

Thailand — Laos Adventure

Dates: Wednesday, 11th January to Wednesday, 25th January 2006 (15 days)
Cost: \$2,700 **Style:** Hotels & Host Families **Start and Finish:** Bangkok

Discover the rich cultural diversity of Northern Thailand's hill tribes in the Golden Triangle region. Travel down one of the world's greatest rivers, the Mekong, through spectacular mountain scenery to the wonderful Laotian World Heritage city of Luang Prabang. Explore the cuisine, religions and lifestyles in this scenic region through home-stays with traditional families, and with the assistance of an expert guide and two voluntary Thai-based community development organizations — HADF and REST.

In 2000 GO BUSH Safaris helped develop an ecotourism strategy for some Northern Thailand hill tribe villages. We have since conducted two very successful safaris of 12 people through Thailand & Laos, as described on our web site — www.gobush.com.au. This itinerary is almost identical.

Inclusions: All travel, access fees, accommodation, meals, and a brilliant, one-day Thai cooking course are included. Some village home-stay accommodation will require sleeping bags and mats.

Numbers: Restricted to minimum 6, maximum 13 safarists.

Season: January is Northern Thailand's cool dry season. Maximum daily temperatures: 22°C to 26°C.

Payment: Because safarists need to book international travel and our Thai domestic flights must be booked and paid for by the end of September, applications should be lodged by Wednesday 12th September together with a \$700 deposit. This is non-refundable once the air-tickets have been paid for. Safarists are responsible for their own travel arrangements to Bangkok, travel insurance, and obtaining a visa to visit.

Su (Tokiko) Dawson who has assisted on dozens of previous GO BUSH safaris, will manage the safari, and English-speaking guides will be provided by our host organizations.

Day 1; Wednesday, 11th January: Group rendezvous at Bangkok Airport at 7.30 am to join an 8.30 am flight to Chiang Mai. Transfer to Hotel. Visit Doi Suthep (1,676 m) and Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep, the most sacred temple in the North. In the evening visit the night market.

Day 2; Thursday, 12th January: Follow the beautiful Mae Jaem River to Mae Jaem. See traditional weaving and the elders' traditional cloth museum at Ban Rai Phai Ngam. Walk in the Ob-Luang National Park. Enjoy marvelous food, great company and some entertainment laid on by Mae Jaem hosts in the evening. Accom: Village Homestays.

Day 3; Friday, 13th January: Spend time sightseeing around the village of Baan Phmon, visiting old temples and weavers' workshops famous for the teenjok (hand weaving). Learn some natural therapy cures from the village "doctor" at Mor Meuang Centre in Ban Yang-Luang. Village Homestays.

Day 4; Saturday, 14th January: Merit making to the monks before breakfast. Travel to Doi Inthanon, the highest mountain in Thailand at 2596 m with its unique cloud forest, and Doi Ang Khang nature reserve, famous for the 'Thousand Year Rose'. On the way back to Chiang Mai visit the Pakagayor ethnic community, a Karen community whose lifestyle is intertwined with the jungle. Dinner in a real Lanna atmosphere (Kun tok), followed by discussion of lifestyle and culture related to nature and religion in Lanna. Hotel.

Day 5; Sunday, 15th January: Travel by mini-bus to Chiang Rai City. Boat ride to Ruamit to visit the Karen Village to ride elephants. Accom: Golden Triangle Inn.

Day 6; Monday, 16th January: Learn Thai cooking from a wonderfully articulate and experienced Thai cook, Ben, starting with a visit to the market. Eat lunch cooked by the group. Dinner at Kantoke. Accom: Golden Triangle Inn.

Day 7; Tuesday, 17th January: Visit Pangsa hill tribe village to learn about the history of the hill tribe people from the village leaders. Explore the village with host families and learn about Lisu lifestyle in a developing village before dinner with host family. Accom: Host Families.

Day 8; Wednesday, 18th January: The group splits into two groups. Accom: Host Families in the respective villages.

A. Travel to Jakorna (Lahu village). Meet Village Headman and committee. Study the watershed area, finding food and having lunch in the forest using bamboo (traditional methods). Traditional dinner with host family before a village meeting on Lahu culture.

B. Travel to Loh Yo (Akha village), stopping to visit the school and maybe teach English. After greeting the village headman, learn some handicrafts and traditional herbal medicine. A cultural exchange night after dinner.

Day 9; Thursday, 19th January: Leave villages and visit Doi Mae Salong Museum and tea plantation and after lunch in the town establish accommodation at the Tribal People Learning Resource Centre. Group A goes to Ban Pah Ka Suk Jai (Akha village) while Group B goes to Ban Jab Bu Si (Lahu village) for dinner and cultural exchange.

Day 10; Friday, 20th January: Travel to Mae Sai, the northernmost point of Thailand and crossing point into Myanmar. Then via the river port, Chiang Saen, and follow the Mekong River to Chiang Khong, a market town. Meet REST guide for Laos. Accom: Baan Tamilla Guest House.

Day 11; Saturday, 21st January: Cross the border to enter Laos at Huay Xai. Board a riverboat to spend about eight hours travelling to small riverside village of Pak-Beng. The Mekong is the twelfth longest river in the world and the tenth largest in terms of volume. For almost half of its 1,800 km length, the Mekong passes through Laos. It is a dramatic, swiftly flowing river which drops 300 metres in elevation in this 300 km journey. There are many places where there are rapids. The Mekong valley has been the cradle to many great Asian civilizations. Overnight in Pak-Beng Guesthouse.

Day 12; Sunday, 22nd January: Continue the great journey down the Mekong to Luang Prabang, about eight hours on the river. Luang Prabang is the jewel of Indochina and a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1995 described thus: "This town reflects the exceptional fusion of traditional architecture and urban structures built by 19th and 20th century European colonial rulers. Its unique township is remarkably well preserved, illustrating a key stage in the blending of these two distinct cultural traditions."

Accom: Hotel in Luang Prabang.

Day 13; Monday, 23rd January: Local guides will lead a cultural tour of Luang Prabang, an ancient royal city of only about 20,000 people at the junction of the Mekong and Khan Rivers, surrounded by mountains. Visit the National Museum, formerly the Royal Palace, which houses the Royal throne of Lan Xang kingdom in its original splendour, and many other treasures. Accom: Hotel in Luang Prabang.

Day 14; Tuesday, 24th January: Tour of the area outside Luang Prabang. Ban Phanom is famous for cotton and silk weaving, and some beautifully made handicrafts. The Lu people of Ban Phanom came originally from Sip Song Panna in southern China. Visit the spectacular Kouangsy Waterfall deep in the forest, with its limestone weirs and pools. Pass through quaint villages with their traditional hydro-rice mills. Accom: Hotel in Luang Prabang.

Day 15; Wednesday, 25th January: Take a midday flight from Luang Prabang to Bangkok where safari concludes in time for safarists to catch evening flights to Australia.