

2023

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LAOS & THAILAND

A New Year's Journey Along the Mekong Aboard *Anouvong*
December 27, 2023–January 6, 2024

with Peter K. Bol,
Charles H. Carswell Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations



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Mekong River (above); Front cover: Pak Ou Caves, Laos. Back cover: Elephant Sanctuary, Pakbeng (top) and Luang Prabang (bottom).

Laos & Thailand Aboard *Anouvong*

Cruise along a lesser-traveled stretch of the Mekong aboard the elegant *Anouvong*, a boutique riverboat with only eight spacious staterooms and two luxurious suites. Begin with three nights of elegant hotel accommodations in Luang Prabang, Laos, where you will discover the serene heart of Laotian culture and attend a private reception at a Laotian prince's villa. Delve into Laos's layered history, from the arrival of Theravada Buddhism in 400 A.D. to the founding of Lan Xang in the 14th century and the French colonization of Laos in the 19th century.

Embark *Anouvong* in Luang Prabang, and celebrate New Year's Eve aboard the riverboat, followed by a three-night voyage along the Upper Mekong. In this timeless exploration of the Golden Triangle region, marvel at scenic riverscapes, ancient Buddhist holy sites, and the rich culture and heritage of Laos. Take part in morning temple visits with a scholar of temple and colonial architecture. You will also meet with experts on the diverse local flora and fauna.

Highlights of the cruise include visits to Pak Ou Caves, with their 4,000 sacred Buddhist statues; the village of Huay Palang, home of a local ethnic Khmu tribe; and the riverside settlement of Pak Beng, with its market and elephant sanctuary. Disembark at the Thai-Lao border town of Huay Xai and transfer to Chiang Rai for an overnight stay and a chance to visit the Akha and Yao hill tribe villages. The next day, fly to Bangkok, and spend two nights at the luxurious Peninsula Bangkok Hotel while exploring the city's exquisite temples and grand palaces.

Activity Level 3:

A LITTLE MORE TO IT

The three-night Mekong cruise aboard *Anouvong* requires moderate-to-basic fitness and sure-footedness when getting on and off the ship or during excursions, which will require short walking distances. *Anouvong* does not have an elevator, but there are only very short walking distances onboard with one staircase connecting the main deck with the terrace deck. At most of the ports of call, the ship moors alongside with guests using a gangway or tender boat to reach the shore. *Anouvong* staff will assist all passengers at all times to get safely on and off the ship. The ship has air conditioning in the cabins and public spaces. Sunny blue skies are normal in December, with outside temperatures around 68°F (20°C), and layered clothing is recommended for the cool evenings. It is advisable to bring some warm clothes, e.g. a windbreaker jacket or pullover. A sun hat, sunscreen, and comfortable but sturdy walking shoes are essential. Smart casual dress is appropriate most of the time. For dinners and special occasions like the welcome and farewell events, more formal attire is recommended, although jacket and tie are not required.

Study Leader



Peter K. Bol is the Charles H. Carswell Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. His research focuses on China's cultural elites at the national and local levels from the 7th to the 17th century. At Harvard, he has played a leading role

in establishing geospatial analysis support for teaching and research and became the inaugural director of the Center for Geographic Analysis in 2005. Additionally, he leads two significant projects in collaboration with other institutions: the China Historical Geographic Information Systems project with Fudan University, which aims to create a GIS covering 2,000 years of Chinese history; and the China Biographical Database project with Academia Sinica and Peking University. The latter is an online relational database currently comprising 420,000 historical figures, with plans to include all biographical data from China's historical record spanning the last 2,000 years. During his tenure as Vice Provost from 2013 to 2018, he oversaw HarvardX, the Harvard Initiative in Learning and Teaching, and research that bridges online and residential learning. Working alongside William Kirby, he also co-teaches several HarvardX courses related to China. His lecture topics for this upcoming travel program will be announced closer to departure.



Bangkok Museum, Bangkok, photo by Ninara

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Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang (left) and Kuang Si Falls, Luang Prabang (right)

Schedule by Day

B=Breakfast, L= Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27

Departure

Depart for Luang Prabang, Laos, on an overnight flight.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28

Luang Prabang, Laos

Upon arrival this morning, transfer to the hotel. Guests opting for the suggested flights will be met at the airport and take the group transport to the hotel. Spend the afternoon at leisure. Later, gather at the hotel for a welcome reception.

