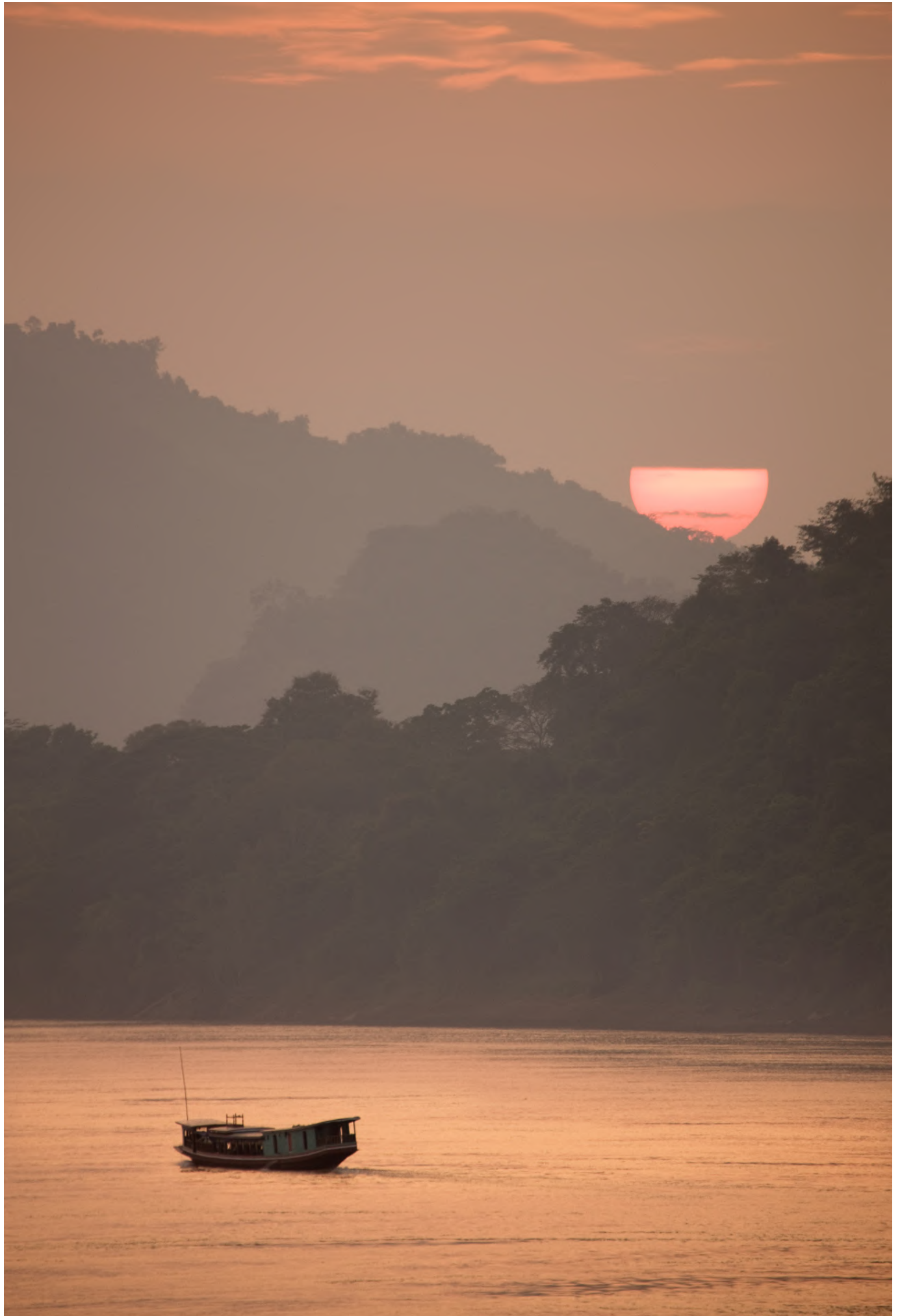


# A M A N T A K A

Activities Guide





Experiences are personal journeys. Our goal at Amantaka is to introduce you to Luang Prabang's deeply-rooted cultural heritage, natural wonders and contemporary attractions, and help you establish a personal connection with its warm and friendly people.

