



The Mekong Pearl

Thailand and Laos Dental Tour and Cruise 10 - 22 March 2025



Level 2
GENTLE





Elephant and monks in Laos

250 years after the first European settlers explored this waterway, a cruise up the Mekong River remains almost as exciting today – if much more luxurious. Parts of the river are as tranquil and wild as they were two centuries ago and much of the onshore culture remains intact.

Journey from Bangkok into the mountainous north of Thailand before embarking on a cruise through the languid lands of the Mekong. Visit destinations that provide a rich experience for the visitor, with ancient and complex histories, exquisite art, culture and natural beauty, and some of the world's finest cuisine.

Cruise on the lovely boutique riverboat, Mekong Pearl, through Laos. The elegant decor of this vessel reflects the lands it travels through, making this a comfortable and stylish way to experience the Mekong.

Perhaps the greatest treasure of the region, however, is its people with their warmth, culture and welcoming smiles. Learn about the culture, history and contemporary society of this area through meetings and specialist visits.

There will be a range of professional visits and talks throughout, making this tour and cruise eligible for CPD.

Tour Leader

Professor Phillip Dowell and Dr Sheila Stork have led successful tours to China, India, Argentina, Ecuador, Vietnam, Southern Africa, Sri Lanka, Japan and on cruises in the Mediterranean and river cruises along the Rhine, Danube and Rhone.

Phillip is a specialist periodontist and past president of the British Society of Periodontology.

Phillip Dowell has lectured both nationally and internationally and is the author of many publications. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Surrey and President of the European Section as well as the International President of the International College of Dentists (ICD). Phillip is currently Director of Development of the ICD and chair of its Global Visionary Fund (GVF).



Dr Sheila Stork (Dowell) is recently retired, having worked as an independent consultant occupational physician following a successful career with the UK Civil Aviation Authority and National Air Traffic Services as Chief Medical Officer. She is a Fellow of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine and a specialist in aviation medicine. She was Medical Adviser to the British Airline Pilots Association and a member of several professional bodies, including the Royal Aeronautical Society.



An Akha woman in Laos

Itinerary: 10 - 22 March 2025

B = Breakfast **L** = Lunch **D** = Dinner

2 nights Bangkok – 2 nights Chiang Rai – 5 nights Upper Mekong Cruise
- 2 nights Luang Prabang – 1 night Vientiane



Day 1: Bangkok, Thailand (Mon, 10 March) **D**

Pm: Briefing at the Riva Surya Hotel.

Eve: Welcome dinner cruise on ChaoPhraya River.

Day 2: Bangkok (Tues, 11 March) **B D**

Am: Visit Bangkok Dental Hospital. Partner programme - visit a local market and take part in a food tour.

Pm: Explore two of Bangkok's most famous temples, Wat Traimit and Wat Pho. Wat Traimit houses a 3m (10ft) tall, 5.5-tonne, solid-gold Buddha image cast sometime in the 13th century. Continue to Wat Pho, home to the famous 45m (148ft) Reclining Buddha; also, the spiritual home of traditional Thai massage and the largest and oldest wat in Bangkok. Walk between the two temples via a flower market and China Town.

Eve: Local dinner followed by rooftop cocktails.

Day 3: Bangkok / Chiang Rai **B D**

(Wed 12, March)

Am: Fly to Chiang Rai and transfer to the hotel.

Pm: Explore Chiang Rai by rickshaw tour. Pass by the King Mengrai Monument, commemorating the founding of Chiang Rai in 1262. See the golden clock tower before continuing to the White Pagoda and the Blue Pagoda and the famous local market of Chiang Rai.

Eve: Dinner at the night market with free time to explore.

Day 4: Chiang Rai (Thurs, 13 March) **B D**

Am: Visit Doi Tung (The Flag Mountain) and Mae Fah Luang Park, the beautiful botanical gardens which feature year-round flowers.

Pm: Local dental visit or at leisure. Optional cookery class.

Day 5: Chiang Rai / The Golden Triangle / Cruise (Fri, 14 March) **B D**

Am: Drive into the Golden Triangle. Visit the Golden Buddha of Sop Ruak and the Hall of Opium. This fascinating museum provides insight into the history and politics of the opium trade and the health impact of opium use.

