
10 DAY LUXURY UPPER MEKONG JOURNEY THROUGH LAOS

Trip Code: TWHLL10D

Duration: 11

Destination: Laos

Travel Dates: 2021/2022

DAY 1 Vientiane – Mid-River (Brunch, L, D)

In the early morning, we welcome our guests directly at the ship docked at the pier in Vientiane (not far from the city centre - time to be advised). Our team assists with your check-in and takes care of your luggage, which we bring directly to your room. Upon check-in, get acquainted with the ship and settle in your cabin as we start our journey. We depart from Vientiane on a wonderful slow journey to explore the Laotian upper Mekong.

Today is a full sailing day and you can let your mind wander while we travel slowly through the hinterland countryside. A wonderful brunch is available during the late morning, and over noontime and you can dine alfresco on the terrace deck or inside the lounge as your preference.

In the afternoon, our local expert guide presents a lecture on the history of Lao royalty with a focus on King Anouvong – this vessel’s namesake. Until we reach our first overnight stop, just relax in your room or in our comfortable public lounge and bar area. You may like to opt for a wellness treatment in our tucked away spa area.

Dinner is served in the ship’s elegant De-Lagree Dining Hall tonight. Afterwards, while some time away in the lounge or join the cinema under the stars on the open terrace deck.

DAY 2 Mid-River – Mid-River (B,L,D)

Wake up early to catch your first sunrise in Laos on the Mekong River. Early birds are welcome to join our daily morning exercise on the terrace deck (Tai Chi or Yoga). We think there is no better backdrop than the stunning river scenery to do some revitalizing morning exercise to start the day. We offer this wonderful and energetic open-air activity daily around sunrise.

After some hours, we stop at Phalat village, a small hamlet which looks over the Mekong, right at Thailand. By local means of transportation, “Tok Tok”, we drive to a nearby chopstick factory. Have you ever wondered how chopsticks become perfectly round and all have the same dimensions? Here you will learn the answers to these questions, and besides, it is interesting to get some look behind the scenes of a local factory.

The ship travels along the Thai-Lao border, something you are reminded of by the large Buddha greeting us from the opposite shore. After lunch on board, the ship sails through an area where the Mekong is very calm and shallow with many small sandy islands along its shoreline. The ideal area to explore the river by kayak

on your own within this active river outing.

We moor this evening at a sandbank in the middle of Laos allowing for the opportunity to treat you with a culinary event. Leave the ship to set foot on one of this deserted islands surrounded by the river. Enjoy an aperitivo during sun set as our team get ready for an unforgettable long-table dining, festively set up mid-river in the middle of nowhere. Afterwards you may like to continue enjoying the outdoors with our open-air cinema on the terrace deck where we screen a popular classic movie.

DAY 3 Mid-River – Mid-River (B,L,D)

The morning hours are free as the ship meanders upstream, giving you time to observe the life on and off the shores. We shortly pass then Pak Lay on the west bank. To the west of Pak Lay lies actually the Nam Phouy National Biodiversity Conservation Area (approx. 10-15 km from the river) , which is home to the largest wild population of elephants in Laos. Despite its small stature, Pak Lay is the last sizeable town with access to a national road along the Mekong River until we reach Luang Prabang two days and nearly 200 km later.

In the afternoon we stop at Don Saynhan village, from where we take a short local “Tuk Tuk” ride to visit the so-called Khao Cave. The cave has been home to a large bat population for many generations and supplies the village with very potent fertilizer. You can venture inside and discover the stalagmites and stalactites.

Back on board, we continue cruising until we reach a quiet area for our mooring for the night. When the weather is right we set up the dinner al-fresco style on the terrace to immerse in Laotian serendipity to the fullest (otherwise in our restaurant).

DAY 4 Mid-River – Mid-River (B,L,D)

The daybreak starts – if you like – with our daily sunrise Tai Chi/Yoga or just snooze a bit longer in your room as the sun gently wakes you up. Anouvong sails further north towards the nation’s famous hydroelectric power plant. During the morning hours you should join our interesting lecture about the role of energy in Laos’ economy and how the country is set to become Southeast Asia’s battery. After lunch we offer two different excursion or activities to chose from:

Set out in a long-tail boat and go on an exploratory and adventurous joyride upstream through the lush jungle along the remote, beautiful Nam Fuang River. We stop over at the shore to explain some facts about the interesting jungle life of the local tribes residing in this area. Alternatively, you may stroll through the small village of Khok Akha sitting right on the riverside plateau. The village’s population is mainly comprised of “Lao Loum” (which translates to “lowland Laotian”) whose main income is from planting rice, fishing and selling wood. The elevated location of the village allows for some great views on the meandering Mekong to take home some great photos.

Eventually, in the later afternoon, we arrive at the Xayaburi Hydroelectric Dam. The ship slowly passes through two ship locks, bringing the vessel up by about 30 meters. We also have the chance to discover this enormous structure during a short guided tour.

The vessel moors tonight in a quiet corner of the river some kilometers upstream from the dam.

