

Craig
travel

UPPER MEKONG RIVER

BOOK BY SEP 30
SAVE \$200 PP



THAILAND AND LAOS • RV MEKONG PEARL
FEB 26-MAR 16, 2025 | 19 DAYS | 43 MEALS
JOURNEY LEADER: JANET WILLIAMS

The majestic Wat Arun Temple

Much has been said about river cruising in Asia, whether on the Lower Mekong, in Myanmar, or India, but the Upper Mekong has for the most part gone unexplored.

Explore the charms of Bangkok before embarking on an exciting journey along this mysterious part of the world. The delightful rv Mekong Pearl will take us from Vientiane, the capital of Laos, which for decades was definitely off the beaten track to the legendary Golden Triangle. Delve into the Buddhist culture in Luang Prabang as we take in the sights of fascinating pagodas and monasteries. Marvel at thousands of Buddha statues in the incomparable setting of Pak Ou Caves.

Get a taste of local flavours as we stroll through colourful markets dotting the banks of the mighty river. Meet the lovely people of Laos and experience firsthand their traditional way of life. Charming villages, stunning scenery, pristine jungle, and magnificent rapids that run through the hills of remote Laos all await.



Journey Leader

Janet Williams, a retired educator with 35 years of teaching experience, including being a Vice Principal, will be leading this thrilling journey to Thailand and Laos. According to her, being a tour guide is the perfect retirement activity! It combines her passion for travel and love of new experiences and cultures with the enjoyment of sharing all of this with passengers from all across Canada. She has done extensive personal travelling and has also led successful trips on our behalf to many parts of the world. This includes Myanmar, China, Russia, Australia and New Zealand, Egypt, Tunisia, Madagascar, South America as well as many parts of Europe. She is looking forward to sharing this wonderful travel experience with you!



Inclusive Features

- Return economy group airfare with Air Canada from Canada to Bangkok
- Enjoy 4-nights in deluxe hotels in Bangkok and a 3-night stay in Chiang Rai, as indicated or similar
- 10-night cruise in an outside stateroom with private facilities aboard the rv Mekong Pearl
- Welcome and Farewell Receptions on the cruise
- Local guides during the cruise
- Excursions in each village visited on the cruise
- 43 meals (B - 17 breakfasts, L - 14 lunches, D - 12 dinners)
- Transfers between airports, hotels and the ship
- All sightseeing and entrance fees as mentioned
- Bottled water on board
- Baggage handling at the hotels and shipside
- Services of our Journey Leader and Cruise Director
- Visa fees for Canadian passport holders
- All gratuities, taxes and fees for included services
- Airport transfers in Canada or equivalent value with purchase of group airfare

Our River Boat • rv Mekong Pearl

This unique boutique ship was built in 2017 and specially designed to sail the roughest sections of the Upper Mekong. It carries a maximum of 27 passengers in 11 main deck staterooms and 4 upper deck cabins.

Beautifully designed, the en-suite staterooms range from 129 to 236 sq. ft. with sliding windows facing the open deck. Relax on comfortable deck chairs and sofa on the Sun Deck as you admire the scenery passing by; treat yourself at the Spa and enjoy an Asian massage after an exciting day of exploration. The caring crew of 18 is here to pamper you throughout your voyage and the onboard chefs will introduce you to unique and local flavours.



The lovely Mekong Pearl. Courtesy of Mekong River

FEB 26 / FEB 27, Wed/Thurs DEPART CANADA

Group members from across Canada gather in Toronto or Vancouver on Wednesday evening, then fly to Bangkok, losing a day en route.