As part of UNESCO, Luang Prabang has 32 temples and 111 historic Lao-French buildings throughout the town, citing Luang Prabang as the best-preserved traditional town in Southeast Asia. New construction is limited, and development must be in keeping with the spirit of the town. Luang Prabang is small in scale and easily explored either on foot or by bicycle, ideal for discovering notable architectural landmarks and other distinctive attractions in town.

At Amantaka, tailor-made itineraries can be made to embrace passions and interests. From a traditional Lao cooking class on our organic farm to a sunset cruise on the majestic Mekong, or from a tour of the most sacred temples to a walk-through surrounding villages, our team at Amantaka are here to help you create your own journey into the heart of this fascinating town.





## Luang Prabang – a UNESCO town

### **Luang Prabang city tour**

#### *Half-day excursion*

Begin the tour at Amantaka, with the first stop at Wat Visoun and Wat Aham. Within their precincts stands the gigantic That Makmo (Watermelon), originally known as That Patum or Lotus Stupa, built in 1503 A. D. Then on towards Mount Phousi, bearing right to follow the Nam Khan River flanked by small vegetable gardens along its banks. After reaching the end of the peninsula, this visit includes Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang's most famous Wat, known as the "Temple of the Golden City" and considered the main gateway of the town.

Walk through winding streets, and observe small storefronts preparing rice cakes and homemade paper products before reaching the main artery of the town to visit the golden Buddha at Wat Sene. Continue to Wat Nong and follow the Mekong to Royal Palace which now houses the National Museum. The most important exhibit in the Pra Bang (Golden Buddha Stupa) for which Luang Prabang (City of the Golden Buddha), was named. The tour ends at Wat Mai, one of the grandest and most impressive temples in Luang Prabang with its golden frontage and unique five-tiered red roof, before returning to Amantaka.

### **Temple and village walk**

#### *Half-day excursion*

This adventure begins with a short river-crossing from the boat jetty behind the Palace Museum. After disembarking at Xieng Mene's makeshift boat landing, walk through an open market where a wooden sign shows the direction to the temples. A narrow yet well-kept footpath unfolds, and visitors are greeted with a chorus of "Sabaidee!" from children of the local village. Wat Xieng Mene is the first of our temples and a living complex restored by UNESCO.

Continuing through the next village, climb over a hundred steps to Wat Chomphet – stopping marvel at the panoramic view of Luang Prabang embraced by the Mekong. Upon entering the temples, visitors will find a seated Buddha and intricate altar space. Though abandoned, it is scheduled for restoration and easy to imagine its importance to residents of the area in years gone by. Descend the stairs and the trail winds through a canopy of large trees to Wat Long Khouan, and onto Wat Tam Xieng Mene. This unique discovery of their four temples is now complete, and amble back to Long Khouan to access the boat and cross the river once more.





## Amantaka and Buddhist Community

Lao Buddhism is a special form of Theravada Buddhism where monkhood plays a central role. Luang Prabang has been its historic centre, and today experiences an astonishing revival of Buddhism with more than 1000 young novices and monks studying at the monk's school. Visitors usually just get a glimpse of the historic temples, while highly interesting aspects of Buddhist life are hidden. Amantaka has developed a special and respectful relationship with the Buddhist community which we are proud to share with our guests. Following the advice of artist Hans Berger, who has been working with the monks of Luang Prabang for more than 20 years, we suggest three meaningful ways to approach contemporary Buddhist life and part of the fee supports the various projects.

