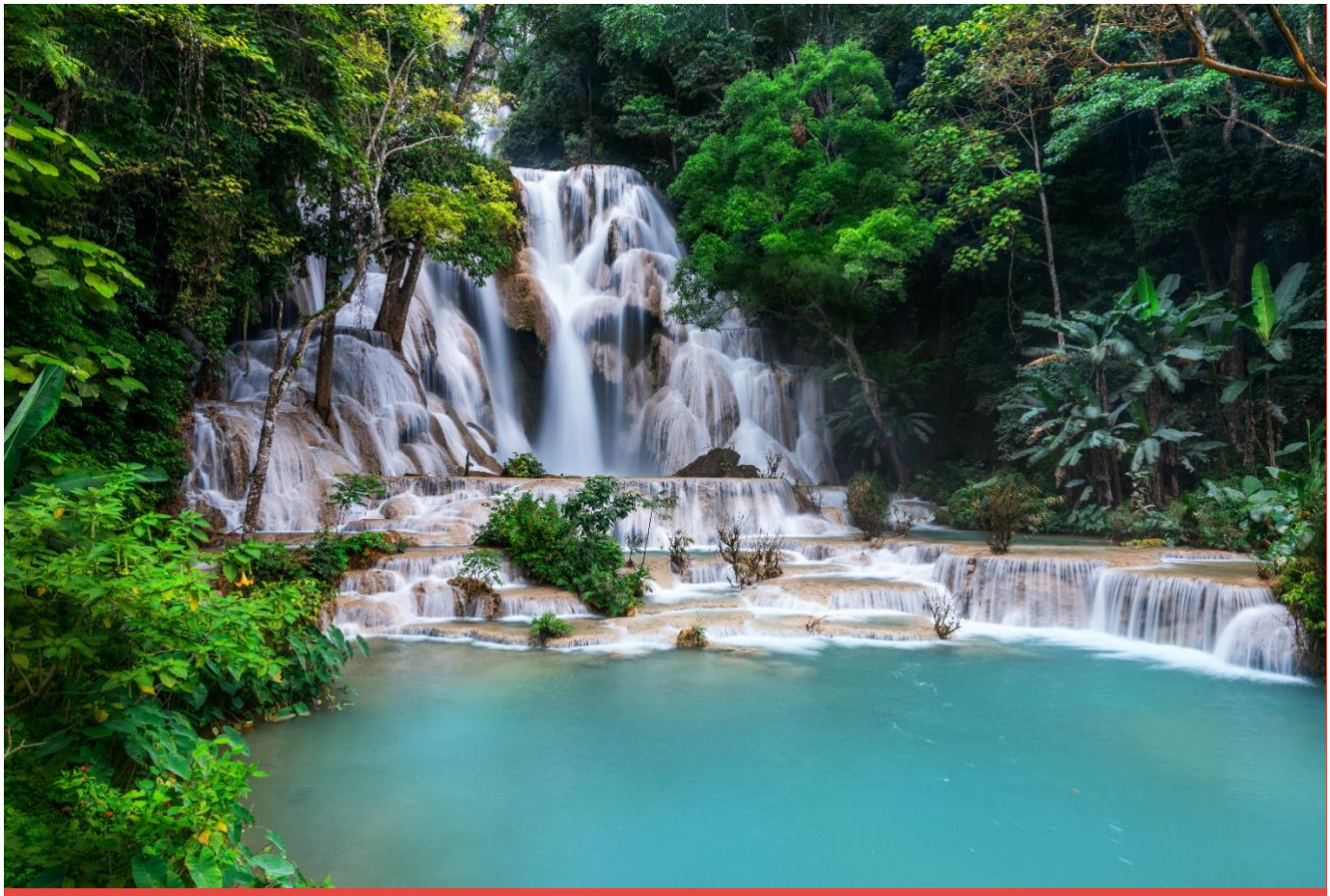

LAOS: TOP TO TOE

Go Beyond Tour | 14 Days | Physical Level 2

Vientiane – Vang Vieng – Luang Prabang – Khong Island – Pakse – Bangkok

Explore Laos from top to toe and discover its rustic charm, uncovering must-see sights in Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng. Admire all the country has to offer from its French colonial architecture, rich history, impressive temples and stunning natural landscapes – plus, catch a glimpse of the country's future by taking a high-speed railway journey.

- Be charmed by Luang Prabang
- Admire Kuang Si Waterfalls
- Enjoy two high-speed rail journeys
- Discover the laid-back capital of Vientiane
- Visit a responsible elephant sanctuary
- Witness the Buddhist ceremony of Takbat

TOUR MAP

LAOS: TOP TO TOE TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Laos e-visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with IATA

The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditures e.g., drinks, any optional excursions or shows if available, insurance of any kind, tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.

