





#### CELEBRATING 21 YEARS

#### Dear traveller,

Welcome to the Pandaw magazine, a collection of inspiring insights from travellers who have experienced an adventure with Pandaw.

It was 20 years ago when our founder Paul Strachan began his incredible journey, fascinatingly described in his latest book, *The Pandaw Story* (available on amazon.co.uk), to re-create the joyous experience of an Irrawaddy Flotilla Cruise. Today, we have a fleet of 15 ships – including our soon-to-be-launched first ever coastal ship the *Andaman Explorer* - offering the widest choice of journeys on the rivers of Burma

and Indochina and a growing portfolio of partner arrangements in other parts of the world including India and the Amazon.

I have spent my working life in the travel industry and have been lucky enough to travel to over 80 countries developing experiences for discerning travellers. I joined Pandaw because I genuinely feel there is no better travel experience in the world: the fascinating history of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company; the stunning ships in teak and brass; the convivial atmosphere of relaxed enjoyment; the tranquillity; the opportunity to explore locations that are well off the beaten track, and to return to your ship for excellent cuisine and personal service. There simply is nothing quite like the sheer enjoyment of sipping a freshly-prepared cocktail at sunset on the sun deck of your Pandaw ship in the

company of like-minded travellers and a knowledgeable local guide.

Our team are all imbued with the same Pandaw pioneering spirit, seeking innovative ways to improve your experience with us. We are continually developing our existing programmes, shore excursions and extensions to lands undiscovered. For example, in Burma, we not only offer classic cruises on the Irrawaddy from Rangoon to Mandalay, but unlike other operators we sail further to places like Nagaland (where you will meet a Naga Warrior in traditional dress) on the scenic Chindwin River or sail all the way upstream on the Upper Irrawaddy to Katha – the village where George Orwell set his novel *Burmese Days*. We are also the first river cruise operator to offer programmes on Burma's lesserknown Salween River. In fact, up till now, the whole southern region of Burma has been off limits to tourists. Be the first to discover with Pandaw.

In Indochina, our new and exclusive Halong Bay and the Red River programme has been very well received by Pandaw clients who enjoy the combination of the beauty of Halong Bay, the fascinating sights of the Vietnamese capital Hanoi and the thrill of sailing into areas on the Red River where tourists have rarely ventured previously. We will be the first cruise operator to venture on the Upper Mekong on the brand new *Laos Pandaw* all the way to Jinghong in China's scenic Yunnan Province.

Our partner programmes are continuing to expand with arrangements on the mighty Brahmaputra in India, a spectacular journey in Brazil combining Rio, Iguacu Falls and an Amazon cruise and the chance to explore the Napa River in Ecuador with the option of a few days spent in the Galapagos Islands.

We at Pandaw always listen carefully to feedback and comments from our valued guests. Recently, in response to requests, we have introduced spacious and luxurious suite rooms on the *Pandaw 2* in Burma and *Mekong Pandaw* on the Mekong. We have also added prebookable high-quality mountain bikes on our ships, introduced private dining and have new spa services on selected ships in Burma. And as a parent with two teenage children, I am personally pleased to tell you about our multigenerational family friendly cruises on selected departures in the summer holidays.

If you feel there is anything else our ship experience is missing or have any ideas for future trips, please do get in touch.

Everyone at Pandaw is passionate about ensuring that your experience with us, from the moment you book onwards,

is truly memorable. We have a strong team of European and Australian expatriates working alongside our local operational teams, captains, pursers, tour guides and crew. Our motto is: "Nothing is too much trouble" and this is particularly true of our Pandaw crews whose experience, skill and focus on making your Pandaw journey a trip of a lifetime is ever-present. It is something all our clients remark on.

I hope you enjoy the *Pandaw Magazine* and look forward to the pleasure of your company on a Pandaw River Expedition soon.

Yours sincerely,

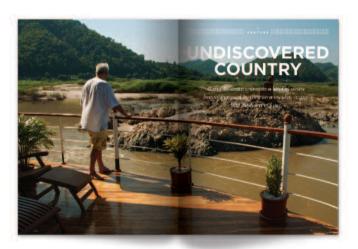
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Hugh Clayson Director

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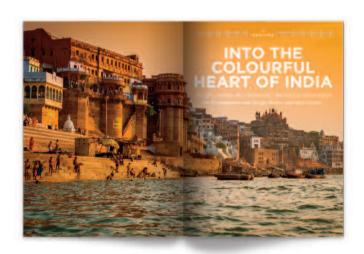
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The river of pleasant sounds



Amazon prime



Into the colourful heart of India



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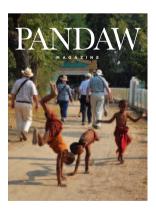
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Front Cover: Young monks at play as Pandaw passengers tour temple in Burma. Photo by Barbara Robert, winner of the Pandaw photo contest 2015

**Inside Cover:** On deck of the Mekong river cruise. Photo by Karl Giger

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# All aboard Pandaw's new classic sea-cruising yacht



f all the exciting new adventures launched by Pandaw in recent years, none stands outs like the one made possible by our purchase of a classic 1960s motor yacht. We sail her from Rangoon to Ranong and on to the mysterious Mergui Archipelago. What makes it special? Because there can

be no more romantic way to travel between the colonial port cities of Rangoon and Moulmein than on this little gem. Throughout the days of the Burmese Raj, teamer services connected these trading posts that dotted the shores of the Andaman sea. Rangoon can only really be appreciated – even understood – from the river. To slip upriver as dawn breaks, or down it as the sun sets is one of the greatest life experiences, once seen, never forgotten.

Moulmein, together with Akyab in the Arakan, were the first British cities in Burma, established in 1824 after the Anglo-Burmese war. Rangoon then became capital of British or Lower Burma in 1855 after the second war. Moulmein, though it has suffered the depredations of urban development, still retains its colonial charm. There are a number of Anglican and Catholic churches from this period, completed in a delightful



Victorian neo-Gothic style. On the hill is the Old Moulmein Pagoda and a sumptuously wood carved royal monasteries.

Pandaw offers two great day excursions from Moulmein. The first is by car to Hpa-an, capital of Karen State on the mighty Salween, the longest river in Burma (see also Ma Thanagi's article on p. 22). Along the way we pass the most extraordinary rock formations and stack-like mountains, the most famous being Mount Zwekabin. Here we see a very welcoming Karen culture at first hand. The town is delightful and after lunch we return to our ship back down the fast flowing Salween on a local boat by way of Martaban.

The other car excursion is to see the war graves at Thanbyuzayat about two hours south of the city. Immaculately maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission servicemen from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands are interred here, all victims of the Japanese and their 'Death Railway' that was to connect Thailand with Burma.

We sail on, hugging the coast to explore Tavoy about which very little is known, but it is a famous old name behind which all sorts of discoveries remain to be made. Then we enter the northern part of the archipelago before entering the bustling port of Mergui. These are areas of mangrove as countless rivers flow off the hills, through labyrinths of creeks, and mazes of channels, to eventually find the sea. Mergui was once home to the writer Maurice Collis and setting for his wonderful book *Siamese White*. Mergui, like all these southern ports, seems like the backdrop to a tale of colonial-era intrigue by Somerset Maugham.

The Mergui Archipelago with its 800 islands is one of those areas that remains almost totally unvisited by Westerners. Though now some dive boats and yachts venture with special permission into the southern islands from their bases in Thailand, the bulk of the archipelago has remained unvisited since colonial times. During that period when the archipelago was first charted, most of the islands were named after colonial civil servants, a number retaining these quaint names to this day.

The local population are Mokkein, often called sea gypsies and sometimes pirates. During the Burmese socialist period the Mokkein controlled the smuggling routes and would prey on shipping. Nowadays they have reverted to fishing and fish curing. They are a people with their own language and culture who entirely live on the sea and have evolved a remarkable way of life. Our tour will visit Mokkein islands such as Lampi in the Sullivan Islands.

The maiden voyages have no itinerary provided. The sailing directions and stops indicated represent "only what we would like to do" says Pandaw founder Paul Strachan.

"All is subject to, trial and error, not to mention navigational directions, tides, weather and government restrictions. Some of these stops may be missed whilst others included in their place. We will certainly work to make this expedition as interesting and exciting as possible. Given the natural beauty of the area, the wealth of things to do and see, this will not be difficult."









#### **Working Expedition Plan - Northbounds**

**Day One** – morning meet in Ranong (meeting place and time to be advised) and transfer by launch to Kawthaung for embarkation on the Andaman Explorer. Afternoon walk round Kawthaung and evening sail to Hastings Harbour.

**Day Two** – explore the Alladin Islands, the largest of which is Davis Island (Than Kyun).

Day Three – the Sullivan island group including Lanbi Island, centre of the Mokkein people and now a Marine National Park.

Day Four – Sular Islands otherwise known as the Great Western Torres (35nm).

**Day Five** – Port Maria on Thayawathadangyi.

Day Six – Iron Passage to Mergui (Myeik) to anchor off or go alongside depending on tides. Explore this fascinating port town.

Day Seven - Port Owen on Tavoy Island (Mali Kyun).

Day Eight - night sail from Tavoy (Dawei) to Moulmein (Maulamyaing).

**Day Nine** – morning in search of the 'old Moulmein pagoda'. Optional trip by car to visit the war graves at Theinbyuzayat in the afternoon. Overnight in port.

**Day Ten** – by car from Moulmein to Hpa-an, capital of Karen State, and return by local boat down the Salween river to Moulmein.