### **The Buddhist archive of photography**

*A privileged, guided visit to a unique and serendipitous collection*

The Buddhist Archive at the gracious Sala Thammavihan holds 35,000 historic photographs taken or collected by the monks of Luang Prabang over 120 years.

It is the largest collection of monastic photography in South East Asia, and miraculously survived war and revolution. The photographs have been digitised by the British Library's Endangered Archives Program from 2006 to 2011 and are now researched by Lao and international scholars. The archive opens its doors especially to our guests for a visit of about one hour. View the significant historical photographs, and learn about the fascinating discovery of the archive in 2005. A privileged moment on the archive's veranda overlooking Wat Khilli, includes a cup of monastic tea, and offers the opportunity to freely discuss questions on the archive and on Lao photography.

Sala Thammavihan of Wat Khilli, (approx. 60 minutes)  
Starts weekdays between 9am and 3:30pm, upon appointment only. These monastic quarters are not usually accessible to the public. We kindly request that a modest dress code is respected.



### **Buddhist pilgrimage to the Budding Buddhist Academy**

*Share and see real Buddhist life of today's Laos*

This is probably one the most heart-warming experience to have in today's Buddhist life whilst in Luang Prabang: accompanied by dozens of novices, guests will offer a locally made, large wooden Buddha statue a donation to the budding Buddhist Academy, a place built in a rice field north of Luang Prabang, where hundreds of farmer's boys are given free education by the monks. Guests will pick up the statue at Wat Khilli and take it in procession to a boat that floats up the Mekong for 40 minutes. The monks will receive guests with bells and gongs and auspicious chanting at the academy. In local belief, visitors acquire through their gifts, karmic energy that may benefit them directly, or they may be transmitted to a person in need, a loved one or an ancestors. A most joyful occasion is when the pilgrimage is done in memory of a happy event in family life, birth or anniversary or marriage.

The significant donation helps with the construction and upkeep of the academy and feeds the numerous novices who live and study there. The pilgrimage is organised by the Buddhist Heritage Project that is part of the Buddhist Sangha.

This pilgrimage takes one half day, best is the afternoon with departure from Amantaka at 12:30pm. Amantaka will provide the ceremonial scarfs and flower offerings.

Dress simply, preferably with light colours (no black) with solid shoes, and the donation in an envelope. A representative of the Buddhist Heritage Project will accompany visitors and give an explanation on the ritual, and on the meaning of the academy in the social context of the town. Return to town either by boat or bus.

### **Buddhist learning session at Amantaka Buddhist Learning Centre**

Designed to educate visitors in the principals of Buddhism, the Buddhist Learning Centre is located within Amantaka, providing Buddhist learning sessions led by the abbot Sengdao Santikaro.

Taking place at the resort's yoga studio, daily private lessons run for 90 minutes offering insights and knowledge of Buddhism. In addition, Senior Monk Sombath Watsiphoutthabat offers personalised tours of Wat Siphoutthabath temple, giving a glimpse into his world and creating a truly authentic travel experience.

Buddhist practice is experienced through a variety of moments at the resort. Every evening, for 45 minutes, an abbot makes his way through the property chanting, demonstrating Luang Prabang's deep spirituality and commitment to faith, while at dawn, 70 monks walk their daily route past the entrance of Amantaka, offering an opportunity for guests to donate alms.

Temples are decorated with colourful candles, garlands and paper stars, but the highlight is the paper boat parade that makes its way around the town, towards the Mekong River.







## Buddhist rituals

There are two main types of festivals in and around Luang Prabang – A 'Bun' is attended by Lao people and A 'Phiti' is reserved for the monastic community. Both are fascinating insights into the rich cultural heritage of daily Lao life. Many 'Bun' events are small in scale and not widely publicised. We are happy to consult the changing Lao calendar upon which these festivals are based to see what events are occurring during your stay.

### **Alms offering 'Sai Bat'**

For centuries monks and novices have left their temples every day and walked through the town, accepting alms from the local townsfolk: a way for people to gain merit and for the monastic community to maintain contact with their community.

