
8 DAY LUXURY LAOS HERITAGE RIVER CRUISE

Trip Code: TWHLL8D

Duration: 9

Destination: Laos

Travel Dates: 2022

DAY 1 **Huay Xai – Pak Ngui (L,D)**

Heritage Line welcomes guests at the Thai immigration office in the morning (times to be advised). Our team assists you with all immigration procedures on both the Thai and Laos sides and we take care of your luggage, which you will find later in your room on board. After all formalities, we transfer you to the ship, which is moored at Huay Xai pier on the Laos riverside. Upon check-in, get acquainted with the ship and settle in your room as we start our journey.

Enjoy your first hours onboard as we sail from the Thai-Lao border southbound. The river in this area is mostly wide, 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.

Our first stop in the afternoon is Khon Teun, a relatively modern Laotian village showcasing various wooden sculptures and home to roughly 800 residents belonging to the Tai Lu ethnic minority. For a traditional Laotian greeting and to wish us a safe journey, the village elders welcome us with a time-honoured “Baci ceremony”. The villagers here practice long-held traditions and techniques of weaving handmade garments with distinguishing patterns. Making their living from it, the families here have passed down their weaving knowledge from generation to generation.

The village also has a lovely temple nearby in which we can arrange an optional meditation session (limited availability). Resident monks and novices (boys who typically pledge to adopt a monk’s lifestyle for at least a few months, but often much longer), are always eager to interact and socialize with visitors. After taking in a bit of ‘Zen’ the ship continues cruising to the overnight mooring spot. Our local expert guide hosts a lecture about Laotian elephants and their cultural importance in the past and the current situation which have brought them to the brink of extinction. A nice and interesting preparation, as tomorrow we will meet these fascinating creatures close up in an elephant sanctuary.

Dinner is served in Anouvong's elegant De-Lagree Dining Hall. Afterwards you may like to while away some time in the bar or join our cinema under the stars on the open terrace deck. The movie named “Chang” (Laos and Thai, for “elephant”), was shot in this region in 1927, by the same producer as the first King Kong movie. Enjoy your first night’s sleep mid-river at a seclude sandbank in the middle of nowhere.

DAY 2 **Pak Ngui - Ban Gaeng Hang Ngai (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.

After breakfast, 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 starboard 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 lecture the day before about these majestic animals, we then visit the conservation sanctuary. All the elephants here used to work as logging elephants, 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.

During lunchtime we continue our journey with stunning views of the shores from the comfort of the dining room. At a sandbank further down the river, the local ethnic Lao, Khmu and Hmong live in the tiny village of Kok Aek. At the riverside they have set up a little parcel of land as an organic garden, caringly maintained and enclosed by bamboo fences and growing organic vegetables, fruits, and herbs. 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, be sure to sample a local specialty, kai paen, which is made of dried freshwater “seaweed” topped with sesame and vegetables.

Back on board, as we cruise for some more hours, lay back and take in the absolutely amazing scenery or enjoy some pampering time in our tucked away spa. We drop anchor to overnight near another small and secluded village. Subject to our arrival time and daylight availability, we may explore this tiny village of just around 300 inhabitants which is bereft of electricity or any semblance of modernity, but for sure not of abounding charm and warm-heartedness of the villagers.

As we remain here at the sandbank overnight, kick back with an aperitif while being serenaded by some local villagers who have come onboard to perform on their ‘Khene’ – a handheld, ancient instrument made of bamboo and originating here in Laos. We end the day with a culinary highlight, as we dine tonight on the terrace deck, with the sights and soothing sounds of nature all around us.

DAY 3 Ban Gaeng Hang Ngai – Luang Prabang (B,L,D)

After breakfast, a morning lecture provides us with interesting insights and facts about Laotian culture relating to the diverse tribes living along the upper Mekong.

The rest of the morning is at your disposal as we sail through lush vegetation and past gently rolling verdant hills. After lunch prepare yourself for a quite unique activity to experience the calmly flowing lower Mekong from a different perspective. Hop in a kayak and paddle along on your own in total symbioses with the peacefully flowing stream. Feel the waters of the Mekong carrying you downstream with almost no effort, relax and enjoy the passing natural beauty and immerse yourself in this very special trip. You may like to paddle all the way to the famous caves of Pak Ou, which is our next stop and highlight to come (or return back on board).

