

THAILAND & LAOS TEXTILES & HANDCRAFTS TOUR 26 November – 9 December 2026

retreat|recreate is delighted to offer this exciting 14 day, 13 night women's tour exploring the beautiful northern regions of Thailand and Laos through the lens of their superb textiles and handcrafts.

Visit the handcraft villages of several culturally diverse ethnic groups, **engage** directly with local artisans and craftspeople, **observe** artisans as they demonstrate their skills and expertise, **be inspired** by traditional designs and motifs, **marvel** at the range of superb textiles and handcrafts on offer, **deepen** your knowledge at textile galleries, cultural museums and private textile collections and **shop** at handcraft villages and colourful textile markets.

Participate in SIX hands-on handcraft activities: try your hand at **Hmong batik** and **Hmong embroidery** and learn about traditional motifs and handweaving with hemp fibre; participate in an **eco-printing** workshop with an organisation providing handcraft training and an alternative source of income to women and young people; explore traditional **natural dyeing in a Tai Lue village**; **weave a silk place-mat** using a traditional supplementary weft technique; and weave a traditional **bamboo basket**.

Explore serene temples and fascinating cultural sites, **relax** as we enjoy a day cruising on the Mekong River, **be in awe** of breath-taking landscapes, **experience** wonderful local culture, **savour** delicious cuisine and **be humbled** by the gentle, generous hospitality for which Thailand and Laos are known.

This immersive foray into the textiles and handcrafts of northern Thailand and Laos is not to be missed. We do hope you'll join us!

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ITINERARY

as 26 SEPTEMBER 2026



Day 1 Thursday 26 November

CHIANG MAI CITY Smile Lanna

Sa-wat dee! Welcome to Thailand!

Upon arrival at Chiang Mai Airport you'll be met and transferred to our hotel.

Our tour kicks off at **6pm** (TBC) with a **pre-trip briefing** at our starting point hotel. You'll meet your fellow travellers, local tour leader and retreat|recreate host, we'll run through our program for the next fourteen days and start to get to know each other.

Afterwards we'll head to one of Chiang Mai's fantastic restaurants for our **welcome dinner**.

Meals: Dinner

Day 2 Friday 27 November

CHIANG MAI CITY Smile Lanna

This morning we'll head to a beautiful **textile studio, showroom and private gallery** where we'll learn about the different styles of textiles, techniques, motifs and historical background of some of the ethnic minority communities of this region. With our host, a renowned textile expert and author, we'll explore the range of materials traditionally used to create **natural dyes and the resist technique used in the preparation of threads for ikat weaving**.

A **weaver** from the Karen community will be onsite to **demonstrate brocade weaving** on a **back-strap loom** and there'll be time to browse the high quality fabric, garments and accessories available for purchase (if you wish).

This afternoon, we're privileged to be able to visit a **private museum** where an incredible collection of **textiles, traditional costumes and artefacts of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar** are showcased. The passion and pride of the owner and collector is very evident as he takes us on a tour of his beloved museum. The exhibits have been collected over 30+ years and some are more than a hundred years old.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 3 Saturday 28 November



Day 4 Sunday 29 November



Day 5 Monday 30 November



Day 6 Tuesday 1 December



Day 7 Wednesday 2 December

CHIANG MAI Smile Lanna
This morning we'll visit a cultural centre dedicated to promoting the traditions of the Lisu community. The Lisu are one of the region's main ethnic groups and our delightful host is always keen to share her Lisu heritage. In preparation for our visit to a Lisu village on day 6, we'll be introduced to the **handcrafts, costumes, rituals, music and traditions of the Lisu people**.

Chiang Mai is well known for its **fabulous markets**. We'll browse the stalls of the **Hmong market** where antique and new fabric, quilts, batik, Hmong skirts, Akha hats and rolls of raw and indigo-dyed hemp are waiting to be found (and perhaps purchased if you wish). At **Wororot market** we'll view the array of interesting fresh and packaged food on offer and perhaps stock up on snacks.

MAE SA NOI Guesthouse
Leaving the city behind, we'll head (about 1 hour) to a **Hmong village** located in a beautiful rural area, surrounded by spectacular mountains.