Day Eleven – depart Moulmein and enter the Gulf of Martaban for a night crossing to the mouth of the Rangoon River and follow the river into Rangoon as day breaks. Moor at Botahtaung Jetty.

#### **Working Expedition Plan - Southbound**

**Day One** – embark at Botahtaung Jetty, Rangoon, for an afternoon departure (time to be confirmed) and sail down the Rangoon River to enter the Gulf of Martaban for a night crossing to Moulmein.

**Day Two** – morning in search of the 'old Moulmein pagoda'. Optional trip by car to visit the war graves at Thanbyuzayat in the afternoon. Overnight in port.

**Day Three** – by car from Moulmein to Hpa-an, capital of Karen State, and return by local boat down the Salween river to Moulmein. Sail on the evening tide south to Tavoy (Dawei).

**Day Four**– anchor off Tavov late morning and explore by RIB tender the creeks that lead inland to the town. Evening sail for Port Owen on Tavoy Island (Mali Kyun).

Day Five -Mergui (Myeik) to anchor off or go alongside depending on the tide.

Day Six – depart Mergui for Iron Passage and then to Port Maria on Thayawathadangyi Island.

**Day Seven** – visit the Sular Islands otherwise known as the Great Western Torres.

Day Eight – the Sullivan island group, including Lanbi Island, centre of the Mokkein people and now a Marine National Park.

**Day Nine** – explore the Alladin islands the largest of which is Davis Island (Than Kyun), moor overnight at Hastings Harbour off Za Det Island.

**Day Ten** – evening moor at Hastings Harnbour, off Za Det Island.

Day Eleven – early morning sail from Hastings Harbour to Kawthaung, disembark and transfer to Ranong by launch.

Activities: snorkelling, swimming, tenders for shore excursions.





# THE ANDAMAN EXPLORER

# PANDAW'S NEW BABY

uilt as the *MV Atlantic Guard* in 1963 in Norway as a Norwegian coast guard vessel *Pandaw Explorer* is 61 meters long and still carries her original Rolls Royce engines. The hull is built to 'ice class' with extra thick plates, giving her the power to withstand north Atlantic storms or chases out to sea.

Retired from coast guard duties in 1998 *The*Andaman Explorer was acquired by one Doctor Bogazzi, a wealthy

Italian businessman whose family owns the Carrara marble quarries.

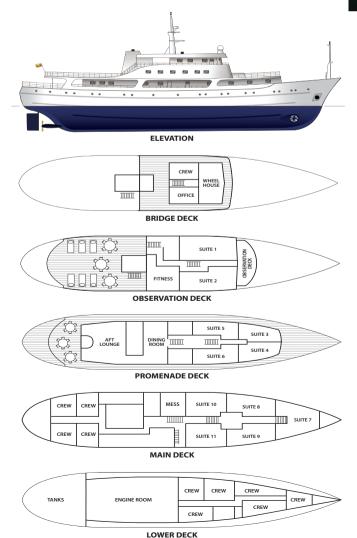
Dr Bogazzi lavished many millions on the ship, completely refitting her with eleven generously-proportioned suites and an on-deck jacuzzi. Much of the ship is floored with Carrara marble, "pleasantly cool under foot for those who go unshod" according to its new owner.

In recent years she has belonged to a powerful shipping family based in Dubai who maintained the ship to a very high standard. Brought from Dubai to Rangoon she has been redecorated and refurnished in Pandaw style. A fuller refit will follow in 2017.

Paul Strachan said: "*The Andaman Explorer* really is a sixties classic. The sort of plaything associated with Onassis, Jackie Kennedy and more glamorous times. There could be no vessel more appropriate for the exploration of South-East Asia's unknown coasts".

He continued: "I have been searching for such a ship for several years and inspected various vessels in Greece and Croatia that were not quite suitable. I believe this is the perfect ship for what we want to do."

Each suite consists of a sitting room, bedroom and marble ("of course!") bathroom. There is a saloon, indoor dining room and two teak decks in the aft, the lower for outdoor dining and the upper with a jacuzzi for lounging. There is also a forward observation deck below the bridge. The ship comes with two RIB [rigid-hulled inflatable boat] tenders for excursions to islands and beaches.



# A HELPING HAND GIVING BACK TO SOUTHEAST ASIA THE PANDAW WAY





Photos by Rick Senley

rom its foundation in 1995, Pandaw has always sought to benefit the countries and communities it is privileged to sail through.

Passengers on our cruises now travel in the knowledge that, directly or indirectly, they are contributing to one of the most remarkable grass roots social support networks in rural South East Asia. While the bulk of the charity's work is in Burma, several socially-beneficial projects have been instigated in other destinations (see list below).

It all started back in 1999, in response to the lack of educational opportunities in upcountry communities, Pandaw founded its first school in the village of Yandabo on the Irrawaddy.

Since then, ten further primary schools and one high school have been constructed from scratch, and handed over to village elders.

Many are on remote river islands or in villages too distant from towns to make a journey to school practically possible.

For example on Thiri Island, which lies in the Irrawaddy south of Pagan, the charity has built three primary schools and one high school providing a complete education to the island children.

Although Pandaw is no longer involved with the running of the schools – the responsibility has passed to the local educational authorities – we remain always on hand to support them, as we did for example with repair work following the floods of December 2015. Schools are, of course, hugely important to the life of a community, and to the life chances of the children who live close to them. It is however in the field of healthcare that Pandaw's support has been literally a matter of life and death for tens of thousands of Burmese.

Pandaw's direct involvement in healthcare started during the disaster of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. This catastrophe, which was

to result in over 140,000 deaths and \$10 billion worth of damage to already-poor communities, has been described as Pandaw's "finest hour"\*.

Our fast-response, on-the-ground interventions in tandem with the medical charity Merlin, using our fleet to penetrate otherwise inaccessible areas of the Irrawaddy Delta with food, medicine and onboard hospital facilities, saved countless lives.

For all its terror and deadly trauma, Nargis left a positive legacy in that it spurred Pandaw to begin the programme of clinic-building, mainly around our heartland operating area of central Burma, Pagan, where our central diagnostic clinic is based, and where patients are referred for further analysis.

We now operate seven clinics, averaging about 5,000 treatments a month or 60,000 a year.

Currently we have 3 full time doctors with a support team of about 12 which includes paramedics, pharmacists, an accountant and a driver.

Since we opened our first Pandaw Free Clinic at Gantgar Village in October 2009, we have treated a total of 225,000 patients. The main ailments our clinicians are presented with are accidents, strokes and heart conditions and dysentery.

Life and death stories are plentiful. On the day we opened the Taungyi Clinic on Thiri Island, in the midst of the opening ceremony, a young girl bitten by a snake whilst working in a field was brought in. She was saved. A few days earlier, she would have died.

The impact of these clinics is huge. They provide the only free medical services for an area the size of an English county and an equivalent population.

With the passage of time, Pandaw's tour operation has become closely interlinked with the charitable work we facilitate. Many of our crewmen are recruited from the villages where clinics are located, boosting an already strong Burmese voluntary impulse.







Some of our senior crewmen have got jobs with the clinics after retiring from active service on the river. For example Ko Po Koh, one of our chefs, after 20 years service on the ships (at the grand old age of 46) is now the driver and has the reputation of something of a sergeant major, keeping the medical staff on their toes.

Of course this free service is expensive to run, and it receives no support from the hard-pressed Burmese authorities.

We need \$250,000 per year just to run the clinics, but much more than that is needed in the form of capital expenditure for new equipment essential to our effectiveness in the field.

For example in 2015 we invested in blood analysis machines and are currently fund raising for an X-ray facility, and the accompanying salary of a qualified radiographer to run it.

We have a few corporate donors, the largest of which is the Pandaw Group, who provide about 90% of funds out of earnings from our cruise operations. But the other 10% comes from individual donors, who are mainly former Pandaw passengers. When you buy your Pandaw ticket, you do so in the knowledge that a portion of your fee goes to support these projects.

Since its inception the UK-registered charity has filed zero administrative expenses on its annual return to the charity regulator. All donations go into the field, not to offices or to salaries for expensive staff.

Quarter of a million dollars is a great deal to raise every year, but it works out at only \$4 for each one of the roughly 60,000 we treat. We call this good value, especially given the impact our treatments can have on the lives of people and communities.

If you would like to find out more about the Pandaw Charity, or would like to make a donation, please visit our website www.pandawcharity.com

\*For a full account of Pandaw's response to Cyclone Nargis see pp193-202 of *The Pandaw Story* by Paul Strachan (2015)

# PANDAW FLOOD APPEAL 2015

In August 2015 much of Upper and Middle Burma was submerged under water. Whilst monsoon floods are not uncommon – most country people are well prepared with houses raised on stilts – no preparations could have defended them against what happened. From the Upper Chindwin down to the confluence with the Irrawaddy and then downstream through Middle Burma as far south as Magwe the entire region was submerged two meters under water. Livelihoods and livestock were immediately lost. With all roads closed food distribution broke down. There were neither medical supplies nor facilities. Disease became rife. The situation became critical as millions of people were cut off from all help.

As this was the off season we had a number of vessels resting and were able to deploy three ships within a few days of the flooding as the crisis revealed itself.

The *Kalay Pandaw*, based at Monywa on the Lower Chindwin, was rapidly deployed, loaded with food aid and medical supplies with a doctor and team from the Pandaw Clinics on board. The *Kalay* operated for one week on a 127-mile stretch of the river between Shwe Sar Yae and Kalewa and delivered \$11,000 worth of rice whilst treating 1,663 patients and dispensing free medications.

