GIVE Trip Overview
Laos Excursion

Growth International Volunteer Excursions

The Roots of Change
# GIVE Excursion Overview Table of Contents

**Introduction** ................................................................. 4

**Preparation Reminders Prior to Departure** ................................ 4
- Passport ............................................................................. 4
- Visa .................................................................................. 4
  - Visa Prior to Arrival .................................................. 5
  - Visa on Arrival .......................................................... 5
- Other ............................................................................... 6
- Vaccinations ................................................................. 6
- Medications ................................................................. 6
- Safety and General Health Concerns .................................... 7

**Flights and Arrival In-Country** ........................................... 7
- Flights ............................................................................. 7
- Arrival ............................................................................. 7
- Airport Pickups ............................................................. 8
- Flight Delays or Cancellations ........................................ 8
- Next Day Flight Arrival .................................................. 9
- Important Note .............................................................. 9
- Lost or Delayed Baggage ................................................ 10

**Donations** ........................................................................ 10

**Money** ............................................................................. 10
- Notifying Your Bank ....................................................... 10
- Currency and Exchange Rates ....................................... 11
- Money Recommendations ............................................. 11

**Communication** ............................................................... 12
- Adapters .......................................................................... 12
- Contacting Home .......................................................... 12
- Home Contacting You .................................................... 12

**Weather** .......................................................................... 13

**Accommodations** ............................................................. 13

**Luggage** ......................................................................... 14
- Important Note Regarding Valuables .............................. 14
Packing for Your Excursion ........................................................................................................14
Packing Checklist .....................................................................................................................15
Volunteer Projects ....................................................................................................................17
Adventure Activities .................................................................................................................18
Itinerary (Sample) .....................................................................................................................19
Culture Shock ..............................................................................................................................21
While On Your Excursion ..........................................................................................................21
GIVE Contact Information .......................................................................................................22
GIVE Laos Experience Overview

Get ready! Your GIVE volunteer excursion is coming up soon, so prepare yourself to be immersed in the culture of new and unique environments, to meet incredible people, and to broaden your perspectives of the world. Your Laos journey will take you all the way from the UNESCO World Heritage City of Luang Prabang, to the majestic landscapes and rural riverside villages of Sop Chem and Nongkiaw.

The people you meet along the way in this journey are sure to inspire you, offering a profoundly unique display of local color from native villagers, coupled with the inspiring dedication and openness of your fellow volunteers. As an individual, you will be directly involved in the innovative, eco-friendly, educational, and sustainable volunteer projects we have set forth to complete, benefitting communities here in these beautiful Laos mountains for years to come.

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.

Preparation Reminders Prior to Departure

All trip preparation information can be found on our website as well! Go to www.givevolunteers.org, then click “Travel Details” in the menu.

Passport:

Don’t forget to bring your passport and a color copy of your passport to Laos! Our office should have already received a color copy of your passport, but it is important that you bring a color copy 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 January 1, 2019, your passport expiration date cannot be prior to June 2, 2019.

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

Visa:

Our partner in Laos has recommended that the standard 30-day tourist visa will be sufficient for GIVE volunteers. We recommend that all volunteers simply apply for a Visa on Arrival, as it is a cheaper and much simpler process. Most GIVE Volunteers will be flying into Luang Prabang, where you can easily apply for the Visa immediately upon entering immigration. Details of the process are listed below.
*You must bring 2 passport-size photos with you to present to the Laos customs agent along with the arrival card and visa on arrival application.

1. Visa On Arrival

Citizens from most countries are able to receive visas on arrival, such as citizens of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union, among others. You can find a complete list at http://www.tourismlaos.org/show.php?Cont_ID=348.

You will need to pay a fee (in cash) for your Visa on Arrival of about USD 20-45, depending on your nationality. Here is a breakdown of the costs relative to different countries.

- Note* that there is a $1 processing fee for visas on arrival in addition to the cost below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Price (US Dollar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will receive two immigration forms: **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: **13 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:
  Name: **Mao Pha Shok Guesthouse**
  Address: **Chao Chom Phou Road, Ban Visoun, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR**
  Telephone: 85671212513
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 Touy’s contact information (see above).

*You must bring 2 passport-size photos with you to present to the Laos customs agent along with the arrival card and visa on arrival application.*

2. Visa Prior to Arrival

There are a few countries not eligible for Laos Visas on Arrival. You can find a complete list at http://www.tourismlaos.org/show.php?Cont_ID=348.

