



Laos Cycling Adventure

Pre- trip Dossier

Current for departures in 2008

Be prepared to get well and truly off the beaten track with our cycling adventure and discover this beautiful region from handlebar height. We experience the very best of Laos as we cycle through the countryside, cruise down the Mekong River, visit the magnificent temples of Luang Prabang and the crumbling French architecture in the world's sleepest capital, Vientiane. This is one country in which you can truly discover the original culture and colour of the land and experience Asian atmosphere at its best.

Laos Cycling adventure

Style Fully supported cycling adventure

Group Size

Maximum of 12 travellers per group

Itinerary

Day 1 Bangkok

On Day 1 people will be arriving throughout the day so the day is free to explore the sights of this vibrant city. We'll meet in the evening for a trip meeting and head out for our first dinner together. (D)

Day 2 Bangkok

30km

In the morning we take to the streets of Bangkok for a fantastic ride through the backstreets of Bangkok. These are places that few people ever visit and you will see a unique side of the 'big' city as we weave our way through tiny laneways and streets. In the evening we board the train to Chiang Mai. (B)

Day 3 Chiang Khong

After stopping at a guesthouse in Chiang Mai for showers we will transfer by private minivan to Chiang Khong and spend the evening in a guesthouse with a beautiful view over the Mekong River and Laos. (L,D)

Day 4 Pak Beng

After crossing the border in the morning comes the non-cycling highlight of the trip as you spend two days cruising down the Mekong River on a converted cargo boat. The perfect introduction to Laos, you'll quickly get a feel for the slower pace of life here in Laos. We overnight in the small town of Pak Beng. (B,L,D)

Day 5 Luang Prabang

Back on the boat we will stop at the Buddhist caves at Pak Ou where thousands of buddha images deposited over the centuries stare out over the Mekong. It has been said that Luang Prabang, which we arrive at in the late afternoon, is the most beautiful town in South East Asia. With a combination of historic temples, French colonial architecture and its setting by the Mekong surrounded by mountains you won't want to leave. (B,L,D)

Day 6 Luang Prabang

70km

On our first full day in Luang Prabang we hit the bikes for a ride to the stunning Kuang Sii Waterfall. The ride is along a mostly dirt road alongside the Mekong River passing through small villages, rice fields and forest. At the waterfall enjoy a swim and picnic lunch before riding back to Luang Prabang. (B,L)

Day 7 Luang Prabang

Enjoy a free day in Luang Prabang to explore the temples, learn Lao cooking, shop, explore the surrounding handicraft villages, ride an elephant, relax in a café - there is so much to do! (B)

Day 8

Luang Prabang to Kiew Ka Cham

78km

Cycling out of Luang Prabang we are faced with what is without doubt the most difficult day of cycling but also one of the most rewarding with two huge uphill climbs. We pass through lush forest and many small H'Mong villages that sit dwarfed by the amazing landscape of limestone mountains that surround them. We stay the night in Kiew Ka Cham, a small village on top on the mountains. Few people stop here overnight so the accommodation is very simple. It is a special experience to stay in such a place. (B,L,D)

Day 9

Kiew Ka Cham to Kasi

95km

You will be high in the mountains for the first half of the day following a ridgeline up and down with peaks all around. In the afternoon it is time to relax a bit as the road is largely downhill along a valley to our overnight stop of Kasi. (B,L,D)

Day 10

Kasi to Vang Vieng 58km

The ride to Vang Vieng is a relatively easy day travelling through the verdant green of rice fields. Vang Vieng is set in a prime location. Surrounded by limestone peaks, caves and rivers this town sees its fair share of travellers but for good reason. (B)

Day 11 Vang Vieng

We enjoy a rest day in Vang Vieng where you can take your pick from caving, tubing, cycling, or for the tired and weary a massage and Beer Lao. (B)

Day 12 Vang Vieng to Nam Ngum

107km

Into the flatter land now we ride away from the mountains towards Nam Ngum Dam, 107km from Vang Vieng. Later in the day we leave Route 13, the road we have been on since Luang Prabang, to an even quieter road that leads us down to our guesthouse which has a beautiful view over Nam Ngum Lake. (B,L,D)