The *Kindat Pandaw* was deployed on the Irrawaddy on a 64-mile stretch of river between Sale and Magwe. She also dispersed about \$10,000 worth of rice and the medical team on board treated 1,533 patients over two weeks.

The *Katha Pandaw* was also deployed in the same Sale to Magwe area and over one month dispersed \$40,000 worth of rice and treated 4,347 patients.

We were able to move fast because we had the ships, highly trained fast-thinking local managers and very enthusiastic crews. In fact, most of our crewmen come from these areas and were helping their own villages. Luckily the Pandaw Charity keeps a reserve fund for such contingencies so there was no delay in trying to raise funds, but as we launched an appeal, funds quickly came in and we raised over \$50,000 in a very short space of time, mainly thanks to the generosity of past Pandaw passengers. The pattern had been set in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 when Pandaw passengers

raised \$500,000 and we were able to deploy two of our ships as floating hospitals and later buy a motorised barge and fit it out as a floating clinic.





## **CLOSE TO OUR HEART:**

### PAST PANDAW PROJECTS

#### Pandaw House, Hpondawoo Monastery, Mandalay

Generously donated by Brian and Vardy Pringle of Australia to house 50 Nargis orphans shipped to Mandalay after the 2008 Cyclone. A most impressive construction to which visitors are always welcome.

#### Pandaw Wing, U Hla Tun Hospice, Mandalay

Donated in 2004, the Pandaw Wing offers a clean and pleasant environment for the terminally ill. These hospices, now established in most major Burmese cities, were inspired by the work of the English hospice pioneer Dame Cicely Saunders.

#### Angkor Baan Village Library, Cambodia

Opened in 2015, a successful community project much loved by the local villagers.

#### Kampong Cham Orphanage, Cambodia

Support has included an accommodation block and sports facilities.



#### Cyclone Nargis Hospital Ships

2008, *Pandaw II* and *Pandaw IV* were converted into floating hospitals. The dining rooms were operating theatres and for three months each ship was able to offer medical treatments, administered by Merlin and Save the Children, in the worst affected areas.

#### **Pandaw Floating Clinic in Delta**

2008-2014, a 128ft converted motorised barge originally operated by the medical charity Merlin and later handed over to a German charity called River Doctors.

#### Omega Home

Continuing monthly support for a Christian orphanage in the Delta with 30 Nargis.



#### To donate or learn more visit

www.pandawcharity.com



# AT YOUR SERVICE

It's the diversity of people behind Pandaw that makes the company unique. Throughout the magazine we will be introducing the multi-skilled international team that, in 21 years, has turned Pandaw into a travel industry legend.



Rorn Saroun

Role: Purser

Age: 36

Nationality: Cambodian

Time with Pandaw: 4 years

What does your job involve?: Making sure all the crew follow company policy. It's my job to make the operation run smooth by coordinating between the crew, the passengers and the onshore authorities.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I've been a waiter, worked in a front office, been a tour arranger and provided butler service.

What's the best part about what you do?: Making sure the passengers have fun, trying to generate new ideas to improve the quality of our work and the standards of the company.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?: Trying to let more people know about our company and getting the team to understand my role and the standards I expect!

What skills do you need to do the job well?: I still feel I need more management and operations training skills to do my job as well as I would like.

**Any hopes/dreams for the future?:** To start my own business one day.



# Bee Nguyen

Role: Finance manager

Age: 32

Nationality: Vietnamese

Time with Pandaw: 8 years

What does your job involve?: I prepare payments and the payroll, monitor incoming money entering the admin system, credit control and debt management.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I used to work in a tourism company as an English-speaking guide, so I have good general knowledge and experience of tour management.

What's the best part about what you do?: I like to meet many people and to learn about different cultures.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?: To improve my foreign language skills and understand other fields which my job involves.

What skills do you need to do the job well?: Good general knowledge, accuracy, integrity, discretion with confidential information, due care and attention to detail, loyalty, responsibility.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I hope that I am able to continue contributing to Pandaw Cruises as much as I can.



## Angie Cachao

Role: Travel Consultant

**Age:** 34

Nationality: South African/Portuguese

Time with Pandaw: 1 Year

What does your job involve?: I help run the Pandaw Expeditions UK office in London, concentrating on reservations and customer service.

#### What previous experience prepared you for the job?:

I've been in the cruising industry since 2002, I started off as a junior reservations consultant with the bigger cruise liners, but later fell in love with small ship cruising. Our Pandaw ships are unique and allows us to get to places that most ships can't, which appeals to many of our passengers.

What's the best part about what you do?: Belonging to a forward-thinking team full of ideas and enthusiasm. The London operation has become my "baby" and my most dearest project enabling me to learn and grow in new fields. Pandaw clients are wonderful and I enjoy talking to them about their experiences.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?: Setting up our UK office a year ago and putting together our systems, trying to make sure that we have all angles covered. It has been an exciting and busy year!

What skills do you need to do the job well? Knowing your airline booking systems, knowing your clients, patience, attention to detail, ability to plan ahead.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I'd like to see the UK Pandaw branch grow further and to continue implementing new ideas, working with all the travel agents/operators and our direct clients creating awareness of the Pandaw product.



## Saroueng Em

Role: Senior Purser, Cambodia

Age: 34

Nationality: Cambodian

Time with Pandaw: 11 years

What does your job involve?: It's my job to supervise guest relations as well as crew operations, to ensure everything runs smoothly. I'm in charge of upholding the Pandaw philosophy for passengers' benefit. That means creating the right onboard environment and ensuring high standards of hospitality.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I was a volunteer English translator for a small Cambodian NGO. I travelled to many provinces and mixed with people of all different nationalities as well as the local villagers.

What's the best part about what you do?: Meeting all sorts of new people. I love to engage with the guests and crew and I relish handling any problems or issues that might occur. I also enjoy challenging and encouraging our highly professional staff, promoting team-building amongst the crew and making sure they are happy with their work and enjoying onboard life. The best part is that I get to perform these roles against such a beautiful river backdrop!

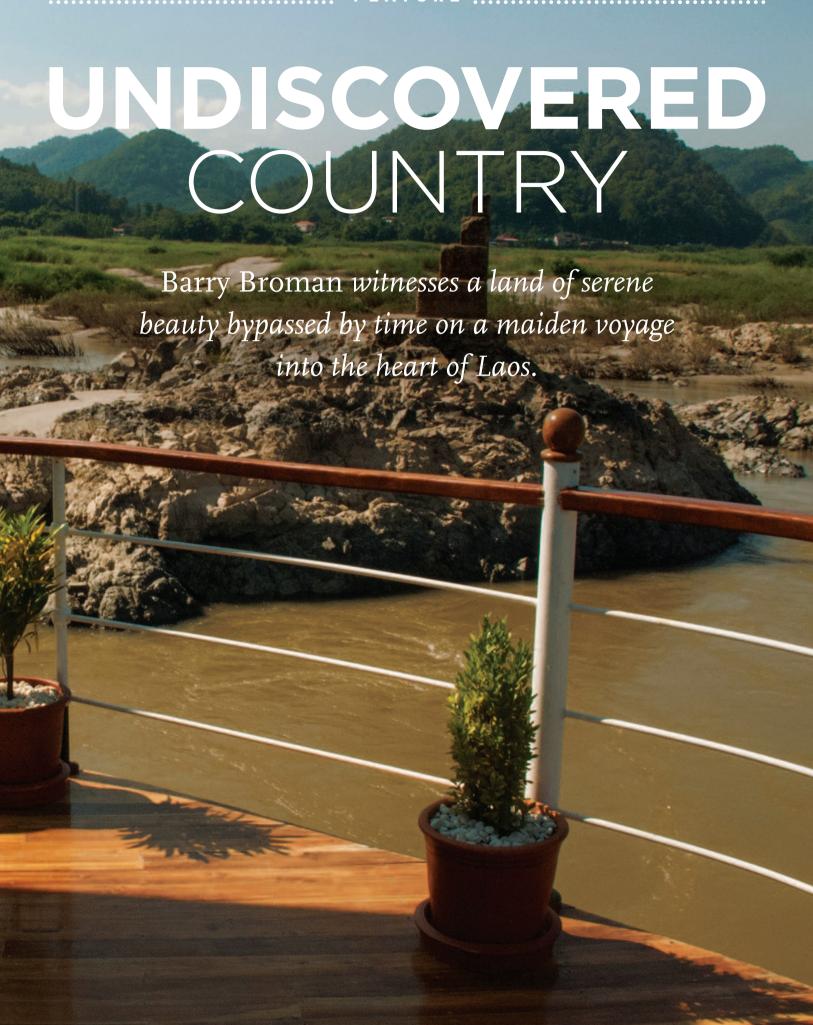
What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?:

I admit it was a bit of a challenge for me in the beginning when I first came and joined the company and had to learn to work with people from different cultures and traditions. I had quite a hard time but it made me stronger and it was great experience. I couldn't imagine back then that I would still be onboard 11 years later, still being excited by what I do every day, and by being part of the beloved Pandaw family. I have enjoyed every minute of it, and learned a lot.

What skills do you need to do the job well?: Speaking and writing English well, ability to report back clearly to my colleagues.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I hope that the company will get much bigger and even more popular around the world. As for me, I hope to go on improving on the job.







Above: Laotian dancers treat passengers to a ceremonial welcome dance onboard



n the nineteenth century the French dreamed of navigating the upper Mekong in Laos, the 'river road to China' to open the markets of the interior of China to French products.

