donations to purchase necessary project supplies directly from local shops and markets in Laos to help stimulate the local economy. If there are specific supplies that we can't purchase in Laos, your guides will notify you well in advance in your WhatsApp group.

Money

Notify Your Bank Before Departure:

Prior to your departure, inform your bank that you are traveling to Laos. This is important so that your bank does not put a hold on your account for irregular transactions. If your bank does put a hold on your account, you will not be able to access your money and it could take days to be able to use your card or access money from your bank. It only takes a quick phone call to your bank before you depart to inform them of your destination and length of travel to eliminate any potential problems. It is also encouraged to bring more than one debit/credit card (if available) just in case one does not work or is lost/stolen.

Currency and Exchange Rates:

The national currency in Laos is the Laos Kip. \$1 USD is equal to approximately 20,000 Laos Kip (LAK). We encourage you to look up current exchange rates prior to your departure as rates do fluctuate.

You must use LAK for local purchases. If you do bring USDs to exchange, you will have a better exchange rate with large bills. It is important to bring new and crisp bills, as ripped or dirty bills will most likely not be accepted. Although uncommon, you may be able to exchange money at your local bank before you depart for Laos. However, most banks do not carry Laos Kip and have to order the currency. Even if you bring Laos Kip, be prepared to withdraw cash from the various ATMs within walking distance of your accommodation in Luang Prabang if necessary.

It's important to consider that you will only be able to use the ATM while we are in Luang Prabang on days 1, 2, 3, 13 and 14 of the trip, as the villages we will travel to do not have ATMs. Therefore, you should carefully consider your spending habits when withdrawing money so that you don't run out of cash. Your GIVE guides will remind you to use the ATM before we depart Luang Prabang.

Money Recommendations During Your Excursion:

Since spending habits vary from person to person, please plan according to your own personal habits! GIVE suggests planning to spend Laos currency equivalent to **\$200 to \$400 USD** for purchasing snacks, souvenirs, gifts, drinks, etc. You can always ask your GIVE guides for help translating and calculating exchange rates while shopping or purchasing souvenirs.

All drinking water and three meals a day are included throughout your trip. Only dinner will be provided on arrival day and only breakfast will be provided on departure day, so plan accordingly. We also encourage you to experience buying local food and drinks at local shops, restaurants, and markets, so expect to purchase some snacks, meals, and drinks for yourself when the opportunities arise.



Communication

Adapters & Electronics:

You will be able to charge your cameras and other electronic devices in Laos. Laos often takes either a flat blade plug, (like the US) or a two round pin plug.

Note that our accommodations in the rural villages often run on generators so electricity will shut off throughout the day. However, you will have sufficient time to charge your electronics, and you will be notified of the times and places where electricity will not be available. We highly recommend bringing your own rechargeable power bank.

Contacting Home:

An important aspect of any GIVE trip is to unplug from your devices and plug in to the experience. We encourage our travelers to minimize use of phones, social media, and contact with friends and family during the trip to get the most of your time in Laos.

Much of your time will be spent in remote areas where there is limited to no mobile service or WIFI. Make sure to inform your family and friends to expect **limited communication** from you during your trip. In the event of emergencies or case-by-case circumstances, your guide will arrange for you to contact home if service is unavailable. GIVE will also contact your emergency contact upon arrival to Laos.

Home Contacting You:

GIVE Excursion Overview - 10

For status updates, general questions, and emergencies your family can contact the GIVE offices at +1 (206) 973-7991 or email info@givevolunteers.org while you are on your trip. Our GIVE HQ team will relay any important messages to you and your guides.

GIVE will occasionally post photos of the group on our social media channels during your trip. Let your family and friends know to follow GIVE's Facebook, Instagram, and other social media channels (@givevolunteers) for updates.

Weather

Come prepared for hot weather throughout the day, sprinkled with short and heavy rain showers. The sun is very powerful in this region, so it is important to pack adequate sun protection, such as sunscreen, SPF shirts and/or hats. Please see our suggested packing list for specific recommendations.

