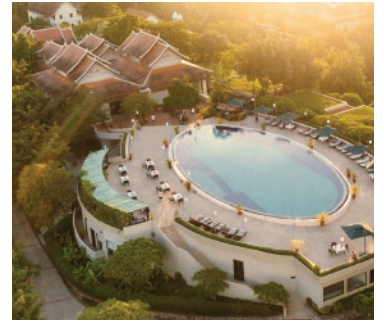




Photograph Laos with Alex Cearns and Free the Bears



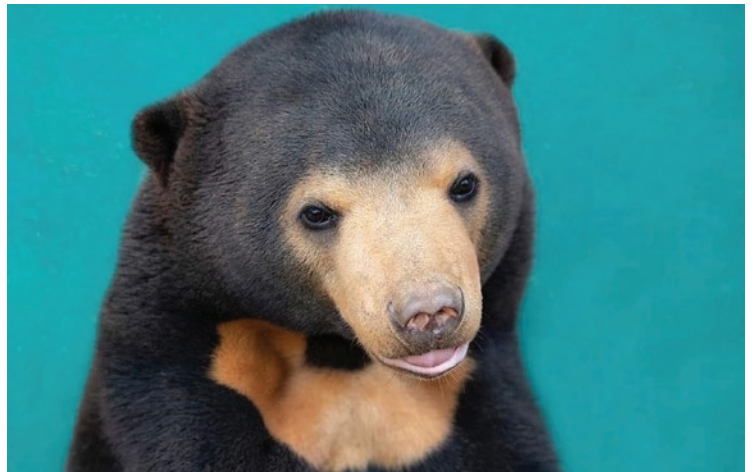
trip highlights

Travel with award winning animal photographer, educator and author Alex Cearns OAM

Go behind the scenes at the Free the Bears sanctuary, witnessing the daily care, enrichment and rehabilitation of rescued bears

Walk alongside elephants on a guided jungle experience, observing these gentle giants in a natural forest setting

Cruise the Mekong River to the sacred Pak Ou Caves and explore Luang Prabang's temples, markets and riverside life



Trip Duration	9 days	Trip Code: FB71
Grade	Introductory	
Activities	Photography in Luang Prabang and at Free the Bears sanctuaries	
Summary	9 Days, 8 nights 5 star hotel	

welcome to World Expeditions

For over 50 years, we've been creating high-quality, expedition-style adventures for active travellers with a curious spirit. From our very first trek in the mountains of Nepal to pioneering remote routes across all seven continents, our journeys are built for those who want to truly explore – not just visit.

At the heart of what we do is a simple philosophy: take the paths less travelled.

This means travelling with care, supporting local communities, minimising our impact, and unlocking experiences that most travellers will never have.



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the trip

This exclusive Laos journey offers a rare opportunity to go behind the scenes with Free the Bears, gaining insight into the remarkable conservation work taking place at their sanctuary near Luang Prabang. You'll witness first-hand the daily care, rehabilitation and enrichment of rescued bears, learning how this dedicated organisation is improving animal welfare across the region. A contribution of \$500 (AUD) per person from your tour price directly supports Free the Bears and their ongoing work.

Hosted by award-winning wildlife photographer Alex Cearns, who will share her expertise and guidance to help you capture compelling images of wildlife, people and landscapes throughout the trip. Alex Cearns has spent a lifetime making a substantial contribution to the lives of rescued animals and endangered species, and prioritises ethical animal encounters above all else.

Based for eight nights at the tranquil hilltop Luang Prabang View Hotel, this is a relaxed and rewarding exploration of one of Southeast Asia's most enchanting destinations. There is ample time to enjoy the hotel's panoramic setting and pool, as well as free time to wander Luang Prabang's atmospheric streets, markets and riverside cafés.

Beyond the sanctuary, we explore the cultural and natural highlights of the region, including a scenic Mekong River cruise to the sacred Pak Ou Caves, home to thousands of Buddha statues, and visits to some of Luang Prabang's most revered temples.

Laos remains one of the most serene and culturally intact countries in Southeast Asia, where forested mountains frame fertile river valleys and life flows at the gentle pace of the Mekong. Combining wildlife conservation, photography, culture and relaxation, this journey offers a meaningful yet unhurried way to experience Luang Prabang while contributing to an important cause.

about your leader/escort

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER ALEX CEARNS OAM is far more than a world-renowned expert in pet and animal photography; she is a force of nature whose passion for the animal kingdom is defined by her substantial contribution to the lives of rescued animals and endangered species. With a career spanning over twenty years and all seven continents, Alex has captured the soul of wildlife in every imaginable environment, from the humid Vietnamese jungles and the vibrant red sands of the Galapagos to the formidable icy tundras of Antarctica. Her reputation as one of Australia's most awarded photographers is built on a foundation of technical mastery and an innate understanding of animal behaviour, ensuring that even the most uncooperative subjects are portrayed with dignity and grace. Travelling with Alex offers a rare opportunity to learn from a mentor who prioritises ethical animal encounters above all else. As the driving force behind Houndstooth Studio, she brings a wealth of expertise to her tours, yet it is her engaging humour and infectious quick wit that truly define the experience. Alex possesses a unique ability to make every attendee, regardless of their skill level, feel inspired and capable of capturing the extraordinary.

