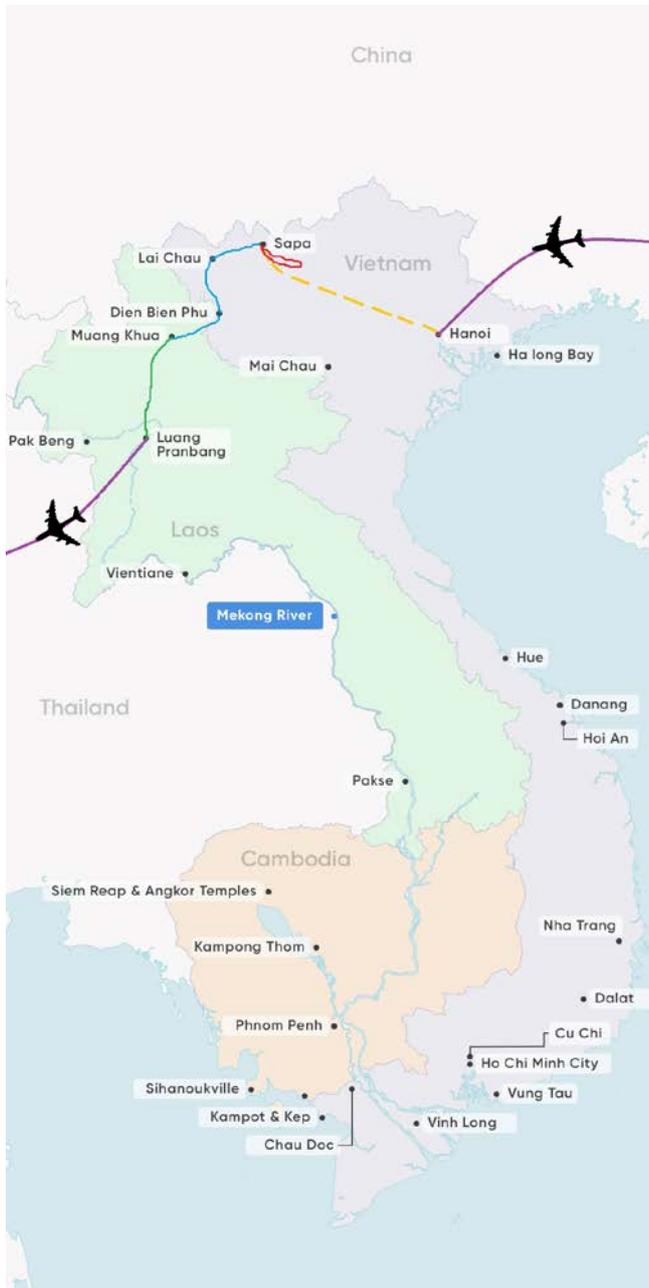


An Epic Adventure: Vietnam & Laos Overland



Departs anytime (2018-19)



Please note: This itinerary can be modified in any way to best suit your school's particular aims, learning objectives and budget.

Please contact us detailing any changes you'd like to make.

Take the road less travelled on this heroic 12-day trip entails a journey through the further norther reaches of Southeast Asia. This epic trip through Vietnam and into Laos is *Student Educational Adventures* most exploratory trip and will be enjoyed by students and teachers looking for a safe yet unconventional Asian educational program.

Beginning in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi, we will travel to the hilltribe provinces of Sapa before the journey to the less travelled town of *Dien Bien Phu* and into Laos. Here we will spend time with remote hilltribe villages before finally reaching the delightful town of Luang Prabang in Northern Laos.

Gilded Buddhist temples, rustic battlefields, meditating monks and friendly local inhabitants are among the many arresting experiences we will enjoy on this true adventure.



David Eales
Asia Manager

Day 1

Vietnam – Hanoi



On arrival in Hanoi, we will be greeted by our tour leader and escort you to your hotel. Following this, we will run through the itinerary and answer any questions you may have.

This afternoon we will visit the Temple of Literature – Vietnam's first University founded in 1070 and the Hanoi Hilton Prison Museum that once held US pilots shot down during the conflict with Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s. This evening we will wander deep into the city's populous old quarter to a popular local restaurant where we will enjoy our first taste of Vietnamese cuisine. (lunch, dinner) **Flight details to be advised**

Day 2

Hanoi / Train to Sapa



This morning we will visit Hanoi's historic Old Quarter travelling through narrow meandering lanes packed with silver, silk and embroidery. We also visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum now a pilgrimage site for locals. For lunch, we will dine at 'Koto' restaurant, a non-profit organisation run by local street kids. Following this, we will visit the Ethnology Museum to gain an understanding of Vietnam's 54 distinct ethnic groups and help us prepare for our community project in the days ahead. The museum is filled with exhibits and artifacts that represent everyday life of the hill tribes including traditional costumes and innovative farm implements. In the early evening, we board our overnight sleeper train bound for Sapa.