3. 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:

GIVE cannot provide you with a list of recommended vaccinations for traveling in Laos. You can, however, find a list of recommended vaccinations on the Center for Disease Control website here: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.htm.

Vaccinations and medical precautions are your discretion with the recommendations of your doctor or travel clinic.

Although there are no vaccination requirements for travelers from the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia to enter into Laos, GIVE strongly recommends 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 you may need a course of vaccinations. Inform your doctor that you are traveling to Laos and the activities you plan to participate in so they can provide guidance. Note that GIVE cannot provide you with vaccinations before or during your trip.

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:

GIVE is unable to provide you with a list of recommended medications for your excursion. It is your discretion with the recommendation of a doctor or travel clinic if you choose to take medications on your excursion.
You are responsible for providing your own over-the-counter or prescription medications throughout your excursion. This includes allergy medications, anti-inflammatory medications, etc. Please discuss these concerns with your doctor before your excursion. If you have asthma (even mild), please do not forget to bring your inhaler! Also, it’s a good idea to plan ahead and bring vitamins (Vitamin C or Emergen-C packets) and over-the-counter medications in case you start to get sick.

If any changes to your health occur, it is critical that you update your Traveler Information in your Volunteer Profile as soon as possible. You can access your Volunteer 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 GIVE guides when you arrive in Laos.

**Safety and General Health Concerns:**

International travel inherently involves risk and we maintain a culture of comprehensive risk mitigation while carrying out our mission to inspire growth, empower global citizens, and encourage sustainable change worldwide. GIVE strives to minimize risk through proactive measures, with the ultimate goal of providing you with an experience of a lifetime that is not only educational and inspiring, but, more importantly, safe and secure.

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. The majority of time spent on our Laos excursion takes place in secluded and rustic rural areas, where you will always be with at least 20-30 other volunteers and at least two guides. This is a group excursion, where individual volunteers will be following our planned itinerary throughout the duration of their excursion. In addition, we have forged strong relationships with local governments and community members where we work, making the environment welcoming, warm, and friendly. In the event that an unforeseen circumstance does arise, we are prepared with a comprehensive risk management plan to respond to the incident(s), and we are therefore fully prepared with resources, such as medical supplies and routes to local hospitals and clinics.

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 be a volunteer. We work outdoors daily engaging in strenuous building projects in a tropical environment. This means that you must be aware of your hydration, sun protection, and nutrition at all times. In the off chance that 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.

**Flights and Arrival in Laos**

**Flights:**

GIVE Excursion Overview - 7
Before you depart, be sure to check your flight departure time online, or if you booked with Corporate Traveler (new USA name for Flight Center), contact an agent to make sure that your flight information has not changed.

GIVE group flight itineraries include routes and layovers through specific airports so that you and other GIVE volunteers departing from the same region may travel together. You can meet other GIVE volunteers in route to Laos during your layover(s) or on the plane and should hence be on the lookout for fellow volunteers. To make it easy to identify each other, tie a green ribbon or string to your carry-on bag. You can even make a GIVE sign to find other volunteers while in transit to Laos.

**Arrival in Laos:**

Since we arrange group flight itineraries, volunteers will arrive at the Luang Prabang International Airport (LPQ) at (or around) the same time. If you are obtaining your Visa On Arrival (see above), you will receive two immigration forms on the airplane: **an Arrival Card and a Visa On Arrival Application.** Complete both forms and provide to a Laos customs agent upon your arrival.

The instructions on how to complete the forms is above 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 Touy’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 one 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 arrivals 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 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 only about 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:**
There will be 2 - 3 airport pickups on your trip start date. We will email you the pickup times one week before your departure date with additional details regarding your excursion. If you arrive before our airport pickup times, be sure to wait in the baggage reclaim area until the scheduled pickup time. Keep an eye out for your guide in a green GIVE shirt!

**Flight Delays or Cancellations:**

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 Corporate Traveler (new USA name for Flight Center), 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.

   **Corporate Traveler USA: +1 877-862-7051**
   **Flight Center UK: +44 203 056 7993**
   **Flight Center AUS: 1300 557-813**

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

3. **After you’re flight has been rebooked, e-mail your updated itinerary to GIVE AND post your updated itinerary on your GIVE group’s Facebook page!** Make sure to include the airline, number, arrival time, and names of other GIVE volunteers with you.

