

Laos and Cambodia

Photography tour with Paul Sansome, for the RPS

An exciting, adventurous tour, roughly tracking the Mekong River from North to South. We travel through two interesting countries, both of which are full of photography opportunities.

Itinerary Overview

Day 1 / 16 Oct	Arrival Luang Prabang
Day 2/ 17 Oct	Luang Prabang
Day 3 / 18 Oct	Luang Prabang
Day 4 / 19 Oct	Luang Prabang
Day 5 / 20 Oct	Luang Prabang – Pakse - Bolaven Plateau
Day 6 / 21 Oct	Bolaven Plateau - Champasak
Day 7 / 22 Oct	Champasak
Day 8 / 23 Oct	Champasak – Don Khong
Day 9 / 24 Oct	4,000 Islands.
Day 10 / 25 Oct	Khong Island – Siem Reap (Cambodia)
Day 11 / 26 Oct	Siem Reap, Angkor Wat, Tonle Sap
Day 12 / 27 Oct	Siem Reap, Angkor Wat, Tonle Sap
Day 13 / 28 Oct	Siem Reap, Angkor Wat, Tonle Sap
Day 14 / 29 Oct	International Departure

Price

Cost: £3500 (There is no single supplement for this tour)

Maximum group size: 10 clients

Includes

- All transportation and guides
- Entrance fees and permits.
- Accommodation as detailed, or similar
- Breakfasts (evening meals will be a la carte and paid for by clients as we go).

Excludes

- International flights
- Tips for guides or drivers
- Personal expenses such as telephone calls, laundry, medical expenses, etc
- Travel Insurance
- Visa fees

High Level Itinerary

Please note that Paul leads flexible tours based on providing the best photography opportunities and noting the interests of the group.

Day 1 : Luang Prabang Arrival.

"Sabaidee" - Welcome to magical Laos! Upon arrival at Luang Prabang International Airport, you will be picked up by a local tour guide and transferred to our hotel.

Days 2, 3 and 4: Luang Prabang.

We have three full days to enjoy and photograph in the Luang Prabang area. It is the best-known place in Laos, having a strong French influence and a long history of tourism. It is significant Buddhist centre and, on one of the mornings, an early start provides the opportunity to witness the captivating, centuries old, daily tradition of the alms giving ceremony, Tak Bat. Before sunrise, hundreds of saffron-clad monks file out from the old town's 35 temples to collect their daily alms from faithful local residents. For those that wish, you can join in the giving of alms.

Luang Prabang has a very friendly, very photogenic, fresh food market sprawling along narrow lanes. Previously, we enjoyed this market so much that we went twice!

Luang Prabang is a significant historic Buddhist centre and we will visit some of its most historically important temples, including the magnificent stupa of 16th Century Wat Wisunarat, Wat That Luang, traditionally the cremation site for Lao Royalty, and Wat Xieng Thong, with its classic Lao style roofs. During these visits, we will be looking to meet and photograph some of the many monks that reside here.

We may also visit some craft workshops.



School children, Luang Prabang

On one of the days we will head out across the rice field landscape to the beautiful Kuang Si waterfalls, with its multi-tiered turquoise pools set in a beautiful lush forest setting. Paul says, "Having seen many grand waterfalls around the world, I rate Kuang Si as one of the most photogenic falls that I have seen".

Luang Prabang is set on the Mekong and perhaps the best way to see the river activity is to hop on a local ferry across the Mekong River to visit a local village.

On one of our days, we will embark on a scenic drive along the picturesque Mekong River, followed by a boat trip to explore the remarkable Pak Ou Caves. Located at the mouth of the Ou River, these caves, namely Tham Ting (lower cave) and Tham Theung (upper cave), boast an abundance of Buddha images and overlook the Mekong.



Rice workers

Day 5 : Luang Prabang - Pakse

An early start sees us heading to Luang Prabang's airport for the internal flight to Pakse, the capital of Champasak Province. On arrival, we meet another tour guide and driver then begin your discoveries with a scenic drive through mountains and winding roads all the way up to the region of Bolaven Plateau.



Watermelon Seller

An expanse of highland formed from an ancient volcano, Bolaven Plateau is resplendent with lush jungles, rivers, scenic farmlands and diverse ethnic communities. Explore this naturally beautiful and cool climate elevated region. Start with a visit to the Tad Fane Waterfalls, 120 meters high and located in the Dong Hua Sao Nature Reserve. Continue to the Tad Champi and Tad Yeung waterfalls, which drop an impressive 42 meters and are surrounded by lush vegetation. Then we may head to a tea and coffee plantation and learn why the Bolaven Plateau is an ideal area for these plantations. Enjoy an exceptional fresh organic cup of coffee prepared with a unique technique at the Jhai Coffee House in Paksong and meet some ethnic minorities.



