

# LAOS

## an adventure to remember

Ever fancied some fantastic off-road riding coupled in with a bit of sight seeing? Well, Britton Adventures think they might just have found the right spot...

The phone rang at Britton Adventures HQ. It was Baz on the other end, "We want you to organise a ride somewhere overseas for a group of us. What do you suggest?"

"What about Laos?" Mike offered. "Sounds good - I'll just check with the boss." A quick chat takes place offline.

"Jan wants to know if we'd be close to those big temples in Cambodia?" asked Baz.

"Yes, really close - we can just fly across at the end of the motorcycle ride in Laos," said Mike

"Okay, sort out an itinerary, and get back to me."

And with that conversation, the Britton Adventures 2010 Laos and Angkor Wat Tour was born.

Baz rang a few people - soon there were 13 wanting to join the adventure. Britton Adventures rang some people they thought may be interested, adventurous souls and team players, who would fit right in with Baz's crew.

Next thing there were 18 people on the tour. Add in Mike and Angela from Britton Adventures, the Laos crew of four, and the group numbered 24. "Enough already," Mike and Angela said, and dashed off a few emails to colleagues in Laos.

Britton Adventures had run a tour in Laos before but this one was different. Limited time - only 14 days, excluding flying days, and a couple of days to see Siem Reap and Angkor Wat had to be incorporated as well. This group wanted lots of challenge and adventure. Among the group were a number of seasoned, and very competent enduro and trail riders; an ex-special armed forces bloke; another fit army bloke; a serious gym bunny; tough old cow cocks; a super-fit 61-year-old; and most terrifyingly, Baz's wife - the hyperactive, mega-walker, Jan R. The pressure was on the Britton team to keep the interest level high and the adventure pumped.

Checking the maps and charts, Britton Adventures planned a route with some interesting off-road segments thrown in, and then crossed their fingers that the monsoon weather wouldn't run too late this year.

Everyone arrived in Vietnam, Laos, and Mike, Angela and the Laos guides were at the airport in Vientiane. Annoyingly, those who had failed to bring the requisite passport photo for visa-on-arrival were the first to clear immigration. Eventually all 18 were through and heading by bus to the hotel in readiness for the following morning's departure.

With bags thrown in rooms, the crafty charged downstairs to select their mount for the tour, while the thirsty dashed downstairs for a much needed beer. With a lower bike already allocated to her, Jan R went for a walk. The group had dinner together, on the banks of the Mekong looking across to the lights of Thailand, and talk was of the ride ahead.



No trailer then?



Mike with pillion



It ain't exactly the Inter-Islander is it!

The first day on the bikes was a great ride out of Vientiane and on to the riverside town of Vang Vieng via a huge hydro lake. The group of 17 dirt bikes arriving in Vang Vieng (more known as a destination for hedonistic backpackers) certainly turned the heads of a few locals. A few cocktails or beers in the restaurant overlooking the gently flowing Nam Song river, a delicious dinner, a great sleep, and the intrepid adventurers were ready for day two on the road.

From Vang Vieng the road wound over the pass on Highway 13 as the group headed for their next destination - the world heritage city, Luang Prabang. An outstanding example of the fusion of traditional French architecture and Lao urban structures, Luang Prabang is a unique and remarkably well-preserved town situated on a peninsula formed by the Mekong River and its tributaries. A day off the bikes gave everyone an opportunity to explore this city and its surrounds.

Leaving Luang Prabang the next day the group encountered the first bit of unsealed roads, and passed through a number of small villages where the kids were delighted to see us. With an overnight stop in a small town, it was then on to Phonsavan, and the Plain of Jars. Huge 6000-plus-year-old megalithic stone jars litter the plains of northeastern Laos and are akin to Easter Island's stone heads - no-one is sure who



See no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil

built them, how they were built or why. There are some 400 clusters of large stone jars crafted out of sandstone and granite.

The following day it was time to tackle Revolution Road from Phonsavan to Paksan. Due to road works and late monsoon rains, 70-80km of this road was a mud bath - passable only to motorbikes and big six-wheel-drive trucks. It was tough going through some of the muddy sections and Jack, a dairy farmer from the Waikato commented later that if he'd known what he was in for he may never have gone on the tour. His sense of achievement at the end of the day made him pleased he had completed the mission though, and he had to hand it to the three riders who had doubled pillion through the mud.

As the group travelled further south, heavy rains in Central Vietnam spread into Laos causing flooding across roads. Navigation across one flooded road was by small dugout canoe, with almost nonexistent free-board and someone gingerly balanced on the bike. There was

**CONTACT**  
This year's Britton Adventure's Laos and Angkor Wat tour kicks off on October 7th, and if this sounds like your kind of adventure holiday contact Mike or Angela Phone 07 8556132 or 021 2849047 or email them on [adventurerides@clear.net.nz](mailto:adventurerides@clear.net.nz). Check out their website [www.adventurerides.co.nz](http://www.adventurerides.co.nz)

one casualty when one of the group decided to take a photo from the canoe, but his movement created rocking. This caused him, the bike, and the local guys who were paddling the canoe, to all end up in the drink!

Further up the road was more flooding - but alas, no ferrymen this time - so a piece of wood had to be fed through the spokes and the bikes carried just high enough to keep the engines out of the water. All in a day's adventure..!

Further floods the following day meant that some sections of the Ho Chi Minh Trail had to be omitted from the route. There was still plenty of excitement though, including replacing broken spokes on the side of the road by 'borrowing' from three of the other bikes of the same model - thank goodness for the enduro boys and their skills.

On reaching Pakse, the finish of the motorbike leg of the tour, the bikes were loaded on the roof of a bus for their journey back to Vientiane. With some sadness the group bid the Laos crew farewell and boarded the plane for Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Siem Reap proved to be a great place to finish the tour with time for relaxing, great dining opportunities, and plenty to see. A visit to the majestic Angkor Wat temples began with an elephant ride. On viewing the huge awe-inspiring temple complex one of the group was heard to comment, "These temples are huge, and amazing and I thought we were just going to see a big Buddha or something." DRD