The dry season is from November to March and has lower rainfall and temperatures that can sometimes drop below freezing in the late night and early morning. However, temperatures can still rise into the 90's (Fahrenheit) during the daytime. March, April and May are generally the hottest months, when temperatures can soar well over 100°F. There is a rainy season from May – September, characterized by sunny, humid days intermixed with short, often heavy rain showers. Expect plenty of rain showers and lots of mud this time of year (July and August especially), as the seasonal monsoons transform the Laos highlands into a lush, green, tropical, and MUDDY oasis.

Weather has been less predictable in recent years so be sure to pack a raincoat and warm clothes to sleep in no matter what time of year you're traveling.

Accommodations

There are 4 types of accommodations throughout your Laos Excursion:

- Merry Riverside Hotel (Days 1, 2, 3, 13 and 14): Air-conditioned rooms with private bathrooms in the city of Luang Prabang. You will share same-sex rooms with 1-2 other travelers. Merry Riverside Hotel has a large deck area overlooking the Nam Khan River where we'll gather for breakfasts and meetings. It is also walking distance to various cafés, restaurants, and shops.
- Nongkiaw Viewpoint 'Glamping' (Day 4): Tent-camping with access to toilets and showers overlooking the town of Nong Khiaw and surrounding mountains. You will share same-sex tents with up to 3 other travelers. Tents, sleeping pads, and blankets will be provided for you. We will enjoy a Hot Pot dinner while watching the sunset, sleep beneath the stars, and enjoy morning coffee or tea with misty mountain views.
- Sop Chem Guesthouses (Days 5-12): Fan rooms with private bathrooms in our host community of Sop Chem. You will share same-sex rooms with 1-2 other

travelers. The guesthouses have decks overlooking the Nam Ou River where you can swim or head out and explore the community.

- Homestay (Day 8): Halfway through our stay in Sop Chem, you will have the opportunity to experience a homestay with a local family. The families of Sop Chem welcome you into their homes for an evening together exchanging culture, food, and laughter. You will share same-sex rooms with 1-2 other travelers and have access to a bathroom. You will be provided a sleeping mattress on the floor, as well as pillows, blankets, and a mosquito net.

Our accommodations are comfortable and equipped with necessary amenities, such as running water, toilets, showers, beds with sheets, pillows, etc. You will have access to electricity for most of your trip, but brief power outages are common throughout your trip. Therefore, **we highly recommend bringing your own rechargeable power bank for charging phones and other small electronics.**

You do not need to bring your own blankets or pillows, as they are provided for you, but **we highly recommend bringing a microfiber towel for bathing.** For the duration of your trip, you will share sleeping quarters and bathrooms with your fellow volunteers, so practice the golden rule! If you'd like to room with a friend, please let us know before your excursion and we will do our best to arrange that for you. Otherwise, your guides will provide room assignments once you arrive in Laos.

Please remember that you will be staying in rural communities in a tropical climate, which means you will encounter different weather conditions and insects than you are accustomed to at home. We will provide mosquito nets when necessary and will always fully prepare/advise you on any necessary precautions to take. Please review the packing list thoroughly to ensure that you're prepared. **Most importantly, arrive with an open mind, positive attitude, and commitment to expand your comfort zone!**

Meals

You will be provided with drinking water and 3 balanced nutritional meals per day throughout your trip. Please note that, due to airport arrival and departure times, only dinner will be provided on arrival day and only breakfast will be provided on departure day. We can accommodate most dietary requirements, including vegans, vegetarians, gluten free, etc.

Please make sure to inform us of any dietary requirements at least 14 days prior to your trip. If you have not done so already, please inform us ASAP (info@givevolunteers.org). Adjustments to dietary requirements CANNOT be made upon arrival, as meal plans have already been organized by local vendors.

Finally, remember that you are in a different country with different types of food than you're used to at home. Prepare to get out of your comfort zone a bit and sample lots of delicious new cuisine. Most importantly, as a responsible traveler, be respectful of our

local chefs and the local food culture. Rice is the dietary staple of Laos and will be served with nearly every meal.

Volunteer Projects

Throughout your trip you will get to volunteer on locally led projects that promote community development, wildlife conservation, and ecological restoration in our host communities. We encourage you to try each project throughout your trip, as it will enhance your overall experience and impact on the ground.