"I have witnessed first-hand the incredible resilience of the bears rescued by Free the Bears and it is their unwavering spirit that fuels my commitment to their cause. My long-term support for Free the Bears comes from alignment with their ethical approach to conservation and their relentless dedication to providing sanctuaries where these beautiful animals can live out the rest of their lives safely and with dignity." Alex Cearns OAM

at a glance

DAY 1	ARRIVE LUANG PRABANG
DAYS 2-3	FREE THE BEARS LUANG PRABANG WILDLIFE SANCTUARY
DAY 4	EXPLORE THE CITY OF LUANG PRABANG
DAY 5	MEKONG CRUISE AND PAK OU CAVES

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trip dates

2027 18 Oct - 26 Oct

fast facts

Countries Visited:
Laos

Visas:
Yes*

Vaccinations:
Please consult a travel vaccination specialist for up to date information

Leader:
Western Escort & local leaders in country

DAY 6	FREE DAY IN LUANG PRABANG
DAY 7	ELEPHANT WALK AT MANDA LAO
DAY 8	LUANG PRABANG FREE THE BEARS SANCTUARY- KUANG XI WATERFALL
DAY 9	DEPART LUANG PRABANG

what's included

- Hosted by photographer, educator and author Alex Cearns OAM
- Expert local bilingual guide
- 8 nights in a five star hotel on twin share basis
- \$500 (AUD) donation to the Free the Bears
- Three days visiting and photographing at Free the Bears sanctuaries
- Jungle walk with elephants
- Mekong Cruise, visit to Pak Ou Caves and Kuang Xi waterfall
- 8 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 3 dinners
- Private transport throughout
- One group arrival transfer on day 1 and one group departure transfer on day 9

what's not included

- Travel to/from Luang Prabang
- Visa
- Travel insurance (compulsory)
- Single supplement when staying in your own room
- Meals & beverages not mentioned in the itinerary
- Tips

detailed itinerary

DAY 1 Arrive Luang Prabang

Welcome to Laos. Our base in Luang Prabang is the tranquil hilltop Luang Prabang View Hotel, offering panoramic views across the town and surrounding mountains, with easy access to the historic centre below. The afternoon is at leisure to settle in, perhaps relax by the infinity pool or take in the peaceful surroundings after your journey. In the late afternoon, we gather for a trip briefing with your guide before enjoying a welcome dinner, our first opportunity to come together and begin this special journey in northern Laos.

NOTE: We will nominate one group flight for the arrival transfer on day 1, if you are arriving outside of this flight time/date, we can arrange a private transfer at an additional cost.

meals: D

DAYS 2-3 Free the Bears Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary

We travel to the Free the Bears Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary for two inspiring and insightful days. Opened in 2017, the sanctuary provides a safe haven for rescued Asiatic black bears and sun bears, along with other vulnerable wildlife including macaques, leopard cats and gibbons. In recent years, even red pandas intercepted from illegal wildlife trade have found refuge here. Since 2003, Free the Bears has rescued more than 170 bears in Laos, with over 130 rescues taking place since 2017. During our time at the sanctuary, we'll be introduced to the resident bears and gain insight into the organisation's rescue, rehabilitation and conservation programs. We'll learn how carefully designed activities encourage natural behaviours and improve the wellbeing of animals in care. This is a rare opportunity to experience the

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sanctuary from a behind-the-scenes perspective. With guidance from Alex, there will be dedicated time to photograph the bears and other wildlife, capturing meaningful conservation stories.

On the morning of Day 3, visit a nearby village close to the Luang Prabang Wildlife Sanctuary to observe daily life and local traditions. With prior permission, we will visit the village school to learn about education in rural Laos

Each afternoon, we return to Luang Prabang, where the evening is at leisure to relax at the hotel or explore the town at your own pace.

meals: B,L

DAY 4 Explore the city of Luang Prabang

Today we explore the stunning UNESCO World Heritage-listed town of Luang Prabang, travelling by local tuk tuk and on foot.