It never happened. The French were first challenged by the Khone Falls near the border of the present day Kingdom of Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Undaunted, they defeated this obstacle by the construction of a mile-long railroad that bypassed the cataracts. But the dangerous passage north from Vientiane proved too much for the French and power boats never ventured further upstream. Until now that is.

Pandaw's new ten-cabin boat, built of teak wood, steams a stretch of this major river that has rarely seen cruise boats before on an II-day, 900km run upstream from Vientiane to Chiang Khong, and back again.

The elegant *Laos Pandaw*, equipped with powerful engines, and designed along the lines of the venerable Irrawaddy Flotilla Company boats of Burma, is





pioneering this challenging run. The boat has an international crew of twenty-one to care for the twenty passengers who fill the boat. The star of the team is the veteran Lao skipper, Captain Houm Phan (see page 85), who has navigated these treacherous waters for years with his trusty first mate and compatriot Boun.

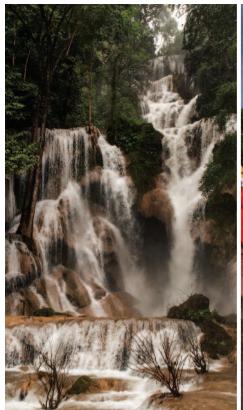
My cruise started with a short tour of Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Invariably described as "sleepy" in travel guides, it is in truth a non-descript, backwater that has changed little since the French decamped in 1953. We visited Wat Sisaket, one the finest and most interesting of the Buddhist temples in Vientiane, saw the gilded *stupa* of Pra That Luang, probably the most important and arresting monuments in Laos and a symbol of the nation. First constructed in the 16th century, the stupa was destroyed many times after invasions by the Siamese and Burmese and was bombed by the Thai military during an air raid in 1940. It was reconstructed by the French after World War II.

We also visited the newest monument, the Patuxai

or Victory Monument constructed after independence from France was attained and closely (and ironically) resembling the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Built with American aid money, earmarked for the construction of a new airport for Vientiane, the monument is sometimes referred to as "The Vertical Runway".

The Laos Pandaw is spacious with a large sun deck, a dining area, and an enclosed lounge/bar where presentations, films, and daily briefings are held. It houses a fully-stocked bar, including local alcoholic products of varying quality, and a prodigious supply of acclaimed Lao Beer served in chilled glasses. A cocktail-of-the-day is served by Cambodian bartender Chankary at the precisely designated time of 1730 hours. The American cruise director Matthew Eberle informed me that he is considering making the "house cocktail" a Lao Lao Margarita. Lao Lao is local moonshine, a fiery clear drink that is available, disconcertingly without labels, at every village en route upstream. One onboard wag described it as

Pandaw passengers encounter the sights and tastes of Laos









"the drink so good they named it twice".

The countryside up the river from Vientiane quickly becomes rural and then lush jungle and steep limestone karst mountains. There is very little traffic on this section of the Mekong apart from scattered fisherman in small boats, an ominous sign. Soon the Mekong shows her teeth. It is low-water season in December and sharp, serrated rocks appear on both sides of the boats in the narrow channel, sometimes quite close, occasionally in rapids. It is then one appreciate the two heavy duty diesel engines pushing the *Laos Pandaw* upstream.

Food on board is a mix of Eastern and Western cuisine; all of it delicious prepared by Cambodian and Laotian chefs and served by a Cambodian waiting staff. On Day 2 Laotian chef Surivanh conducted a cooking class on how to make a spicy fish salad (*laap pla*). Easy to prepare, the dish was a big success. Breakfasts offer eggs Benedict (or any other egg variation one desires) competing with tasty Asian

above: Enjoying the wonders of Laos, including the "sky lantern" ceremony

soups. Tough-choice dinners are worthy of the top restaurants in the region, as is the service. One night ostrich stroganoff can appear on the menu, or perhaps a Vietnamese crepe. All good. We were lucky to have executive chef Kim Hong from Cambodia on this run supervising two Lao chefs and a fellow Khmer.

As the river turns northwards, there is little sign of human habitation but the scenery is spectacular and it is something of a relief to be able to sit in a deck chair and watch Laos pass by, utterly untouched by man. On Day 4 we make a brief stop at a Khmu hilltribe village but the shore trip was curtailed by a sudden downpour which quickly cooled our sense of adventure, turning the hillside into a tricky quagmire. The children are friendly but understandably wary; we may be the first foreigners they have seen. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia children clamour around, some seeking sweets or posing for photos. Here the river and its villages are pristine and unspoiled. That will



change but for now, passengers can enjoy the moment.

The first sign of modernity on the Mekong comes on Day 5 when we round a bend and are faced with the Sayaboury Dam, an unfinished Chinese-funded project that blocks the path up river. Deftly the skipper manoeuvres the *Laos Pandaw* into a very narrow lock that, once filled with water, raises the boat sixty feet vertically and then allows us to continue northward as construction workers look down on our luxury craft wending its way past the dam that will bring electricity to Laos (and Thailand). The 21st century has arrived.

On Day 6 we arrive at Muang Khay village where it is a short walk to an elephant camp where thirteen elephants are housed and protected and where tourists may visit and enjoy rides on the otherwise unemployed pachyderms. There are only nine hundred elephants left in Laos, a country that was once known as the "Land of a Million Elephants". It

was good to see the lucky thirteen here. Well cared for, they enjoy life along the Mekong without having to haul trees and perform other arduous tasks, they now can pass along their own apparent love of life to others.

Soon minivans arrive to transport us to the nearby Kang Si waterfall, a majestic series of falls and cataracts that tumble two hundred fifty feet down the hillside into deep pools. It is serene and beautiful. It is also a tourist destination, helped by its proximity to Luang Prabang, the main population centre of Laos on our journey northward. Luang Prabang is a must-see destination for anyone interested in the history and culture of Southeast Asia.

We continue upriver and moor on the left bank of the Mekong at the northern end of Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site. At the bottom of steep steps near the famed Wat Xieng Thong, a prime example of the stunning architecture that graced Luang Prabang (meaning literally "Royal Buddha")

Shore party: passengers disembark to sample the wonders of Luang Prabang







image in the dispelling fear pose") in the 16th century, when it held wide sway along the river into areas now part of Thailand and Burma.

The wat whose name translates as 'Temple of the Golden City' is a symbol of Laos' past glories, its traditional art and devotion to Buddhism, and its patronage for centuries by the Lao royal family. That came to an end in 1975 when the communist Pathet Lao took power, jailed many in the royal family, and turned their back on religion.

Wat Xieing Thong suffered accordingly and over the past two decades has been in a sad decline. That seems to be changing. A large sign at the wat entrance announces a grant of \$600,000 by the US Government for restoration of this iconic temple. It is a start. Despite past edicts emanating from the Politburo of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, Buddhism thrives in Laos and in Luang Prabang. This is most easily seen early every morning when hundreds of the city's Buddhist monks walk door to door allowing the faithful to make merit by providing the monks food for their one meal of the day. Tourists are now directly involved and many line up with food with which they also help feed the monks.

We pass two pleasant nights in Luang Prabang, a walkable city bounded by the Mekong on the West which meets the Khan River at the north end of town. The regional capital retains the look of a French colonial town thanks to the architecture, and the omnipresent baguettes. There is also a night market which in the past consisted of the sale of Lao and tribal hand woven textiles, notably from the Hmong who inhabit many of the nearby hills. Today, the market is more crowded with cheap goods that may be found in many of the markets of the region. But there remain a number of shops featuring high quality goods from antique Lao artifacts to modern jewelry and handicrafts.

A highlight of the visit to Luang Prabang and indeed the whole trip is witnessing a *baci* ceremony performed on board the *Laos Pandaw*. This is an important facet of Lao culture. Its name means "calling of the soul" and is used to celebrate important events, in this case the exposure of Laos and its culture to foreign visitors. The elaborate ritual originates from pre-Buddhist times when spirits were (and are) propitiated. It seeks to bring and preserve good luck in those honored at the ceremony, in this case the passengers on the boat.

A key feature of the *baci* ceremony is the tying of strings on the wrists of those being honoured. Each passenger had stings tied, in my case the captain gave me a string along with other members of the Lao crew. The ceremony included taking of spirits, literally in this case as shots of lao lao were provided. Then an ensemble of young girls dressed in both classical Lao costumes as well as those of Lao ethnic groups dance on the aft of the boat to accompaniment of a three-man Lao band. The whole thing was colourful, charming and a short but deep insight into Lao culture in action. A Lao version of Auld Lang Syne was played as the boat prepared to continue its northward journey. Part of the elaborate floral centerpiece from the ceremony stayed on board and was placed on the boat's bow to bring good luck to the boat and all aboard her.

A short distance north of Luang Prabang, at the mouth of the Ou River, are the Bac Ou Caves, caverns in a limestone cliff that sits on the right bank of the Mekong. The two caves are filled with hundreds of Buddhas images of varying age and condition. It is a holy place that welcomes visitors moving up or down stream. The silent images keep watch on the river below.

After dusk on the 8th Day we land gently on a sand bar and set up a bar before celebration the Pandaw version of the *Khom Loy* or Sky Lantern ceremony. Lanterns are illuminated with candles and then launched above the river. These eco-friendly sky-borne lights soon extinguish themselves, leaving no trace. To add some spirit to the happy event a bar is set up on the sand serving liquid refreshments.

