JOURNEY THE UPPER MEKONG
LAOS

LAOTIAN SERENDIPITY
HUAY XAI - VIENTIANE (DOWNSTREAM)
8 DAYS - 7 NIGHTS
Southeast Asia’s most sacred waterway. Known as the “Mae Nam Khong” to Laotians, or “The Mother of Water”, the upper Mekong slowly meanders through the unchanged local life and captivating riverscapes of charming Laos. It is this imposing river that the last ruler of the Kingdom of Vientiane, King Anouvong, would cross to fight for his realm’s independence against the oppressive Siam empire.
LAOTIAN SERENDIPITY
HUAY XAI - VIENTIANCE
8 DAYS - 7 NIGHTS

This longer cruise at a leisurely pace offers a blissful journey through beautiful Laos. Perfect to experience the unhurried riverine life with naturally stunning backdrops, paired with mesmerizing excursions and charming local rendezvous.

DAY ONE

Heritage Line welcomes our guests at the Thai immigration office in the morning hours (please see details in our Dis-/embarkation guide). Our team assists you with all immigration procedures on both the Thai and Laotian sides (the process of passing through immigration on both sides can take up to one hour). We take care of your luggage, which you may find later in your room on board. After all formalities, we transfer you to the vessel, which is moored at Huay Xai pier. Upon check-in, get acquainted with the ship and settle in your room as we start our downstream journey.

Our first stop today is Huay Palang village, home of the Khmu minority. The locals’ lifestyle here depends fully on the Mekong as a means of transportation and a primary food source. The village consists of approximately 85 families. Learn about the local art of weaving Bamboo mats, which you can try your hand at if you like. Local households also produce their own alcohol by distilling rice to make the famous Lao whisky. We are sure you are curious to understand all the steps of the production process.

As the sun sets over the Mekong River, we will hold a Baci Ceremony, held by the village elders in your honour for a traditional Laotian welcome.

After dinner, there is a famous Laotian “comedy” movie scheduled in our nightly “on-board cinema”. The movie, called “Chang” (Laotian for “elephant”), was shot not far away from our current location in 1927 and was made by the same producer as the first King Kong movie.

TODAY’S ROUTE
Huay Xai - Huay Palang

TODAY’S DINING
Lunch and dinner.

DAILY INSIGHT

Baci is a popular Laotian ceremony of spirit-calling practiced at many special occasions in life: weddings, funerals, birth, departure or return of a trip, illness, birthday celebration of an ancestor; etc. Lao beliefs state that a human being has thirty-two organs, each with a corresponding guardian spirit (khuan). The Baci ceremony calls back any lost or roaming spirits, bringing harmony back to the soul as well as good luck and prosperity.
Early birds are welcome to join our daily morning exercise on the terrace deck (Tai Chi or Yoga is offered every day around sunrise hours). There is no better backdrop than the stunning Mekong scenery to do some morning exercises to start the day.

As we cruise along in the morning, our local expert hosts a lecture about Asian elephants, particularly the Laotian species, their cultural importance in the past and the current threats which have brought them to the brink of extinction.

After lunchtime, 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 upper Mekong. We pass by the local market scene and visit a beautiful hill-top temple with amazing views of the gently flowing Mekong below.

We then have the chance to expand on the knowledge from our morning lecture when visiting an elephant preservation sanctuary. The elephants here used to work as logging elephants and can live in peace and safety here as they now lack the ability to survive in the wild. The sanctuary is designed under the aspects of ecotourism, and its management looks strongly after sustainable tourism while supporting this threatened species.

Back on board, the journey continues for a few more hours – lay back and enjoy the scenic views as the Anouvong proceeds towards its next destination. At a secluded sandbank, the local ethnic Lao, Khmou and Hmong residents welcome us to the tiny village of Kop Aek. Dive into centuries-old traditions and practices as you immerse yourself in a unique Laotian experience. As we remain at the sandbank into early evening, kick back with an aperitif accompanied by a classical dance performance by the local people.

After the show we have another highlight in store for our guests – a barbecue dinner on the terrace deck as we take in the sights and soothing sounds of nature.
AFTER BREAKFAST, OUR MORNING LECTURE PROVIDES YOU WITH INTERESTING INSIGHTS AND FACTS ABOUT LAOTIAN CULTURE OF THE DIVERSE TRIBES LIVING ALONG THE UPPER MEKONG. IN ADDITION TO THE LECTURE, YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN AN AUTHENTIC LAOTIAN COOKING CLASS TO LEARN HOW TO PREPARE SOME OF THE DELIGHTFUL AND EASY-TO-MAKE LOCAL FOODS. THE REST OF THE MORNING IS AT YOUR DISPOSAL AS WE SAIL THROUGH LUSH VEGETATION AND GENTLY ROLLING VERDANT HILLS.