Luang Prabang has approximately 1,200 monks and novices who compose a large proportion of the town's total population. The locals place sticky rice and other foods into their alms bowls before the monks return to their temples with the collected food for breakfast. This walking meditation occurs at first light in different locations throughout Luang Prabang. There is a procession along the town's main street, but we prefer the quieter and less frequented Sai Bat in front of the resort. We invite you to join us for this contemplative and spiritual experience.

### **Floral temple offering**

This hands-on experience in traditional religious floral decoration uses banana leaves and local flower from the lush jungles that surround in this art form, and will aid the creation of a religious offering, or Vanh-Cornet, to offer to monks at our village temple of Wat That Noi.

### **Baci ceremony**

A traditional Baci or 'Sou Khouan' ceremony is a brahmin-influenced ritual that has been practiced in Luang Prabang for hundreds of years. With sadness and general malice in everyday life, their influence works best if all the Khouan are working together, but from time to a new environment occurs. Celebrations such as honeymoons, birthdays and anniversaries are also wonderful occasions to experience this ceremony.

The blessing is a community affair, overseen by a master of ceremonies or 'Mo Phone' who repeats the rhythmic ritual words and chants to the spirits, reminding them of their duties. Baci strings are wound around wrists symbolising the bonding together of all the 32 Khouan. A tray of floral decorations, candles, baci strings and offerings will be prepared the visitor.



### **Food offering to one chosen monastic community**

The monasteries are often home to a large number of novices, mostly poor boys from faraway villages who study at the Buddhist schools, and who are supported by the town's population. To bring food to the temples for them is an essential participation in the life of a monastery.

This is done mid-morning for lunch: Amantaka can prepare this, and we will suggest a temple further away from the normal tourist paths where we conduct this in the correct and respectful manner.

### **Monk blessing at Wat That Luang**

Escorted by Amantaka staff, we arrive at Wat That Luang (the monastery of the royal stupa). We respectfully remove our shoes before entering the sim, and once inside, we sit quietly with offering of flowers, incense and candles before Ancient Buddha Statues. The monk will bless visitors with fragrant water as they kneel before him.

At the end of this blessing, he will tie string bracelets on the visitors wrists. Unlike the Baci strings, the bracelets are to be kept on indefinitely.





## Lao culinary experience

### **Organic farm tour & Lao cooking class**

Only a short drive from Amantaka, guests will be settled amidst the organic farm with an open view of rice fields and lush forest against a beautiful backdrop of the mountain from a distance. The farm is entirely organic, supports the education of the farmers' children and assists the local community in improvements to the village infrastructure.

Upon arrival, visitors will be greeted by our chef who will talk through vegetables and herbs growing in the farm, as well as their health benefits. Guests can partake in picking some of the fresh ingredients for food preparation.

The chef will provide an overview of the basic tenets of Lao cuisines. Following this, we begin with the steaming of Lao staple of sticky rice. As the sticky rice gently steams, the chef will guide guests through the preparation of all ingredients that will make up the feast, from a spicy green papaya salad (Tam Mak Hoong) through to an aromatic pork curry (Moo Phak Sikai). Once all the hard work is done, it is time to enjoy the fruits of your labour in our dining Sala overlooking the farm's fish pond.





## The Mekong – Cruise, Caves and Sunsets

The mighty Mekong River starts its journey in the Tibetan Plateau and passes through Laos on its way to the South China Sea. One of the most scenic places to enjoy the river is around Luang Prabang, and there is no better way to absorb the atmosphere than on one of Amantaka's private boats.

### **Cruise to Pak Ou caves**

*Morning or afternoon*

Cruise leisurely along the Mekong River on a private Amantaka boat to the caves at Pak Ou where pilgrims have been visiting and offering Buddha statues for hundreds of years. The caves are believed to have been discovered in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and were possibly a centre for spirit worship prior. Float along the Mekong and observe village life as children play on the river bank, women do laundry and men fish for some of the large catch that live deep on the river floor. Reaching the caves, ascend a flight of stairs to see the lower and upper-level limestone caves filled with thousands of Buddha statues.

