

welcome to Soulfit adventures

Thank you for your interest in SoulFit adventures. SoulFit adventures retreats and trips incorporate health and wellness activities including but not limited to yoga, cycling and hiking with a touch of pampering into adventures on the road less travelled and sometimes frequently travelled, while at the same time travelling responsibly and supporting local communities. SoulFit adventures aims to positively benefit the local community by staying at locally owned accommodation, generating income for local businesses, employing only local guides, drivers and assistants throughout the trip to ensure that the local community benefits not only in the short term but in the long term. Our retreats and tours are designed for people of all ages and abilities who want to take time out from their busy lives, have a holiday and do something that's good for them and the local community at the same time. Our group sizes are small, never exceeding a maximum number of fifteen.

Cycling for the Soul, Northern Laos, 11 days/10 nights 22 November to 2 December 2015

Cycling for the Soul through Northern Laos is a unique journey through the quiet world of northern Laos. Starting in Luang Prabang we will stay at some of Laos' most unique hotels and in the company of our private yoga instructor, massage therapists and expert guide we will cycle the back roads during the day and indulge in massages, yoga and some excellent local cuisine during the morning and evenings. This tour is truly an indulgence for your mind, body and soul. Soak up the warmth and revitalise yourself during these 11 days of activity and relaxation.

Day 1: Arrival Luang Prabang (D)

Check into our hotel which is the beautiful 9-room boutique property, The Apsara Rive Droite. Running along the right bank of the Nam Khan River, the Apsara Rive Droite has nine huge, glamorous rooms, all with their own veranda or terrace, overlooking the river and the heart of Luang Prabang. This afternoon we are fitted for our bikes before some time to relax in the hotel's luxurious, tropical gardens or take a dip in the refreshing pool before a briefing and 'Welcome to Laos' dinner at the famous 3 Nagas Restaurant.

Overnight at The Apsara Rive Droite Hotel – www.theapsara.com/rive-droite.php - superior room

Day 2: Luang Prabang Past, Present and Future (B, L) – 25kms option to extend

Start the morning with yoga and then we take a half day easy cycling to settle in get comfortable with our bikes. We visit the Royal Palace, and the town's centuries old temples. We also visit an orphanage school where we visit the small gallery and vegetable gardens that are managed by the children. Before heading back to the hotel we will stop for lunch at a local restaurant. The rest of the afternoon is yours. Maybe visit the Saa paper and weaving village which are both located within an easy ride of the hotel or relax by the pool. Tonight you can climb **Phusi hill** to enjoy the view overlooking the city and watch the amazing sunset. From here you will see the magic Mekong and the small Nam Khan rivers. Maybe explore the local restaurants or indulge in a massage, the choice is yours.

Overnight at The Apsara Rive Driote



Day 3: Luang Prabang- Nong Kiau 70 km (B,L) - option of extending to 130kms for those interested

After our morning yoga class and breakfast we head off on our first full day cycling. First we transfer by vehicle and then cycle 70 km to Nong Kiau, a small town on the banks of the Nam Ou River. **Nong Kiau** boasts a gorgeous backdrop of imposing limestone mountains, picturesque river views and genuine local colour. If time permits, explore the **several caves** in the immediate area, one of which was apparently the site of many deaths when local villagers sheltered there during the war. Alternatively get a massage, join in a gentle yoga and meditation class, walk and play in the river with the local children.

Overnight at Phaxang Resort Nong Kiaw – standard room

Day 4: Nong Kiau – Muang Khoua by boat on the Nam Ou River (B,L)

Today the Nam Ou, which is one of the most beautiful rivers in the region awaits. We journey slowly upstream. Here, where there are no roads, life feels completely different from what we are accustomed! And, we want to share in this peace and tranquility. Let's stop on the way to visit and discover some remote villages.

Overnight at Senaly – basic room (best hotel in town)

Day 5: Muang Khoua – Muang La 70 km (B,L,D) – additional cycling can be organized

Today we cycle 70 km to reach the village of **Muang La**. The lush green vegetation and houses made of wood and bamboo are met by two rushing rivers: the Nam Phak and the smaller Nam La. Aside from its general beauty and attractive ancient wat, the main reason for foreigners to visit this town is the **hot springs**. The night is yours to sample the hot springs or join in a yoga and meditation class.

Overnight at Muang La resort - www.muangla.com

Day 6: Muang La (B, D) – optional cycling around the local area

A free day to do whatever takes your fancy. Cycling around the local area, join in some yoga and meditation, enjoy a massage, sauna, hot springs bath or simply do nothing!

