



DAY 1

Morning

Vientiane is all about coffee and bakeries; coffee from the lush region of the Bolaven Plateau in the far south, and bakeries harking back to the colonial times of the French, when baguettes and pastries were absorbed into Lao food culture. Start your day early at Le Banneton, a simple little patisserie that turns out the best croissants and tarts. Then at 8.30am meet Tuk Tuk Safari for one of their memorable tours of the city in a comfy tuk-tuk. The 'Lao for One Day' tour takes you far beyond the obvious as you explore a fresh food market, try a sweet snack known as kao larm (sticky rice and coconut roasted in bamboo), then visit a silversmith's workshop. After this you'll get behind the scenes in the kitchen of a restaurant that helps train street youth, before taking lunch there. After visiting the COPE Visitor Centre, which gives victims of UXO (unexploded ordnance) all over Laos the chance to walk again with prosthetic limbs and physio, the final stop will be a temple to learn to make a wax flower offering.

Afternoon

After your tour, grab your own tuk-tuk and make for Laos' most important national monument, Pha That Luang, passing Patuxai, the country's version of the Arc de Triomphe. Later, consider a visit to Wat Si Saket, before taking an early dinner at the excellent, contemporary Lao Kitchen to feast on delicious laap (chicken or pork mince with mint leaves, lime juice, spring onion and coriander).

Evening

As the light turns golden over the Mekong, head to the riverfront and soak up the atmosphere of the night market, wandering past stalls grilling meat and fresh fish. Bor Pennyang has a balcony where you can drink to the sunset. For Indochine-style lodgings for the night, go down a quiet lane beside a temple to Lani's House by the Ponds. This tranquil art deco house has French chandeliers, roomy bedrooms at affordable prices, and koi carp turning silent arabesques in its ornamental pools.