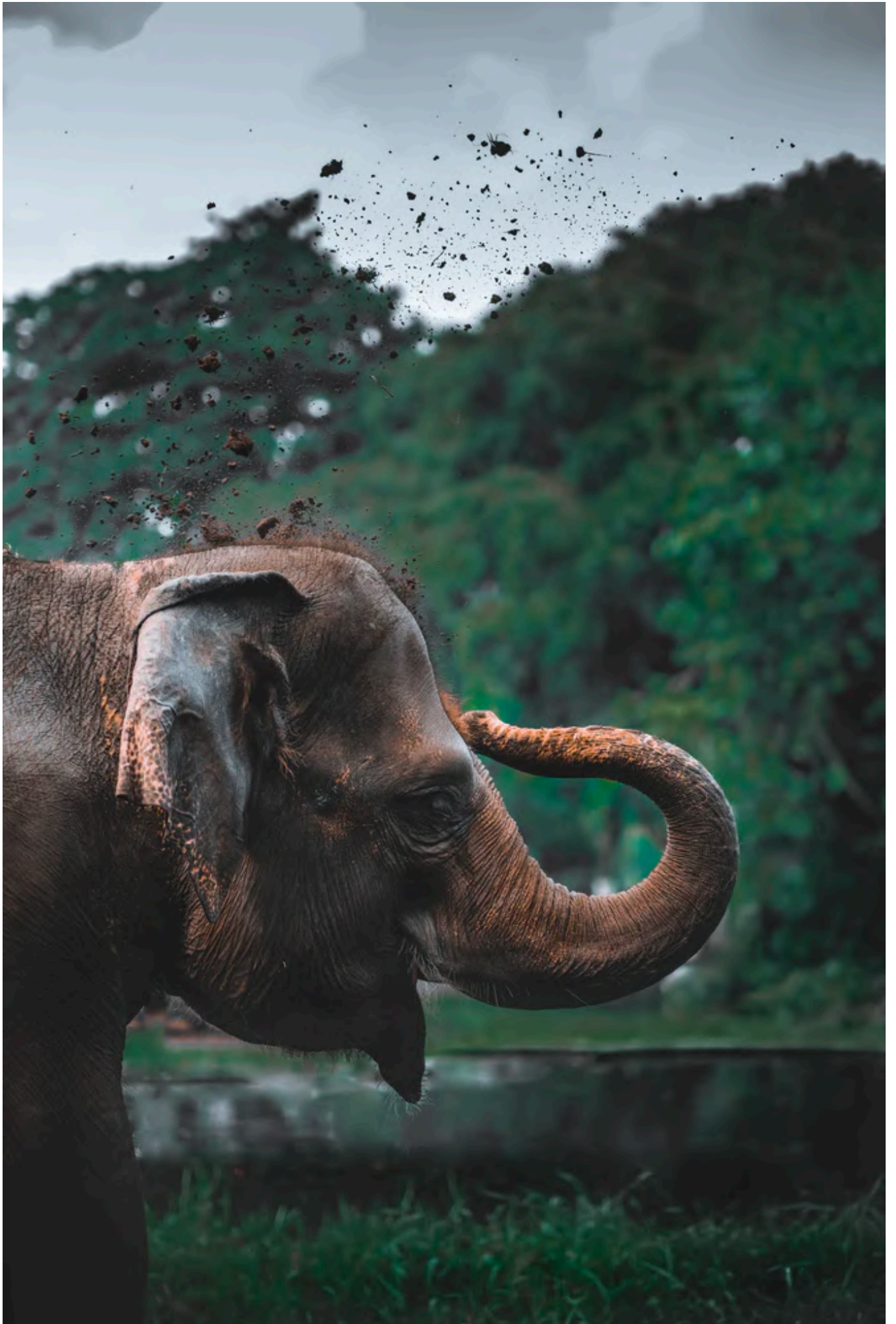
### **Sunset Mekong cruise**

Absorb the magic of dusk in Luang Prabang on a private cruise as the sun sets behind forested mountains. Enjoy snacks and drinks served by a personal bartender. Witness the end-of-day local rituals as villagers return home on small boats and fishermen check their catches. Return to the hotel by Amantaka's tuk tuk or walk leisurely through the streets past the bustling night market en route to Amantaka.

### **A river excursion into nature**

*Half-day excursion*

Spend a morning with our resident writer and photographer Hans Berger creator of the Buddhist Archive of Photography. The Sala is part of artist Hans Berger's private residence, designed by UNESCO World Heritage architect, Laurent Rampon. Arrive after a 45-minute boat ride on the mighty Mekong through a pristine, dramatic landscape and enjoy a relaxing morning, followed by a gentle return to Luang Prabang.







## Waterfalls & Wildlife

### **Trip to Kuang Si waterfall (Tad Kuang Si)**

A winding road travels through small villages and rice paddies into the lush area of Kuang Si. Wander through the cool rainforest, and arrive at a majestic tiered waterfall tumbling 100 metres over white limestone formation into multi-level turquoise pools. It is possible to cool off in some of the pools below, or just wade in the water. Walk down the path that follows the stream, passing small pools and ancient trees.

### **Lao bear sanctuary**

Amantaka has arranged a unique experience for our guests to view rare moon and sun bears. On arrival at the rescue centre, visitors will receive a “behind the scenes” tour, including time with some of the centre’s newest arrival (these bears, and cubs are usually raised away from general visitors with a little human contact as possible). After rewarding the bears with a banana or two, will join the keepers as they hide the bear’s lunch time food around their enclosure. Finally, from a safe vantage point, watch the bears return from their dens to forage for the hidden treats.