Overnight at Muang La resort

Day 7: Muang La – Oudomxai 30 km (B,L)

Start the day with a yoga and meditation session and then in the afternoon we cycle to the town of Oudomxai. Maybe finish the day with a massage with one of our resident masseuses.

Overnight in Charming Lao Hotel - www.charminglaohotel.com - Deluxe Room

Day 8: Oudomxai - Muang Hong – Pak Beng 52 km (B,L,D) – option of extending cycling

After breakfast a transfer by minivan will bring you to Muang Hong (or skip the transfer and cycle), where you will start cycling for the day. This is probably one of the best roads of Laos. You will finish in the narrow valley of the Beng River at the northern section. This afternoon participate in a meditation session or enjoy a massage.

Overnight in Pakbeng Lodge



Day 9: Pak Beng – Pak Ou Cave and cycle to Zen Nam Khan Resort 37 km (B,L)

As we make our way down river, we will pass areas of un-spoilt forest with little villages along the riverbanks and perhaps the odd elephant or two with his mahout. We will visit a fishing village and a rice winemaking village and perhaps even taste some the infamous beverage known as Lao Rice wine. You also visit the **Pak-Ou caves**, where thousands of Buddha statues are stored. From here we start cycling 37 km with an ending that has a bit of a 'sting' in its tail to **Zen Nam Khan Resort**, a remote and peaceful resort, which we have all to ourselves!

Over night at Zen Nam Khan Resort – www.zennamkhanresort.com

Day 10: Relaxing day and activity optional (B)

Our last day and it's a free day. Yoga by the pool, enjoy one last massage or simply lie back, do nothing and enjoy the surroundings! If you are up for it tonight venture back into Luang Prabang and soak up the atmosphere one last time.

Day 11: Transfer to the airport for departure (B)

End of program, transfer for flight to Bangkok for connecting flights or continue on with your travels.



about your host and yoga instructor, Virginia Slevin, owner SoulFit adventures. Virginia has always had a passion for travel which was first ignited some 20 years ago when she was fortunate to spend 7 years living and working in Europe. Her passion for health and wellness has developed slowly over a number of years and she is still on this journey. In early 2009 Virginia decided she needed to make a major change in her life. Virginia decided to find a way to combine her passion for travel, health and wellness with her skills as an event manager and so, SoulFit Adventures was born!

Virginia coordinates all the bits and pieces that happen when you're 'on retreat or tour' and worries about all the details - great and small - to guarantee you get the most out of your time away, and that you'll have a trip to remember. After all, your time is precious! Virginia is very grateful to have been part of the amazing Power Living Yoga community in Sydney, Australia and she has completed her 200 hour Power Yoga teacher training with modern Australian master yogi, Duncan Peak. Some of the many teachers Virginia has been privileged to train and study under include: Keenan Crisp, Sol Ulbrich, Tiffany Cruiskshank and Kristi Abraham. Virginia also practises Kundalini yoga when time permits and you will find her either on her mat, on her bike or in the ocean.

How much does it all cost?

Total trip excluding airfares, travel insurance and visas **UD\$3325.00** per person based on twin share (**US\$800 single supplement) and **INCLUDES** all of the following:

- 10 nights' accommodation in boutique hotels (twin share)
- All meals as indicated in the itinerary: B= breakfast, L= Lunch, D= dinner
- Private yoga instructor for daily yoga and meditation
- SoulFit adventures representative
- English speaking local country/cycling guide
- 2 x 60 minute massages per person
- Transportation in private minivan or boat where indicated
- All sightseeing activities as listed in the itinerary
- Admission fee to indicated sights as listed in the itinerary
- Bike rental on Trek mountain bikes (you are welcome to bring your own bike and pedals)
- Private air conditioned vehicles including cycling support vehicle
- Domestic government taxes and service charges

- Luggage handling and daily drinking water
- Airport transfers on day 1 & day 11

There are some things you’ll need to pay separately, these are listed below:

- International airfares
- Visa fee on arrival US\$30.00 per person
- Travel Insurance – appropriate for all of the activities listed including cycling
- Additional meals not mentioned in itinerary
- Alcohol and soft drinks
- Single room surcharge)
- Hotel incidentals: mini bar, laundry, telephone
- Tips and gratuities
- Helmets - compulsory
- Any additional expenses caused by reasons beyond our control such as natural calamities (typhoon, floods), flight delays, rescheduling or cancellations, any accidents, medical evacuations, riots, strikes etc

Please note that if you choose not to participate in the cycling, it’s completely up to you, and you are welcome to jump in the support vehicle. Non cycling friends and partners are also welcome. For more information on the cycling please refer to the practical information section following.