Pm: Board the Mekong Pearl and settle into your comfortable cabin for a six-day cruise. In the evening enjoy the spacious decks and the onboard lounge.

Eve: Welcome cruise reception for dinner.

Day 6: Mekong Cruise (Sat, 15 March) **B L D**

Am: Visit the Laotian town of Huay Xay on the Laotian-Thai border and enter Laos amidst stunning scenery, continuing to the small village of Pak Tha. Take a long-tail boat excursion on the Namtha River to a local village of the Khmu minority and visit a small village school. Continue cruising downstream and anchor on the riverbank.

Day 7: Mekong Cruise (Sun, 16 March) B L D

Am: Dental CPD talks on board. Cruise through a densely populated region, accessible only by water. These are some of the Mekong River's most beautiful landscapes; hills covered with tropical vegetation, dramatic rock formations, with a mixture of fast currents and more placid stretches of river. On the way, you will visit a remote village.

Day 8: Mekong Cruise (Mon, 17 March) B L D

Am: Dental CPD talks.

Pm: Stop at a small riverside village for a visit to the famous Pak Ou Caves, with thousands of small Buddha statues inside the caverns. There is the option to take a short jungle trek through the forest to a local village to see their local distillery. Alternatively, visit the village by boat. Elephants can be seen nearby.

Eve: Enjoy a BBQ dinner in a beautiful riverside location.

Day 9: Mekong Cruise / Luang Prabang, Laos (Tues, 18 March) B L

Am: Reach Luang Prabang, the former royal capital of Laos, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Take part in a city walk to the famous Wat Xieng Thong Temple with its golden tiled roofs. Explore other highlights during this full day excursion through Luang Prabang.

Eve: Walk up Phou Si hill, which offers a spectacular view over the Mekong as well as the Khan River and the surrounding mountains. Enjoy strolling along the Mekong promenade or visit the colorful night market of the local Hmong minority. As Luang Prabang offers many opportunities for fine dining, tonight you are free to choose from the numerous offerings in town or along the Mekong River. We will provide a list of restaurants.

Ho Phra Bang temple and night market in Luang Prabang



Itinerary: 10 - 22 March 2025

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Day 10: Mekong Cruise / Luang Prabang **B D** (Wed, 19 March)

- Am:** Option to witness the traditional giving of alms in the streets of Luang Prabang and explore the morning market. Disembark the Mekong Pearl after breakfast. Visit the UXO Lao Visitors Centre. Laos is the most heavily bombed nation, per capita, in history. Between 1964-1973 the US dropped more bombs on Laos than during WWII. The centre details the work being done to clean up the bombs and survivor rehabilitation.
- Pm:** Transfer to the hotel and at leisure to explore the town's most unique shops, including antiques in an impressive old French mansion; a riverfront shop with treasures ranging from Chinese retro to Burmese Buddhist statuary; hand-woven silks by local weavers and indigenous Lao wood handcrafted by master carvers and turners; and a variety of semi-precious stones and silver.
- Eve:** Dinner at Le Calao.

Day 11: Luang Prabang (Thurs, 20 March) **B D**

- Am:** Visit the local market before driving to visit one of Luang Prabang's most picturesque sights, the turquoise Kuang Si Waterfall. Drive south of Luang Prabang, with a stop at the vibrant Phousi Market. Option to swim or walk the forest trails. Return to the hotel via the Laos Buffalo Dairy and enjoy a tasting platter of different buffalo-milk cheeses, coffee and delicious home-made ice-cream at the café.
- Pm:** At leisure.
- Eve:** Dinner at Manda de Laos.

Day 12: Luang Prabang / Vientiane **B D** (Fri, 21 March)

- Am:** Take the new high-speed train to Vientiane through the spectacular mountain scenery of central Laos.
- Pm:** Transfer to Settha Palace Hotel.
- Eve:** Drinks at 525 bar before dinner at Kuo Lao restaurant.

Day 13: Vientiane (Sat, 22 March) **B**

- Am:** Depart hotel for the airport for onward flight or take the Thailand beach extension.

NB: All itineraries are subject to change according to local conditions.

Tour Activity Level

Level 1 Relaxed



A gentle pace, involving minimal walking and exertion. Shorter travel distances and a full but relatively relaxed itinerary.