4. Your guides will make alternative arrangements for your pickup – note that **delayed flights may incur additional pickup fees** (see below sections). Contact GIVE if you have any further questions at info@givevolunteers.org or call our offices at +1 (206) 973-7991.

5. **If flight changes result in a layover of more than six hours or if you have to 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!**

Talking to gate agents at the airport and calling your flight agents/the airlines are the best resource to rebook your ticket. If you have additional questions or need support, GIVE monitors the lines 24/7 while volunteers are in route to their host country.

**Next Day Flight Arrival:**
If your flight is cancelled or delayed and you are unable to arrive to Luang Prabang Airport on your trip start date, do not panic. **Follow the same steps outlined above for delays and cancellations.** Make sure you email your new flight itinerary and post in your GIVE Trip Facebook Group so your guides can arrange alternative transportation.

**Note that you will be responsible to pay for transportation to our accommodations to meet the group.** Depending on the circumstances, your Travelers Insurance may reimburse you for costs incurred as a result of your flight delay or cancellation.

**Important Note:**

Any travel expenses outside of the GIVE excursion itinerary are the responsibility of the volunteer to pay out-of-pocket, including costs associated with delayed and/or interrupted travel to and from the host location. We require all volunteers to have International Travel Insurance that may provide reimbursement for costs if they are within the policy coverage.

It’s always a good idea to bring an extra change of clothes, all medications, important documents and money IN YOUR CARRY ON LUGGAGE in the case of a next day arrival, lost luggage or any other unforeseen circumstances. Our guides will do everything in their power to obtain clothing and appropriate items if your luggage is lost or delayed.

**Lost or Delayed Baggage:**

If your baggage does not arrive at the airport, do not 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.

**Donations**

We ask you to please avoid bringing donations from home. This will help to stimulate the local economy by buying directly from the communities of Sop Chem, Nongkiaw, and/or in Luang Prabang. Your support is in no way less desirable; we are only aiming to create the most sustainable and direct impact as possible. If there are specific supplies necessary that we can’t purchase in country such as materials for our education program, your guides will notify you well in advance in your Facebook group.

**Money**

GIVE Excursion Overview - 10
Notify Your Local Bank Before Departure (Important!):

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 about 8,300 Laos Kip (LAK).

We encourage you to look up current exchange rates prior to your departure as rates do fluctuate. You must use LAK if you plan on spending money shopping, eating, or engaging in other activities, though USD’s are accepted at certain locations. 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. 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 ATM’s within walking distance of your accommodation in Luang Prabang.

It’s important to take into consideration that you will only be able to use the ATM while we are in Luang Prabang on days 1, 2, 3 and 13 of the trip, as the villages we will travel to do not have ATMs or banks. Because there is limited access to ATMs or banks in the villages, think about your spending habits when withdrawing money. Plan ahead so you are not left without cash. Your GIVE guides will remind you to use the ATM in Luang Prabang before we depart for our destinations. Make sure to plan ahead so you do not run out of money!

Note that if you’d prefer not to keep cash with you on your excursion, your GIVE guides can collect your money and keep it in a safe until you are ready to use it.

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 $300 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 of your fresh, drinking water, as well as three meals a day are provided for you during your GIVE excursion. Since we encourage you to experience purchasing and tasting the delicious local cuisine (as well as helping to boost the local economy), expect to purchase a couple of meals or snacks yourself when the opportunities arise. Additionally, you will be working hard throughout the day so packing additional snacks is suggested. There will be one opportunity to purchase snacks in Luang Prabang before heading to the village. In our experience, volunteers prefer to buy a few meals themselves to broaden the scope of their adventure!

**Communication**

**Adapters:**

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.

**Contacting Home:**

We understand that your family would like to know you arrived safely in Laos. To satisfy this, an email will be sent to your emergency contact after your group has arrived and settled in your accommodations. Please double check and verify that your emergency contact's information is correct on your volunteer profile and that they are aware that we will be sending them an email upon your arrival. We will also post on our Facebook page when you arrive and will update the page throughout your excursion, so tell your family and friends to follow our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/givevolunteers!

An important aspect of traveling internationally is to “unplug” from your life back home and “plug in” to the surrounding environment. We ask our volunteers to unplug from phones, social media, and contact with friends and family at home during their GIVE excursion to truly engage in their volunteer experience. Keep in mind that Laos is a developing nation with limited infrastructure and it may pose a new challenge to not have daily access to electronics and Wi-Fi. Disconnecting from your daily life will allow you to plug into different parts of yourself and truly experience Laos, and it will ultimately provide you with a more enjoyable, authentic, in-the-moment experience.