DAY 5 Mid-River – Luang Prabang (B,L,D)

The morning is again entirely at your own pace. Enjoy a relaxed and extended breakfast as you look out over the beautiful Mekong River and while away the time on the terrace or in the lounge with a good book and coffee.

In the early afternoon, we set out for our today's sightseeing and pay a visit to an innovative and socially responsible Laos Buffalo Dairy Farm. Having almost no dairy products some decades ago, these milk based products have become more and more popular in recent years in Asia and also in Laos. It is interesting to see how various dairy products, such as cheeses, ice cream and yoghurt are made locally and distributed to local markets. We continue with a visit to a breath-taking sight in the area, the cascading Kuang Si waterfall with its rushing turquoise waters. It is a pleasure to hike leisurely through the surrounding natural park, and if you like you can also refresh yourself with a swim in the natural pools of water at the waterfall's base. So refreshing!

Back on board, the ship now sails towards Luang Prabang, where we should arrive in the early evening at the enchanting town of Luang Prabang in the early evening. After dinner, you may like to have a first look of the mesmerizing charm of this old town by a promenade through the small streets by yourself.

DAY 6 Luang Prabang (B,L,D)

This morning after breakfast we explore one of Southeast Asia's most unique and charming cities. We head out for a walking tour to discover ancient Luang Prabang (almost flat terrain, easy walking, tour duration about 3.5 hours including refreshment stops).

In celebration of the 20th UNESCO Anniversary in 2015, a book was published which highlights numberless aspects of this unique World Heritage Site. Our "off the beaten track" guided walking tour explores the old town and its peninsula where the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers meet. See Luang Prabang's distinct architecture and hear interesting stories about the houses and the places we pass. We stroll leisurely along the crisscross of small roads and streets lined with antique structures and mango trees. Some of the 100-year-old Lao-style buildings brim with a by-gone era atmosphere. One of the houses, the Lamache, was once home to noble families and later was the appointed ice cream supplier to the royal family. There is no better place to have a "Lao Tea Break" with Lao coffee or herbal tea, traditional snacks and artisan ice cream.

We return to the vessel for lunch and refreshments before we continue in the afternoon on our discovery of Luang Prabang. The afternoon is dedicated to a visit to the former Royal Palace – which is now the National Museum. The museum displays interesting local art and other exhibits which used to belong to the Lao royal family. After the museum tour, you have some time on your own to walk around the small city center further - or just pick one of the inviting street cafés and enjoy the laid back, or "sabai-sabai", atmosphere before we return to the ship.

In the early evening, you are warmly invited for a sunset aperitif on the terrace deck which is accompanied by a classical local dance or music performance. Afterwards, we leave the vessel for an evening out, dining in one of the city's fine venues for a distinctively Lao-style ambiance. After dinner, the rest of the evening can be spent exploring the night market or back on board.

DAY 7 Luang Prabang - Ban Khok Kham (B,L,D)

For the very early risers, we have a special treat today. Before the daylight basks the town in warm golden tones, the morning alms round, referred to as "Tak Bat" in Lao, is a spiritual Buddhist tradition where hundreds

of saffron-robed monks walk along the streets. After the alms giving, stroll through the morning market and watch as the town comes to life before returning to the ship in time for breakfast. This morning you meet Mr Francis Engelmann, who used to work for UNESCO on heritage preservation projects. Born in Paris in 1947, he has lived in Laos for over 20 years. Join his fantastic presentation, in which he shares some of his expertise of the country's rich cultural heritage and fascinating history.

After arriving at the confluence of the Mekong and one of its larger tributaries, we offer our adventurous guests an optional kayak tour on the Nam Ou River. Hop in a kayak and feel the waters of the river carrying you downstream with almost no effort while enjoying the natural beauty.

We then explore the famous Pak Ou Caves, located directly on the Mekong's rocky shore and opposite the mouth of the Ou River. There are two limestone grottoes which house approximately 4,000 sacred Buddhist statues and images ranging from mere centimetres up to 2m (7ft) in height. We arrive first at the lower, impressive cave and then head up the stairs (approx. 200 steps) to the smaller chamber.

At the cave, we meet a local "medicine man" of the nearby local village. We take a small trek leading into the jungle while our local expert explains various kinds of interesting things about the flora and the nature in this area. Arriving in the village we are able to see households with traditional weaving and the 'the art of local whisky distillery'. (Kindly note a basic fitness level is required for the approx. 45 min trek, relatively easy walking downhill with some short uphill terrain. Guests can also skip the hike and return to the ship moored in front of the Pak Ou caves.)

The journey takes us further up the river into the golden evening sun. If we arrive at daylight we have time to stroll through another gem of a local village. A mixture of Lao Loum and Lao Theun (lowland and midland Laotians) reside in this idyllic riverside settlement. The village does have a Buddhist temple – though many of these tribes and ethnics in the Golden Triangle are not religious and follow beliefs in ancestorship and nature.

Meanwhile our culinary team is in full preparation of a very special happening for tonight. On a nearby, very beautiful peaceful sandbank our chefs invite to a BBQ dinner. Some villagers join to entertain us with some classic traditional dance and music performance. Have a grand time together with newly made friends and soak in this truly unique atmosphere of dining on a remote little sandbank in the midst of Laos.