THIS TOUR IS CLASSIFIED AS:

Level 2 Gentle



Easy walking at a mostly leisurely pace. Slightly more daily activity and travel.

Level 3 Moderate



Regular walking at destinations, extended standing and/or increased travel distances. Good fitness is required.

Level 4 Active



Longer and fuller days. Significant levels of walking, covering longer distances, requiring very good fitness and mobility.

Level 5 Challenging



May involve extended drives, hikes and multiple visits across busy days. Excellent fitness is required.



Mekong River

Beach Extension

22 - 24 March 2025

Day 13: Vientiane / Bangkok / Hua Hin (Sat, 22 March)

B

Am: Fly to Bangkok.*

Pm: Transfer to Hua Hin (approx 2.5 hours) and check in to the beach resort. At leisure.

Day 14: Centara Grand Beach Resort, Hua Hin (Sun, 23 March)

B

Am: Full day at leisure.

Day 15: Centara Grand Beach Resort, Hua Hin (Mon, 24 March)

B

Am: Depart hotel after breakfast.

*This flight is not included.



Centara Grand Beach Resort



Mekong Pearl

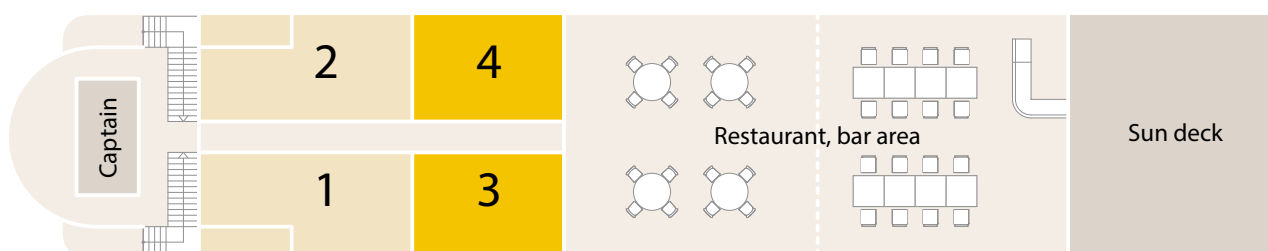
Cruise Ship

The Mekong Pearl

The lovely Mekong Pearl offers 17 cabins on two decks, all of which are outside cabins, equipped with air conditioning and private bathrooms with WC and shower. The upper deck offers an indoor restaurant, a bar area and a separate sun deck featuring a retractable roof.

The six classic cabins are 12 sqm and the six superior cabins are 16sqm. Both classic and superior cabins all face the water with wide sliding windows and a French balcony. The two deluxe cabins are 22sqm and have private balconies. 18 ship's crew take attentive care of a maximum of 29 guests.

Upper Deck



Main Deck



- Classic cabins (9 – 12, 14 – 15)
- Single cabin (17)

- Superior cabins (3 – 8)
- Deluxe cabins with private balcony (1, 2)



Sun deck



Deluxe cabin



Morning at the market

Hotels

Riva Surya Hotel Bangkok (Bangkok)

An elegant, riverside boutique hotel in the heart of historic Bangkok, Riva Surya provides stylish, comfortable rooms, a riverside pool and excellent customer service.

The Legend Chiang Rai Boutique River Resort and Spa (Chiang Rai)

This hidden oasis has a superb location overlooking Kok River and attractive, well-kept grounds and gardens. Facilities include restaurants, a large pool, herbal spa and a fitness centre.

Angsana Maison Souvannaphoum (Luang Prabang)

Once the residence of the late Prince Souvanna Phouma, former Laotian Prime Minister, this beautiful classic mansion elegantly blends French colonial architecture with Lao motifs and modern comforts. Cool off in the pool, relax in the garden, or unwind at Angsana Spa.

Settha Palace Hotel (Vientiane)

This luxury boutique hotel was a colonial mansion built in 1932, now restored to its former glory, with high ceilings, period furniture and lighting, beautiful Italian-marble floors and rosewood furniture. The public areas including a large pool and gardens and an excellent French-Laotian restaurant.

