

**TLo04**

**Thai/Lao Explorer**

**15 Days**

**Community Development Project:**



Teaching English



**Trip Highlights:**

- Bangkok's temples & palaces
- Nakhon Phanom's graceful French colonial buildings
- Caves and limestone formations
- The ancient city of Aran



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- Koh Samet island for sunbathing, relaxing and swimming

**Trip Description:**

Arrive in Bangkok, transfer to your deluxe room in the Peninsula Hotel. We visit several magnificent temples in Bangkok, including Wat Pho, which features the largest reclining Buddha image in Thailand.

After a full day's excursion in the heat of the day, enjoy a delicious genuine Thai-style dinner, accompanied by Thai classical music and dances. Once performed in the inner-court only for royalty, every hand gesture carries a separate meaning. In the background, expert musicians demonstrate their considerable skills with ancient instruments designed for Thai classical music.

We fly to Nakorn Phanom , and relax the rest of the day. After breakfast the following day, your guide will pick you up and transfer you to the Laos border on the Mekong River.

We then drive by van or pick-up truck into the Khammouane Central Limestone District to the Nam Theun Bridge area. This drive passes through some of Laos' most spectacular limestone (karst) landscape. Today's drive takes place on the edge of what is known locally as a National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NBCA).

We drive up to the Nam Teun Bridge. The road elevation at points allows for unique, dramatic views of fields of jagged limestone ridges below. You will enjoy spectacular viewpoints high above ridges. At the Nam Theun Bridge see how local people have utilized US aircraft bomber fuel drop-tanks (probably F-111 bomber tanks, left from the Vietnam War) to make bomb boats. Time & weather permitting, we take a short ride on one of these local boats before continuing to the edge of the National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NBCA) at Na Hin town, where we will stay for the night. Dinner is at a local restaurant.

On Day 4, we hike 3 kms through the forest to Tat Nam Senam Waterfall. While not difficult, you will certainly need strong walking shoes, and a sure step for this small trek. Scramble on the rocks or enjoy a dip in the cold clear water before returning to Na Hin for lunch.

After lunch drive by “Jumbo” down to the Nam Hin Boun River. Here we board a long-tail riverboat to journey into the high limestone of the Khammouane NBCA. A several hour boat ride takes you through the Limestone Karst landscape of the NBCA. Keen nature watchers can sometimes see examples of NBCA wildlife. This area is home to monkeys, elephants, deer, bears and several large species of cats including Clouded Leopards and Tigers. Local flora includes many types of ferns, rare orchids, cycads and a variety of epiphytes.



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We stop along the way to enjoy the lovely views of the limestone and swim in the river before we continue on to the riverside village of Ban Na Kok where we will be accommodated by the village headman & his family. Here you will have a taste of real Lao village life. Enjoy meeting & playing with the charming children who will come from all over the village to have a look at the Westerners! Enjoy the rest of the day in the village, exploring, walking, or just relaxing. Dinner will be prepared by our guides to be eaten at the headman's house.

After breakfast on Day 5, we spend the day exploring the area. First, a 2 km walk will bring you to the mouth of Tam Heup Cave from which emanates a crystal clear stream. After equipment distribution & checks by the guides, walk through the 1KM-long cave – actually a tunnel from one side of this mountain to the secluded valley on the other side, where the Ancient City of ARAN once stood. Crossing the cave requires walking & wading. At some times of year the water is waist-deep. Lunch will be prepared by our guides on the banks of Heup Creek, the stream running through the cave. After lunch explore the Ruins of ARAN. Largely overgrown by jungle, you will enjoy exploring the ruins among the huge rocket-fin trees. Little is known about the origin of these ruins, except that they date back several centuries.

**Option:** For those who wish to hike more, walk 3 kms to the tiny remote village of Ban Na. Meet the villagers and reflect upon how simply they live, making the most of their jungle surroundings.

Walk back through the cave to enjoy a well-earned dinner at the headman's house. Following local tradition, villagers often make a “Bai Sii” blessing ceremony for travelers. But this will depend on the season & the villager's workload (during planting / harvest this may not be possible).

**NOTES FOR THIS DAY:**

- Wear TEVA style sandals or tennis shoes for crossing through the sand & pebble-floored cave. Your feet will be wet for the walk through.
- We reserve the right to change at a moment's notice this day's activities, as weather & water level conditions have a bearing on clients' safety.

After breakfast on Day 6, we say our goodbyes/ farewells with the local village community. PLEASE thank the headman's family before boarding our long-tail boat for the last leg of the river trip to Song Hong. We will stop for a picnic lunch and a swim around the riverbank. Our van will meet you at the Song Hong boat landing and bring you to Tha Kaek. Time permitting; stop to see the Khampaeng Yahk, or old city wall. Parts of this wall look man-made and local people are divided as to the wall's origin. Observers will also wonder how 10-tonne stone

blocks could be so neatly stacked. Once in Tha Kaek town, spend some time exploring by foot before crossing the Mekong by ferry to Thailand before 6 pm, and transferring to your hotel for relax & dinner.

On Day 7, we take a 1 hour drive to visit the Thad Phanom Chedi & Museum. We then return to Nakorn Phanom to visit sites around town. Visit Ho Chi Mihn's house on the reservoir at Na Jok where he lived for 7 years during the 1920s planning the revolution in Vietnam; visit the old City Hall (now a library) opposite the provincial capital buildings.

This building was designed & built in the 1920s and follows the classical lines of French Colonial architecture so prevalent all over Indochina. Then visit the Vietnamese Catholic Church on the river at North end of town. Shopping at the silk & silver shops near the Vietnamese clock tower. Here you will find top quality merchandise at a fraction of Bangkok price! Then come back to your hotel. Lunch & Dinner will be served you at the local restaurant.

We then spend four days at the English Camp for our Community Development Project.

We then transfer to Nakorn Phanom airport, back to Bangkok, and transfer to Rayong, and take a speed boat to Samet Island. We transfer to Sai Kaew Beach Resort, where we spend the next two days relaxing at the beach, before transferring back to Bangkok on Day 15, where our adventure ends.

**Day by Day Itinerary:**

Day 1	Bangkok tour	(D)
Day 2	Bangkok tour; fly to Nakhon Phanom	(B,L,D)
Day 3	Nakhon Phanom, Na Hin (Laos)	(B,L,D)
Day 4	Ban Na Kok	(B,L,D)
Day 5	Ban Na Kok, hiking, Aran ruins	(B,L,D)
Day 6	Ban Na Kok – Nakhon Phanom (Thailand)	(B,L,D)
Day 7	Tour Nakhon Phanom and Thad Phanom	(B,D)
Day 8- 11	Baan Pheang - English Teaching	(B)
Day 12	Fly to Bangkok, bus to Koh Samet	(B)
Day 13-14	Koh Samet island	(B)
Day 15	Return to Bangkok, tour ends	(B)



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**Comfort Level:** 4/5

Accommodation is in upmarket and centrally located hotels and resorts (4\* throughout, except for Koh Samet, with a superior room in one of the best resorts on the island, which is 3\*)

**Activity Level:** 3/5

**Min. Travellers per Group:** 2

**Max. Travellers per Group:** 12

**Police Check Required?** Yes



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