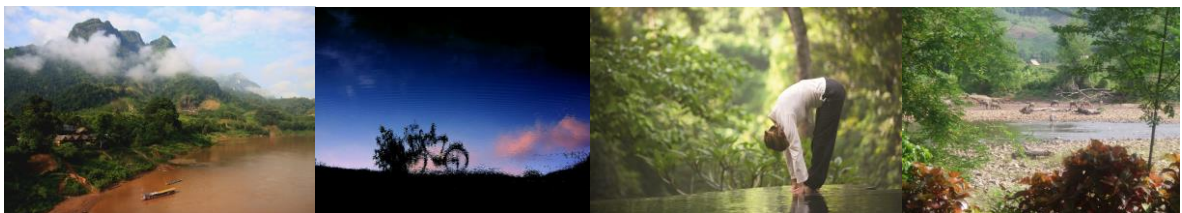
This is an amazing 11-night experience in one of the most beautiful locations in the world. The trip is limited to 14 places so book early to ensure your place. A minimum number of 6 are required to run the trip. For more information or to make a booking, please contact email virginia@soulfitadventures.com or call 61 407 88 600.

PRICES

Prices are quoted in local currency of the retreat or trip and are correct at the time of printing. Payment can be made by Paypal, bank transfer or credit card (which will incur a 3.5 % surcharge).

Disclaimer

SoulFit adventures is committed to costing our trips as accurately as possible. The trip costs and inclusions are current at the time of publication but maybe subject to change. SoulFit adventures will not increase the tour price except under exceptional circumstances for those that have previously booked the tour. Any changes to pricing will be communicated to you clearly before final payment is due. SoulFit adventures reserve the right to alter or change the itinerary above if deemed necessary.



practical information including what to bring on your Laos SoulFit adventure

SoulFit adventures would like you to have a happy and memorable holiday and so that you are prepared for your time with us in Laos, following is some practical information for you to be ready for your trip. Please take the time to read through and please email as soon as possible if there is anything unclear or incomplete.

SoulFit adventures Representative Contact Number

Virginia Slevin mobile: +61 407 788 600

Transfers

Airport transfers on the day first day of your trip are included as part of the trip cost. If you are flying into Luang Prabang, please let us know in writing at least 2 weeks before the start of your trip your flight details.

Cycling

SoulFit adventures yoga and cycling holidays have been designed for people of all ages and abilities and anyone with a reasonable level of fitness should be able complete all of the cycling. The terrain is predominately sealed with very little traffic. It is our aim to deliver as much traffic-free riding, but at we do encounter some. There are only a few short hills on towards the middle of the trip and on the last day, so you have plenty of time to work up to these. You must be comfortable riding in quite hot conditions and it is highly recommended to get some practice on unsealed surfaces with a little loose sand and gravel as this will help you feel more confident at times on this ride. There is always a support vehicle on hand to give you a lift if you need a break from the riding.

What to bring specifically for Cycling for the Soul:

- Lots of cycling pants and some with extra padding!
- Cycling gloves
- Light and comfortable clothing for yoga and meditation
- A good pair of runners, a pair of comfortable working shoes, sandals and sunglasses
- Helmut if bringing your own
- Yoga mat
- Soft gel seat cushion cover for bike seat for some extra comfort – optional
- Flashlight / torch
- Small backpack/’bum bag’ for your camera and other bit’s n pieces and cycling days
- Swimming suit and towel
- Long sleeved shirts and long pants for entry to any temples, and for protection for mosquitoes
- Anti malaria medication
- Strong insect repellent, Deet medicated preferred
- Good general first aid kit
- Sunscreen
- Last but not the least an open mind, tolerance, and some patience!

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT LAOS IN GENERAL

Dos and Don'ts in Laos

Respecting the following customs and principles will help make a stay in Laos a positive experience for both you and your hosts. Using your eyes and common sense will help guide you – while in Laos. Try and do as the Lao do, and you will be rewarded with hospitality and friendliness.