Extension Hotel

Centara Grand Beach Resort & Villas Hua Hin (Hua Hin)

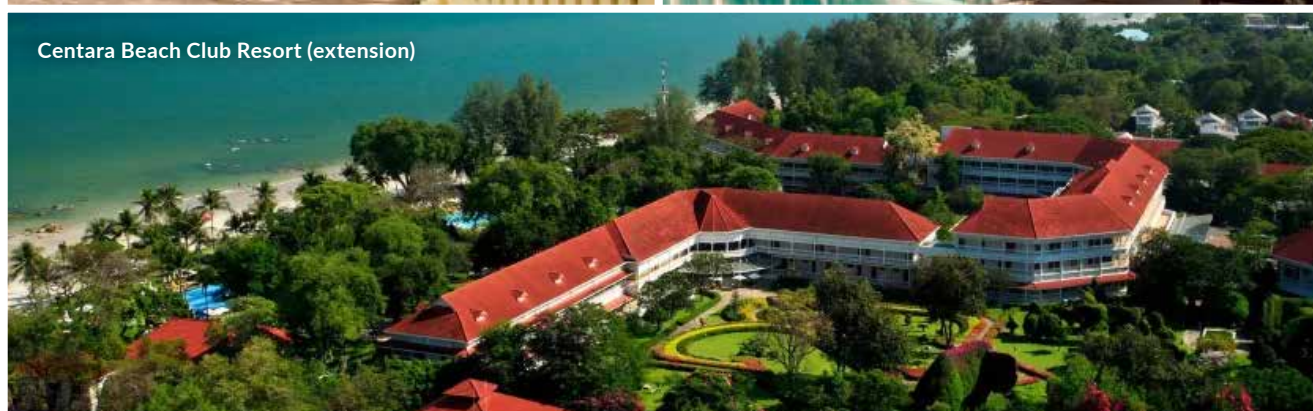
The ultimate grand colonial style hotel, the Centara Grand Beach Resort & Villas provides historic charm, lush, beautifully maintained gardens and several lovely pools. The classically elegant rooms are spacious and the service is warm and professional. This is a very peaceful place to relax at the end of the tour.



Settha Palace



Maison Souvannaphoum



Centara Beach Club Resort (extension)

The cost of the tour sharing a classic cabin on the cruise is: £4,162

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself based on a classic cabin on the cruise is: £5,650

The cost of the tour and cruise sharing a superior cabin is: £4,456 per person sharing

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself based on a superior cabin on the cruise is: £6,180

The cost of the tour and cruise sharing a deluxe cabin is: £4,742

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself based on a deluxe cabin on the cruise is: £6,972

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself based on a small cabin on the cruise is: £4,978

The cost includes:

- The services of experienced tour leaders (Prof. Philip Dowell and Dr Sheila Stork)
- Seven nights' accommodation in double or twin-bedded rooms with private facilities in medium grade and first-class hotels
- Five nights' accommodation in double twin-bedded cabins on the 'Mekong Pearl' private cruise ship
- All professional visits and dental CPD talks
- Breakfast and lunch or dinner daily (all meals on days 6,7,8)
- All admission fees
- Services of an English-speaking national guide in Thailand and Laos
- English speaking national guides on the Mekong Pearl
- All transport services and taxes in Thailand and Laos
- Water and all tips

The cost excludes:

- Flights and airport transfers
- Meals not mentioned and drinks with meals
- All optional excursions, tours and visits
- Travel insurance and visa

The beach extension cost sharing is: £368

The cost of the beach extension with room to yourself is: £572

The beach extension cost includes:

- Two nights' accommodation at the Centara Grand Beach Resort, Hua Hin with breakfast daily
- Transfers (from Bangkok Airport to the hotel and back)

*Flights from Vientiane to Bangkok are excluded and are an additional cost

About Us

To travel with us is to dig below the surface, revealing the deeper destination. Of course, you will visit the great historical sites; marvel at the wonders of architecture and engineering; be moved by the riches of culture and art; and experience the most spectacular landscapes in the world. What we also do is make sure that you see the country as it is today, giving you privileged access that independent travel and other tour companies rarely get close to. We give you a variety of experiences, from the sublime to the humble, in the company of intelligent, curious, like-minded people. And while we can be worthy, we also make sure that you have a lot of fun.

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Bangkok city (top); Fishermen on Mekong River;
Hmong women; Wat Ho Pha Bang (above)



Jon Baines
tours

