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Traveling back centuries through Laos II

April 20, 2015

8:31 AM MST

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Children in village on way to Vang Vieng
Beverly Mann

Your journey through [Laos](#) will now take you even further back in time. As your bus climbs curvaceous mountain ranges, which may appear forever during the seven-hour sojourn, you are given the opportunity to walk around some tribal villages along the way.

Next stop is a visit to the 2,000 year old [Plain of Jars](#) on the Xieng Khouang plateau, where hundreds of jars are scattered across the sloping plains. Some of these giant structures were first uncovered in 1930 by archeologist Madeleine Colani, who found glass beads and human bones and hypothesized that these sites were used for cremations and also ancient trade routes for salt. Others disagree, however. So, it is still a mystery. Villagers believe ghosts roam amid the jars, which are cups for giants. You will only see three sites out of 50 because of the

land mines of the past war which are still not uncovered in certain areas.

Two days later, descend the mountain into one of my favorite Laotian cities -- **Vang Vieng**, reminiscent of the stunning sculptured dome mountains of Vietnam's Halong Bay. It is like entering another world surrounded by this majestic natural beauty of towering limestone peaks and the Nam Song River lined with colorful fishing boats. **Hotel Thavonsouk Resort** sits right on the bank of this river and is a perfect spot to unpack for a few days to explore the nearby **Tham Chang Cave**, containing a natural spring with medicinal properties.

To really feel part of the stunning scenery, take a two-hour kayaking journey along the Nam Song River, maneuvering through some tricky currents in view of forested landscapes.

Move on and travel four hours by bus through the backroads of Laos, where you arrive at the final stop, the capital of **Vientiane**, the country's largest city with a population of 600,000. Though not as charming as Vang Vieng, the capital is filled with some memorable sights— from the esoteric **Buddha Park**, mixed with both bizarre **Buddhist** and Hindu concrete statues, to the renowned golden-spired stupa of **That Luang**, one of the most significant monuments symbolic of both the monarchy and Buddhist religion. Also, don't miss Laos' **Patuxai Monument**, the Laotian version of Paris' Arc de Triomphe.

Dining options are vast. Try the popular the Makphet Restaurant, where people with disabilities are trained and supported to work. Recommended is the grilled beef fillet wrapped in betel leaves with soy and chili sauce. The Spirit House on the edge of Mekong has generous portions of Lao and international cuisine.

The tastes and experiences of Laos remain with its visitor-- just as the country's mystical landscape is untouched by time.

For further information on small group trips to Laos, contact **Insider Journeys**, 1-800-342-1957.

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