IN THE AFTERNOON, WE ARRIVE AT ANOTHER LITTLE VILLAGE NAMED MUANG KEO. IN THIS VILLAGE, YOU CAN OBSERVE LOCAL WEAVERS HONOURING THEIR TIMEWORN TRADITIONAL CRAFTS. FROM MUANG KEO, WE TAKE A SHORT AND EASY TREK TO THE FAMOUS PAK OU CAVES, LOCATED DIRECTLY ON THE MEKONG’S ROCKY SHORE AND OPPOSITE THE MOUTH OF THE OU RIVER. THERE ARE TWO SPACIOUS LIMESTONE GROTTOES WHICH HOUSE APPROXIMATELY 4,000 SACRED BUDDHIST STATUES AND IMAGES RANGING FROM MERE CENTIMETRES UP TO 2M (7FT) IN HEIGHT.

ONCE BACK TO THE SHIP WE RECHARGE FOR A LITTLE MORE ADVENTUROUS ACTION LATER IN THE AFTERNOON (OPTIONAL ACTIVITY): TAKE A KAYAK AND DISCOVER THE PEACEFUL, FLOWING RIVER ON YOUR OWN AND OBSERVE LIFE ON THE SHORES FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

GET REFRESHED BEFORE THE EVENING, WHERE WE GET TO MEET MR FRANCIS ENGELMANN, A WRITER AND RETIRED CONSULTANT TO UNESCO ON HERITAGE PRESERVATION PROJECTS SINCE 1994. BORN IN PARIS IN 1947, MR. ENGELMANN HAS LIVED IN LAOS FOR OVER 20 YEARS AND KNOWS ITS MANY FACETS LIKE THE BACK OF HIS HAND. IN HIS PRESENTATION, MR. ENGELMANN SHARES SOME OF HIS EXPERTISE ON THE COUNTRY’S RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE, THE TURBULENT HISTORY AND THE DAY-TO-DAY LIFE OF LAO PEOPLE.

THE SHIP CONTINUES TO SAIL TOWARDS LUANG PRABANG, WHERE WE SHOULD ARRIVE IN THE EARLY EVENING. DINNER IS SERVED ON BOARD UPON OUR ARRIVAL, AND YOU CAN HAVE A FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE OLD TOWN THIS EVENING. EXPLORE THIS PICTURESQUE TOWN, WHICH IS IN WALKING DISTANCE FROM THE PIER, AND LET THE COLONIAL DAYS COME BACK TO LIFE BEFORE YOUR MIND’S EYE.
Today we start the day with a wonderful exploration in one of Southeast Asia’s most unique cities. After breakfast, we head out directly from the ship for a walking tour to discover ancient Luang Prabang.

In celebration of the 20th UNESCO Anniversary in 2015, a book was published which highlights myriad aspects of this charming World Heritage Site. We set out on foot for an “off the beaten track” guided walking tour to explore the old town with its peninsula where the Mekong and Nam Khan River meet. See Luang Prabang’s distinct architecture, hear interesting stories about the houses and the places you pass. We stroll along the main road and stop at a wonderful antique place lined with mango trees. The 100-year-old Lao-style building brims with an old-world atmosphere. One of the houses, the Lamache, was once home to noble families and later 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 or artisan ice cream.

We return to the vessel for lunch and refreshments before our afternoon discovery of Luang Prabang continues with a visit of the 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 explore the city centre further, or you may just sit in a street café enjoying the “sabai-sabai” atmosphere before returning to the ship.

In the early evening, we invite you for a sunset aperitif on the terrace deck which is accompanied by a classical local dance performance. Afterwards, we leave the vessel this evening for an outside dinner in one of the city’s nicest venues to enjoy delicious food in a wonderful Lao-styled ambiance.

The rest of the evening can be spent exploring the night market of Luang Prabang or back on the boat.
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 living Buddhist tradition for the people of Luang Prabang and dates back generations. Wake up before dawn to witness a procession of hundreds of saffron-robed monks in the early morning light, a truly spiritual experience! After the almsgiving, walk along 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 sail further downstream to Ban Muang Kai village to set out for today’s sightseeing.

First, we visit the innovative and socially responsible Laos Buffalo Dairy Farm. Because dairy is a non-existent industry in Laos, most locals have never seen a buffalo being milked. Seizing on an under-utilized opportunity, the owners of the dairy farm rent pregnant female buffalo from poor villagers six months as a time, where they milk, care, feed, and vaccinate both the mother and her calf before returning them to their owners. The milk is then used for a plethora of dairy products, including an assortment of cheeses, ice cream, and yoghurt.

We continue to explore one of the most breathtaking sights in the area, the cascading Kuang Si Waterfall with its turquoise waters. It is a mere pleasure to hike leisurely through the natural park, and if you like you can refresh yourself with a swim in the pools (please bring your swimwear).