The train trip to Sapa is approximately 10-hours. Snacks and drinks can be purchased on board. Train compartments are 4-berth soft sleepers. Blankets and pillows are provided. Toilets are western style. (breakfast, dinner)

Day 3 & 4

Sapa



We will arrive in the border town of Lao Cai this morning, from where we will make the 50-minute bus ride up to Sapa (elevation 1650 metres). A former French retreat from the days when Vietnam was a colony of France, Sapa is our gateway to exploring the wild border areas of the north inhabited by some of Vietnam's most colourful hill tribes. Two days are spent exploring Sapa town and the valley below dotted with numerous hill tribes. We will embark on a walk to a nearby hill tribe village to experience hill tribe life and customs in the region. We will learn about the ingenious bamboo irrigation systems and the rituals and history of the H'mong and Dao ethnic groups. We return to Sapa and our hotel each afternoon. Main luggage may be left in the Sapa

hotel. A smaller bag or day-pack may be used while trekking in the Sapa region. (2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 1 dinner)

Day 5

Sapa – Lai Chau

This morning we enjoy spectacular views of Vietnam's highest mountain range including Mt Fansipan 3,150 meters in elevation. Following this, we explore Sapa Market frequented by the various hill tribes. Here we will see unusual food items for sale and quality handicrafts including weaving and silver jewellery making.

After lunch we depart Sapa for the quaint little town of Lai Chau, most noted for its huge hydro dam built in the surrounding valley and for flooding several old settlements during its construction. En route we will pass the Silver waterfall, travel over Hoang Son mountain range and descend into quiet valleys scarcely frequented by foreign travellers. After hotel check-in we wander the small town and learn about the local tea plantations. There is the option to enjoy a motorbike ride as a pillion passenger along tranquil roads, experienced drivers & helmets provided. Motorbikes are only 125cc. (breakfast, dinner)

Day 6

Lai Chau – Dien Bien Phu



We continue our drive to Dien Bien Phu arriving midafternoon. After hotel check-in, we will explore this historic battlefield where in 1954 a famous siege took place between French Colonial forces and a very determined Army of some 50,000 communist Vietnamese soldiers.

This afternoon we visit the Dien Bien Phu Museum to learn of the battle and visit one of the most important French strongholds - *Elaine II*. We will also visit the barbed wire trenches amidst the wreckage of military vehicles strewn across this plateau.

Late this afternoon we will visit a longhouse on the black Thai minority tribe to learn of this vanishing minority. Dinner tonight will be at one of the town's rustic restaurants.

(breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 7

Dien Bien Phu - Pangkok – Muang Khua (Laos)



We briefly continue our history tour of the battlefield area this morning and take in the French Army General's command post, climb over several tanks, see artillery pieces and the historic Bailey Bridge that led to the command post.

Mid-morning, we depart Dien Bien Phu and drive to the Laos border. This seldom visited area of Vietnam (and Laos) will be the doorway to our new adventure as we farewell Vietnam and cross into Laos. Quickly we will notice how culture and physically different these two countries are as we travel towards the town of Pangkok for lunch and then on to Muang Khua. We spend tonight here in this sleepy town and enjoy our first taste of Laotian cuisine

(breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 8

Muang Khua (Nong Kiew, Pak Ou Caves) – Luang Prabang



After breakfast, we board a small boat for a scenic river journey along a remote river to Nong Kiew. Our boat trip will provide ample time for students to enjoy the beauty of this landlocked country only opened to foreigner visitors since 1994.

Before arriving to our final destination for today, we will stop to visit some ancient caves where hundreds of ancient Buddha figures have been stored. Our local guide will explain the intricacies of the Buddhist religion and the meaning of the various Buddha images depicted here. Following this we will

continue down the river to Luang Prabang, arriving late afternoon.

After check in there will be some independent time to stroll around this UNESCO World Heritage town as it comes to life at dusk when local merchants set up for the town's night market – time we will have to enjoy after dinner this evening. (breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 9 & 10

Luang Prabang (Student-initiated activities)

Prior to travelling, a Student Educational Adventures staff member will talk to teachers and students about specific activities that your students might like to add to their overseas experience. These activities can be included based on students' knowledge of the country or their interests or passions for any aspect of a country's culture. The activities we can include are many and varied. These may include; an introduction to a country's creative or performing arts scene, visits to local schools, great race activities, cooking classes, outdoor educational pursuits such as hiking, bike riding or a plethora of cultural programs. Please contact us for further ideas.