Make sure to inform your family that communication is limited and is not to be expected. There will not be access to phone or Internet throughout your excursion, so do not plan to contact home daily. Tell your family that communication is extremely limited and that they should not expect to hear from you. In the event of emergencies or case-by-case circumstances, your guide will arrange for you to call or email home.

**Home Contacting You:**

GIVE Excursion Overview - 12
It is important to let your family know that they should not expect to have communication with you while you are on your Laos excursion. For status updates or general questions, your family can contact the GIVE offices at +1 (206) 973-7991 or email info@givevolunteers.org while you are in Laos. Our GIVE team will be able to relay any messages to you and your guides.

For emergencies or non-emergencies, your family can contact the GIVE offices. For time-sensitive emergencies only, your parents can contact your guides directly. You will be emailed these numbers in the near future to have and use in emergency situations only.

GIVE will occasionally post photos of your excursion to our social media, so be sure to let your family and friends know they can follow your excursion on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as GIVE’s other social media sites. GIVE’s social media webpages can be accessed through the social media icons on our website at www.givevolunteers.org. Please inform your family that we will do our best to post photos of your group throughout the trip!

**Weather**

Come prepared for hot weather, sprinkled with short, sometimes heavy showers, as well as physical activity in the heat. Please see our suggested packing list below for recommendations on what to pack.

In the northern mountainous region of Laos, there are three distinct seasons. The hot season is from March to May, when temperatures can soar as high as 100°F. The slightly cooler wet season is from May to October, characterized by daily highs around 85°F and frequent tropical downpours (especially July & August). **So be sure to pack a rain coat.** The dry season from November to March has low rainfall and temperatures can get as low as 40°F, or even below freezing in the mountains at night. Definitely make sure to pack some warm clothes to sleep in if you’re coming on our December/January trips!

The sun is very powerful here, so it is important to bring more than enough sunscreen and even a sunhat to protect you from the sun. We take a break from our volunteer projects in the early afternoon because it is the hottest part of the day. During this time you are free to relax, take a nap, or engage in other activities with fellow volunteers or village locals.

**Accommodations**

Our accommodations are comfortable and equipped with necessary amenities, such as running water, bathrooms, showers, beds with sheets, etc. You will have consistent access to electricity for the first 3 days and the final two days of your trip; however, brief power outages are common in Luang Prabang and Nongkhai. During the 8 days in Sop Chem, you will only have generator-powered electricity for a few hours each night. This is why we highly recommend bringing your own rechargeable portable battery 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 remember to practice the golden rule! If you’d like to room with a friend, please let us know before your excursion and we will be more than happy to arrange that for you. Otherwise, your guides on the ground will provide room assignments when your group arrives in Laos.

Please remember that you will be staying in rural communities within the tropical jungle, 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. If you have any questions about what to expect in order to pack accordingly, you are highly encouraged to contact the office to ensure that you feel as prepared as possible prior to your arrival. Most importantly, arrive with an open mind and desire to push yourself beyond your comfort zone, growing mentally, physically and emotionally each step of the way. Embracing personal growth is the key to a successful GIVE trip!

Luggage

We encourage you to pack as light as possible in bags convenient for in-country travel, such as travel backpacks or duffle bags. We also highly recommend bringing an additional day pack/camelbak for heading to the worksite, day trips and hikes. Please do not bring boxy, rolling suitcases! We will be staying in two very different locations—Luang Prabang and Sop Chem—and we travel by minivan and long-tail boats the majority of the time. For these reasons, it is imperative to pack light. To compensate for your lack of excess clothing, there will be opportunities for you to do laundry throughout your excursion.

Before transporting your luggage from your home to Laos, check the baggage rules and regulations for your specific airlines. Generally for international flights, the airlines allow you to bring one personal item (45 in/111cm), one carry-on bag (62 in/158cm), and one checked bag (50lbs/23kgs) at no additional cost. It is important to remember that you cannot have any liquids that exceed 3.4 ounces or 100ml in your carry-on bags, so be sure to make note of that while packing at home. Please refer to TSA website for more detailed information about baggage regulations at http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm.

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, 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. With many connecting flights and traveling such a long distance it is important to take all precautions to be sure your belongs arrive safely.