Sop Chem Community Farm

Over the last decade, our host community of Sop Chem has seen some dramatic environmental and socioeconomic changes. It all started with the construction of a series of hydroelectric dams on the Nam Ou River, which runs adjacent to Sop Chem and is the major lifeline of a community that relies primarily on subsistence farming, fishing, hunting, and foraging for sustenance. Construction of the dams has led to rapid deforestation, appropriation of large tracts of farmland, and major changes to the ecology of the river and riparian environment. Furthermore, the region's rugged mountainous landscape makes access to fertile farmland a precious commodity and residents are simply running out of space to produce their own food.

To maintain food security, community leaders understand they must adapt and innovate their food production systems. Essentially, they must figure out how to grow more with less. Since 2019, GIVE has worked alongside local farmers and community leaders to develop the Sop Chem Community Farm – a model farm that demonstrates best practices in nutrition-based regenerative farming. Not only does this farm produce a diverse variety of nutritious fruits, vegetables, herbs, and livestock, but it also hosts educational workshops for local students and farmers to learn and practice new techniques.

Educational Programs:

At the Sop Chem Primary School, there are only a handful of hardworking and talented teachers struggling to manage numerous age groups and teach them a variety of subjects, including English. What becomes even more challenging is that these teachers have never received adequate training in English education. To help alleviate these problems, GIVE volunteers work alongside local teachers to provide conversational English lessons to local students. Our volunteers' play an important role in increasing the educational potential of these children by creating a fun, interactive environment for them to communicate, read and write in English.

Our Adult English program is also gaining ground, as local parents in Sop Chem have asked to join in the fun. We now host evening classes a couple nights per week to provide local adults with basic conversational English skills. Many local women utilize these skills to sell handicrafts to visiting tourists.

Wildlife Conservation:

Since 2015, GIVE has partnered with a local nonprofit that has established wildlife sanctuaries throughout Southeast Asia to protect the Asiatic Black Bear from the illegal wildlife trade. This year, GIVE will be helping to further develop facilities and/or support animal enrichment and nutrition programs at the Tat Kuang Sii Wildlife Sanctuary.

Adventure Activities

Work hard, play hard is our motto. Lots of your time will be focused on our volunteer projects, but you will also have plenty of opportunities to explore the culture, landscapes, and wildlife of Laos!

Here is a list of activities you will have the chance to do while in Laos:

- Meditation classes & Alms Ceremony with local monks
- Lao cooking class
- Traditional rice farming
- Viewpoint 'Glamping' (glamorous camping)
- Waterfall & jungle trekking
- Fishing with locals
- Seeing Asiatic Black Bears at the Tat Kuang Sii Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Making traditional rice wine
- Exploring the Luang Prabang Night Market
- Volleyball, soccer, and other sports with local children
- Learning how to make local handicrafts
- Exploring limestone caves
- Joining a Baci Ceremony

Itinerary (Sample)

This is a sample itinerary of GIVE's Laos Excursion, and, as such, will be modified during your excursion. Traveling abroad **requires flexibility** based on weather, wellness of the group, and other important factors. We appreciate your understanding and adaptability with the itinerary.

Day 1:

Trip Commencement: Once your flight has landed, you will make your way through immigration and baggage claim and then meet up with your guides and fellow travelers in the arrival hall. After a warm welcome and orientation from your guides, the evening is free to explore the Night Market, sample some delicious Lao cuisine and get to know your fellow travelers!

Day 2:

After breakfast, we will head to the Living Land Farm – a social enterprise that funds education opportunities for local youth – to participate in planting, harvesting & processing rice with traditional equipment and techniques. Rice is a staple of the Lao diet, economy, and culture, making this is the perfect way to kick off your Laos experience. That evening we'll join a Lao Cooking Class and prepare our own feast of delicious Lao cuisine!

Day 3:

Spend the morning learning about wildlife conservation efforts in Laos and volunteering on enrichment and nutrition programs at a local wildlife sanctuary. From the sanctuary it's just a short hike to Kuang Sii Falls – a stunning 200-foot waterfall feeding a series of smaller falls and turquoise blue pools. Here we'll enjoy a picnic lunch and some free time to explore and swim in the falls.