R

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29

Luang Prabang

In the morning, explore the highlights of this incredibly picturesque town. Start with a visit to the Royal Palace, which is now a National Museum housing precious artifacts that belonged to the Laotian royal family. After lunch at leisure, discover Luang Prabang's famed temples including Wat Visoun, the city's oldest temple. Notice its distinctively shaped *stupa* (dome-shaped shrine) designed to look like a lotus flower. Additionally, see Wat That Luang, traditionally the cremation site for Lao royalty, and the gorgeous Wat Mai, with its detailed golden reliefs depicting scenes from village life. At Wat Xieng Thong, built in the 17th century, notice the stunning "tree of life" mosaic set on its western exterior wall. End the day with an optional

hike to the top of Mount Phousi, where you will admire the panoramic views across the Mekong and Khan rivers as well as the mountain range. Attend a welcome dinner this evening.

B,D

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30

Luang Prabang

Rise early to take part in a charitable Buddhist ritual of almsgiving. After breakfast, explore the Luang Prabang countryside with a visit to the Kuang Si Falls, with their vividly turquoise waters. Upon arrival at the waterfalls, take a leisurely hike through the natural park past the Asian Bear Rescue Center. After lunch, continue south of Luang Prabang and visit the Ock Pop Tok Living Crafts Centre, a social enterprise working primarily in the field of textiles, handicrafts, and design. Back in town, visit the Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre, which is dedicated to the preservation and celebration of the many ethnic groups in Laos. View valuable artifacts, traditional textiles and clothing, jewelry, handicraft tools, photography, and household objects. In the late afternoon, attend a private reception at the villa of Prince Nith and learn about his charitable foundation and preservation projects. Return to your hotel with dinner at leisure.

B,L,R

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

Luang Prabang / Embark Anouvong / Ban Khok Kham

After attending a morning lecture, check out of the hotel and transfer to the pier to board

Anouvong. After the welcome and safety briefing, set sail and head upstream on the Mekong River. Observe the rugged limestone formations along the river banks, as well as the lush forests and fishing villages. Arrive at the sacred Pak Ou Caves, where you will see thousands of Buddha statues in a range of sizes and poses. Continue to a nearby village to meet with an expert on the region's flora, followed by a visit to a local whisky distillery. Enjoy lunch aboard *Anouvong* as you cruise further up the river. Later, meet villagers from a riverside settlement and learn about traditional basket-weaving techniques, followed by a temple visit. Attend a special dinner prepared over an open grill by a peaceful sandbank and watch a traditional dance and music performance as you dine. Ring in the New Year with a festive celebration aboard the riverboat.

B,L,D

MONDAY, JANUARY 1

Ban Khok Kham / Ban Khok Aek

Early risers can join a morning yoga or Tai Chi class. As *Anouvong* slowly meanders along the Upper Mekong, behold the endlessly captivating landscape of Laos, where local life remains unchanged for centuries. Join your study leader for an insightful lecture on Laotian culture and the diverse tribes inhabiting the Upper Mekong region. At the village of Kok Aek, step ashore to meet with local Lao, Khmu, and Hmong residents who take pride in their organic gardens and harvesting of freshwater seaweed. Dinner will highlight a "Zen" menu, followed by a movie viewing under the stars.

B,L,D



Wat Phra Singh, Chiang Rai, photo by Paul Arps (left) and Grand Palace, Bangkok, photo by Raphael Labaca Castro (right)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 2

Ban Kok Aek / Pakbeng / Pak Ngui

After breakfast, attend insightful lectures, with one focusing on Laotian elephants and their cultural significance. After lunch, arrive at the town of Pakbeng, a riverside settlement and the site of an elephant sanctuary. Observe elephants freely walking along the shoreline before visiting the conservation sanctuary. Upon return to Pakbeng, transfer to its temple atop a hill with views of the mighty Mekong. Attend a farewell dinner this evening on the ship's terrace deck.

B,L,D

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3

Pak Ngui / Huay Xai / Disembark / Chiang Rai, Thailand

Attend a class or a lecture this morning as *Anouvong* heads to the Thai-Lao border and the convergence of the Mekong and the Nam Tha Rivers. Watch as the arresting surrounding landscapes become increasingly mountainous. Before disembarking, attend a Lao cooking class featuring easy-to-make delicacies and local dishes. Upon arrival in Huay Xai, disembark and transfer to the Mae Chan district, where you will visit the Akha and Yao hill tribe villages. Continue to Chiang Rai for check-in at the Legend Chiang Rai Hotel.

B,L,D

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4

Chiang Rai / Bangkok

While in Chiang Rai, visit Wat Phra Singh, a temple that dates to the 14th century. The temple is a typical example of Northern Thai wooden construction with its low sweeping roof and impressive wooden doors. Fly to Bangkok and transfer to the elegant Peninsula Bangkok Hotel. Your hotel overlooks the Chao Phraya River, the lively artery of old Bangkok and gateway to many of the city's glittering temples and palaces. Before checking in, visit the Jim Thompson House Museum, the former home of the American expatriate who was a pioneer of the local silk industry. The museum is a group of six traditional houses collected from all over Thailand and now showcases Thompson's marvelous Asian art collection. The remainder of the evening and dinner are at leisure.