Religious

- Please dress neatly and show respect when entering religious grounds: cover yourself from shoulders to knees, and take off hats and shoes when entering buildings
- Women should not touch monks or their robes
- Please do not touch, point your feet at, or turn your back on Buddha images
- Keep your head lower than Buddha statues and monks
- Do not take pictures or disturb monks during prayer times

Cultural

- Wearing revealing clothing and showing your flesh (for women and men) is offensive to Lao
- don't wear bikinis, skimpy clothing, or take off your shirt in public
- In Laos, your head is 'high' and your feet 'low'
- Don't gesture with your feet, and don't put your feet on furniture.
- Also, do not touch someone else's head
- Kissing and hugging in public is impolite – please be discrete
- Please ask before taking photos of people
- Support development by buying local food and handicrafts

Environmental

- Do not take anything from the forest except fresh air
- Do not litter on land or in water; take all your rubbish with you
- Do not buy wildlife or wildlife products - nor let your guide buy it
- Do not make unnecessary noise
- When trekking or riding bicycles, do not leave the route or trample and destroy vegetation & crops

Drugs

Drugs tourism does damage and creates a false image of the country and its people. Do not use drugs, give a better example.

Drug use

- encourages economic dependency on internationally illegal commodities
- encourages impressionable Lao adolescents to do the same
- impedes the development of one of the world's poorest countries
- has resulted in the death, injury and imprisonment of tourists

- means quick profits for a few but social problems for whole communities

Visas

A 30 day tourist ‘visa on arrival’ can be issued at all official international border crossings, and at Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse international airports. The procedure is usually quick and straightforward, with a simple form to complete, one passport sized photograph required and USD in cash for the visa processing fee. Visa on arrival fee varies depending on nationality – for example USD\$30 for Australians, New Zealanders, French, Germans and Eastern European passport holders, USD\$ 31 for Swedish, USD\$35 for USA Passport Holders, United Kingdom and some other Western Europeans, and USD\$ 42 for Canadians. Often in the evening, on weekends or Public Holidays an extra USD\$ 1 overtime fee will be charged. Alternatively tourists can apply for a 30 day ‘visitor visa’ in advance through Laos Embassies and Consulates abroad.

Money

The Lao kip is a non-convertible currency and now trades at around 8,400 kip to USD\$ 1. Most shops and restaurants in the main cities and towns will also use USD and Thai Baht freely. We recommend that visitors to Laos bring USD cash to use during their visit to Laos. There are limited ATMs at this stage in Laos (in Luang Prabang and Vientiane only). Cash advances from major credit cards can usually be done at banks in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, however credit cards are still not widely accepted throughout the rest of the country and travellers’ cheques can only be cashed at authorized foreign exchange outlets and banks in main centres, and require presentation of a passport. Small denominations of USD cash are the most practical currency to carry although if staying for a while or planning to do a lot of shopping \$50 and \$100 have the best exchange rate. Clean, new USD currency is recommended as torn, dirty or old notes are usually not accepted.

Climate

The monsoonal influence results in three main seasons, although there are days that are exceptions to the rule!!

Wet season: - June to October: Rains can begin as early as May and extensive road travel may be difficult during the height of the rainy season in the more remote areas. Temperatures average around 25 degrees in the highlands/valleys and 29 degrees in the lowlands so quite pleasant.

Dry Season: - November to February: This is the high season and is generally the favoured time for travelers when there is little rain and temperatures are not so high. In Luang Prabang and the Northern region you can expect to need a warm jacket to keep warm as it does get cold, especially during the chilly evenings and mornings. Daytime temperatures are generally mild but it can start to heat up in mid February.

Hot Season: - March – June: April tends to be the hottest month and temperatures can reach the mid 30 degree plus mark. During March and April the northern areas can at times be shrouded in smoke, as local farmers practice ‘slash and burn’ form of agriculture.

Food/Cuisine

Bottled water is readily available everywhere and is recommended at all times – please do not drink the tap water. At local restaurants fresh salad vegetables are best avoided unless washed yourself, although there will not usually be any problems at international standard hotels and restaurants in Luang Prabang or Vientiane.

We do not recommend purchasing food from street stalls unless assisted by your local guide. Fresh vegetables are in abundant supply and exotic fruit is a common dessert and excellent breakfast accompaniment. The French colonizers not only left behind examples of their architecture but French cuisine is abundant at restaurants and the French bread stick can often be seen in the shopping basket of locals heading home from the market. Most Lao dishes are shared in the middle of a table, and traditionally eaten with fingers and or with spoon and fork, with chopsticks used for noodle dishes. The local Beer Lao is a good brew, quite light and refreshing and freshly ground local Lao coffee is also delicious.

Airport Taxes

Airport taxes are presently included in the air ticket prices, so no additional payment is needed at the airports.

Electricity

220AV circuitry – most power points are two pronged and are either round or flat sockets.

Mobile Phones

If your phone has international roaming, you should be able to use it in the main cities and towns via the local Tango network. If you don't have global roaming then a local SIM card can be purchased cheaply.