That afternoon, we'll head to a Buddhist temple to learn about the history of Luang Prabang and the Lan Xang Kingdom, the basic principles of Buddhism, and how it all integrates into Lao culture. Local monks will then teach us about the ancient practice of meditation and lead us in a meditation practice! From the temple it's a short walk to the Luang Prabang Night Market for some of the best food and souvenirs in SE Asia.

Day 4:

Wake up early to take part in the Alms Ceremony, a Buddhist tradition of waking up before dawn to provide monks with fresh food for the day. After breakfast, we'll visit the UXO Museum for a sobering look at the history and lingering effects of the Second Indochina War (Vietnam War) on the people of Laos.

From there it's a 3.5-hour drive to the scenic riverside town of Nongkiaw, where we'll hike up to an epic viewpoint for a night of 'glamping' (glamorous camping). We'll enjoy a Hot Pot dinner as the sun sets over surrounding mountains and gather around the fire as the stars come out.

Day 5:

After enjoying morning coffee/tea with misty mountain views, we'll hike down to town for a delicious breakfast. After breakfast, we'll board local long-tail boats and cruise up the Nam Ou River to the village of Sop Khong for a short hike and picnic lunch at a nearby waterfall.

From there, it's just a 45-minute long-tail boat cruise to the village of Sop Chem – a riverside community surrounded by limestone cliffs and dense jungle, and our home for the next week! We'll spend the rest of the afternoon exploring the village and learning more about our projects and what's in store for the next week.

Days 6-12: A typical day in Sop Chem:

Start each morning with tea or coffee and misty mountain views. After breakfast, we will volunteer on our education and permaculture projects from around ~8:30 - 11:30 AM. After lunch, we will have a bit of free time to relax and digest before returning to the project site for the rest of the afternoon.

In the late afternoon, we will wrap up volunteer work and head out on one of our daily excursions, like exploring nearby caves, fishing with locals, brewing rice wine, playing sports with local kids, learning to make local handicrafts, swimming in the Nam Ou River, or just relaxing and watching village life unfold.

Note: On the final night in Sop Chem, the community will hold a traditional Baci Ceremony to wish us good fortune and safe travels on all future journeys.

Day 13:

After breakfast, we'll say our goodbyes to the community and begin our journey back to Luang Prabang. That night, we'll gather for our final dinner to reflect and celebrate an incredible journey together.

Day 14:

Trip End: All good things must come to an end. Soak up your last few hours in Laos before heading home or off to your next adventure!

Packing for Your Excursion

People tend to over pack while traveling and we suggest that you challenge yourself to only pack the bare necessities. Our best suggestion is to lay out what you think you need, and only bring three-fourths of that. You will realize that you need a lot less than you think once you're on the ground and there are opportunities to do laundry throughout your trip.

In accordance with the cultural considerations of the communities we will be visiting, you will be required to wear culturally appropriate clothing throughout most of the trip. While teaching at local schools, exploring temples, or walking through our host communities, you will need to wear culturally appropriate clothing. By following these local standards, you are displaying cultural awareness and respect to our host communities:

- Females will be asked to cover their knees, shoulders, and cleavage, and to not wear any low cut, tight-fitting, or see-through clothing at these times. We recommend packing at least 4 culturally appropriate outfits, which you can wear multiple times.
- Males should bring at least 2 outfits that cover their shoulders and knees as well.

Expect to wear the same clothes multiple times for our reforestation and Farm to Cafeteria projects, as they will inevitably get dirty. Also keep in mind that many of the clothes you wear while working and exploring will become very muddy, so don't expect them to remain spotless when you return home.

**If you are also doing the Elephant Experience, Thailand Scuba, and/or Laos Excursion, keep in mind that those packing lists have many of the same items listed here. Plan to re-wear a lot of the same clothing, as there will be several opportunities for you to do laundry.*

**If you are doing the Elephant Experience, we highly recommend bringing a smaller backpack or duffle that can fit approximately 6 days of clothing and gear for days 2-7 of the itinerary. This way you can leave your big bag at our hotel in Chiang Mai and travel light into more remote communities.*

Packing Checklist of Recommended Items:

Please keep in mind that this checklist is based on the best possible recommendations from our guides and past volunteers, but at the end of the day it is up to you to bring what you think you will need throughout your trip. We have not suggested a specific number of t-shirts, shorts, pants/leggings, underwear, or socks, because individual preferences often vary. Please review the itinerary to get an understanding of how often you will use each article of clothing, and keep in mind that basic laundry services will be available on certain days of your trip.