Day 13 Nam Ngum to Vientiane - 92km

Our final day on the bikes takes us 92km along flat roads to the finish of the tour in Laos' capital Vientiane. The roads will become busier as the day goes on but Vientiane is nothing like other capital cities of Asia. Feeling more like a large town, Vientiane is a sleepy city with wide streets perfect for cycling. (B,L,D)

Day 14 You are free to leave at anytime today. (B)

Getting back to Bangkok

If you require assistance in getting back to Bangkok we can help:

Flight - you can fly with Lao Airlines to Bangkok, we can book a ticket for you for US\$120

Train - trains to Bangkok depart from Nong Khai, the town on the Thai side of the Mekong River.

Arrival Complications

We don't expect any problems (and nor should you!) but if for any reason you are unable to commence your group trip as scheduled, please contact your starting point hotel, requesting that you speak to or leave a message for your trip leader. If you have pre-booked an airport transfer and have not made contact with our representative within 30 minutes of clearing customs and immigration, we recommend that you make your own way to the Starting Point hotel, following the Joining Instructions in the Trip Notes. Should this occur, please apply to your travel agent for a refund of the transfer cost on your return. No refund is available on missed transfers or portions of your trip owing to a different flight arrival or delayed flight arrival. Any additional cost incurred in order to meet up with your group is at your own expense.

Meeting Point -

This trip will begin and end at the Viengtai Hotel. The hotel is located close to Khao San Rd, a famous backpacker street with all services needed by travellers close at hand. Surrounding the hotel there are many restaurants, internet cafes, travel agents, market stalls and banks. The hotel has comfortable rooms with private bathroom, air conditioning, TV and 24 hour reception.

All flights into Bangkok now arrive at the new Suvarnabumi Airport. From the airport there are a few options for

getting to the hotel:

- The AE2 airport bus runs approximately every 30 mins and costs 150 baht (US\$4) per person (more with a bicycle) and will drop you a short walk from the hotel. Go to the last stop on the bus - Khao San Road - and walk back two streets in the direction you came on the bus to Rambutri Road. Turn right here and walk about 150m to the Viengtai Hotel.
- Meter Taxis will cost 350-450 baht (US\$7.50-\$10), please note there is a 50 baht pickup charge and road tolls amounting to 65 baht payable by the passenger.
- There is a limousine service which costs 1000+ baht (US\$20+). People will approach you in the Arrivals Hall of the airport offering a taxi service, these people are offering the limousine service, ignore them if you want a meter taxi as these are only available from the taxi rank outside the Arrivals Hall.

Joining Point

Viengtai Hotel
42 Tanee Rd
Banglumphu
Bangkok
Thailand
Tel: +66 (0) 2280 5434-45

Finishing Point

Mali Namphu Guesthouse
114 Pangkham Road
Vientiane
Laos

Accommodation

7 nights comfortable hotel, 4 nights local guesthouse (with private bathroom), 1 night basic guesthouse, 1 night sleeper train.

Due the nature of cycling trips we stay in some towns where the general standard of accommodation is quite low.

In these places we have chosen the best possible place to stay - trust us there's nothing better! The standard will vary according to where we are and we ask for your patience, as at times things do not work the way you are used to at home. Sometimes there may be no electricity, the plumbing may be temperamental.

Single rooms

Single room cost US\$250

On RAW Adventures tours single travellers do not have to pay any extra to join our trips - we will match you up with another same sex, single traveller. However, should you wish to choose to take a single room we are happy to book rooms for you for an extra charge. This single supplement is completely voluntary and only applies to hotel accommodation, on overnight train trips there are no single rooms available. We should point out that on occasion single rooms may not be available and in these instances you may need to share for a night or two - we will refund part of your single supplement in these cases.

Meal Inclusions

Most meals included - see itinerary.

Included meals: 12 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 8 dinners, plus water, fruit and biscuits on cycling days.

You should consider bring some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

Transport

Private vehicle and support truck.

Physical Rating

Be prepared for some serious physical activity. This may be treks of up to 6 hours per day in steep terrain, or extended bike rides of more than one day. The fitter you are, the more you will enjoy your holiday.

