
GEEO ITINERARY

Bangkok to Hanoi

Day 1: Bangkok Arrive in Bangkok at any time. Meet your group for a welcome meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m.

Arrive in Bangkok at any time. Due to the potential for flight delays or cancellations, we recommend that you plan to arrive in Thailand at least a day in advance. This will also give you time to rest and adjust to any time difference. We can book extra hotel nights for you in Bangkok before the trip. Relax, explore the city, and adjust to the frantic pace and humid heat of Bangkok. Please note that check-in at the hotel is usually around 2:00-3:00 p.m. There are no planned activities until an intro meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., usually in the hotel lobby. Check for a sign or ask at the reception desk about the exact time and location of the group meeting. At this meeting, your tour leader will check that you have a visa for Vietnam. (Please note that you **MUST** arrive with either a Vietnam visa or pre-approval visa on arrival. Please refer to the visa information section of these trip notes for more information on obtaining a visa for Vietnam; GEEO will also share instructions to the group several weeks prior to departure.) Please make every effort to arrive in time for your welcome meeting. If you are delayed and will arrive late, please inform us. Your tour leader will then leave you a message at the front desk informing you of where and when to meet up tomorrow. After the meeting, you might choose to get dinner at a nearby restaurant with your traveling companions and your tour leader to further get to know one another. Our hotel is located in Chinatown next to the central train station and MRT (subway) and is only a short taxi ride from Khao San Road and the central shopping area of Siam Square, MBK, Siam Paragon, etc.

Day 2: Bangkok (B) Guided longboat tour of Bangkok's klongs and Wat Po. Optional Grand Palace and National Museum visit. Overnight train to Chiang Mai.

Enjoy a one-hour long-tail boat tour on Bangkok's busy Chao Phraya River and through the famous klongs, or canals, of western Bangkok's Thonburi district. Our boat trip finishes at the Royal Temple of Wat Po. Our included guide will introduce you to Thai Buddhist culture and show you the famous reclining Buddha. When your guided tour ends there will still be time for some afternoon shopping, a visit to the Grand Palace or a stroll through the backpacker area. We will meet back at the hotel within easy walking distance to the train station where we board our overnight train to Chiang Mai. Tonight's accommodation is an overnight sleeper train. Beds are dormitory-style, with bunks on two layers along the side of the train carriage. There are curtains along each bunk for privacy. Your luggage will be accessible during the journey. The train has air-conditioning and clean bedding is provided for each bunk. There are both Western-style and Asian style toilets at the end of each carriage. Food and drinks are served on the train but you can always bring your own food from the shops and restaurants in the train station. Approximate travel time: 12 hours on overnight train from Bangkok to Chiang Mai. Please Note: Due to disruptions of Thai trains in the north during the monsoon season, we may end up needing to use alternative transport.

Day 3: Chiang Mai Enjoy a guided tour of Doi Suthep temple. Optional activities include a cooking class or visit to the night market.

We arrive in the early morning and have free time to explore for the rest of the day. To fill your free time, you can choose from a large range of optional activities or stroll the city independently. Opt to explore the rural lanes of Chiang Mai in a tuk-tuk by pre-booking the Full Day Tuk-Tuk Adventure or experience the flavours and scents of traditional northern Thai cuisine by pre-booking the Northern Thai Cooking Class. In late afternoon, set off to visit the temple complex, Doi Suthep. If you're lucky, you may witness the chanting of the monks. Climb the 300-step naga (mystical serpent) staircase to one of northern Thailand's most sacred temples, or opt to take a cable car and enjoy the view. Learn all about Doi Suthep's history from a local guide – built on top of a mountain, the temple sits among pagodas, statues, bells and shrines.

Day 4: Chiang Khong (B) Head to Chiang Khong via Wat Rong Khun and enjoy your first view of the mighty Mekong.

En route to Chiang Khong, visit Wat Rong Khun, the dazzling "White Temple." This unconventional Buddhist temple was designed by prominent Thai painter-turned-architect Chalermchai Kositpipat. Be wowed by the temple's contemporary exterior made up of a mosaic of mirrors. View the interior walls that have pop culture and sci-fi influence. Find murals of Batman, Superman, Predator, and *The Matrix*. We spend one night in Chiang Khong, a small border town that is a part of the trade route between Laos and Thailand. Wander the local food market or sit back and enjoy the slow pace of life as we spend our last evening in Thailand. Approximate travel time: 5 hours by private transport.

Day 5: Mekong River Cross the border into Laos then travel by traditional boat down the Mekong River.

We cross the river border today to Laos by small local boats to Ban Houay Xai and Lao Immigration. Once we have completed the immigration process we take a songthaew (local bus) to our traditional slow boat. As we travel down the Mekong River, you will slowly adjust to the relaxed pace of life in Laos. This predominantly mountainous country has unsurpassed views of the riverside villages, the tropical jungle, and the mountains. Our private boat is reasonably comfortable and spacious. A toilet is available onboard. Fruit, tea and coffee, are provided free of charge for you to enjoy. Other drinks, such as water and soft drinks are all available for purchase on the boat. We overnight in Muang Pakbèng village, a stopover for local traders heading to Luang Prabang. For travelers, the town offers an interesting vibe and a good introduction to Laos. Our guesthouse is located some 200 meters from the pier. Approximate travel time: 30 minutes by private vehicle, 8-10 hours by riverboat depending on river conditions.

Day 6: Luang Prabang (B) Continue down the Mekong for most of the day. Take a guided tour of the Pak Ou caves before arriving in Luang Prabang.