North of Luang Prabang river traffic picks up markedly as long low-rise river boats carry tourists and goods up and down the river connecting Thailand and Lao towns. A few speed boats pass by bringing a rare blast of noise to an otherwise silent setting. Half way up to our destination of Chiang Khong, Thailand, we put in at Pak Beng, a bustling town catering to overnight budget travellers with dozens of guest houses and a few upscale hotels. We land at one of these and notice a sign posted about sixty feet about the river stating that this was the high water level in August. We visit the market at Pak Beng, undistinguished but plentiful with local produce and even, incongruously, ATM machines. Fresh river catfish are a specialty along with large frogs, freshly grilled.

On the 10th Day we put in at Huay Say, an expanding town in Laos opposite the larger town of Chiang Khong, Thailand.

We leave the boat in Laos, clear immigration and customs, and board busses taking us across the Friendship Bridge to Thailand. Here we again pass customs and immigration and rejoin the boat for our last night on the Mekong.

It was the end of what had been a memorable excursion along a stretch of the Mekong River where nothing seems to have changed for decades, if not centuries. On the *Laos Pandaw* we had a rare look at a segment of the river where danger lurks, the beauty of nature dominates, and the hand of man is rarely shown. Making this journey is a treat none of us will ever forget.

It is notoriously difficult to combine real river adventure with five-star service but somehow, Pandaw has done it.

Pandaw operates 14-night 'Mekong, from Laos to China' between September and April.

Cruise only prices from USD 5,670 per person (main deck, twin share)

#### MAN OF MANY PARTS

Photographer, author, newspaperman, soldier and diplomat Barry Broman is one of the

West's most distinguished and authoritative commentators and observers of South East Asian travel, culture and politics. He began his photographic career in 1962 as an Associated Press photographer in Bangkok. After receiving a BA in political science in 1967 and MA in Southeast Asian studies in 1968 from the University of

Washington, he served as an infantry officer in the US Marine Corps in Vietnam and later as liaison officer in Thailand.

Broman served more than 25 years in the US Department of State, mostly in Southeast Asia, and retired in 1996 after serving as the US Counselor of Embassy in Rangoon, Burma. Since retiring from government service, he has been actively writing and photographing books and producing documentary films.

These include Cambodia: The Land and Its People (2009), Myanmar Architecture: Cities of Gold (2005), Irrawaddy: Benevolent River of Burma (2004) and Spiritual Abodes of Thailand (2005). Among the films he has produced are Flowers of Death (2003), about drugs in the Golden Triangle and Jim Thompson, The Man and the Legend (2006).

### **EXPRESS SERVICE**

Pandaw founder Paul Strachan tells the story behind the hasty birth of the Laos Pandaw

The Laos Pandaw was built in a hurry. There are no proper ship yards above the Khone Falls and we could not persuade our Vietnamese builders to assemble a ship trucked in bits on the river bank. We tried our Rangoon builder but he also declined to take the risk. By January 2015 we were taking bookings and selling out but still had no ship. My wife and I flew to Vientiane and took a taxi down to the river bank and boarded the first cargo ship we saw, a 40-metre barge used to carry heavy loads of cement and rice up to China. She had two 400hp truck engines and was just the thing for tackling the terrifying fast flow of the Upper Mekong. The captain was the owner and we asked him 'how much?' (Every ship in the world is potentially for sale.) A price was agreed and the owner agreed to stay on as skipper and is still there. He immediately took her up to the Golden Triangle, a week's sail away.

The Golden Triangle is where Burma, Laos and Thailand meet and was the perfect place to convert the ship. You could see from where she was moored on the Laos side both Burma and Thailand. Everything we needed could be bought off the shelf in Thailand and the build team came over from Mandalay, a two day bus journey across the Shan mountains. They made a camp on the Burmese river bank opposite. We hired a house on the Thai side to act as an office. Amazingly we had the ten cabin ship finished on time for the maiden voyage on the 1st November 2015. Actually it was the first time we have had the ship finished on time! Normally there are still sparks flying as the first passengers are welcomed on board.

Plans for the next ship involve laying the hull ourselves on the Thai side where we have discovered some local yards specialising in cargo barges and then get our Mandalay team of carpenters back to outfit her. We will be going a little bigger and upping the engine power for the China run. This really is exciting stuff.

# THE "RIVER OF PLEASANT SOUNDS" - AND GLORIOUS SIGHTS

Celebrated local author Ma Thanegi watches Burmese culture and history floating by on the Irrawaddy's giant eastern sister, the sublime Salween

orn in the icy Qinghai Mountains of Tibet, the Salween River first passes through China for approximately 1248 km, then northwest Thailand for the next 96 km, before entering Burma's eastern tip and flows the final 1056 km southwards into the Andaman Sea. An impressive 2400 km in total, it is called Nujiangin in China, then Salawin by the Thai and finally Thanlwin by the people of Burma, meaning "pleasant sounds". Salween is a 19th Century British coinage.

In Burma it passes through thick jungles from which timber elephants drag the logs into its rapid waters to be dragged out again by elephants in Moulmein, (Mawlamyaing in Burmese) and shipped out to other countries. Nowadays with highways connecting one country with another, shipping is only one of the options for the timber trade. Moulmein is the capital of the Mon State, the third largest city and the second biggest port in Burma. Upriver of Moulmein is Hpa-an, meaning Rocky Spur in the Shan language, was just a small fisher village of three centuries' ago inhabited peacefully by the Karen, Shan and Taungthu races. Over time the village grew and prospered to be named capital of the Karen State in 1954.

The mouth of Salween River meets the smaller Jaing River (aka Atrium) to flow into the Andaman Sea, but there is Ogre's Island at this junction, so that the view of the sea is blocked. Here on a spur of the western bank of the Salween lies the ancient town of Martaban (Mottama) where centuries ago, ships from Europe and the Middle East stopped to replenish food and water, storing them in the huge, glazed Martaban jars. On the opposite shore to Martaban is Moulmein itself, the first city to be ceded to the British in 1826 after the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824.

It was there that the First Baptist Church in Burma was established in 1827 by Dr Adoniram Judson who translated the



Bible into Burmese and imported a printing press. This led to the locals importing their own presses to publish books and newspapers; traditional books had been sheets of layered dry palm leaves painstakingly inscribed with a stylus and used mostly for religious and administrative purposes.

The city is beautifully laid out with stately colonial era buildings still used as government offices as well as one old residence of a princess as a school for girls. The exiled Princess known as the Fourth Royal Daughter, the youngest of the daughters of the exiled last king and queen of Burma, lived there with her family as she was not allowed to go to Mandalay or Yangon. Official royal names tended to be complicated, so the easy-going Burmese found easier alternatives. The children of the princess were educated at the missionary schools of Moulmein and nowadays their descendants lead non-royal lives in Mandalay and Rangoon (Yangon), proud of their ancestry but not exploiting it. The Mon Culture Museum, closed on Mondays, has a small but exquisite collection of antiquities.

A high narrow ridge looms over the city, its top lined with pagodas for no hilltop in Burma is left unadorned with







Buddhist shrines, however inaccessible it might be.

The most revered pagoda is Kyaik Than Lan on the highest point, believed built in 875 A.D.by King Mutpi Raja and enshrined with Buddha's relics. It was originally 17m high and successive kings raised the height to 46m by topping each spire with a larger one.

This is the "old Moulmein pagoda" where the beautiful girl was remembered sitting in Kipling's great celebration of the Irawaddy River "On the Road to Mandalay". The pagoda is there alright, and maybe the cheroot-smoking lass was too, but more than that was probably poetic license.

For a start, the barrack-room romantic who narrates the oft-quoted ballad remembers that 'er name was Supi-yaw-lat-jes' the same as Theebaw's Queen.

However Supi-yaw-lat means "middle royal princess". Had the poor girl really called herself that, she and her parents would have been rapidly sent to the madhouse.

On the pagoda platform is a pavilion named Yan Pyay Mahn Shin meaning "anger forgotten and pride cleared away", donated by Queen Sein Don, one of the dowager consorts of King Mindon, father of the said King Thibaw. She settled here after 1885 when the British colonised Burma and apparently named this pavilion after her state of mind.

Within the pavilion is a large bronze image on an ornate seat, a replica of thrones in the palace. Everywhere in the pavilion there are gilded clay and mirror mosaics made by artisans from the palace who had followed her.

Another result of merit-making by this queen is the Maha Muni Pagoda, an exact replica of the famous one in Mandalay. The charming building has colorful stained-glass windows in the western style and pillars covered with glass mosaic of Burmese motifs. The upper parts of the walls are lined with old paintings with Buddhist themes. The Yandana Bon Myint Monastery which was also her merit lies at the southern foot of the ridge. Constructed in the charming mixture of Burmese and European architecture which was very popular at the time, the interior displays an eclectic and magnificent collection of traditional art work.

Around Mawlamyaing are Setse and Maun Magan Beaches, the Kyauk Kalut Pagoda perched on a natural pillar in the shape of a stemmed glass and Kyaik Khami Pagoda where women devotees worship in a special hall, together with the praying figure of the Mother Goddess and the female Sea Dragons. Her figure is seated in front of a huge Buddha shrine overflowing with donated images, platters of fruit, bowls of flowers and baskets of the green coconut homage offering. A lighthouse that guides and protect ships can be seen some distance away.

On the banks of Jaing River is the peaceful town of Kyaik Maraw. People come here to worship the famous Buddha image donated by Queen Shin Saw Pu in 1455. It is now

enshrined in the U Khema Monastery, which was constructed centuries later, attested by the mixture of east-west architecture of colonial era, producing a finely balanced beauty. The seated image is in the rarely-seen pose of sitting on a chair with the feet down. It seems to be the earliest of its kind and along this southern coastal region there are several such images to be seen whereas it is almost unknown in other parts of the country; perhaps other donors copied from this merit of the great Mon queen who is still loved by the people of Burma.