**Packing for Your Excursion**

People tend to over pack while traveling and we suggest that you challenge yourself to only pack the bare necessities. Be realistic and ask yourself, “What do I really need to have?” Please adopt the motto “Travel Light!” Our best suggestion is to lay out what you think you need, and only bring 75% of that. You will realize when you arrive in country that you need a lot less than you think!

Generally, volunteers will wear the same work clothes daily, as they may stain with cement or dirt from working all day. Also keep in mind that many of the clothes you wear while working and trekking will become very muddy, so don’t expect them to remain clean when you return home!

While working at the school teaching the kids, exploring local temples, or walking in public through the villages, you will need to wear conservative clothing, making sure to cover your shoulders and knees and the same methods of repeating outfits just like when you are at the worksite. You will have an opportunity to buy elephant pants at the local night market!

**In accordance with the cultural customs of the communities that we will be working in, you will be required to wear “culturally appropriate” clothing for the majority of the trip.** We require our female volunteers to cover their knees and shoulders and to not wear any low cut, spandex or see through clothing at these times. Rules for males are less strict, but they should certainly bring 2-3 outfits that cover their shoulders and knees. There will be specific times that this will not be necessary, such as when we are in Luang Prabang or at our accommodations away from the community, but it is encouraged that you plan on wearing clothes that abide by these guidelines for the majority of the trip. Please note that by adhering to these rules you are practicing sensitivity and respect both to GIVE and to the host communities.

**Packing Checklist of Recommended Items:**

**General Clothing**
- 1 lightweight raincoat/poncho
- 1 sweatshirt, lightweight jacket or sweater
- 2-3 T-shirts or tank tops to wear during down time (*females cannot wear tank-tops on project sites or in public in village, but they can wear them in the city as long as they are modest i.e. no spaghetti straps, not low cut, no open back, etc*)
- 1-2 pairs of shorts to wear during downtime
- Underwear and socks. Keep in mind that on volunteering days you *may* need two pairs of socks daily (*one for morning, one for evening*).
- 1-2 swimsuits (*to remain respectful of local culture; females must wear shorts and t-shirts over their swimsuits while swimming in Sop Chem village, bathing*
suits are okay when swimming at the waterfall in Luang Prabang – please avoid “cheeky bottoms”)

- Sunglasses
- Hat for sun protection
- 3-4 sport or athletic bras (females)
- Pajamas or comfortable sleeping clothes
- 1 long sleeve athletic shirt, long pants, and long socks to be worn during ziplining day (to protect us from itchy jungle plants)
- 1-2 “nice” outfits for a special ceremony in the village and the last dinner night in the city (ceremonial outfits must cover shoulders and knees to be culturally appropriate) There will be opportunities to buy ceremony skirts in the village!

Volunteer Worksite Clothing
- 3-4 T-Shirts for construction work - these will get dirty! (*Females cannot wear tank-tops in public or on the worksite*)
- 2-4 athletic shorts for construction work (we will be working alongside locals, so *females should not wear “short shorts” or spandex on the worksite*)
- 2-3 pairs of loose fitting (*no tights or yoga pants*) clothes that cover your knees for volunteering at the school, visiting temples and exploring villages. We will refer to these outfits as “culturally appropriate” (*Lightweight pants, past-knee length shorts, or past-knee length skirt – Elephant pants are a great go-to!*)
- 4-5 modest shirts that completely cover your shoulders, chest and midriff for volunteering at the school, visiting temples and exploring villages. *If you plan on teaching you are not allowed to wear shirts that are scoop, V-neck, sheer, off the shoulder or cropped* (*Wear your GIVE shirt!*)
- 1 pair of work gloves

Footwear
- 1 pair of closed-toed working boots or running shoes for the construction site. *Keep in mind that these will get wet & dirty!* If you need to bring an extra pair of boots/shoes for hiking or casual wear, please do so.
- 1 pair of *waterproof* shoes or hiking boots for jungle trekking and crossing streams (*Teva's, Keens, Chacos and other strapped sandals/water shoes are ideal – these will get wet and dirty!*)
- 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 good pair of sandals will expedite the whole process.

Other Gear
- Small day pack or overnight backpack (*waterproof/water resistant if possible*) that you can use for bringing to the school, worksites, overnight trips to neighboring villages and during bamboo rafting.
- Rain cover for your daypack or big pack in case of rain during travel.
- **Headlamp and batteries** (*Very Important for cave exploration and late night bathroom trips*)
- 1 towel (*a microfiber towel is recommended for quick dry purposes*)
Toiletries: shampoo/conditioner, face wipes, toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, etc.

