



INTERNATIONAL EXPEDITIONS

World Leader in Nature Travel

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INTERNATIONAL EXPEDITIONS LAUNCHES NEW LAOS & VIETNAM PROGRAM IN 2010

Extraordinary Two-Week Journey Brims with Authentic Experiences

BIRMINGHAM, AL, August 17, 2009 – From visits to sacred *wats* and traditional villages to stops at three UNESCO World Heritage Sites and an elephant-back safari in Xe Pian National Protected Area, [International Expeditions](#)' new 15-day [Laos & Vietnam](#) program in 2010 offers an authentic look into the history, culture and natural beauty of Southeast Asia.

The world leader in nature travel, International Expeditions celebrates their 30th year of innovative and trailblazing travel with this unique exploration. Like all of IE's [small-group journeys](#), just 12 guests on each of the four January and February Laos & Vietnam departures are led by an experienced, knowledgeable [expedition leader](#) and native experts.

In Laos, a country that has been open to tourism for less than a decade, the town of Luang Prabang is widely regarded as the most authentic and peaceful city in Southeast Asia. It is here, at this UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its combination of traditional, colonial and urban architecture, that the journey begins, with three nights at a boutique hotel, just steps from the city's central evening market and cultural sites.

Day three offers a snapshot of the daily lives of practicing monks at traditional *wats* and the region's religious history and practices during visits to the Royal Palace Museum and Phu Si Hill, before participating in a traditional Lao *Baci* welcome ceremony. Next, guests delve further into Laos' diverse cultures during a visit to an ethnic minority village where they have the opportunity to

distribute school supplies purchased through IE's local partnership with Big Brother Mouse, an organization that strives to bring the fun of reading to the children by publishing books in their own language.

An early morning *tak bat* ceremony is a chance for guests to witness the silent, sacred practice of giving rice to the thousands of orange-robed monks as they make their way through the city streets. The group then flies south to explore Wat Phou Champasak, a UNESCO World Heritage Site designed to reflect the Hindu vision of the relationship between humanity and nature.

Day six begins with an elephant ride to the ancient temple ruins of Pho Asa Mountain and a visit to the remote village of Khiet Ngong, where *mahouts* (elephant drivers) are trained, followed by an afternoon hike through the bird-rich wetlands. The following day, guests tour coffee and tea plantations and learn about traditional crafting techniques in the lush highlands of Bolaven Plateau. Throughout their stay in this isolated region, IE guests enjoy comfort bungalows at the unique and charming Kingfisher Ecolodge, with sweeping views of the wetlands of Xe Pian National Protected Area.

Next the group travels to Vientiane, the capital city of Laos and heart of French-colonial Indochina, to see Wat Sisaket, the oldest monastery in the city, Patousay, the city's victory gate, and That Luang Stupa, a national symbol where ancient rituals are performed by local people.

The expedition next reaches Hanoi, Vietnam, a city inhabited since 3000 B.C. and marked by every Vietnamese dynasty. Here the tour begins with a step back to more recent history during a visit of Hoa Lo Prison, the notorious "Hanoi Hilton," which held American POWs during the Vietnam War. A stop is also made at the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the One Pillar Pagoda, one of Vietnam's most iconic Buddhist temples, and the Temple of Literature, the most prominent temple of Confucius in the country. After lunch with Anh Tuyet, a well-known local artist and chef, guests enjoy a cyclo-rickshaw ride through the Old Quarter, where streets overflow with shops.

Rice paddies are on view en route to Halong Bay, where all embark on a *junk* for an overnight cruise taking in the expansive seascape of 1,600 limestone islands. A sunrise over the astounding natural setting tops off the excursion, which also features a stop at the Cave of Surprises and free time to swim in the blue lagoon waters.

On day 13 all fly south to modern Ho Chi Minh City, still called Saigon by the locals. Here the day is spent exploring the Notre Dame Cathedral and the Presidential Palace – where the group will tour the war rooms used by the U.S. and South Vietnamese to coordinate efforts. The final day of the journey features a drive through the fertile countryside of the Mekong Delta, and a cruise through the bustling waterways around the Mekong Islands. In addition to exploring the quaint island villages, a lunch of the local delicacy, elephant fish, is enjoyed.

The [Laos & Vietnam](#) tour is offered January 17 & 31 and February 14 & 28, 2010. Per person prices start at \$3,898, double occupancy, and include all accommodations, most meals, local transportation, guides and group transfers. International and in-country airfare is not included, though flights can be arranged through International Expeditions.

Guests can also add a three-day extension to [Siem Reap, Cambodia](#) featuring Angkor Wat and other UNESCO temples, starting at \$798 per person, double occupancy.

Founded in 1980, International Expeditions is the World Leader in Nature Travel, specializing in small group and independent journeys to the most exhilarating destinations around the globe. A pioneer of environmentally responsible travel, International Expeditions is committed to preserving natural habitats and improving the welfare of the people and communities it visits.

For more information or an International Expeditions brochure, call an International Expeditions destination specialist at 1-800-633-4734, see your travel agent, e-mail nature@ietravel.com, or visit www.IEtravel.com.

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