Buddha statues, Pakse

Day 6 : Bolaven Plateau to Champasak

We make a relatively short journey back down to the Mekong valley, visiting an ethnic minority village as we pass. We are heading to a very relaxing hotel, overlooking the river and will enjoy some down time here. It is a location that deserves that you set an alarm so that see the sun rise over the Mekong.

Day 7 : Champasak

After breakfast, we visit Wat Phou, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Dating back more than 1,000 years, Wat Phou is a spectacular pre-Angkorian temple of southern Laos. Explore this mythical temple ruins and tumbledown structures. Paul says "I really enjoyed this ancient temple and it offered some of the best photography of the tour. To reach the old temple we need to climb a steep hill!"

Champasak also has craft workshops that we may be able to visit.



Wat Phou Temple

Day 8 : Champasak – Don Khong

After breakfast, we check out of the hotel and journey along Mekong River to Don Khong to the south of Champasak.

We continue to Khong Island, the biggest island in Southern Laos and the start of the 4,000 Islands. Called "Siphandon" in Laotian language, this area is where the Mekong stretches over 14km wide and houses thousands of islands between its cascades and rapids.

Later in the afternoon, you will arrive in the peaceful island of Don Khong, home to small villages and plantations, where we spend two nights.



Sunset from our hotel balcony

Day 9 : Explore 4,000 Islands

Today we spend all day travelling on traditional long-tail boats, cruising amongst the Siphandon riverine archipelago. Our destination is the 10km-long Khone Pha Pheng Falls, Southeast Asia's largest waterfalls and one of Laos' best natural attractions, but we are also interested to see the local fishermen and birdlife that we will see along the way.

Day 10 : Khong Island (Laos) – Drive to Siem Reap (Cambodia).

Check out hotel and get ready at around 7 A.M for the long journey by car to Siem Reap (Cambodia). Stop at to the Lao/ Cambodian border (Nong Nok Khiene/ Trapeang Kreal) for visa stamp. Farewell Laotian guide and driver then meet the others in Cambodia territory We now face our longest day of road travel with 6 hours, on often bumpy roads, to Siem Reap.

Days 11,12,13 : We have 3 days to enjoy the Angkor Wat temples, the villages of Tonle Sap and the markets and shops of Siem Reap.



Monk climbing temple steps

Paul says “In choosing to have 3 full days in Siem Reap, it allows us to cover the vast temple sites in a more relaxed way”

Angkor Wat is the name of the largest of the temples, but there are over 70 temples on the vast complex. Perhaps the more photogenic ones are tree-overgrown Ta Prom (made most famous by the Tomb Raider film) and Angkor Thom, with it's huge carved heads.



Angkor Thom



Ta Prom

Paul continues, "However, it is not all about temples. The stilted (Kompong) and floating (Chong Kneas) villages of Tonle Sap lake offer unique photography opportunities and Siem Reap has one of the largest fresh food markets that I have visited".



Kompong village



Chong Kneas

It is nice to seek some peace in the dappled light of some of the less-visited temples.



Preah Khan Temple

Day 14 : Siem Reap Departure.

Today is free at your leisure for last minute shopping or sight-seeing before driving to Siem Reap International Airport to catch your departure flight home.

Your Experience with Paul Sansome

Paul is one of the UK's most successful fine art photographers, selling photography to hang on people's walls since becoming a professional in 2003. Paul has been Highly Commended in the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year, has many times featured in Landscape Photographer of the Year and in 2017 won the first of several major awards in the Travel Photographer of the Year competition; it is very unusual for a photographer to be recognised in different genres. For the past 20 years, Paul has been leading four or five photography holidays each year to countries that include Italy, Morocco, Iceland, Myanmar, Vietnam and India.



On the trips there is an emphasis on both having a great holiday and also on taking great photographs. Paul also looks to improve the client's photography skills. We visit locations specifically because they offer good photo opportunities and spend much longer at any given location than a

normal tour because photography can often need that little bit of patience to get the perfect shot. Of course, we are travelling with a group that has the shared interest in both photography and travel.

Paul says, "On our trips into Asia, I have the strongest passion for capturing the character and lifestyle of the people that we encounter". There is group education at the beginning of the tour so that clients have an awareness of some creative and compositional ideas as well as a strong technical grounding in how to get the best results. Paul is always available on location and the guidance given when alongside someone taking the photographs is probably the most instructive.

All photography by Paul Sansome