With our Hmong hosts guiding us, we'll **try our hand at batik**. Using traditional tools and beeswax, we'll create motifs and patterns on **hand-woven hemp fabric**. Our batik will later be dipped into an **indigo vat** and dried before the wax resist is removed.

After lunch we'll learn **about the production of hemp fibre**. The harvested plant stems are peeled, pounded, spliced and then spun by hand. We'll watch a demonstration of the various stages of the process and also see **hemp fibre being woven into cloth**.

After a simple barbecue dinner, we'll be treated to a short cultural performance featuring **traditional Hmong music and dance**. We'll spend the night at a **village guesthouse** - simple accommodation with 4-5 floor mattresses per room. Each room has its own bathroom with a western toilet and hot shower. The single supplement does not apply tonight. See the Trip Notes for details.

CHIANG MAI Smile Lanna
After breakfast, we'll sit with the Hmong women and enjoy an **Hmong embroidery workshop**. We'll explore traditional **Hmong motifs and stitches** and each embroider and hand stitch a small bag from handwoven hemp fabric.

We're very fortunate to spend time in this village with the Hmong community and to have the opportunity to learn about their handcraft traditions and way of life. In the late morning, we'll farewell our hosts and travel back towards Chiang Mai.

On the way we'll stop at **Mae Sa waterfall** - a series of waterfalls and swimming holes - the perfect place for a refreshing dip, if you wish.

We'll continue on to **Doi Suthep**, arguably one of Thailand's most stunning temples. A 300-step, naga-guarded stairway leads to the complex, where the hypnotic chanting (subject to timing) of Buddhist monks and panoramic views over the city are sure to make this a very memorable experience. A tram/gondola is available if you'd rather not climb the stairs.

CHIANG RAI Saan Hotel
Leaving Chiang Mai after breakfast, we'll drive 2.5-3 hours and arrive at a **Lisu village** in the late morning. We'll take a short guided walk around the village and join the villagers for a delicious home-cooked lunch.

Afterwards, we'll watch as the Lisu women demonstrate their **beautiful embroidery, patchwork, applique and weaving techniques** and the men create traditional **bamboo basketry** items. Sadly, the younger generation are not keen to learn the basket weaving skills and this ancient tradition may soon be lost.

In the late afternoon, we'll head to **Chiang Rai city** (about 1.5 hours) and check into our hotel where we'll stay for the next two nights.

We'll have the opportunity to explore Chiang Rai's popular **night market** this evening.

CHIANG RAI Saan Hotel
This morning we'll visit a **textile museum and gallery** known for its display of traditional textiles as well as its support of the local community. The gallery's **learning centre** offers career development opportunities for local women and young people by teaching (and thereby preserving) traditional Lanna embroidery, weaving and eco printing techniques. Traditional handcrafts are incorporated into contemporary fashion and homewares, providing the artisans with the means to earn an income without the need to leave their community. We'll view the gallery's textile collection and then enjoy an **eco-printing workshop** under the guidance of a local expert.

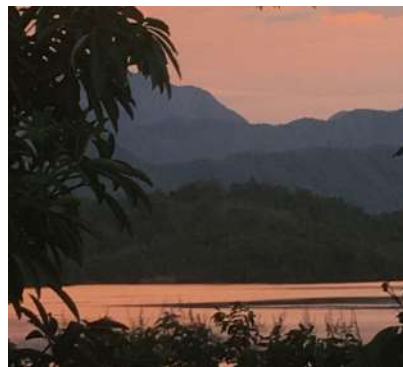
In the afternoon, we'll visit **Wat Rong Khun** (the white temple), a 'must see' attraction for visitors to this region. A local artist who achieved fame overseas, has spent a huge sum rebuilding and reimagining the original temple (which fell into disrepair in the late 1990s).



Day 8 Thursday 3 December



Day 9 Friday 4 December



Day 10 Saturday 5 December



Day 11 Sunday 6 December



Day 12 Monday 7 December

PAK BENG Sanctuary Lodge

We'll have an early start as we make our way to towards the Thai/Laos border. On the way, we'll visit a beautiful **museum** where a **superb collection of antique costumes and textiles of the Tai Lue** ethnic group are displayed.