- 1-2 large bottles of sunscreen (30 spf or higher)
- 1-2 large bottles of insect repellent (Expect to use this every day – especially in July & August)
- Anti-itch cream/wipes
- Hand sanitizer/hand wipes
- **Refillable water bottle**
- Reusable coffee cup and straw to minimize plastic waste. We also suggest a reusable bag to put all your goodies in at the night market 😊
- Large Ziploc Baggies/Waterproof bag (these are good to protect cameras and valuables from getting wet, especially during bamboo rafting)
- Large mesh bag or trash bag for transporting dirty clothes/laundry.
- Rechargeable portable battery for charging phones and small electronics in villages without electricity.
- Phone or a watch with an alarm clock
- Small first aid kit
- 1 good book
- Camera
- Vitamins (*multi-vitamins, vitamin C, Airborne, Emergen-C, etc - optional*)
- Over-the-counter fever reducers, gastrointestinal medications, anti-inflammatories, electrolyte packets, etc. (*optional*)
- English/Laos dictionary (*optional*)
- Deck of cards or other games (*optional, for hanging out at night*)
- Notebook with pens and pencils to write about your excursions (*optional*)
- Money belt (*optional*)
- Snacks (*optional, but HIGHLY recommended! Your guides love them too!*)

*Note: GIVE is constantly striving to be as eco-friendly as possible. In an effort to reduce our 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-$300 (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

**Volunteer Projects**
You will be directly involved in groundbreaking projects intended to maximize our positive impact on Laos people and their surrounding environment, particularly in the rural village of Sop Chem in the rugged northern reaches of the Luang Prabang province. This impact will be felt not only in the classroom, but also on the ground with the various infrastructure projects we will complete to promote economic success, inspire growth and empower citizens from the ground up.

**Sop Chem Permaculture Learning Center**

Over the last 5 years, our host community of Sop Chem has seen some dramatic 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 almost entirely on subsistence farming, fishing, hunting and gathering for their sustenance. Construction of the dams has led to rapid deforestation, appropriation of large tracts of farmland, and major changes to the biological, chemical and physical properties of the river and its riparian environment; all of which is adversely impacting the community’s ability to maintain food security. Furthermore, the region’s rugged mountainous landscape makes access to fertile farmland a precious commodity and Sop Chem residents are simply running out of space. Community leaders understand that, in order to survive and thrive under these new circumstances, it’s critical for local residents to adapt and innovate their food production systems. Essentially, they must figure out how to do more with less.

Permaculture provides a timely opportunity for Sop Chem residents to regenerate their soil, conserve water resources, minimize land usage and increase crop yield; however, considering the dire consequences of a failed season, many farmers are naturally hesitant to experiment with new techniques. In response, GIVE is working alongside them to establish the Sop Chem Permaculture Learning Center – a model farm that will demonstrate best practices in organic, nutrition-based, regenerative agriculture, and produce a large variety of nutritious fruits, vegetables and livestock on a relatively small plot of land. Ultimately, we hope to provide nearby farmers with living proof of permaculture’s positive potential in the region, inviting them to learn and practice these innovative techniques on our farm so they can eventually begin implementing them on a larger scale.

**Educational Programs:**

English education in these remote communities is inadequate, as there are only a handful of teachers struggling to manage numerous age groups and teach them a variety of subjects. What becomes even more challenging is that most Laotian teachers have never received adequate training in English education. To help alleviate these problems, GIVE volunteers provide conversational English lessons at the local Primary School during their summer break. Our volunteers’ play a vital 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 seen the progress their children have made and asked to join in on lessons. We now hold Adult English Lessons several nights a week to provide them with basic conversational English skills. Many local women utilize these skills to increase their potential to sell handicrafts to visiting tourists.

**Wildlife Conservation:**

For the past 4 years, GIVE has partnered with an Australian NGO named Free the Bears, which has established wildlife sanctuaries throughout Southeast Asia to protect the Asiatic Black Bear from the illegal wildlife trade. This year, GIVE will be working with Free the Bears to construct and further develop enclosures at their newest sanctuary, the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary. This new sanctuary will serve to relieve the effects of overcrowding that bears are experiencing at the current Tat Kuang Sii National Park. It will ultimately house more than 150 bears, along with a variety of primates and other species rescued from the illegal wildlife trade in Asia.