Thanbyu Zayat is the site of the graves of Allied soldiers who gave their lives as prisoners of war forced to work on the "Death Railway" built by the Japanese during WWII, to connect Burma and Thailand in order to improve supply lines. On the side of the main road an old steam engine stands on part of the original track as a monument to this horror.

The most famous and biggest meditation centre in Burma is Pa-Auk Forest Retreat spread over 500 acres of land. Here, locals as well as foreigners come to meditate on the conscious awareness of the mind in a practice called *Vipassana*. Another famous site not of the mind but seemingly of matter in its most overwhelming form is the 600ft reclining Win Sein Buddha image across a dry gulch of another similar image under construction, to be 800 feet long on completion.

In the wide expanse of sea facing the Strand lies tiny Shampoo Island where centuries ago a princess used to wash her hair, but now there is a meditation monastery and pagoda. Ogre's Island once produced elegant carved woodwork but the craftsmen had moved to more accessible places. Only one man in his seventies continues to make the Meerschaum-style pipes out of wild lime tree burrs which he had been selling to overseas customers for fifty years, still climbing the trees himself to get the best formations. Here, younger men make their own trucks put together with what machinery or parts they could transport by boats plus dials and knobs they salvaged from old radios and cassette players for the dash board. If the planned bridge connecting the island to Mawlamyaing gets built, these cars will all be replaced by reconditioned Toyotas.

Moulmein looks like a city on the verge of sophistication. Hpa An on the other hand has a feel of an old-world leisureliness that is increasingly hard to find. The town is as calm as the majestic Mt. Zwegabin whose image is reflected on the surface of Kan Tharyar Lake.

Around Hpa An, as if pushed out abruptly from the earth, black stony hills rise from the flat and wide green fields, mostly singly but sometimes in family groups with ranging sizes. The distance from Moulmein to Hpa An is about 30 miles by river, but the road is too eventful to miss.

Some of the higher stony hills have caves and, unsurprisingly in this pagoda-obsessed country, each has been turned into a shrine with images ranging in numbers from a

Above: The craft of the pipe-maker Below: Colonial house on the banks

of the Salween

great many to thousands, in size from 2 inches to larger-than-life-sized

Htaron, Kawka Thaung, Pyattamya, Bayint Nyi and Hsadan Caves are five sacred sites with many images within. The last, Hsadan Cave, has a long dark tunnel that opens at the other side of the hill to a lake at the foot of it. Here, people take boats back to the bank near the main entrance, the boatmen skillfully weaving through weeds and flowering lotus.

More special than these five is Kaw Gun Cave, of which colonial era traveller V. C. Scott O'Connor wrote in his 1904 book *The Silken East* that "ten thousand images of the Buddha lie within the first sweep of the eye, from yellow-robed figures which line the footpath, to terra-cotta plaques fixed high on the jutting face of the cliff; from golden giants, the height of Goliath, to miniature figures. A great stalagmite, rising up from the floor to near the brow of the overhanging cliff, is completely covered with small images of the Buddha enthroned, and its summit is crowned by a small pagoda."

Just inside the entrance in Kawgun Cave there is an overhanging ledge that runs for approximately 100 ft. facing a high ground of almost the same length. Three sentences of an unknown language can be seen on one wall, but no scholar has yet been able to decipher it. Another intriguing find is a beautiful stone sculpture of a headless torso.

A more recent structure is the pagoda in Kaw Hnut Village and a monastery with two prayer pavilions and an ordination hall donated by the self-made entrepreneur U Nar Auk (1832-1913) who made his fortune through rice and timber. Once he imported machinery and parts from Glasgow and set up a shipyard in Martaban and operated nine double-decker steamers on the Salween and Jiang Rivers, but faced too much completion from the bigger Irrawaddy Flotilla Company to make a go of the project.

Instead he built a pagoda, with a monastery and pavilions around it, bringing over the best carvers in Mandalay for the interior decorations. Along the top of the exterior walls of the prayer pavilions he hung painted scenes from the Jataka Tales and the interior walls were lined on the upper pats with connecting panels each carved with scenes of Buddhist celebrations and ceremonies. The carvings are in high relief and not only painted in lifelike colours, but the size of each figure, tree or building is adjusted to give a realistic perspective.

The people of the Salween River region are unique, with their own traditions, beliefs and cuisine. At the same time they share many similarities with the other races of the Union of Burma such as obsessive eagerness to honour the Buddha, their generosity in doing good deeds, friendliness, love of food and sharing of food. Many do not look for much more out of life than stability, underpinned with a safety net, in accordance with the saying that one could suffer the pain of poverty but not that of wealth, and thus they live with the luxury of pleasant leisure.



Pandaw operates 7-night 'Mighty Salween' from October to March.

Cruise only prices from USD 2,396 per person (main deck, twin share)

# DOYENNE OF BURMESE CULTURE

Ma Thanegi is one of Burma's most distinguished and prolific writers and

translators and a leading expert on on the country's culture, traditions,

cultural attractions and cuisine.

Born in 1946 in Shwebo, a town in Upper Burma, the daughter of a local official, she grew up in Rangoon and was educated at the Methodist English High School but says "I still consider myself an upcountry gal".

A personal (non-political)
assistant to the democracy
ner Aung San Suu Kyi, in 1988 shi

campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi, in 1988 she was arrested and in 1989 was imprisoned by the military regime for "distributing anti-military material". She served less than three years in Rangoon's notorious Insein Prison before being released under a suspended sentence as part of a "special order" along with 100 other political prisoners. Her account of her imprisonment *Nor Iron Bars a Cage* (2003) is "about the strong characters of wit and resilience she met in Insein Jail".

Ma Thanegi is a contributing editor to the *Myanmar Times* and editor of *Enchanting Myanmar*, a travel magazine

**OVERLEAF: Ma Thanegi's** tastes of the Salween







# FISH CAKE IN COCONUT GRAVY

Serves four, eaten with steamed rice together with soup and side dishes.

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In Myanmar coconut is used mostly in desserts and rarely in savoury cooking, apart from a few curries or coconut rice. This is the most-often eaten coconut-based curry that originated in the towns around the Salween delta.

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#### For the fish cakes:

500 kg scraped fish Salt to taste

For the gravy:

¼ teaspoon turmeric powder
2 shallots, pounded
3 cloves garlic, pounded
¼ inch ginger, pounded
1 teaspoon sweet or hot paprika
½ cup water
¼ cup coconut cream
¼ cup oil
Salt to taste

Scrape fresh fish with side of a thin metal spoon. Alternatively remove skin and bones and cut into pieces and grind in electric grinder with the salt to taste, chopped garlic and onion. If scraped, remove bones and mix thoroughly with salt to taste, finely chopped garlic and onion. Then, scoop up a handful and throw it with force into a large bowl about two or three times, and until it is hard if you want a chewy texture. Form into balls or cakes and set aside or fry in hot oil to crisp surface.

Heat oil in pan with the turmeric powder and add the pounded onion, garlic and ginger and fry until the gravy base turns golden brown. Add the paprika and stir a few seconds. Add the fish cakes and water, then cover pan, lower heat and cook until you hear the oil sizzling. Add coconut cream and stir and cover again until you hear the oil sizzling again. Add salt to taste and remove pan from heat.





## MAWLAMYAING MONHINGA

Serves four

Monhinga is soft, thin rice noodles served in a thick fish broth and is the most favoured breakfast dish in the delta and coastal regions of Myanmar. Garnishes are usually half a hardboiled egg, coriander and strips of fish cake with wedges of lemon for those who want a dash of tartness. Fresh rice noodles are used in Myanmar but thin Japanese *somen* noodles have the closest texture.

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#### Fish stock

500 gm firm-fleshed fish such as catfish
1 teaspoon shrimp paste or 1 tablespoon fish sauce;
both can be substituted with a fish bouillon cube
4 stalks lemongrass, ends crushed
1 inch ginger, crushed

Boil the fish with other ingredients. Sieve the stock, set aside the fish and discard everything else. Carefully flake fish in large chunks removing bones at the same time.

#### **Soup Base**

3 shallots pounded
3 cloves garlic pounded
½ inch ginger peeled and pounded
½ teaspoon turmeric powder
1 teaspoon hot paprika
3 tablespoon oil
Salt or fish sauce to taste
8 small whole shallots, peeled - to be added in the last
5 minutes

Optional: for crunchy texture, peel outer layers of a 6 inches long banana tree stem until soft core remains, slice and soak in water. You can substitute it with dried lotus root soaked in warm water.

Heat oil and cook ingredients, apart from the small shallots, until fragrant. Stir in paprika and carefully fold in the flaked fish to keep fish chunks whole. Add the stock and the banana stem and simmer gently with salt to taste. Add more water as needed, bring to a boil and add the small shallots and turn off heat when they begin to turn translucent.

#### Garnishes

Boil eggs 9 minutes for moist yolks; peel and halve Prepare fish cake as in the fish cake curry recipe or use readymade fish cakes and fry in a little oil to crisp the surface and cut into strips.

Cut coriander leaves and lemon or lime wedges.

# TALAPAW KAREN VEGETABLE SOUP

Serves four



This is a thick hearty soup eaten almost at every meal by the Karen race. The main ingredients are grilled fish, roasted rice and tender bamboo shoots, pumpkin and Asian basil. The optional vegetables can vary according to what one could gather from the woods or pluck from the garden.