Back on the vessel, the cruise carries on towards the nation’s famous hydroelectric power plant. Before we arrive at the dam, 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. Eventually, we arrive at the Xayaburi Hydroelectric Dam. The ship slowly passes through two ship locks, bringing the vessel down by about 30 meters. Here we have the chance to discover this enormous structure during a guided tour.

Tonight, we moor at a sandbank near the Khok Akha village on the southern side of the dam.

First, we visit the innovative and socially responsible Laos Buffalo Dairy Farm. Because dairy is a non-existent industry in Laos, most locals have never seen a buffalo being milked. Seizing on an under-utilized opportunity, the owners of the dairy farm rent pregnant female buffalo from poor villagers six months as a time, where they milk, care, feed, and vaccinate both the mother and her calf before returning them to their owners. The milk is then used for a plethora of dairy products, including an assortment of cheeses, ice cream, and yoghurt.

We continue to explore one of the most breathtaking sights in the area, the cascading Kuang Si Waterfall with its turquoise waters. It is a mere pleasure to hike leisurely through the natural park, and if you like you can refresh yourself with a swim in the pools (please bring your swimwear).

Back on the vessel, the cruise carries on towards the nation’s famous hydroelectric power plant. Before we arrive at the dam, 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. Eventually, we arrive at the Xayaburi Hydroelectric Dam. The ship slowly passes through two ship locks, bringing the vessel down by about 30 meters. Here we have the chance to discover this enormous structure during a guided tour.

Tonight, we moor at a sandbank near the Khok Akha village on the southern side of the dam.
After your optional morning exercise activity and breakfast, you have two excursions to choose from this morning:

You can set out in a small long-tail boat and go on an exploratory joyride upstream through the lush jungle along the remote, beautiful Nam Fuang River. After about 20-30 minutes, we stop over at the shore to explain the interesting jungle life of the local tribes residing in this area.

Alternatively, you can opt for a stroll through Khok Akha village with its very local charm. The village’s population of 350 is mainly comprised of “Lao Loum” (which translates to “lowland Laotian”) whose main income is from planting rice, fishing and selling wood. The village also sits a bit elevated on a riverside plateau so you might need some good footwear and a basic level of fitness, but the views and the opportunity to take home some wonderful photos are worth it.

Setting sail once again, 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, where we take a short local “Tok Tok” 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 may like to venture inside and discover the remarkable stalagmites and stalactites.

Back on board, we keep cruising until we reach Pak Lay village, where we stop for the night.
DAY SEVEN

Strengthen yourself during 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.

When we set sail again, we travel along the Thai-Lao border, something you are reminded of by the large Buddha greeting us from the opposite shore.

Our next stop after lunch is Phalat village, a small hamlet which looks over the Mekong, right at Thailand. By the 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.

After Phalat, we slowly 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, we have prepared a culinary treat for dinner. Step off Anouvong onto the secluded sandbank and savour a barbecue dinner in a romantic setting.

While chopsticks have been and are called by many different names in Asia, such as “kuai-zi” in China and “hashi” in Japan, the word chopsticks is likely derived from Chinese pidgin English “chap chap”, meaning “quickly”. Therefore, chopsticks mean “quick sticks”, perhaps an apt description given by the earliest western explorers as they first experienced people nimbly eating with chopsticks. The earliest written English use of the word “chopsticks” is from explorer William Dampier’s book “Voyages and Descriptions”, published in 1699.
The last sunrise aboard paired with a morning Thai Chi/Yoga is the perfect way to commence your final day. Enjoy the sumptuous breakfast buffet afterwards as we voyage towards Vientiane. As we sail past beautiful landscapes and remote villages, our local expert presents a lecture on the history of Lao royalty with a focus on King Anouvong – this vessel’s namesake.

Just before noon, we arrive in Laos’ capital Vientiane. Here, your journey with us ends and after assisting you with check-out and your luggage, our staff bids you a fond farewell and wishes you a wonderful journey onwards.

**DAY EIGHT**

This longer cruise at a leisurely pace offers a blissful journey through beautiful Laos. Perfect to experience the unhurried riverine life with naturally stunning backdrops, paired with mesmerizing excursions and charming local rendez-vous.

**TODAY’S ROUTE**

Sandbank - Vientiane

**TODAY’S DINING**

Breakfast.

**DAILY INSIGHT**

The etymology of Vientiane’s name originates from different meanings. Historically, Vientiane’s name meant “City of Sandalwood”, but nowadays the capital of Laos is better known as the “City of the Moon”. The association of the moon and sandalwood comes from the fact that these two words are both spelled and pronounced identically: “tiane”, and “Vien”, meaning “city”.

All mentioned times are approximate. Although it is our intention to operate the proposed itinerary as outlined above, we cannot be held responsible for any changes of the program and activities that might be necessary due to operational factors.