Culture Shock Rating

Expect to rough it every now and again, whether it's very simple group-share accommodation at a homestay, a packed public bus where you are forced to stand, the odd cold shower or an encounter with a squat toilet.

Important Notes

Days cycling 7

Distance cycled 530km

Difficulty Moderate/Difficult - this trip involves some riding up long mountain roads, some dirt road riding and longer days over 80km. Riders should be of reasonable cycling fitness.

Cycling conditions Road conditions in Laos are good on the main highways which we will be using. Maintenance, however, is not always the best so you must expect random potholes, short sections of terrible road and road works. While this ride does lose altitude over its course, the two days out of Luang Prabang are very challenging with long hills to climb. Traffic is generally light but care must be taken with all those unexpected surprises like chickens, children and dogs running out in front of you. Stay alert.

For safe cycling we highly recommend wearing a helmet whilst cycling on our trips.

The half day ride in Bangkok follows a surprising route away from traffic. You will ride quiet back streets, tiny laneways, and along side canals. You'll be surprised by a side of Bangkok that you'd not normally see.

Bikes You will need to bring your own bike for this trip. The best bike for conditions in Laos would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tyres to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before travelling to ensure that it is in good working order. While we do provide mechanical assistance and carry some spare parts during the trip you will need to bring spare parts (including tubes) for your bike as different bikes use different parts and we cannot guarantee that we will have a part to suit your bike.

Bike Hire

US\$100

If you don't have a bike or don't want to bring your own you can hire a bike from us for the entire trip. We provide well maintained Giant Boulder mountain bikes in sizes 15"-21" and will be responsible for any maintenance required during the trip for these bikes. Please note, renters will be liable for any damage caused to rental bike which is a result of riding accidents. For added comfort you should consider bringing your own seat and pedals which we can easily fit to your rental bike.

Bringing your own Bike?

Not a problem but any extra charges for taking it on the train or plane are your responsibility. It is best to pack your bike in a bike box available from any bike shop. We can then carry the box in the truck. Please note that while every effort is made to maintain all the bikes in good condition on each trip, we cannot guarantee that some small damage such as scratching will not occur as a result of the daily loading and unloading of bikes into and out of the support vehicle.

Please note - If you are bringing your own bike and it has disc brakes, hydraulics, rear suspension, oil units or special pumps for adjusting the suspension pressure, please make sure that you bring the necessary spares and parts with you.

Please note that it can get cool in Laos in the winter months from November through to February so ensure you bring warm clothing.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects. When travelling on a group trip, you will not be permitted to join the group until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company's 24 hour emergency contact number has been seen by your leader. If you have credit card insurance your tour leader will require proof of purchase of the trip (a receipt of credit card statement) with a credit card in your name. Contact your bank for details of their participating insurer, the level of coverage and emergency contact telephone number. Please go to www.RAWtravel.com/insurance.php for links to various travel insurance providers.

Visas

Please note that visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. We keep the following information up to date as much as possible, but rules do change. It is important that you check for yourself. It is your responsibility to arrange visas before you travel.

In **Thailand**, 30 day single entry visas are free on arrival for many nationalities. If you want to stay long than 30 days, 2 month visas are available from the Thai embassy in your country.

Lao visas can easily be obtained on entry at the immigration point where we enter the country. Visas cost US\$30. Make sure you have one passport photo for your visa application form. All nationalities require a visa to enter Laos. Passports must have at least 6 months validity.

Health

All RAW travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our group leader, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, RAW reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund. We therefore ask that you read the itinerary in these trip notes thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts.

There are no specific health requirements for entry into Laos. However, you should consult your doctor or travel clinic for up-to-date information and prescriptions for vaccinations and anti-malarial requirements. We would suggest that you are up to date with immunisation protection against typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis. These countries are also a low risk malarial area and we recommend that you take a course of suitable malarial prophylactics. As some vaccinations require a course over weeks or months, contact your doctor as early as possible prior to departure. Generally, six to eight weeks' notice is adequate.