Internet

In the main cities and towns in Laos internet is wifi and the internet is widely available. In smaller towns or more remote areas (for example Plain of Jars or Don Khong) connections may be slow or erratic

Tipping

Tipping for service is not compulsory in Laos but is most certainly always appreciated. You should tip at your own discretion this includes your local guides and any drivers.

Heat

Do cover up and/or use sunscreen it's HOT out there (and cool in the mountains...)! Drink plenty of water. Heat exhaustion won't hit you until the evening, and the last thing you want is to be feeling groggy when you should be relaxing. Cheap rehydration salts are available at most pharmacies in Vientiane, Luang Phabang and bigger cities, and your guide will also carry some on the tour.

Bugs

We all hate them but mosquitoes are here to stay. Use a good repellent to keep them off you, and try to cover up with long cotton trousers and shirts around sunset when they're at their hungriest. Wherever mosquito nets are necessary they will be provided; make sure you tuck them under your mattress before sleeping. Natural remedies include citronella spray, and Vitamin B12 or garlic supplements. Malaria prophylaxis is not necessary, but contact your local physician if you would prefer this. Doxycycline is the most commonly used preventative in Cambodia and Laos.

Medicines/toiletries

Most medicines such as antibiotics, painkillers etc are available at any City pharmacy, and your guide will be happy to assist should you require any help. However, if you have any specific medication requirements, be sure to bring these with you from your home country. There is no need to pack large quantities of soaps and shampoos etc as most major brands are available in major cities, and even some of the smaller towns.

How to get to Laos

Most travellers to Laos arrive from Bangkok Airport and make their way up north into Laos. The following airlines service Laos airports:

- Laos Airlines
- Vietnam Airlines
- China Southern
- Thai Airways
- Bangkok Airways
- EVA Air

There are night buses, airplanes and train connections between major cities such as:

- Chiang Mai (to Enter via Mekong to Laos - Houay Xai),
- Nong Khai (to enter via Vientiane) or
- Ubon Ratchanthani (to enter Laos at Paxe in the south)
- Bangkok connects via airplane to Laos into Luang Prabang and into Vientiane. There are also direct flights to Laos also from Singapore, Hoh Chi Minh City, Hanoi and from China as well as Bangkok.

To Luang Prabang - Air Travel

Luang Prabang is linked with major cities from neighbouring countries. There are daily connections between several places and other flights from to Luang Prabang as well.

- Luang Prabang - Chiang Mai (Thailand)
- Luang Prabang - Bangkok (Thailand) and all further connections
- Luang Prabang - Vientiane (up to 4 times a day)
- Luang Prabang - Hanoi (daily)
- Luang Prabang - Siem Reap / Phnom Penh (few times per week)

Over land travel to Luang Prabang - from the south

You find daily buses from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and even night buses which run overnight saving a night in a guest house. The ride is scenic and takes about 8-9 hrs.

Also from Vang Vieng you will find daily mini buses going up north to Luang Prabang for a few Dollars. Buses need about 6 hrs.

On the Mekong to Luang Prabang - from the north of Laos and Thailand:

Coming from northern Thailand you may catch buses from Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and other cities to get to the border town of Chiang Khong (Thai side). From here cross the Mekong river to Houay Xai. Here you find slow boats down stream to Pagbeng and further to Luang Prabang which takes 2 days (2 x 8 hrs.) Visas are available on the border!

From all northern Laos Cities there are daily buses to Luang Prabang as well.

To Vientiane - Air Travel

International Airlines link up with Vientiane such as Vietnam Airlines, Bangkok Air, Thai Airways, Air Asia and others.

By Train to Laos

You can also arrive with night trains from Bangkok to the small border town of Nhong Kai. Take a Tuk-Tuk to the border of Thailand and enter Laos. From the border of Laos you will find many taxis and Tuk-Tuks who can transfer you into town for only a few dollars.

If you are arriving in Bangkok you can also come over land within a day.

Entering Laos from Cambodia

It is possible at one entry point in the south, Dong Crorlor in Cambodia. There are Buses connecting Phnom Penh and the border. It might be hard in rainy season and there are also Mekong boats going upstream in the direction of Stung Treng (from here go on with Bus or Pick Up).

Entering Laos from Vietnam

It is easy to arrange from major cities in Vietnam. Hanoi, Hue, Hoi An, Saigon. You can buy bus tickets in all agencies and also arrange visas there or on arrival.

For cheap onward air travel from Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hanoi, and Vientiane as well a new connection to Kuala Lumpur from Vientiane sees also www.airasia.com.

We hope the above information helps. If we have missed something or if you have any questions at all please let us know – virginia@soulfitadventures.com.

Best Wishes

Virginia