Free the Bears Fund relies on generosity in order to continue their work and would like to kindly thank guests for their donation which is included in every visit and added to guests’ personal account.

### **Tad Sae waterfalls**

*Available from August to December*

Tad Sae Waterfalls flow out of the forest and into the Nam Khan River. A short drive north reaches the upper Khan River. At the small village of Ban Aen, join a ten-minute local boat ride through dense jungle to the waterfalls of Tad Sae. Here, walk towards the main falls and stroll past a herd of local elephants. Drawing closer, encounter a waterfall that flows out of the jungle. The limestone pools are much more numerous than at Kuang Si, although lower in height: and they offer a refreshing swim on a hot day. If inclined on the way back, feed an elephant or two.

### **Amantaka elephant experience**

With their mission to demonstrate respect for the elephants through interactive learning experience, Manda Lao Elephant Sanctuary invites guests to participate in a new training process largely pioneered by Khun Prasop Tipprasert in hope that these techniques will be adopted throughout the region and in other elephant-inhabited countries. An intimate and exclusive experience, while hiking up a cool mountain stream in the jungles of Laos. This is a unique chance to participate in something entirely new with a potential to change the future of elephant welfare in Laos and abroad. The journey concurs with Lao lunch, freshly prepared from the sanctuary’s own organic vegetables farm.





## Cultural experiences

### Lao textile experience

Unlock the secret of Lao Textile in one afternoon at Ock Pop Tok's Lining Crafts Centre. Bringing alive the concept of "east meets west", the Centre is an ideal venue to learn about the origin of silk, interact with master weavers and a Hmong batik-artist, and increase appreciation of Lao's diverse textiles and cultural heritage.

A short drive to Ban Saylom, visitors will be welcomed by Ock Pop Tok's Cultural Guide in a beautifully-restored wooden house over refreshing tea. Learn the art of the silk-making process with an explanation of the three distinct types of Lao weaving.