We recommend that you carry a First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (such as a spare pair of prescription glasses). Please be aware that for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets/antibiotics etc. Your first aid kit should include headache tablets, diarrhoea treatment both a blocker to bring relief from the symptoms and an antibiotic, band-aids, an antiseptic for cuts & scrapes, lip balm, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen.

Given the physical nature of this trip we strongly advise bringing some sachets of an oral rehydration solution (available at chemists) as this aids recovery following activity and dehydration and also helps replace lost body salts should you suffer from 'gastro'. Just add a sachet to your water bottle each day. Please scroll down to the Special Safety Notes below for information on dehydration.

For more detailed travel health advice please refer to your local Travel clinic.

For all challenge participants a completed Medical Certificate is required. RAW reserves the right to exclude any traveller from all or part of a trip without refund if in the reasonable opinion of our group leader they are unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group.

Physical Preparation

In order to physically prepare yourself to cycle long hours in the saddle for up to 7 hours on successive days it is so important that you undertake a fitness program. Getting yourself fit is all part of the Challenge and one that you'll benefit from long after your trip is over. It is really worth putting in the effort before you go to condition the body (backside, neck, shoulders & leg muscles) as it means you'll enjoy the event rather than it being a struggle.

For a fitness program & advice click on our: [Cycling guide](#).

Build up your base endurance by long and frequent bike rides which will ensure that you are in peak condition for the adventure. You can also mix this up by taking other forms of regular exercise which you currently do such as yoga, spinning classes, walking and swimming.

Money Exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: www.oanda.com. Please check current exchange rates on our departure information page. It is advisable to take most of your money in cash or travellers cheques in US currency. There can be delays when changing travellers cheques. Major credit cards are accepted in cities only, but cash withdrawals are subject to a 3% to 4% service charge. We recommend that you don't use money changers on the street.

The official currency of Thailand is the baht which should be used for all transactions. Thailand has a modern banking systems with ATMs and money changers in everywhere. When coming to Thailand it is possible to use Visa/Mastercard or Cirrus/Maestro cards to access cash with an ATM. You should, however, carry travellers cheques as a backup. Most international currencies can be exchanged so it is not necessary to bring only US dollars - AUD, EUR, CAD, NZD are all accepted at banks in major centres.

The current exchange rates are:

US\$1 = 34.5 baht

AU\$1 = 28 baht

The official currency of Laos is the kip, however, the US dollar serves as a second currency and can be used for larger purchases. If going to Laos it is best to bring some small denomination US dollars cash along with travellers cheques as your main form of money. Thai Baht can also be changed easily. Credit cards can are not that useful in Laos.

The current exchange rates are:

US\$1 = 10,000 kip

1 Thai Baht = 250 kip

Spending Money We recommend that you allow approximately US\$10 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. It is customary to tip the guides and drivers in Laos. You should allow approximately US\$20 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction.

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping and tipping. Please also remember the following specific recommendations when planning your trip.

Any tip that you wish to give your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated.

Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional USD\$400, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or an outbreak of bird flu) necessitate a change to our planned route. This is a rare occurrence but it is well worth being prepared!

keeping in touch - communication while on the road

If you need to be contacted while travelling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road, rather than relying on snail mail. Email has quickly become the preferred way for our leaders and travellers to stay in touch and email cafes are commonplace throughout the regions we visit. If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency while you are on one of our trips we recommend that they contact your local booking agent, or refer to our emergency contact. We don't recommend that family and friends try to contact you through hotels, as they are subject to change and the reception staff may not speak English.

Emergency Contact

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, RAW's Melbourne Office can be reached on Tel: +61 3 9597 0799 or out of business hours please call 0410 290 544

Your fellow travellers

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

Group Leader

All RAW group trips are accompanied by one of our group leaders. The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. They will provide information on the places you are travelling through, offer suggestions for things to do and see, recommend great local eating venues and introduce you to our local friends.

While not being guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad general knowledge of the countries visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. We also use local guides where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting - we think it's the best of both worlds.

Responsible travel

We believe strongly in low impact or rather positive impact tourism. Broadly speaking this means that we try to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects. Please refer to our website at www.rawtravel.com/responsibletravel for further details and suggestions on how you can be a responsible traveller.