FEB 28, Friday ARRIVE IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

Upon arrival at the Bangkok airport, we will be met by a local representative and transferred to our hotel. The rest of the day is free until we gather for our welcome dinner. **Chatrium Hotel Riverside** (3 nights) BD

MAR 1, Saturday BANGKOK

In the morning, we visit Bangkok's Chinatown, a renowned culinary hotspot. After wandering through the area, we enjoy a traditional Yum Cha (light lunch) consisting of tea and dim sum. Next, our journey takes us on a boat tour

through Bangkok's klongs (canals), along the Chao Phraya River to experience the city's diverse neighbourhoods. We will make a stop at the Temple of Dawn (Wat Arun), whose towering spire has become an iconic symbol of Bangkok. Tonight, we will participate in a Thai cooking class. Remember to pay attention, as the dishes we prepare will be our dinner. BLD

MAR 2, Sunday **VIENTIANE, LAOS / EMBARKATION**
Fly to Vientiane, then savour lunch at a local restaurant before boarding our Mekong River cruise. After a guided tour of Vientiane's highlights, we will return to the ship for a welcome reception and dinner.
rv Mekong Pearl (10 nights) BLD

MAR 3, Monday **THE MIGHTY MEKONG**
Unwind on deck as our boutique cruiser glides up the Mekong River, the jungled landscapes and rural vistas unfolding before us. We will anchor at a tranquil location for a serene night's stay. BLD

MAR 4, Tuesday **SALAKHAM**
Venturing further north, the landscape transforms, with rolling green hills and ancient rock formations rising gently from the earth. The Mekong River winds its way through the terrain, alternating between rapid currents and peaceful stretches. Its mighty power adds a genuine sense of adventure to our cruise. We will briefly stop in the town of Salakham during the day, then continue our journey north for the night. BLD

MAR 5, Wednesday **FARMING VILLAGE**
We stop upstream at the small farming village of Ban Don Saingam, where you can join a 30-minute trek to explore a secluded cave rarely visited by travellers. Here, the pristine natural landscape remains untouched except for the occasional views of tiny villages and local cattle roaming free. BLD

MAR 6, Thursday **XAYABOURI DAM**
Enjoy breakfast on board while taking in the stunning views. Keep an eye out for local fishermen along the shore and do not miss the impressive Xayabouri Dam, the largest hydroelectric power plant in Laos. In the afternoon, we will have the chance to meet the inhabitants of a small hill tribe village. BLD

MAR 7, Friday **KUANG SI FALLS / LUANG PRABANG**
We start the day with a guided tour of Kuang Si Falls, one of Laos' most stunning waterfalls. Later, we reach Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and former royal capital. In the evening, we hike up Mount Phou Si for panoramic views of the Mekong and Khan Rivers, along with the surrounding mountains. Afterwards, enjoy a leisurely stroll along the Mekong promenade and visit the colourful night market of the local Hmong minority. BLD

MAR 8, Saturday **LUANG PRABANG**
Early risers can witness the traditional morning alms ritual where hundreds of monks collect their daily sustenance. Following breakfast on board, our guided city tour includes the National Museum in the former royal palace and a visit to a local handicraft village. After lunch, our exploration of Luang Prabang's charms continues. In the evening, enjoy the town's diverse culinary offerings, from quaint eateries to riverside dining along the Mekong. BL



Explore the temples of Bangkok



Fishermen on the banks of the Mekong River



Visit one of the largest tea producers in Thailand

MAR 9, Sunday **PAK OU CAVES**
In the morning our cruise ship will stop at the famous Pak Ou Caves, which house thousands of Buddha statues. You can take a short trek through the forest to a small riverside village and visit its distillery. Alternatively, if you prefer, you can reach the village by boat. You might even have the chance to see working elephants nearby. BLD

MAR 10, Monday **THE MIGHTY MEKONG**
As our journey progresses, the river's hustle fades, revealing breathtaking landscapes all around us. Whether on deck, in your cozy cabin, or the lounge, find tranquility bathed in the warmth of the sun. BLD

MAR 11, Tuesday **VILLAGE LIFE**
Unwind on deck taking in the peaceful northern Laos scenery, a perfect respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life back home. As we glide past verdant hills, we start heading towards the small village of Pak Tha. You can join a long-tail boat excursion on the Namtha River, which

takes you to a nearby Khmu village, whose school has been supported by donations from Mekong River Cruises' guests for many years. End the day with Mekong River Cruises' famous riverside barbecue dinner in a beautiful riverside location. BLD

MAR 12, Wednesday CHIANG RAI

Enjoy our final onboard breakfast before disembarking in Huay Xai. After visiting a temple and a traditional market, we will cross the Thailand–Laos border at Friendship Bridge before transferring to our local hotel in Chiang Rai.