Once the ancient royal capital of the Lao Kingdom, Luang Prabang sits gracefully at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers. Our exploration includes the former Royal Palace, now the National Museum, offering insight into Laos' royal history, as well as visits to Wat Mai and the exquisite Wat Xiengthong, one of the most important monasteries in the country. We also visit the Living Crafts Centre to meet local weavers and learn about traditional textile techniques, before continuing to the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre for a deeper understanding of Laos' diverse ethnic communities. Late in the afternoon, there is the option to climb the 328 steps to Mount Phousi for panoramic views across the town and surrounding rivers, particularly beautiful as the light softens toward sunset. In the evening, you may wish to browse the vibrant Luang Prabang Night Market, where handicrafts, textiles and local snacks line the lantern-lit streets.

meals: B,L

DAY 5 Mekong Cruise and Pak Ou Caves

Today we join a scenic Mekong cruise, travelling upstream, where small riverside villages and traditional fishing boats line the banks, offering a gentle glimpse into daily life. Our destination is the sacred Pak Ou Caves, set dramatically in limestone cliffs at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Ou Rivers. For centuries, pilgrims have travelled here to leave offerings, and inside the two cave chambers are thousands of Buddha images of varying sizes and styles, placed by devotees over generations. We enjoy lunch riverside before a leisurely cruise back to Luang Prabang.

meals: B,L

DAY 6 Free day in Luang Prabang

Today is yours to enjoy at leisure in Luang Prabang. You may choose to explore more of the town's quiet laneways, linger in its temples, or simply relax at the hotel's infinity pool overlooking the river valley. Luang Prabang is a delight to wander. Boutique shops and artisan galleries line the main street, offering handwoven textiles, locally made jewellery, natural soaps and traditional crafts created by nearby ethnic communities.

meals: B

DAY 7 Elephant walk at Manda Lao

Deeply woven into Lao culture and Buddhist tradition, elephants hold a revered place in the country's history. We visit MandaLao, an ethical elephant sanctuary dedicated to providing a dignified, low-impact environment for elephants formerly working in logging and tourism. With logging restrictions now in place across

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Laos and increasing awareness of animal welfare, sanctuaries such as this play an important role in ensuring elephants can live more naturally in protected surroundings. Accompanied by experienced guides, we walk alongside two adult elephants on a gentle 2.5km jungle trek through forest paths, streams and rice fields. This is a calm and respectful experience, allowing you to observe the elephants' behaviour at their own pace while learning about their care, diet and personalities.

After the walk, we enjoy lunch at the MandaLao property before returning to Luang Prabang in the afternoon.

meals: B,L,D

DAY 8 Luang Prabang Free the Bears Sanctuary- Kuang Xi Waterfall

After breakfast, we travel to the Kuang Xi Free the Bears Sanctuary for our final visit with the team and resident bears. It's an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the sanctuary's work and spend further time observing the animals in their forested surroundings. We also explore the spectacular Kuang Xi Waterfalls, where turquoise tiers cascade through the jungle into a series of clear natural pools. There is time to walk the forest trails and, or enjoy a refreshing swim.

In the afternoon, we farewell the sanctuary team and return to Luang Prabang. This evening, we come together for a celebratory farewell dinner at a local restaurant, accompanied by a traditional Lao dance performance.

meals: B,L,D

DAY 9 Depart Luang Prabang

Our journey comes to an end. A group departure transfer to the airport will be provided at a nominated time. If you are departing at a different time or extending your stay in Luang Prabang, we will be pleased to assist with additional arrangements.

Thank you for being part of this special journey in support of Free the Bears.

meals: B

This itinerary is subject to change with any change in Community regulations as well as Governmental changes and natural circumstances beyond our control.

country information

Laos is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, sharing borders with China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The Mekong River flows the length of the country, shaping daily life and culture along its banks. Characterised by forested mountains, fertile river valleys and remote highland plateaus, Laos remains one of the most unspoiled and least densely populated countries in Asia.

Home to more than 7.5 million people and over 50 recognised ethnic groups, including the Hmong, Khmu, Yao and Akha, the country is rich in cultural diversity. Each community maintains its own language, traditions and distinctive way of life. With a population density of approximately 32 people per square kilometre, Laos retains a strong sense of space, tranquillity and traditional rural living.

Laos' recorded history dates back to 1353, when King Fa Ngum unified the region under the kingdom of Lane Xang, meaning "Land of a Million Elephants." Luang Prabang served as the royal capital, and Theravada Buddhism became the spiritual foundation of Lao society, a legacy still evident in the country's temples, festivals and daily rituals. Later French influence is reflected in the elegant architecture, café culture and tree-lined streets of towns such as Luang Prabang.

Nestled at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, Luang Prabang is one of Southeast Asia's most enchanting cultural centres and a UNESCO World Heritage-listed town.

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Celebrated for its harmonious blend of traditional Lao architecture, gilded temples and enduring spiritual traditions, it offers a gentle pace of life shaped by Buddhism and community.