Donations

Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving items away to local people can create an expectation that a visiting foreigner equals free give away's. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to Grasshopper Adventures which we will then pass on to development organisations, schools or whole

communities. In this way items are distributed by those working in the communities who understand better the local needs.

Poverty

There is an enormous amount of poverty in Laos which you will see, particularly in tourist areas. If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. Many beggars can earn more than those who work unskilled jobs. There are organisations in Laos who are working to alleviate this poverty issue and may be able to do more good with donations that you might like to make. Your Tour Leader will be able to provide more information about this.

a couple of rules

Illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our trips. Possessing or using drugs not only contravenes the laws of the land but also puts the rest of the group at risk. Smoking marijuana and opium is a part of local culture in some parts of the world but is not acceptable for RAW travellers. RAW's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, and in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our group leader has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or if they use prostitutes.

What To Take

What you need to bring will vary according to the trip style you have chosen, the countries you are visiting and when you are travelling. Generally speaking though, you should pack as lightly as possible. On the vast majority of our trips you are expected to carry your own luggage (please see below for exceptions), and though you will not be required to walk long distances with your luggage (max 30 minutes) we recommend keeping the weight under 10kg/22lb.

Suitcases are not recommended for RAW travellers! Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags with wheels are acceptable, although we recommend your bag has carry straps as well, as you may be required to negotiate bus and railway station steps. You will also need a day pack/bag to carry water and a camera etc for day walks and day trips.

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout Asia. On this trip we use our own private transport and it is recommended to pack as lightly as possible (try to stay under 12 kg). Any portage fees you may incur is your responsibility. Most travellers carry their gear in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice. Suitcases are not recommended! The weather in the North will be in the low 20's C and there is always a chance of rain. It can get cold in the Highlands especially at night where a light weight fleece or warm sweater can be useful to have. A light water and windproof jacket is useful and a hat essential.

Checklist

Travel Documents:

- Passport (with photocopies) and Laosese visa
 - Airline ticket
 - USD cash and travellers cheques
 - Credit card
- ** Tip: use a money belt for security (put documents inside a plastic bag)

Personal Items

- First Aid kit (see the health section)
- High factor sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent
- Sunglasses
- Toiletries (biodegradable)

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- Watch or alarm clock
- Ear plugs (in case room mate snores!)
- Plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing
- Wet wipes or antiseptic hand gel

Clothing

- 3 T-shirts (lightweight quick drying fabric) / long sleeved T-shirt
- 2 pairs Cycling shorts (padded)
- 1 pair of comfortable shoes for cycling
- pair of sport sandals
- socks (for cycling)
- 1 pair of knee length shorts
- 1 pair lightweight long trousers
- Lightweight waterproof top
- Light sweater/fleece for evening
- Small towel and swim wear
- Sarong (useful for ladies unscheduled toilet stops / temple visits)
- Sun hat
- Clothes to relax in

Cycling Equipment

- Helmet - (compulsory)- bring one with good ventilation
- 1 water bottle (min. 750 ml capacity recommended) or 'Camel Bak' hydration pack
- Handlebar bag / pannier (as bikes have rear racks) / small day pack for carrying items when cycling
- Cycling gloves

Optional:

- Multi-tool (allen keys) for minor adjustments to your bike

If Hiring a bike:

- Bar ends (to give more choice of riding positions)
- Your own saddle or gel seat cover
- Your own SPD pedals
- Mini bicycle pump
- Favourite snacks for cycling energy boost e.g. 'PowerBars', sports gel (a concentrated carbohydrate that delivers immediate energy when you feel tired or flat), dried fruit or nuts

***Please refer again to our Cycling guide on the RAW Travel website to see photo of bikes used and how to customise it.

Other Suggestions:

- Camera and plenty of film
- Adapter for recharging digital camera (American style with 2 parallel flat pins)
- Spare batteries
- Reading / writing material
- Penknife (put in main luggage at airport)
- Torch
- Small calculator (when out bargaining!)
- Photos of family or postcards of Australia (great way to have fun with locals you meet)
- Laos phrase book, map and Lonely Planet guide
- Small padlock for securing your luggage during flights

Please note if traveling to Laos in December/January it can get very cold on the Mekong boat trip and in the mountains. You should bring a wind breaker and cold weather clothing.