Continue down the Mekong for most of the day. We approach Luang Prabang in the late afternoon. Before arriving, we will make a stop outside of town at the Pak Ou caves. This dramatic cave houses thousands of Buddha statues and images and is considered an important spiritual sight by many Lao people. After our visit, we re-board the boat and continue to Luang Prabang, arriving around 5 pm. Located at the confluence of the Nam Khan and Mekong Rivers, Luang Prabang is one of the loveliest towns in the whole of Southeast Asia. Approximate travel time: 8-10 hours by boat depending on river conditions.

Day 7: Luang Prabang (B, L) Enjoy a guided tour of the Ethnology Museum, Ock Pop Tok Living Crafts Center, and Kuang Si waterfalls. Enjoy lunch with a local family.

The center of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed town is quite small and is accessible either on foot or by bicycle. You can visit the most impressive of Luang Prabang's 32 temples including Vat Vixoun, Vat Sene, and Vat Xiengthong. You can pack a picnic to eat on Phousi Hill and watch the sunset over the horizon or rise at dawn to watch the monks walk through the city collecting offerings of food from the locals. Take an afternoon to browse the many textile galleries and relax and enjoy a local coffee in one of the town's cafes. We take a guided tour of the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Center, a great chance to learn about the traditional arts and cultures of Laos's many diverse ethnic groups. We also visit Ock Pop Tok "East Meets West" Living Crafts Center on the banks of the Mekong River to learn from the artisans about Lao handicrafts and the importance of woven textiles in Laos culture. During our stay in Luang Prabang, we will enjoy a traditional Lao meal in a local home partaking in a traditional Buddhist ceremony and enjoying some Lao delicacies. We also make a half-day trip out to the stunning Kuang Si waterfalls. Don't forget your swimsuit if you intend to opt for a dip in the turquoise waters framed by the jungle landscape.

Day 8: Luang Prabang (B) Enjoy a free day exploring all Luang Prabang has to offer. Options include cooking classes, temple visits, massages, night market

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Day 9: Vang Vieng Local Village (B, D) Drive to the picturesque town of Vang Vieng. You will spend the night in a local village near Vang Vieng. Sleep and eat like a local with your guide explaining everything along the way.

Today we embark on a scenic drive through winding mountains to a small village where we will experience a local homestay. Enjoy traditional Laotian food while getting to know your host family. Here, your local guide will explain the life of the people in this village. Typically, the group is divided into 2 or more homes in close proximity to each other. Mattresses are placed across the floor in the central living area for sleeping. Each mattress will also include a blanket, pillow and a mosquito net. Bathroom facilities are shared. The evening meal is eaten together in one of the houses. The food will be very simple and an excellent opportunity to experience typical Lao cuisine. A vegetarian option will be available. Approximate travel time: 7 hours on a winding mountain road by private transport.

Day 10: Vang Vieng (B) Move to a hotel in Vang Vieng for the night, an ideal location for exploring the limestone karst vistas of the surrounding countryside by bicycle or kayak.

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Day 11: Vientiane (B) Explore the capital of Laos. Opt to visit temples, see the National Museum, or explore highlights of the town.

A drive out of the mountains takes us to one of Asia's sleepiest capital cities. Enjoy the highlights of Vientiane including Wat Sisaket, one of the city's oldest and most fascinating temples and Phat That Luang, Lao's national symbol and one of her most sacred sites. For those who like to shop, don't miss the Morning Market, which, incidentally, is open all day! Approximate travel time: 3-4 hours by private transport.

Day 12: Hanoi (B) Flight from Vientiane to Hanoi

A short flight on day 12 takes us away from quiet Laos and into the bustling city of Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. Opt for a leisurely walk through the Old Quarter followed by a traditional Vietnamese meal as the perfect way to start your visit to this diverse country. We spend two nights in Hanoi. Our hotel is located in the Old Quarter. Approximate travel time: 2 hours by plane, 45 mins by private vehicle.

Day 13: Hanoi (B) Visit Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, stilt house, and the presidential palace. Enjoy a water puppet show. Optional tour of Temple of Literature, museums, Hoa Lo Prison.

Today we visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, his Presidential Palace and house on stilts. The mausoleum houses the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh, the founding father of unified Vietnam. During the afternoon you will have free time to explore this beautiful city. Opt to visit the Tran Quoc Pagoda, the Temple of Literature, the Museum of Ethnology, or just take a walk through Hanoi's Old Quarter – a virtual maze of fascinating streets, each one traditionally devoted to a different product or industry. In the late afternoon or early evening, we attend a performance of Vietnam's famous water puppets before sampling one of Hanoi's amazing eating venues. Ask your tour leader to tell you more about the local Northern delicacies. Opt to pre-book the "Hanoi Foodie Culture Tour" ahead of time to include this optional on your tour.

Day 14: Hanoi (B) Depart Hanoi at any time.

There are no planned activities today, so you may depart Hanoi at any time. If you wish to extend your stay in Hanoi, consider booking post-tour accommodation with us. Please note that check-out time from the hotel is usually mid-morning, but luggage storage services are available at the reception desk. Want more adventure? Book two or more GEEO programs in the same school year and receive a discount! GEEO will give you 10% off of the lesser value program(s) (up to 3 programs per year). If you would like to extend your time abroad but don't see another GEEO program that interests you, let us know. We can work with you to find a trip from our tour operator's much larger catalog. Their tours are open to the general public and not designed specifically for educators, but we can still offer you and your travel companions a discounted educator price on any additional tours that you book.