Item	Notes	Required	Optional
General Clothing			
1 Raincoat/Poncho	December – January is a dryer season but rain should be expected year round	x	
1 Sweatshirt, lightweight jacket or heavy sweater	December and January can get quite cold in the mornings/nights so make sure to bring a jacket that will keep you warm enough if you are on a winter trip.	x	
T-shirts	<p>For females:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>When out in public:</u> shirts must be loose-fitting and tight around the neck. Cropped tops, spaghetti strap shirts, mid-riff showing shirts, and tank tops are NOT acceptable to wear in public throughout the trip. <u>At accommodations:</u> Tank tops are OK to wear at accommodations but should not reveal cleavage. Sports bras are not acceptable to wear in lieu of a shirt. <p>Shirts worn during projects and adventure activities will get dirty, so pack enough to last the entire trip or plan to do laundry during the trip.</p>	x	

SPF shirt(s)	We highly recommend at least one SPF shirt for sun protection.		x
Shorts	Loose-fitting athletic shorts and hiking shorts are ideal. ‘Short shorts’ or spandex shorts are NOT acceptable to wear at any point throughout the trip Shorts can be worn on agriculture projects, while trekking, and while hanging out at the accommodations for both males and females.	x	
Pants/leggings	For females , leggings are okay for most occasions, EXCEPT while teaching and while out in public in our host communities. For teaching and going out in public, lightweight pants, knee length shorts, or knee length skirts are ideal (elephant pants work great and are very affordable in Chiang Mai!). Long, lightweight pants or workout capris made with breathable and durable fabrics are ideal, such as soft-shell hiking pants. These are great for working on projects, caving and hiking with elephants.	x	
Underwear and socks	Keep in mind that socks can get wet and dirty, so pack a couple extra pairs.	x	
1 swimsuit	Out of respect for local cultural considerations, females will be asked to wear a t-shirt and shorts over their swimsuits.	x	
Sunglasses			x
Hat for sun protection			x
Sport or athletic bras		x	
1 pair of work gloves	We will provide basic gloves when necessary, but bring your own if you have a pair that you prefer.		x
Warm pajamas or sleeping clothes	It gets down to 40°F at night in December & January	x	
1-2 “nice” outfits for special occasions in the community and nights out	At least one of these outfits must be culturally appropriate. There will be opportunities to buy ceremony skirts in the village – dress like a local!	x	
Footwear			
1 pair of flip flops or sandals	These are crucial for walking around the villages. It’s impolite to wear shoes inside people’s homes, temples and some businesses, so a <i>durable</i> pair of sandals will make it easy to slip on and off, and will be worn for the majority of the trip	x	
1 pair of closed-toed working/hiking boots or running shoes for project sites	Keep in mind that these will get wet & dirty! Closed-toes shoes are required for the project site. If you need to bring an extra pair of boots/shoes for hiking or casual wear, please do so (your feet might get cold with sandals!)	X	
1 pair of waterproof shoes or hiking boots for trekking and crossing streams	Chacos/Tevas with good traction are acceptable.	x	
Other Gear			