It's time to say farewell to Thailand and Sabaidee (hello) to Laos! After crossing the border we'll board our private long-boat for a whole day **cruise** along the mighty **Mekong River**. Sit back, relax, view the **breath-taking scenery**, and **river-side villages** and experience the slow pace of riverside life. You may wish to bring a small, portable handcraft project to work on as we cruise along.

In the late afternoon we'll reach the small, remote trading port of Pak Beng where we'll settle into our lodge accommodation for the evening.

At the local market, the Hmong and Thai community sell their homegrown produce and handcrafted goods. We'll take a short walk around the market and town to gain an insight into local life.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

OUDOMXAI Namkat Yorla Pa

Driving towards Oudomxai, we'll divert from the main road and travel along some dusty and sometimes bumpy roads to a rarely visited **Khmhu village**.

Here, **kheuapiad fibre** is made. The fibre is extracted from a vine (*Pueraria phaseoloides*) that grows in the jungle in this region. The vine is split into strips, dried, twisted into string and then skilfully knotted into bags and other items using a **net-making technique**. The Khmhu women will demonstrate the process of creating and knotting the 'jungle vine' fibre and are always proud to show us their finished works.

At a **Tai Lue village co-operative** we'll be able to see how **cotton is prepared, spun and woven**. The range of beautiful cotton textiles and handcrafts is sure to impress.

Our accommodation tonight is at a fabulous riverside eco-resort, surrounded by misty mountains and tropical jungle.

Meals: Breakfast

NONG KHIW N K Riverside

We'll have a slow start this morning, allowing time to explore our stunning resort and surroundings. You may wish to sleep in, have a swim in one of the resort's swimming pools, walk some of the trails through the rainforest, visit the bird and wildlife learning centre or shop at the resort's fabulous textile and handcraft-filled shop.

Leaving Oudomxai province in the late morning, we'll drive (about 3.5 hours) to the riverside town of Nong Khiaw.

We'll check into our lodge, where we'll stay in bungalows nestled alongside the picturesque Nam Ou River, surrounded by stunning limestone karst mountains.

The rest of the afternoon is free. You may wish to explore the town, perhaps have a massage or steam bath, or simply relax and enjoy the riverside views.

Meals: Breakfast

LUANG PRABANG Cozy An

This morning we head to a **Tai Lue village** (< 1 hour). As we walk around the village, we may see weavers at work on their looms, often set up under the shade of their homes on stilts. Intricate **supplementary weft** designs are woven into the exquisite **sinhs** (sarong-like skirts) for which the Tai Lue are known.

Before enjoying lunch with the villagers, we're privileged to take part in a traditional **Baci ceremony**. 'Baci' means 'calling of soul' and is an important ritual for special occasions such as welcoming guests, celebrating returns, honouring farewells etc.

Our hosts will teach us about their traditional **hot and cold dyes made from local natural ingredients**. We'll each have the opportunity to dye a **handwoven cotton scarf and placemat to take home**.

In the late afternoon we'll continue on to the beautiful UNESCO World Heritage city of Luang Prabang and our hotel-home for the next three nights (about 3 hours).

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

LUANG PRABANG Cozy An

Today will be spent at an inspiring and very beautiful **textile and artisan centre** on the banks of the Mekong. **Ock Pop Tok** (meaning east meets west) was founded on principles of **fair trade and sustainable business practice**.

We'll enjoy a fascinating seminar illustrating the journey of Lao textiles, from the **creation of silk to the weaving process**. We'll learn about the social and cultural meaning of **traditional motifs** and also have the opportunity to observe incredibly **skilled master weavers** at work.

Following a delicious lunch overlooking the Mekong, we'll enjoy a **silk weaving class**. With one-on-one guidance from our attentive tutors, we'll each create a place-mat with a Lao motif **using a supplementary weft weaving technique**.