Each morning, saffron-robed monks walk silently through the streets collecting alms, while vibrant markets showcase fresh produce, handicrafts and the cultural diversity of northern Laos. Beyond the town, forested mountains, limestone landscapes and cascading waterfalls frame the countryside, with opportunities to encounter rare wildlife such as Asian elephants and gibbons.

climate

October marks the beginning of Laos' dry season and is one of the most pleasant months to visit Luang Prabang. As the monsoon rains ease, the surrounding hills are lush and green, and waterfalls are flowing at their most impressive.

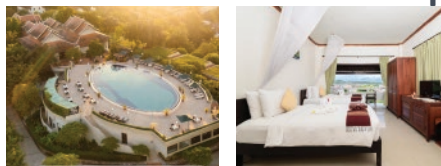
Daytime temperatures typically range between 28–32°C, with warm, humid afternoons. Evenings are slightly cooler and comfortable for outdoor dining and market visits. While occasional short showers are still possible early in the month, these are usually brief and followed by clear skies.

Lightweight, breathable clothing is recommended for daytime exploration, along with sun protection and comfortable walking shoes. A light layer may be useful for early mornings. With air conditioning throughout the hotel and a swimming pool overlooking the town, there are ample opportunities to cool off and relax during the warmer parts of the day.

dietary requirements

Provided we are advised in advance of your departure we are able to cater for vegetarian diets and can assist with medically recommended diets (allergies and intolerances). Please note that options are likely to be limited in very remote locations or alternatives may be unavailable. We are unable to guarantee a peanut-free or allergen-free trip, and therefore, we strongly encourage that travellers with life-threatening or severe allergies take all necessary medical precautions to prepare for the possibility of exposure. Passengers must travel with all necessary medications for food allergies and be capable of self-administering these medications.

accommodation on the trip



Perched on a peaceful hillside at the southern edge of Luang Prabang, Luang Prabang View Hotel offers a tranquil retreat with sweeping panoramic views across the UNESCO-listed town and surrounding mountains. This elegant property combines contemporary comfort with easy access to the historic centre, just a short 10-minute shuttle ride from the Night Market, temples, cafés and riverside promenades.

Spacious, air-conditioned rooms provide a restful sanctuary, thoughtfully appointed with modern amenities and locally inspired touches. The hotel's standout feature is its stunning 31-metre infinity pool, dramatically positioned at the crest of "The Hill," where guests can relax with a drink from the pool bar while taking in uninterrupted views over the valley.

For relaxation and wellbeing, the hotel also features the Champa Hom Spa, offering traditional massage therapies, as well as a fitness room and all-day dining at the Sky Lounge & Bar overlooking the pool terrace. Regular scheduled shuttle services ensure seamless connections to the town's cultural attractions, while the hotel's elevated setting provides a serene and scenic base for your stay in Luang Prabang.

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equipment required

YOU WILL NEED TO PROVIDE WORKING CLOTHES FOR THIS ADVENTURE. This should include sturdy enclosed footwear, working gloves and long pant and shirt you don't mind getting dirty. A full list will be provided at time of booking.

visas

A visa for Laos is required for passport holders from the following countries: Australia New Zealand United Kingdom United States Canada

Citizens of the above countries can obtain a 30 day tourist visa with the easy to use e-visa system - <https://laoevisa.gov.la/index>. Processing time is 3 days and the e-visa can be used to enter through the following border points;

Wattay International Airport (Vientiane)

Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge I (Vientiane)

Luang Prabang International Airport

Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge II (Savannakhet Province)

Pakse International Airport (Champasack Province)

Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge IV (Bokeo Province)

You can also obtain your Laos visa upon arrival at Vientiane and Luang Prabang International Airports, and at the Friendship Bridge between Nong Khai Thailand and Vientiane Laos. Passport photographs are required for a visa on arrival. To apply for a visa on arrival you will need: 2 blank pages in your passport 2 recent passport-size photos USD40 in cash.

In addition to holding a valid visa, all travellers must complete immigration arrival and departure information. This can be done either by filling out the paper immigration form on arrival or by submitting details online through the Lao Digital Immigration Form (LDIF). If using the LDIF, it must be completed within 3 days prior to entering or exiting Lao. The online submission is made via the Lao Department of Immigration website:

<https://www.immigration.gov.la/en/home>

All other nationalities should check with your nearest embassy or consulate.

Please bear in mind that visas may be required for countries you are visiting en route or transiting through on the way to your destination. It is important that you check the requirements of all countries you will visit. Visa costs and requirements do change regularly so we suggest you check with your travel agent or World Expeditions reservations consultant. It is your responsibility to obtain all necessary visas.

how to book

Please submit your booking & deposit online www.worldexpeditions.com.

We highly recommend you have your travel insurance in place as soon as you start paying for any aspect of your travel plans, including your trip deposit.