OPTION 1:

Waterfall, Asian Bears & Elephants: We will set off to visit an Asian bear protection centre to learn about conservation efforts then walk a short distance to a beautiful 3-tiered waterfall to enjoy a refreshing swim (optional). After time spent at the waterfall relaxing, we journey to a valley and the site of an elephant sanctuary to learn of these iconic animals. (breakfast, lunch)

OPTION 2:



River Kayaking: While the mighty the Mekong River is the most famous river in Laos, we will instead enjoy kayaking on the Nam Khan tributary river. Following safety instructions from our guides we put on our lifejackets and helmets and paddle down river passing occasional rapids, calm stretches of water and taking in scenic views in all directions and pass Tad Sae waterfall. The water will be at times a turquoise colour as we kayak for over 2 hours. On the return trip to Luang Prabang, we stop in a small village. (June – September the waterfall is most spectacular)

OPTION 3:

Great Race: Students will embark on a *Great Race* style activity where they will work in small independent teams to achieve objectives while navigating around the city and beyond. Along the way, students will try various forms of transport, interact with the locals and embark on mini fact-finding missions. Students will climb hills, explore cultural buildings, purchase items from the market and note down facts and observations. Later in the day as the groups return to base, we will compare the results. (breakfast, lunch)

On our second day in Luang Prabang, we take a scenic boat trip upriver to the Pak Ou caves to see this auspicious religious sight and learn how Buddhism influences many aspects of daily life. In the evening we take part in a hands-on cooking class hosted by a local chef. We will prepare, cook and eat our own dinner tonight. (2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 1 dinner)

Day 11

Luang Prabang



We spend the day at a local school learning about the education system in Laos and take part in an immersion program that includes conversational English, playing educational games, sports competitions and drawing. There may be the opportunity to renovate school buildings as an extended project. On our final evening, we will enjoy a traditional 'Baci' dinner blessing ceremony accompanied by a display of traditional Laotian folk dancing. We will be invited to join the dance. (breakfast, dinner)

Day 12: Date



Depart Luang Prabang ✈️

On our final morning in Southeast Asia, we will venture town to await the arrival of Laotian monks who have taken a vow of poverty. Locals shower them with homemade sticky rice, and fruit as an offering a sacrament we too can partake in. Something we may also do. There will be a final time for some independent exploration before we check out of our hotel today and transfer to the airport for our departing flight back home.

Our group leader will take care of all flight re-confirmations, assist with check-in and wave us farewell. (breakfast) Flight details to be advised

Summary

Grading

Challenging; Students will be required to be in good health to get the most out of this trip while any one of reasonable fitness will be able to take part. There are no real physical difficulties however students will be expected to walk every day. You will also be expected to work diligently during the days of the community service project. You will also be expected to be able to ride a bike and be able to participate in a light hiking activity. It will be necessary for you to carry your own luggage throughout the trip but only for short distances.

Accommodation

Student accommodation is on a twin/triple share basis. Teacher accommodation is on a single room basis. Hotels hold a 3-Star equivalent rating.

Transport

Modern air-conditioned bus, boat, plane, bicycle.

Group Size

Minimum group size 20 students & 2 staff members.

▲ [Smaller group sizes can be quoted upon application](#)

Your Tour Leader

Your tour leader is probably the person who most influences the success of your trip. Thus, Student Educational Adventures employs our own team of meticulously trained student dedicated, local tour leaders - not foreigners, imported at your students' expense with no language skills or insight into your host culture.

These nationals are not only the best folk to show you their country. They are your teachers, translators and an enthusiastic purveyor of authentic experiences. They are there to facilitate your immersion into new cultures and are the bridge between you and the world of education and new experiences.

Your tour leader is always with your students throughout your trip and is thoroughly versed in safety protocols and duty of care responsibilities. This ranges from assisting in the most basic of health and safety measures to ensuring that teachers & students are always safe during our trips. All have been chosen because of their ability to deal with the needs and unique issues associated with escorting young people through this wonderful and at times, most foreign of regions.

Service Learning Program

All service-learning programs initiated by Student Educational Adventures are conducted after careful consultation with the local community and with the local People's Committees.

These projects are initiated based on a model of mutual learning and designed as an immersion experience. An understanding of the importance of an integrated approach to community development is useful to frame what students and teachers might see, learn or experience during a student immersion.

An Epic Adventure: Vietnam & Laos overland 12 days

Inclusions

- All accommodation, transport, activities, entrance costs and other programs as describe in itinerary
- *Student Educational Adventures* tour leader throughout trip & additional specialist guides
- Meals (+ drinking water) as described in the itinerary
- School program costs (Luang Prabang)
- Pre-departure support, briefings & planning meetings for students and parents
- 24/7 in-country support

Exclusions

- International flights to Vietnam / from Laos
- Some meals
- Vietnam & Laos Visa (if required)