½ cup rice pan roasted until golden brown 200 gm catfish

4 stalks lemongrass, ends crushed

4 cups fish stock made from scratch or from bouillon cube Pumpkin and bamboo shoots cut in equal-sized chunks – compulsory

(Optional: potatoes, daikon, eggplant, carrots) Some whole green chilies

A bunch of fresh Asian basil

(Optional: mustard greens or tender tips of gourd or pea vines)

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Grill the catfish and remove bones. Pound the roasted rice roughly and mix with a little warm water and set aside to soak.

Boil the stock with the grilled fish and lemongrass and stir in the rice mixture when it boils hard, until the soup thickens.

Add the chunks of vegetables with salt to taste and when they are tender, tear apart and throw in the basil and green chilies.

Add mustard greens or pea tendrils if preferred; remove pot from heat and take out the lemon grass stalks before serving.



#### EFATUDE



he Amazon is made for superlatives. Over 6000km long and challenging the Nile for the title of the longest river in the world, the Amazon Basin is home to the largest rainforest in the world and the largest single source of fresh water in the world. It provides the habitat for over 2000 species of birds & mammals and an astonishing 2.5 million species of insects.

When Pandaw asked me to venture into the depths of the Amazonian jungle to investigate whether the river's cruise ships were up to the company's exacting standards, I knew the assignment would make a deep impression. I just didn't guess how deep.

The list goes on.

Nothing quite prepares you for the romance of this river, or for the variety of its moods and landscapes. From a source deep in the high Andes of Peru it winds its way across a lush mysterious continent, before emptying into the Atlantic via a "mouth" that is at least 180km wide. Fed by 1100 tributaries along the way, it is home to lost tribes and much-mythologised creatures such as piranha, anaconda and pink river dolphins.

Before I journeyed to South America to explore the cruising options, I became obsessed with the prospect of seeing those pink dolphins (*inea geoffrensis* to give them their proper title). 'Very rare' the consensus was: "You'll be lucky. They're nearly extinct as they're hunted for fish bait."

But somehow I knew that the Amazon wouldn't let me down. Indeed the reality is that the river dolphins are protected not only by law – which can be tricky to enforce in such a vast and sparsely populated area – but also by local legend and myth. It is considered terribly unlucky to kill a dolphin, particularly a pink one, and the local fishermen go to great lengths to free them from their nets if one strays nearby.

I can safely report that every single day I was in the Amazon I saw dolphins playing around while all the time keeping a curious eye on us. From the shallow waters of the Rio Napo in Ecuador, through the port of Iquitos in Peru in to the large City that is Manaus in Brazil, and along the meeting of the waters in Santarem. Dolphins abounded. Pink dolphins and grey dolphins hunting and larking around together, easily distinguishable from the more familiar marine variety by their shape, let alone the colour.

It was in Ecuador, exploring the shifting currents of the Rio Napo, an 1000km-long Amazon tributary, on the *Anakonda*, that I discovered the magic of Amazonia.







Above: The Anakonda. Right: Rio Brazil.

A beautiful, luxurious ship lovingly designed and maintained by the Quito-based company to allow others to enjoy the wonders of the Ecuadorian Amazon basin, *Anakonda* is well outfitted with motorised canoes to take you deep into the flooded forest or the waterways of the basin, to explore the nature reserves where local tribes are supported to preserve the wonder of the forest and find sustainable ways of looking after the habitat rather than catching and selling the creatures for money.

One evening we took a short boat trip to a local settlement. We were then taken by four wheel drive to one such reserve – a small lake, home to many species of birds and also a haven for caiman, the Amazon's version of a crocodile. I had no great desire to get too close to the caiman although our native guides did an amazing job of navigating us across the lake, safely to see them hunting as the sun set.

We drifted to a halt at one of the lake's inlets, listening to the night noises of the jungle, and the cacophony of howler monkeys, frogs and insects amongst others when, little by little, a magical carpet of fairy lights emerged up and down the banks of the lake.

This was firefly larvae who emit the same glow as their parents but create a vision so enchanting that I found it physically difficult to tear myself away.

The *Anakonda* navigates its way up and down river somewhat tortuously. The Napo is wide but shallow and the currents not only mean that the base of the river is continuously shifting but also that the silt stirred up by the flow renders depth-finding radar all but useless.

Despite the design of the ship having a very low draft, it is essential to have a man with a pole continuously testing the depth of the river and guiding the captain to ensure the ship doesn't run onto a sandbank.

A glance at the on board menu testifies to the incredible range of fish that inhabit the Amazon basin, including the mighty piracuru, the world's largest freshwater fish, which can grow up to 120kg in weight. Apart from making a delicious carpaccio, its scales also make pretty decent nail files.

Brazil offers a feast in every sense, not just for the gourmet. This first time visitor found the country to be everything that could be hoped for, from the cosmopolitan joyfulness of Rio with its famous beaches and mountains, to the grandeur of the Amazon as it approaches the end of its journey to the ocean. The country is infused with fun, welcoming people, great music and a huge appetite for life.

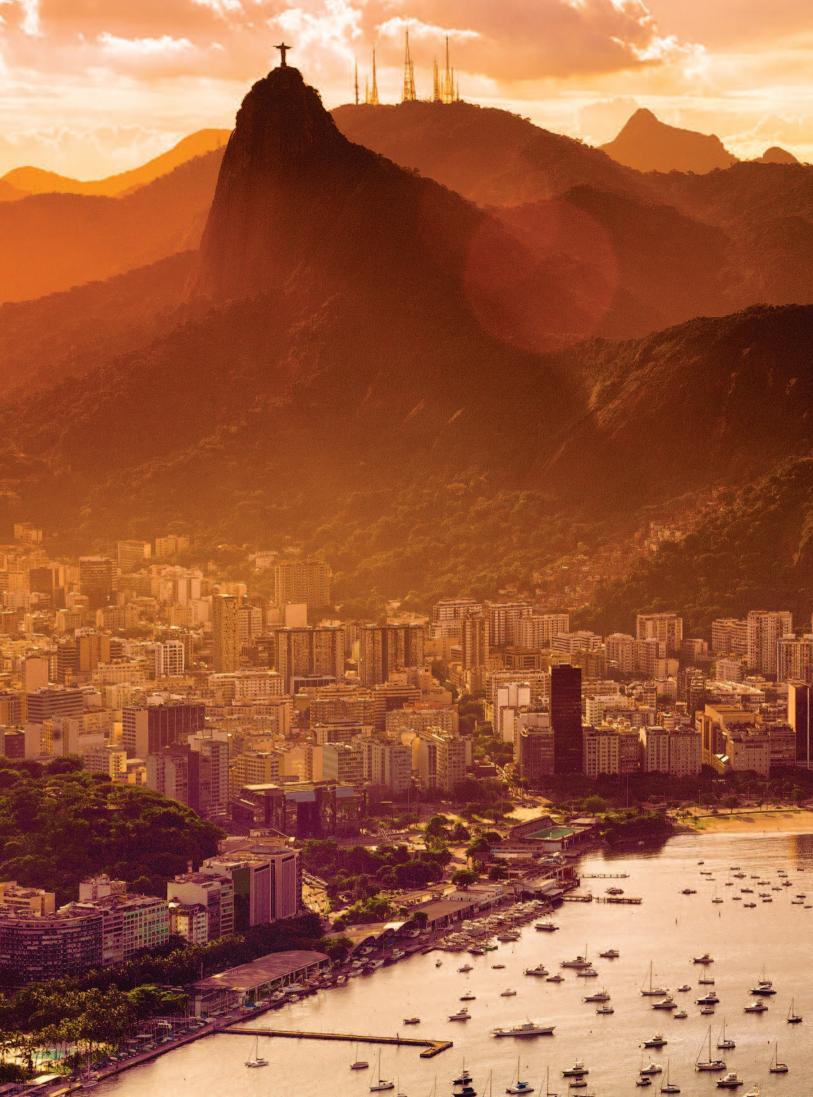
About 500km upriver from the the town of Santarem is no exception from this norm. Although compared to Rio this is a sleepy river port with very few foreign tourists. This gives it a special charm and Santarem, founded by the Portuguese in 1661 and known for its beautiful riverine beaches as "the Caribbean in Brazil", delightedly welcomes you to share its privileged position where the Rio Tapajos joins the Amazon.

In Brazil you truly understand the incredible difference in the level of the Amazon between the wet and the dry season. In Santarem this can mean a difference of over 15m between low and high water, which means that the many passenger and cargo ferries that travel the Amazon basin either dock right beside the town or far in the distance depending on the height of the river. In Santarem you can also see the famous meeting of the waters where the dark warmer waters of the Rio Tapajos meet the paler waters of the Amazon. The latter is a degree of centigrade colder thanks to its journey from the high mountains. There is a distinct line between the two colours of water and the change in temperature and colour is marvellous to behold.

Santarem is the home port of the small but perfectly formed *Amazon Dream*, a river ship built in the local Amazonian style with a touch of French influence. She has nine comfortable cabins, a dining area and sun deck. You can easily test the temperature difference for yourself by hand as you travel backwards and forwards in one of her tenders.

Modelled on a typical Amazonian passenger boat, *Amazon Dream* is ideal for heading up into the tributaries and her small size allows passengers to get up close and personal with nature in a way that larger ships simply don't allow.

The *Amazon Dream's* onboard naturalist and her crew make the most of this intimacy, enthusiastically pointing out sloth, monkeys, birds, plants and – of course – dolphins as you glide by. Even better, she has small motorised canoes that bring you even closer into the forest and allow you to visit some of the local tribal settlements she supports.