GO BEYOND TOURS:

Venture off the beaten track to explore fascinating destinations away from the tourist trail. You will discover the local culture in depth and see sights rarely witnessed by other travellers. These tours take you away from the comforts of home but will reward you with the experiences of a lifetime. These tours include:

- Walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

PHYSICAL LEVEL 2:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Laos: Top to Toe' is rated as a **physical level 2** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it is more about spending time on your feet rather than covering large distances. You will be getting on and off coaches and boats and walking around the sights, often including steps, plus occasional longer walks.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time, often on uneven surfaces.
- You will be required to get on and off small boats without assistance.

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

If you require any more information about the pace of our tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 14 days in duration including international flights or 12 days in duration based on 'Land Only'.

Travellers booked on a 'Land Only' package, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Vientiane and end the tour on Day 13 in Bangkok. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

We intend to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours, or as dictated by local conditions. In these circumstances, we will endeavour to make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2: **Fly overnight to Vientiane** Meals: D

Fly overnight to Vientiane, Laos' laidback capital, where you will be met at the airport in the arrivals hall by your Local Guide or National Escort. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer to your hotel and check into your room, or store any luggage if arriving before check-in time. Depending on your time of arrival, the rest of the day is yours to start soaking up the local culture.

Please note *– Early check in / any additional nights are not included but can be arranged by speaking to our reservations team.*

Destination Information

Vientiane – Vientiane, Laos' laid-back capital, mixes French colonial architecture with Buddhist temples such as the golden, 16th-century Pha That Luang, a national symbol. Along broad boulevards and tree-lined streets are notable shrines including Wat Si Saket, which features thousands of Buddha images, and Wat Si Muang, built on a Hindu shrine. Many bakeries, cafés and villas seem straight out of 19th-century Paris.

Day 3: **Discover Vientiane** Meals: B, L, D

This relaxed little city lies nestled in a languid bend of the Mekong River, close to the Thai border. See the Patuxai Victory Monument, dedicated to those who fought for freedom from French rule, and visit the city's main temples, including Wat Si Saket and Wat Phra Keo. This afternoon, visit a Buddha Park unlike anything else in Laos. Founded by a shamanic priest some 60 years ago, it contains over 200 enormous and eccentric statues of gods, demons and animals from Buddhist and Hindu faith.

Destination Information

Wat Si Saket – Wat Si Saket is a Buddhist wat built in 1818 on the order of King Anouvong (Sethathirath V.) Wat Si Saket was built in the 'Siamese style' of architecture, with a surrounding terrace and an ornate five-tiered roof, rather than in the Lao style. This may have kept it safe, since the armies of Siam that sacked Vientiane following Anouvong's rebellion in 1827 used the compound as their headquarters and lodging. Wat Si Saket features a cloister wall with more than 2,000 ceramic and silver Buddha images.

Buddha Park – Buddha Park, also known as Xieng Khuan is a sculpture park located 25km southeast of Vientiane. The park is the folly of Luang Pu Bunleua Sulilat, a monk, shaman and mystic of Hinduism and Buddhism. Untrained in sculpture, Sulilat and his students created more than 200 cement statues filled with cryptic symbols of horror and fantasy. Keep your eye out for the skeleton thin Buddhas, a giant pumpkin with a demon head, a gigantic 40m long reclining Buddha, or Shiva waving his menacing eight arms of swords.

Patuxai Victory Monument – Patuxai means Victory Gate or Gate of Triumph, and is a war monument in the centre of Vientiane. It was built between 1957 and 1968. The Patuxai is dedicated to those who fought in the struggle for independence from France.

Day 4: **Vientiane - Vang Vieng** Meals: B, L, D

Today, you will experience a high-speed train journey from Vientiane to Vang Vieng (approximately 45 minutes). This comfortable modern train offers a surprising contrast in an otherwise beautifully rustic country. Upon arrival in Vang Vieng, transfer to your hotel and enjoy time at leisure before dinner.

Destination Information

Vang Vieng – A town in Vientiane Province just over 100 miles north of the capital. The town lies on the Nam Song River. The most notable feature of the area is the karst hill landscape surrounding the town.

Day 5: **Vang Vieng** Meals: B, L, D

Explore Vang Vieng's beautiful countryside, venturing through some of the many hillside caves that belong here. Enjoy a leisurely walk strolling along the Nam Song River. The afternoon is at leisure.