Small day pack or overnight backpack	Waterproof/water resistant if possible This is what you will bring to the school, worksites, and during adventure activities	x	
Rain cover for your daypack or big pack in case of rain during travel	Highly recommended		x
Towel	You must bring your own towel. We recommend a microfiber towel for easy packing and quick drying.	x	
Toiletries	Shampoo/conditioner, face wash/wipes, toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, etc. Eco-friendly options are always suggested!	x	
Sunscreen	30 spf or higher	x	
Insect Repellent	Expect to use this every day – especially in July & August. <i>Natural and non-toxic insect repellent highly recommended!</i>	x	
Anti-itch cream/wipes			x
Hand sanitizer/hand wipes			x
Refillable water bottle	REQUIRED	x	
Reusable coffee cup and straw	To minimize plastic waste Great if you plan on buying coffee or drinks		x
Large Ziploc Baggies/Waterproof bag	These are good to protect cameras and valuables from getting wet, especially during bamboo rafting		x
Headlamp and batteries	REQUIRED for caving and recommended for late night bathroom trips. Handheld flashlights are not sufficient	x	
Rechargeable portable battery			x
Phone or a watch with an alarm clock			x
Headphones/Earplugs	Roosters roam around and can be quite loud while we sleep in the villages!		x
Small first aid kit	Having your own medications and supplies is always recommended for any travel 😊		x
1 good book			x
Camera			x
Vitamins	Multi-vitamins, vitamin C, Airborne, Emergen-C, etc.		x
Prescribed medications	You are responsible for bringing and taking any medication prescribed by a medical professional.	x	
Over-the-counter medications	Over-the-counter fever reducers, gastrointestinal medications, anti-inflammatories, electrolyte packets, motion sickness medication, etc.		x
English/Lao dictionary			x
Deck of cards or other games	For hanging out at night		x
Notebook with pens and pencils to write about your excursions			x

Snacks	Local snacks are tasty, affordable and help to support the local economy, but feel free to bring some of your favorites from home.		x
Outlet converter/adapter			x
Hammock	Great way to relax during downtime		x
Face mask	During travel and extra precautions		
COVID-19 Rapid Self-Test	We strongly recommend bringing your own at-home test. Travel/airplanes can cause people to feel stuffy or exhibit cold-like symptoms. Bringing this test will help rule out that your illness is COVID-related		

*Note : GIVE is constantly striving to be as eco-friendly as possible. To reduce your waste, please plan on bringing home what you pack in (i.e. bottles of sunscreen, bug spray, etc.)

Spending Money: Laos Kip is necessary to purchase snacks, souvenirs, etc. in Laos.

- \$200-\$400 (equivalent in USD) of crisp/clean spending money for exchange or souvenirs, snacks, and other opportunities. We will have *very* limited access to ATMs throughout the trip, and 1 day to exchange USD to LAK, so withdraw/bring sufficient cash based on your spending habits.
- Remember to let your bank know you will be traveling to avoid any credit/debit card holds!

IMPORTANT! Don't forget to pack your passport!!!

- Passport
- Color copy of your passport

Culture Shock

Culture shock is a strange feeling many of us will face when we are traveling in a country that is culturally different from our own. Knowledge about symptoms of culture shock can help us identify and work through the shock as we continue to be involved with the community and culture. Below is a list of symptoms of culture shock that you may experience while traveling in a different country. Do not be worried about culture shock as it is a normal part of the travel process, and completely expected to happen to just about everyone. If you experience culture shock, your guides will assist you to work through your feelings and experience, so don't be embarrassed or afraid to say anything to them. We have all been through it, so don't think you're the only one to feel this way! You're not alone!

Symptoms:

- Preoccupation with health
- Trying too hard to absorb everything in the new culture or country
- Insomnia, desire to sleep too much or too little
- Changes in temperament, depression

- Developing stereotypes about the new culture
- Feeling vulnerable, feeling powerless
- Irritability, resentment, unwillingness to interact with others
- Identifying with the old culture or idealizing the old country
- Loss of identity
- Melancholy, loneliness, sadness
- Lack of confidence and feelings of insecurity
- Developing obsessions with over-cleanliness
- Longing for family
- Feelings of being lost and overlooked

If you experience any of the above, please reach out to your GIVE guides, as they will provide you with support. Your guides will help you decipher your feelings and cope with these symptoms, making the adjustment to this new land and new culture easier on your mind, and a lot less stressful on your body.

While on Your Excursion

Do not hesitate to let your GIVE guides know what you need while on your excursion. We are here for you! We want you to work hard and enjoy this experience to the fullest, so make sure if there is something preventing you from enjoying yourself entirely to let your guides know so they can help you through it.

GIVE Contact Information

Phone USA +1 (206) 973-7991
E-mail info@givevolutneers.org
Skype info.give
Mail 1900 W Nickerson St STE 116 #123, Seattle, WA 98119

Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you and we are excited to see you in Laos!