DAY 8 Ban Khok Kham – Ban Kok Aek (B,L,D)

As we cruise along in the morning, our local expert hosts a lecture with interesting insights and facts about Laotian culture of the diverse tribes living along the upper Mekong.

We arrive at a very rural and utmost charming village inhabited by Khmu people. The village also has a small primary school for the few kids residing here remotely with their families. We take a leisurely walk into the surrounding neighborhood of the village. In the simple bamboo huts built on stilts and scattered across rice fields the local people today still perform all work manually which basically consists of processing agricultural products.

Once back onboard the ship continues its slow meandering upriver. After lunch and in the afternoon we arrive at a secluded sandbank spot. The local ethnic Lao, Khmu and Hmong live in the tiny village of Kok Aek. These residents have committed themselves to the organic growth of vegetables, fruits, and herbs. At the riverside they have set up a little parcel of land as an organic garden, caringly maintained and enclosed by bamboo fences. Though these plots are unusable at certain times of the year due to flooding, the nutrient-rich Mekong irrigation

promises bountiful annual harvests. As we get to know the villagers proudly displaying their gardening achievements, be sure to sample a local specialty, kai paen, which is made of dried freshwater “seaweed” topped with sesame and vegetables - so wholesomely unique and yummy!

We stay overnight at this pleasant place. The village also has a little temple in which we can arrange an optional meditation session (limited availability). After taking in a bit of ‘Zen’, dinner is served in Anouvong’s elegant De-Lagree Dining Hall. Afterwards you may like to while some time away in the lounge or join the cinema under the stars on the open terrace deck. The movie named “Chang” (Laotian for “elephant”), was shot in this region in 1927 and was made by the same producer as the first King Kong movie. Enjoy your night’s sleep mid-river in the middle of nowhere.

DAY 9 Kok Aek – Pak Ngui (B,L,D)

Wake up early to catch the sun’s first rays on the river which is always a magical moment. Early birds are welcome to join the daily morning exercise on the terrace deck (Tai Chi or Yoga).

After breakfast and during our way to Pakbeng, our local expert guide hosts a lecture about the Laotian elephants and their cultural importance in the past and their current situation which have brought them to the brink of extinction. A good and interesting preparation as tomorrow we will meet these fascinating animals in real. Enjoy the rest of the morning and your lunchtime while we sail along over mid-day.

In the early afternoon, we arrive in the small town of Pakbeng. This riverside settlement is halfway between our embarkation at Huay Xai and Luang Prabang. Many locals also stop here when they travel or transport goods between these two “hubs” on the river. Opposite of the town – so to say on the port side of cruising direction – is the country’s most sustainably managed elephant sanctuary. If we arrive early enough, we may still see elephants freely walking along the shoreline and taking a morning bath. To expand your knowledge from our morning lecture about these majestic animals, we then visit the conservation sanctuary. All the elephants here used to work as logging elephants, and since they have ‘checked-in’ here, they have lived in peace and safety. One may ask why not let them live in the wild and enjoy the freedom of mother nature? After their time as working animals, they lack the ability to live and survive in the wild (there still exists very few wild elephants). The sanctuary is fully committed to the tenets of ecotourism and sustainability.

We cross the river and have a look at the town of Pakbeng and drive up to a lovely hill-top temple. The location allows for fantastic river views to the left and right of the zig-zagging Mekong river.

Back on board, we cruise for some more hours. Lay back and take in this absolutely amazing scenery or enjoy some downtime in our tucked away spa. We drop anchor at a protected area mid-river. Kick back with an aperitif on the open deck and get prepared for your last dinner on board. Our culinary team is pleased to spoil you with a gala and farewell dinner in al-fresco style on the terrace deck. Have a grand time together with newly made friends and soak in this truly unique atmosphere of sights and soothing sounds of nature.

DAY 10 Pak Ngui – Huay Xai (Brunch,L)

Enjoy your last sunrise aboard with a morning exercise again. This morning you can take all the time for a long and relaxed brunch (which we can serve to you also on the terrace deck) as we voyage along and towards the Thai-Lao border.

Pre-lunch, the ship passes at the junction with the Nam Tha River, one of the Mekong's major tributaries. The Nam Tha, which translates to "Green River", begins near the Chinese border, 325 km to the northeast, and ends at this crossing with the Mekong.

Kick back and enjoy these last quiet sailing hours as slowly the river scenery begins to open up bit. The river in this area is now wider, however our captain always has to watch out for rocks and stones or sandbanks in order to navigate safely - making the sailing an interesting one to observe from the open deck. After some hours the landscape and the river starts to change, becoming more mountainous and the river increasingly narrow.

We also offer a Lao cooking class to learn how to prepare some of the tasty and easy-to-make snacks and local dishes. The rest of the cruising time until we reach Huay Xai (approximately 15:00 o'clock) is at your own liking. Upon arrival and check-out, we assist you with your luggage and we transfer you to the Lao-Thao boarder. We also help you with the border crossing before bidding you farewell on the Thai side in front of the immigration building. End of our services.

DAY

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