Destination Information

Pou Kham Cave – Accessed via a small entrance, this is a remarkably large cave once inside, where a reclining Buddha statue welcomes visitors to a place once serving as home to bats, gibbons, monkeys, and antelopes. Its name, meaning 'Golden Crab', takes its name from the crab-shaped rock formations inside.

Day 6: **Luang Prabang & Kuang Si Waterfall** Meals: B, L, D

This morning, hop on the high-speed railway to Luang Prabang. The journey will whisk you north to Luang Prabang in just over an hour. On arrival, enjoy an introductory tour of this former capital. Visit the country's most famous temple, the gold-covered Wat Xieng Thong, with its beautiful Tree of Life mosaic, and the neighbouring Wat Visoun. Visit the beautiful Royal Palace, preserved as a museum, and learn about the republic's former royal family. Afterwards, head out of the city to visit Kuang Si Waterfall, with its beautiful cascading waters. The water here is so turquo ise that it feels almost ethereal. Enjoy time here to relax under the shady trees, paddle at the waters' edge, or even bathe in the beautiful pools.

It is possible to take a swim in the river near the falls. If you wish to do this, please remember to bring along your swimsuit and a towel. Changing rooms are available on site.

Destination Information

Luang Prabang - The capital of Luang Prabang Province in northern Laos, lies in a valley at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers. It's known for its many Buddhist temples, including the gilded Wat Xieng Thong, dating to the 16th century, and Wat Mai, once the residence of the head of Laotian Buddhism.

Kuang Si Waterfalls - A three-tier waterfall approximately 29 kilometres south of Luang Prabang. The falls begin in shallow pools atop a steep hillside. These lead to the main fall with a 60 metre cascade. Water collects in numerous turquoise blue pools as it flows downstream. The many cascades that result are typical of travertine waterfalls. There are walkways and bridges for your enjoyment.

Day 7: **Morning Alms & Pak Ou Caves** Meals: B, L, D

Rise early to witness the Buddhist ceremony of Takbat, when the monks of Luang Prabang collect alms from the locals.

You will then visit a small art studio to experience the local craft of Saa paper making, using pulp and colourful flowers, before boarding a boat to cruise the mighty Mekong up to the sacred caves of Pak Ou, known for the hundreds of miniature Buddha sculptures that reside within. Return to Luang Prabang in the afternoon.

Destination Information

Pak Ou Caves - Tucked into limestone cliffs along the Mekong River, the Pak Ou Caves are a spiritual sanctuary filled with thousands of Buddha statues. Just a short boat ride from Luang Prabang, these ancient caves offer a unique glimpse into Laos' religious heritage.

Day 8: **Uxo Visitor Centre & Elephant Sanctuary** Meals: B, L, D

Head to Elephant Village, a responsible sanctuary that has been caring for rescued elephants since 2001. Meet these majestic creatures, learn how their mahouts communicate with them, and tour the sanctuary's elephant hospital and museum. Ride a Lao long boat to the Tad Sae waterfall and relax or swim before lunch.

Later, visit the UXO Visitor Centre, where you'll learn about the valuable work this organisation is doing to clear rural areas of unexploded wartime bombs from the 1960s – 1970s.

Destination Information

UXO Visitor Centre – Learn about the history of Laos and its devistating past of the Secret War. See the real-life 'bombies' on display, many of which remain in the earth throughout the country, and read about their impact along with moving stories from survivors.

Day 9: **Luang Prabang – Don Khong** Meals: B, L, D

Fly 1 hour and 45 minutes to Pakse. On arrival, drive to Champassak to explore the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Wat Phou, a ruined Khmer temple complex set in the beautiful landscapes of Mount Phu Kao. Drive to Khong Island, the largest island on the laidback Si Phan Don archipelago in the Mekong River, and your home for the next two nights.

Destination Information

Pakse – The gateway to southern Laos, sits at the confluence of the Mekong River and the Se Don (Don River). The city retains fewer colonial-era buildings remain, but do look for the grandiose, Franco-Chinese-style Chinese Society building in the centre of town.

Wat Phou - A ruined Khmer Hindu temple complex in southern Laos. It is located at the base of mount Phu Kao, some 6 km from the Mekong River in Champassak province. There was a temple on the site as early as the 5th century, but the surviving structures date from the 11th to 13th centuries. The temple has a unique structure, in which the elements lead to a shrine where a linga dedicated to Lord Shiva was bathed in water from a mountain spring. The site later became a centre of Theravada Buddhist worship.