The Riverie by Katathani (3 nights) BLD

MAR 13, Thursday CHIANG RAI

Today's sightseeing includes a cruise along the Kok River, a tricycle ride through the city, a visit to Boon Rawd Farm, one of the largest tea producers in Thailand, and visits to the Three Coloured Temples. BL

MAR 14, Friday CHIANG RAI / GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Winding through Doi Tung, we catch glimpses into the lives of hill tribe villagers. En route, enjoy the spectacular scenery of farming terraces and admire the Palace of the Princess Mother. Located at the top is the Wat Phra That Doi Tung temple, offering magnificent views of the rice fields below. Continuing to the Golden Triangle, where Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand meet along the Mekong River. Here, we will visit the Hall of Opium museum to explore the complex 5,000-year history of opium. BLD

MAR 15, Sat CHIANG RAI / BANGKOK

After a relaxed morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Bangkok. Upon arrival, we check into our airport hotel for an overnight stay.

Novotel Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel (1 night) B

MAR 16, Sunday BANGKOK / CANADA

All too soon, our journey has come to an end, and we catch our return flights back home. B

Important Note

This is an expedition voyage. The cruise itinerary as shown is an indication of what we hope to achieve. Group members must be prepared for adventure and changes due to local conditions. The cruise may be affected by delays at border crossings, variable water levels, and other uncontrollable factors. The cruise line and its staff strive to cover as much of the itinerary as possible. We assure you that we will see and do as much as we can, hopefully more than indicated in the itinerary.

CT Rating 3.5/5 - Challenging: This will be an expedition, a journey on a river on which few tourists have travelled. Visits ashore may involve difficult walking conditions over very rough surfaces without safety features etc. Members should expect difficult conditions in a region known for a hot and humid climate - daytime temperatures will exceed 30C. The river boat does not have an elevator. Members must be fully mobile and physically active to fully enjoy this adventure.

 **Book and deposit by September 30, 2024**
and save \$200 per person 

Cruise Cost in Canadian Dollars Per Person

Cruise / Tour Only* (Join / Leave Bangkok).....	\$9,245
Vancouver	\$11,195
Victoria.....	\$11,235
Calgary / Edmonton.....	\$11,295
Winnipeg / Regina / Saskatoon.....	\$11,545
Toronto	\$11,395
Ottawa / Montreal	\$11,545
Halifax / St. John's.....	\$11,655
Single Supplement (land & shared cabin).....	\$1,175
Single Supplement (land & single cabin)	\$4,245

Singles are extremely limited. Single Supplement rates include either a single hotel room and a shared cruise cabin or a single hotel room and a single cruise cabin. *The price includes the flights from Bangkok to Chiang Rai plus Vientiane to Bangkok. Rates are per person based on sharing an outside Classic cabin on Main deck. Airfares from other gateways are available on request. Airfares and air carrier are subject to change and will be confirmed prior to final payment. Refer to Inclusive Features.

Supplements to upgrade to higher category:

Category/Description/Deck	Per person
Superior Outside (French Balcony - Upper, Main).....	\$750
Deluxe Outside (Private Balcony - Upper).....	\$1,360

Prices are based on a minimum of 20 members and on rates, taxes, and fees effective January 2024 and are subject to change due to factors beyond our control. Single accommodation is on request basis only and subject to confirmation. See deck plan for details of ship layout and cabin locations. Cancellation penalties for this cruise begin on the date of booking. Please discuss this and your insurance needs with a Craig Travel Sales Specialist when making your reservation.

Insurance is NOT INCLUDED but is highly recommended. Premiums are calculated based on the individual's age, destination (country), trip length, and trip booking window – please contact our staff to receive a quote. Your coverage starts on the effective date of your confirmation of coverage. Please discuss your insurance coverage prior to booking. Check our website for the most current information. Refer to the enrollment form for terms and conditions.

Final payment will be due November 19, 2024
Deposit is \$1,500 per person

To reserve your spot on this journey, simply complete the enclosed enrolment form, indicating the cruise you wish to join and your home city, and forward it with your deposit to:



Experiencing Our World
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