We stop close to Pak Ou, and go ashore where we will meet the local “medicine man” who takes us on a jungle

trek explaining various interesting facts and astonishing features about the flora and the nature in this area. In the village we may one more time be able to observe local weaving, and find here as well ‘the art of local whisky distilling’. (Kindly note a basic fitness level is required for the approx. 45-minute trek, which is relatively easy walking but does involve some uphill terrain; guests may opt to stay on the ship to reach our next stop, the Pak Ou caves).

The trekking group reaches the caves via the “backdoor”. The famous Pak Ou Caves are 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 in size from mere centimeters up to 2m (7ft) in height. We arrive first at the upper cave and then take steps down (approx. 200 steps) to the lower, most impressive grotto.

Once back on board you can refresh yourself and lunch is served afterwards. From Pak Ou we have about three more hours to sail. During this time, we 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 and knows Luang Prabang like the back of his hand. Join his fantastic presentation, in which he shares some of his expertise on the country’s and Luang Prabang’s rich cultural heritage and fascinating history.

We arrive at the enchanting town of Luang Prabang in the early evening (approx. 18:00 o’clock). Dinner is served on board after our arrival. Afterwards, you may like to have a first taste of the mesmerizing charms of this old town on a stroll through the small streets on your own.

DAY 4 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 5 Luang Prabang - Khok Akha (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 for Lao people and dates back generations. It is lovingly and faithfully adhered to here in Luang Prabang especially. Wake up before dawn to witness a procession of hundreds of saffron-robed monks in the early morning light. After the alms giving, walk through the morning market and watch as the town comes to life before returning to the ship in time for breakfast. We say good-bye to Luang Prabang and continue our journey further downstream on the Mekong river.

In the morning, 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 the vessel, the cruise carries on towards the nation’s famous dam and hydroelectric power plant. Before we arrive at the dam, we offer an interesting lecture about the role of energy production in Laos’ economy and how the country is set to become the ‘battery’ of Southeast Asia. Eventually, we arrive at the Xayaburi Hydroelectric Dam. The ship slowly passes through two ship locks, bringing the vessel down by about 30 meters. We also have the chance to discover this enormous structure during a short guided tour.

After some additional sailing time into the evening, we moor near the southern side of the dam midstream at a sandbank. Enjoy some cocktails with the sand under your bare feet before heading to a lovely dinner on the terrace deck.

DAY 6 Khok Akha - Pak Lay (B,L,D)

After the morning exercise (Tai Chi or yoga on the terrace) and breakfast, we offer this morning two different excursion or activities to choose 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.

Setting sail, the shorelines have now become a bit rockier with some very narrow channels to navigate through. 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 keep cruising until we reach Pak Lay village, where we stop for the night. This evening after dinner our daily cinema is held open-air under the stars on the terrace deck with another classic movie on display.

DAY 7 **Pak Lay – Mid-River (B,L,D)**

Fortify yourself with a hardy breakfast for this morning’s exciting kayaking excursion. In this area, the Mekong is very calm and shallow with many small sandy islands along its shoreline, making it ideal to explore on your own for some time.

The ship then travels along the Thai-Lao border, something you are reminded of by the large Buddha greeting us from the opposite shore. After lunch we stop at Phalat village, a small hamlet which looks over the Mekong, in sight of Thailand. By local means of transportation again, “Tuk Tuk”, we trundle 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 always interesting to get a look behind the scenes of a local factory.

After Phalat, we make our way to one of the deserted sandbanks, where we moor for your final night. To end your journey with us on a high note, our kitchen team has prepared a culinary treat. Step off Anouvong onto the sandbank and savour a barbecue dinner in a wonderfully remote and romantic setting.

DAY 8 **Mid-River - Vientiane (B)**

Enjoy your last sunrise aboard with a morning Thai Chi or Yoga. Today you can take a long leisurely breakfast as we voyage towards Vientiane. During the morning time our local guide presents a lecture on the history of Lao royalty with a focus on King Anouvong – this vessel’s namesake.

Around midday we arrive in the Laos’ capital, Vientiane. Our team assists with your check-out and helps with your luggage. End of our service.

DAY

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