Local Dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout Asia. Laos is extremely conservative countries and you should dress accordingly. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Asian climate. As a general guideline shoulders and knees should be covered at all times. The wearing of shorts and halter tops away from the beach or swimming pools are not allowed as they will restrict your entry into buildings of a religious nature and family homes. Cycling shorts and tops are ideal, though we do insist that you cover up when coming off the bike or stopping in villages as local people will be shocked and sometimes offended by the sight of tight body hugging lycra! So please be a good ambassador for your country and have a loose pair of shorts to put over your cycling shorts or a sarong to wrap around.

Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure. Please refer to our website's Safety page for links to major travel advisories and updates on safety issues affecting our trips: www.RAWtravel.com/safety. We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling, for the safe-keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items. Leave your valuable jewellery at home - you won't need it while travelling.

Many of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage. Your leader will accompany you on all included activities however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. While your group leader will assist you with the available options in a given location, please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your RAW itinerary, and RAW makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment when selecting an activity in your free time. Please also note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns. For more details on the type of conditions and safety standards you can expect on your trip, please refer to RAW's operational safety policy at www.RAWtravel.com/safety. We recommend that you take a moment to read through this information before travelling, and would appreciate any feedback on how well it is being implemented in the field.

Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical challenge such as cycling over undulating terrain. It is so important to be aware of your fluid intake especially at altitude and to constantly drink water throughout the day (even when you do not feel thirsty). Symptoms of mild dehydration include: - flushed face - extreme thirst, more than normal or unable to drink - dry, warm skin - cannot pass urine or reduced amounts, dark, yellow - dizziness made worse when you are standing - weakness - cramping in the arms and legs - sleepy or irritable - headaches - dry mouth, dry tongue; with thick saliva. The simplest way of monitoring your fluid intake is by checking the colour of your urine. If it is clear or slightly yellow you are well hydrated but once it is a dark yellow you are in the danger zone and need to increase your fluid intake immediately. Ensure that you bring some Gastrolyte sachets as these help your recovery both during and after cycling with the replacement of electrolytes. Gastrolyte is also the recommended treatment for dehydration caused by diarrhoea ('gastro').

Photography

Film is available in larger towns, if you use pro film you will probably only find it in Bangkok, Luang Prabang and Vientiane. It is easy to burn digital photos to CD in the larger towns - Bangkok, Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng, Vientiane.

Climate

Laos has a tropical climate with generally warm to hot days and warm nights, however, in the north it can get quite cold during the cool season. The coolest months are November to January - during this time you should expect very cold mornings down to 5 degrees Celsius. During the wet season (May-Oct) it does rain most days but the rain generally falls in the late afternoon or night - after we have finished our cycling. The wet season is actually a fantastic time to visit Laos as the rain brings the fields and country to life. Endless green rice fields are a feature of this time of year.

[Participation form](#)

All RAW travellers are required to sign a Participation Form on day 1 of the trip. Please note that signing the form is a prerequisite of travelling with RAW. The wording of this form follows:

"I understand that travelling with RAW may involve risks (and rewards) above and beyond those encountered on a more conventional holiday, and that I am undertaking an adventure trip with inherent dangers. I understand that I am travelling to geographical areas where, amongst other things, the standard of accommodation, transport, safety, hygiene, cleanliness, medical facilities, telecommunications and infrastructure development may not be of the standard I am used to at home or would find on a conventional holiday. I have read and understood the RAW trip notes for the trip I am undertaking and have provided details of any pre-existing medical conditions I have to RAW's representatives.

I accept these risks and obligations and I fully assume the risks of travel. I release RAW Travel from any liabilities connected to these risks to the maximum extent permitted by law."

[RAW Travel newsletter](#)

This is our free email newsletter - coming soon!- News, reviews, recipes.

The information in these trip notes has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and RAW Travel.