Creativity follows and visitors are led to the dyeing shed and coached through dyeing their own colourful silk scarf, using all-natural materials. Then it's over to the weaving studio where master weavers work using techniques and weaving patterns unique to Laos. A master weaver will accompany visitors to the riverside *sala* to try their hand at using a loom, while leaning the master's techniques. Visitors will be escorted to a nearby *sala*, to meet Mrs. Suxiong, the only Hmong batik teacher in Luang Prabang. After an introduction to batik print, Mrs. Suxiong will prepare a clean piece of hemp and will guide visitors to design their own batik masterpiece.



### **Village Tour to Ban Pa Noh and Ban Long Lao**

Drive south out of the town in direction of Kuang Si Waterfalls, then take a left turn southeast through winding unpaved roads and take in the beautiful panorama of the mountainous countryside. Drive past a small hydropower dam and vegetable farms and then past sprawling pineapple and banana plantations before arriving at Ban Pa Noh.

This is a traditional Khmu village where culture is passed down by the recital of stories around evening fires, typically, entire Khmu villages are enclosed in fences with three or four gates which separate the Khmu from their granaries and barns. Altars are placed outside the perimeter to ward off fires and storms. Traditionally, the homes have two rooms, one for unmarried girls and one for the rest of the family.

The Khmu do not generally believe in rebirth. Traditional Khmu animism puts emphasis on the concept of taboo, as villagers believe that violations of taboo result in vengeance of spirits. Forbidden actions include touching the altars or the amulets representing the house's spirit, birth ceremonies for children born feet-first, and entering a house without permission.

Visitors will continue higher up into the mountain to reach the small village of Ban tin Pha, and meet another hill tribe group known as the "Hmong", probably the best-known minority group in Laos. Several Hmong fought against the communist-nationalist Pathet Lao during the Laotian Civil War. The drive continues on to a visit of the last village, Ban Long Lao.





## Family Adventure

### **Organic farm tour & cooking class**

On arrival of the Amantaka's organic farm, visitors will be given a short tour of the farm and its open-air kitchen overlooking eight hectares of sticky rice fields as the chef provides an overview of the basic tenets of the Lao cuisine. Visitors will prepare all the ingredients that will make up the final feast. Once all the hard work is done it is time to enjoy the fruits of your labour overlooking the rice fields, fishpond and the mountains in the distance.

### **Rice planting experience**

In the midst of ancient rice terraces, embrace Luang Prabang way of life on rice planting experience. Learn the life of a rice farmer and have a hands-on experiences with family including planting seedlings, cutting and bundling rice, ploughing a rice paddy with a buffalo, and threshing rice.

### **Buffalo farm experience**

In Laos, Buffalo is known as a friend to farm families not only for draught power and fertiliser but also for taking full advantage of feeds resources, free time and subsidiary labours. At the farm, visitors will be shown around the dairy, learn how to milk a buffalo and try some delicious ice cream.

### **Elephant sanctuary experience**

Observe, connect and experience a daily life of the elephants with family at Manda Lao Elephant Sanctuary. With their mission to demonstrate respect for the elephants through interactive learning experience, Manda Lao Elephant Sanctuary invites visitors to participate in this new training process largely pioneered by Khun Prasop Tipprasert in hope that these techniques will be adopted throughout the region and in other elephant-inhabited countries. This is a unique chance to participate in something entirely new with a potential to change the future of elephant welfare in Laos and abroad. The journey concurs with Lao lunch, freshly prepared from the sanctuary's own organic vegetables farm.

### **Family cycling tour**

Discover historical temples and embrace local way of life on two wheels with the family. Visit the National Museum, witness Buddhist monks chanting at temples, children getting home from school, or chat to the locals. A private tour guide is also available to provide riding tips and insights about notable architectural landmarks and other distinctive attractions in town.

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