B,L

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5

Bangkok

Discover the Grand Palace, the residence of the kings of the Chakri Dynasty. In the religious complex of Wat Phra Kaew, see the Emerald Buddha, the most sacred image for Buddhists in Thailand. Continue to view the Reclining Buddha at Wat Po. After lunch, transfer to the Bangkok National Museum, whose collections include both early Siamese Buddhist bronzes and some spectacular Khmer stone sculptures. This evening, attend a farewell sunset cruise accompanied by dinner highlighting Thai dishes.

B,L,D

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6

Bangkok / Return

Depart the hotel early this morning for flights home.

B



Regional map

Accommodations

Avani+ Luang Prabang Hotel

Serene yet centrally located, this hotel displays the craft of the local artists through its use of indigenous fabrics and materials. Rooms have complimentary Wi-Fi, flat-screen TV, and private balconies.

The Legend Chiang Rai Boutique River Resort & Spa

Nestled on the banks of the picturesque Mae Kok River, this hotel's spacious studios and villas are equipped with luxurious furniture and a unique tropical bathroom. Revel in stunning facilities, including the infinity pool, outdoor spa, and the Sala Rim Nam Thai restaurant.

Peninsula Hotel Bangkok

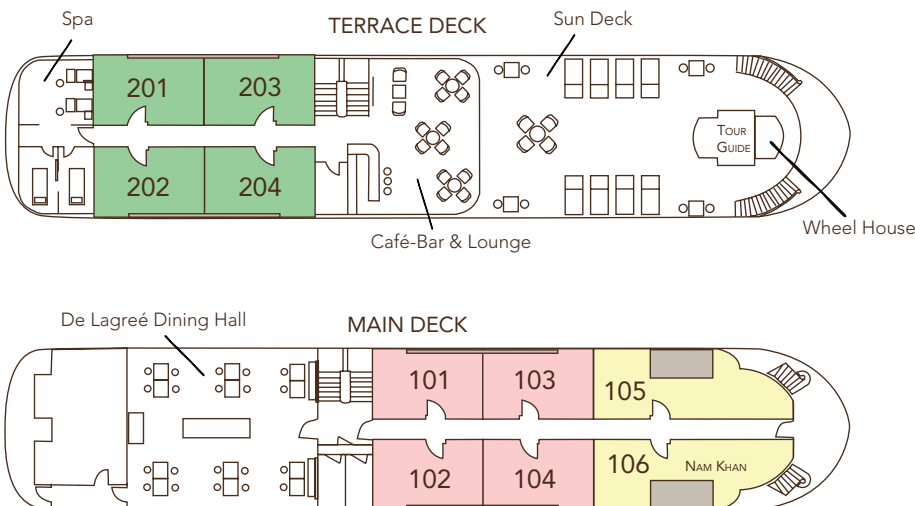
On the banks of the Chao Phraya River, this elegant five-star hotel offers a mix of traditional Thai style and modern comfort. Amenities at the Peninsula include a pool, spa, fitness center, tennis courts, and several restaurants and bars.



Avani+ Luang Prabang Hotel

Rates Per Person

CATEGORY/DECK	DOUBLE RATES	SINGLE RATES
101-104	\$11,999	\$17,999
Deluxe Staterooms. Main Deck, approx. 215 sq.ft., twin bed/double bed, French balcony		
201-204	\$13,499	Inquire
Deluxe Executive Staterooms. Terrace Deck, approx. 215 sq.ft., twin bed/double bed, French balcony		
105 & 106	\$15,999	Inquire
Signature Suites. Main Deck, approx. 323 sq.ft., double bed, separate seating area, private balcony		



Anouvong

Anouvong enchants as a small boutique luxury ship that seamlessly blends traditional Laotian ambiance and artwork with French-Colonial finesse. Passengers aboard this exclusive vessel discover the most beautiful, remote areas of Laos along the meandering river in utmost luxury. The large staterooms and lavish suites welcome guests with an inventive room layout while emphasizing comfort. The intimate restaurant, the tucked-away spa, and the cozy, light-flooded Café-Bar & Lounge with its adjacent wooden terrace deck all enhance the singular *savoir-vivre* lifestyle aboard *Anouvong*.



Anouvong



Anouvong Deluxe Executive Stateroom (left), Café-Bar & Lounge (center) and Terrace Deck (right)

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