Day 10: **Rivers & Waterfalls** Meals: B, L, D

Around Si Phan Don, meaning '4000 Islands' the pace of life is slow and easy and the river views are beautiful. See the magnificent Khone Phapheng Waterfall, Southeast Asia's largest by volume. Visit Khone Island by speedboat to discover its French colonial buildings and see Liphi Waterfall, nicknamed the Devil's Corridor. Return to the hotel, where any time before dinner is at leisure.

Destination Information

Khone Phapheng Waterfall - The largest in Southeast Asia and the main reason the Mekong is not fully navigable into China. The fall is characterised by thousands of islands and countless waterways, giving the area its name Si Phan Don or 'The 4,000 islands'.

Liphi Waterfalls - A roaring collection of powerful falls spilling down at odd angles along a branch of the characteristically coffee-coloured Mekong River.

Day 11: **Bolaven Plateau – Pakse** Meals: B, L, D

This morning you will spend around driving 2 hours to Pakse, stopping en route to admire Tad Yuang and Tad Fane waterfalls. Continue up onto the Bolaven Plateau to pay a visit to a coffee plantation and hear about the process of planting, harvesting and roasting the beans. This evening, enjoy dinner in Pakse.

Destination Information

Tad Fane – A set of twin 120 meter-high waterfalls formed by the merging waters of the Champy and Pak Koot rivers. These impressive falls are situated on the edge of Dong Hua Sao protected wildlife area, 38 kilometers from Pakse

Bolaven Plateau – Located in an ancient volcano that erupted millions of years ago, the area spans 50km of southern Laos most vegetated area. From an altitude of 800 and 1350m it is green all year round and cooler than the rest of Laos and Thailand. Surrounding the plateau there are a number of protected national parks, dramatic waterfalls, remote hill tribes, dense jungle and a taste of some of the world's best coffee beans.

Day 12: **Flight to Bangkok** Meals: B, D

Today you will be transferred across the border to Ubon Ratchathani in Thailand, from where you will fly to Bangkok (flight time approx. 1 hour 15 minutes). Upon arrival, you will be transferred to your hotel for check in. Enjoy your farewell dinner at your hotel this evening.

Destination Information

Bangkok - Thailand's capital, is a large city known for ornate shrines and vibrant street life. The boat-filled Chao Phraya River feeds its network of canals, flowing past the Rattanakosin royal district, home to opulent Grand Palace and its sacred Wat Phra Kaew Temple. Nearby is Wat Pho Temple with an enormous reclining Buddha and, on the opposite shore, Wat Arun Temple with its steep steps and Khmer-style spire.

Days 13-14: **Depart Bangkok, Thailand** Meals: B

According to your flight time, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home today, arriving the following day. Any time before your flight is at leisure.

Please note *– Late check out / any additional nights are not included but can be arranged by speaking to our reservations team.*

TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Laos: New Zealand passport holders require a visa to enter Laos. For Wendy Wu Tours group tours, the cost of the e-Visa is included. An online immigration arrival form must be completed before entry – details will be provided in your final documentation.

Thailand: New Zealand passport holders can currently enter Thailand for tourism purposes without a visa for stays of up to 30 days. An online Thailand Digital Arrival Card must be completed before entry – details will be provided in your final documentation.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

TRANSPORT:

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are typically used on our group tours for city sightseeing, countryside excursions, and longer transfers. However, in Laos – where roads are often narrow, steep, or poorly maintained – smaller vans or minibuses are frequently required. Depending on group size, in areas where large coaches cannot operate, the group may be split into separate vehicles. While roads across Southeast Asia have generally improved in recent years, many routes in Laos remain unpaved, and traffic or seasonal weather conditions can significantly extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, any timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and Southeast Asia. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort or Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

EATING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

Southeast Asia is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in many local dishes. Whilst Southeast Asian food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

When dining in Southeast Asia, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetizers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it is appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. Usually, chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Southeast Asia is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

SOUVENIRS:

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrate a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

Although Southeast Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in New Zealand. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in New Zealand; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guides.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS:

If you are travelling within the below Laos Public Holidays, please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open but may be crowded. In Laos: International Women's Day - 8th March, Laos New Year Holiday 14th – 16th April.

GROUP SIZE:

Our groups will be accompanied by a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides, instead of a National Escort.

LUGGAGE:

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 5kg. It is essential that your luggage is lockable.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Southeast Asia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy, but we do recognise that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour, we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

Wendy Wu does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you. Safe travel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice. If a visa is required, our Visa Department will be in touch with the paperwork and next steps. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: October 2026