Afterwards, we'll return to our hotel for the evening.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 13 Tuesday 8 December

LUANG PRABANG Cozy An

We'll rise early to participate in the age-old traditional Buddhist ceremony of 'Tak Bat'. Saffron-clad monks move in single file along the streets, receiving alms and demonstrating their vows of poverty and humility, while lay Buddhists gain spiritual merit ('het bon') from the act of respectful giving.

After breakfast we'll visit the **Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre**, a wonderful organisation that collects, preserves, and interprets the traditional arts and lifestyles of Laos' many diverse ethnic groups. Following a **tour** of the current **textiles and handcrafts exhibition**, we'll enjoy a **traditional bamboo basket weaving workshop** before a delicious lunch at the centre.

In the afternoon we're fortunate to visit the **textile gallery** of Dr Linda McIntosh, a highly regarded **researcher, author, collector and curator of South-east Asian textiles**. We'll enjoy a presentation of spectacular textiles from Laos and South East Asia and learn about their roles in culture and society.

Our final group dinner will be at one of Luang Prabang's fabulous restaurants.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 14 Wednesday 9 December

LUANG PRABANG

Our tour comes to an end after breakfast. We'll pack up our memories and textile souvenirs, say our fond farewells to Thailand, Laos and each other and head our separate ways.

There are no activities planned for today and you are welcome to depart at any time.

We encourage you to extend your stay in Luang Prabang and/or continue your travels in Laos. We can assist you with booking extra nights at our Luang Prabang hotel (subject to availability).

Luang Prabang airport is a 20 minute drive from our hotel. Departure transfers (at additional cost) may either be pre-booked through us or arranged directly with the reception staff at our hotel.

Meals: Breakfast



INCLUSIONS:

- 14 days/13 nights accommodation
- Arrival airport transfer in Chiang Mai
- 13 breakfasts, 7 lunches, 3 dinners as per the itinerary (drinks not included)
- Transport: mostly in two private mini-buses, one day on a river boat, occasional tuk-tuks and songthaews
- Hands-on handcraft workshops and activities (indicated on the itinerary in red)
- Entrance to museums, galleries, studios, villages and excursion venues as per the itinerary
- Services of a local English-speaking tour leader and retreat|recreate host

EXCLUSIONS:

- Airfares
- Travel insurance
- Visas (refer also to the Trip Notes)
- Early check in or late check out
- Departure transfer in Luang Prabang
- Personal spending (souvenirs, phone, laundry, mini-bar etc)
- Meals and drinks not specified in the itinerary. Drinks with included meals.
- Tips

NOTE

The single supplement does not apply to our accommodation on day 4



THINGS TO NOTE:

- Please refer to the **Trip Notes** and **Booking Conditions** for more details
- The hands-on handcraft activities included in this itinerary are not formal classes with trained teachers. They're more about genuine person to person interactions, cultural exchange and learning directly from authentic, traditional artisans at their workplace, village or home, in their own style.
- Our simple guesthouse accommodation on day 4 is quite basic. Each room will be shared between 4-5 people including a basic bathroom/wet room comprising a western toilet and hot shower (but no shower screen or curtain). Each bed comprises a firm mattress on the floor (not the ground) with a fitted sheet, quilt and pillow. We recommend that you carry only what you'll need for our overnight stay in a day-pack or small overnight bag as our main luggage will remain in the vehicle.
- While this is not an adventure tour, a 'sense of adventure' is required as we do venture off the tourist trail and visit semi-remote villages. Please refer to the **'Fitness to Travel' declaration** and the **Trip Notes** for specific health, fitness, and mobility requirements for this trip.
- retreat|recreate strives to offer **culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable tours**. To this end, we: engage local guides; partner with a wholesale tour operator whose values align with ours; patronise organisations and co-operatives that return all profits directly to their local community; visit handcraft villages so we can meet makers face-to-face and the proceeds of any purchases go directly to the artisans; support fair trade and non-government organisations providing vocational training, experience and rehabilitation to disadvantaged groups and communities, particularly those that empower women and girls to earn an income through the production of traditional handcrafts.
- The itinerary is full to provide value for money, however there are a couple of brief periods of free time. We strongly recommend you add a few extra days before and/or after the tour for independent exploration and leisure.
- Any questions? Please email Susan K at retreatrecreate@gmail.com