**Adventure Activities**

A tremendous amount of effort and energy will be poured into our volunteer projects and, while we will work hard to get those projects done, we make sure to play hard as well. This is your time to explore and broaden your horizons!

During your breaks from volunteering and on certain adventure days, you will have plenty of opportunities to explore the region, become immersed in local culture and get your adrenaline pumping!

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

- Ziplining through the jungle canopy
- Meditation classes
- Chasing waterfalls
- Jungle trekking
- Alms Ceremony with local monks
- Fishing with locals
- Getting up close and personal with Asiatic Black Bears
- Making traditional rice wine with locals
- Working in the rice paddies (in July & August)
- Shopping and experiencing local markets
- Volleyball, soccer, and other sports with local children
- Learning how to weave handmade fabrics
- Exploring limestone caves
- Baci Ceremony held by Sop Chem villagers
Itinerary (Sample)

This is a sample itinerary of what could happen on a Laos excursion, and, as such, will be modified during your excursion. Traveling abroad, therefore, 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: Group arrives in Luang Prabang. After a warm welcome and orientation from your local guides, the evening is free to explore the Night Market and get to know your fellow volunteers!

**Day 2** – Wake up early to take part in the world famous Alms Ceremony, a Buddhist tradition of waking up before dawn to provide monks with fresh food for the day. After breakfast, take part in the ultimate cultural orientation by discussing Buddhist culture and practices with local monks! Monks will then teach us about the ancient practice of meditation and lead us in a brief exercise. Later that morning we’ll tour 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.

After lunch, we’ll head to the Tat Kuang Sii National Park to behold one of Laos’ greatest natural wonders – a 200-foot cascading waterfall feeding a series of smaller falls and turquoise blue pools. We’ll spend the rest of the afternoon exploring the falls and relaxing in its’ pools.

**Day 3** – Spend a full-day learning about wildlife conservation efforts in Laos and working hard to construct new enclosures for the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary, a 60-acre sanctuary that will ultimately house more than 150 Asiatic Black Bears, along with a variety of primates and big cats rescued from the illegal wildlife trade in Asia.

**Day 4** – After breakfast it’s a 3.5 hour minivan and 1.5 hour long-tail boat cruise to our main destination, Sop Chem – a rustic, riverside village surrounded by limestone cliffs and dense jungle, and our home for the next week! We’ll spend the rest of the afternoon and evening exploring the village and learning more about our project initiatives here.

**Days 5-11** – Volunteering in Sop Chem

Start early each morning with a locally prepared, delicious breakfast. After breakfast, we will begin education and construction projects around 9:00 AM. You will work hard until lunchtime, when you will break to have a filling lunch and relax for a couple hours before returning to the project site for the rest of the afternoon. In the late afternoon, we will wrap up volunteer work for the day and then head out on a variety of cultural and adventure activities, like fishing with locals, brewing rice wine, playing sports with local children, taking part in traditional ceremonies, exploring nearby caves, learning to make local handicrafts, tubing downstream, or just relaxing and watching village life unfold.
Note: On the final night in Sop Chem, locals will hold a traditional Baci Ceremony for us – wishing us good fortune and safe travels on all future journeys. This is an incredibly meaningful and special tradition to take part in.

Day 12 – After breakfast we’ll begin our long-tail boat journey down the Nam Ou River towards the town of Nongkiaw, where we’ll take flight on the most epic zipline in all of SE Asia! Soar through the jungle canopy, overlooking tropical forests, limestone waterfalls and scenic mountain ranges on a multi-tiered adventure complete with ziplining, monkey bridges and cargo net crossings.

Day 13 – Wake up early to trek through dense jungle and bamboo forest on your way to one of the most stunning viewpoints in Laos! Option 2: Never leave your hammock 😊 After lunch we’ll drive back to Luang Prabang for one final night of celebration and reflection on an amazing trip!

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 destination!

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

GIVE Excursion Overview - 21
• 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 guide know so he/she can help you through it! GIVE is dedicated to inspire growth, empower the marginalized, and encourage sustainable change worldwide. With your help, we can make this goal a reality!

GIVE Contact Information

Phone USA +1 (206) 973-7991
Phone UK +44 (207) 193 3163
Phone AUS +61 (02) 8011-3174
E-mail info@givevolunteers.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!