



DAY 2 Morning

Grab an early breakfast at JoMa Bakery & Café, where you can feast on fresh fruit, bagels and fresh juices, before meeting Green Discovery (greendiscoverylaos.com), the country's premiere adventure and ecotourism operators. On their one-day kayaking and cycling trip you'll cycle alongside the Mekong and through rice fields to a fertile chilli-growing island (with a delicious picnic to follow), then float leisurely downstream back to Vientiane by kayak. Alternatively, stay closer to the city with a visit to one or two of Vientiane's museums, such as the Kaysone Phomvane Memorial and Haw Pha Kaeo; or take a bus or tuk-tuk out to Xieng Khuan, aka Buddha Park, to see the myriad religious and mythological statues.



Afternoon

By now it's well into the afternoon and you've earned the right to shop a little. Make for T'Shop Lai Gallery, arguably the city's most refined shopping experience. Here you can purchase handmade soaps and perfumes and see the gallery's latest exhibition. All products are made by the cooperative Les Artisans Lao, which helps disadvantaged women. Fragrances in hand, it's time to enjoy something Vientiane does very well: massage! The trick is to go where Lao people treat themselves, and, yes, it may look like a hole in the wall but Oasis, near the riverside, is something of a Tardis. Expect sensuous treatments from foot rubs to deep-tissue Swedish massage, in relaxed, cool and very clean surroundings.

Evening

Walking on air, and doubtless a beatific grin on your face post-pamper, settle in at one of Vientiane's famous restaurants. PimentUn boasts the best steak in the city - from rib-eye to chateaubriand - with Argentine beef cooked on their open-range grill; while stylish Le Silapa is known for its authentic French cuisine. If its Lao cuisine you're after then join the hungry locals at the sizzling aromatic fog that is earthy Ban Anou Night Market. Before turning in, enjoy a glass of something refined and cool at iBeam or The Jazzy Brick Bar. If you want a little more life, make for the city's oldest falang (foreigner) hangout, Khop Chai Deu, and its South Beach-style rooftop. (www.lonelyplanet.com)