This close connection to local tribes is reflected on board where as much as possible the furnishings and decoration showcase the craft-making talents of the local communities. Although a small and understated ship, this combination of local skills and the delicate touches of French flair means that the *Amazon Dream* has a simple elegant charm which cannot fail to enchant.

As mentioned, one of the other great joys of Santarem

and the Rio Tapajos are the beautiful white sand beaches up and down the river. Navigating to one of these isolated beaches, mooring there to enjoy swimming in the clear sweet waters, and then relaxing on the beach enjoying a Caipirinha (made with Brazil's national sugarcane spirit Cachaca, sugar and lime) prepared by the *Amazon Dream's* talented barman as the sun sets over the Amazon basin. It is, without doubt, the perfect ending.



Pandaw operates 14-night partner programme 'Rio, Iguacu and the Amazon' on selected dates year round..

Cruise and tour only prices from

USD **5,4**00 per person

(main deck/standard room, twin share)

Jenny Brydon is Pandaw's Product Development Consultant. She has held several senior positions in the UK travel industry, including Commercial Director at SAGA Holidays. Above: Iguacu Falls

# WHERE THE OLD FLOTILLA LAY...

Paul Strachan uncovers the extraordinary story of the Irrawaddy Flotilla, from 1852 to 1942, the commercial backbone of Burma - made in Glasgow...

he story of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, on whose heritage Pandaw is based, is central to Burma's modern history.

The flotilla was the means by which two colonial wars were won by the British and its expansion and economic dominance helps account for the immense prosperity Burma achieved under British rule. The technical brilliance of the ships, their scale and beauty, remain unrivalled to this day. Their scuppering in the Second World War in the face of a rampant Imperial Japanese Army symbolised the humiliating end of empire, while nationalisation after Burmese independence represents the country's long rejection of world. It is only now coming to an end.

How did it all happen? It is, as they say, a long story.

After the First Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-25 the Arakan and Moulemein, Burma's coastal territories, were ceded to Britain's Indian Empire. Secluded in the palace city of Ava the Burmese king, Bagyidaw, withdrew into a state of melancholy bordering on insanity. By the 1830s government had all but broken down as dacoity [banditry] enveloped the country. Village was pitted against village and piracy made the Irrawaddy unnavigable.

In 1837 the Tharrawaddy Prince [Min in Burmese] rebelled and

took power and the court was moved back to Amarapura. He refused to honour the treaty with the British and relations worsened. In 1854 the Pagan *Min* in turn rebelled and seized power from his unstable father, but proved even more vicious.

Unlike its predecessor, the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852 was not caused by Burmese invasion of British territory. Rather it was about "face" — in this case British face. The Burmese came to neglect the terms of the 1826 Treaty of Yandabo, which ended the first war, and her port governors set about harassing British merchants. An anti-British party at court achieved the appointment of a belligerent governor for Rangoon who succeeded in provoking the local commander Commodore Lambert into naval action. The latter became known as the 'combustible commodore' and was reprimanded by The Earl of Dalhousie, the (Scottish) Governor-General of India. Yet, war became inevitable and in 1852 the Province of Pegu or Lower Burma was annexed.

Unlike the first war, when the British had been caught out by the monsoon, this campaign was a highly organised affair. Preparations in India were extensive and included the transfer of steam paddle ships of the Bengal Marine for troop transportation on the Irrawaddy. These were officered by British and crewed by Bengali lascars. Taking advantage of divisions in the court, the expedition





Top Left: Sir Charles John Austen, Top Right: King Mindon Min, Left: The Earl of Dalhousie

force flotilla advanced rapidly up the river capturing Prome and then the prized Myédé forests just above Thayetmyo.

The British had never intended to hack off such a large chunk of territory, the original plan was to capture and hold Martaban, Rangoon and Bassein – the important southern ports.

However, the province of Pegu, rendered defenceless by a court infighting, with its deep forests and rich resources was too great a spoil to resist. Interestingly the commander of the naval operations, who died of illness on the river, was one Rear-Admiral Charles Austen, brother of the novelist Jane.

Meanwhile at Amarapura the king, Pagan *Min* was deposed by Mindon *Min* who promptly negotiated a treaty with the British. Following a decade of peace, stability and good relations with Royal Burma, the flotilla was assigned to peacetime duties.

In 1864 Arthur Phayre, the governor of British Burma, decided to privatise the flotilla. Todd, Findlay & Co, a Scots firm based in Rangoon, purchased the four steamers and three flats. As a sweetener the government guaranteed mail contracts but given the poor condition of the vessels Todd, Findlay & Co had nothing but trouble. Yet, the potential was realised and in 1865 a company was formed in Glasgow with Paddy Henderson, the shipping line, who were already established first in Moulmein and latterly Rangoon as a port of call on their New Zealand run. The shipbuilders Denny of Dumbarton made up the Scots ownership triumvirate with their expertise in shallow draft paddle technology.

This winning partnership of merchants, shippers and ship builders offered a combination of technical expertise and practical experience that proved enduring. The entrepreneurial thrust linked to a strong grasp of technological innovation represented the best of 19th Century Scotland.

By the late 1860s it proved necessary to replace the old government steamers and new vessels were built on the Clyde, dismantled and shipped out for reconstruction in Rangoon. It took some years and much trial and error before the company perfected a design suited to the difficult conditions of the Irrawaddy, with its perilous shallows. By 1872 the fleet comprised eight new steamers and twelve flats. Services operated between Rangoon and Prome in



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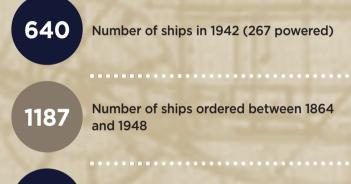


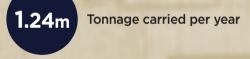
British Burma, and in Royal Burma up to Mandalay.

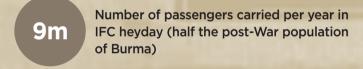
Despite such good relations, King Mindon was said to have moved his capital to Mandalay from Ava in 1855 out of irritation at the sound of passing steamer's whistles. Though he made efforts to establish a flotilla of his own, the company prospered in Royal Burma thanks to the close relationship between the company agent, Dr Clement Williams, and the king.

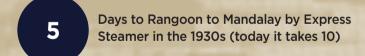
Burma now possessed a king of some sagacity. A devout Buddhist and patron of the arts, Mindon pursued a conciliatory policy towards the British. Mindon was worldly enough to realise that his country needed peaceful reconstruction. Unlike his predecessors he had learnt the hard way that the British Raj was to be treated with, not insulted. In 1855 Arthur Phayre the Governor of

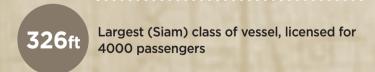
### **IFC IN NUMBERS**

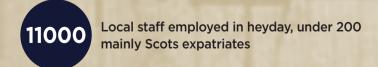












Lower Burma conducted a mission to the king, and the Scots orientalist Henry Yule's *Narrative of the Mission to the Court of Ava* (1858) provides a fascinating snapshot of Burmese royal circles.

Rangoon quickly grew into the capital of Lower Burma replacing Moulmein as the main mercantile and port centre. Gradually Lower Burma became rich and prosperous from its own markets and resources and as the gateway for Upper Burma. Agriculture flourished as rich paddy lands were reclaimed from jungle.

At the same time Royal Burma, with its magnificent new palace city at Mandalay, prospered under the reforming hand of Mindon *Min.* A commercial treaty with the British in 1863 allowed the Irrawaddy Flotilla, then still in the hands of the Rangoon government, access to trade. The British Resident, Dr Clement Williams, pioneered the river by steamer as far north as Bhamo, anxious to explore the possibilities of a trade link to China.

On his retirement from service Williams stayed on as Company Agent and 1868 the company began a regular Rangoon-Mandalay steamer service and in 1869 a service to Bhamo, the gateway to China and once rather optimistically known as the 'Chicago of the East'. Mindon introduced coinage and reformed administration with proper salaried officials rather than feudal 'town eaters'.

Mindon cleverly played off British against French interests and in 1872 despatched the Kinwun Mingyi [Prime Minister] as Burma's first ambassador to London and Paris.

In 1878 Mindon died without appointing a successor and in a palace coup power was seized by the Kinwun Mingyi, who in alliance with the chief queen crowned a puppet-to-be, Thibaw. However the Kinwun did not reckon on Thibaw's wife Supayarlat who rapidly established dominance over the young king. The 'Massacre of the Kinsmen' – an old Burmese institution – was revived, and over eighty relatives were put to death by the traditional mode for members of the royal family. They were placed in velvet sacks and clubbed to death.

Relations with the British took an immediate turn for the worse. The old Manipur border problem that had started the First Anglo-Burmese War resurfaced. Extortion and maladministration led to a influx of refugees into Lower Burma. To cap it all, Thibaw flirted excessively with the French, upsetting his father's delicate balance and jeopardising British commercial arrangements.

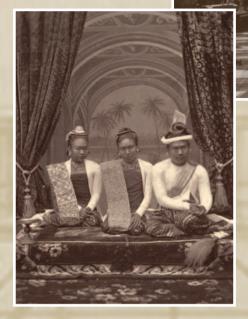
A Burmese embassy lingered in Paris threatening to upset the entire balance of power in Indo-China. The business lobby feared that the French would be first into China and seize the rich economic pickings before them. By 1879 the situation in Mandalay became so tense that an Irrawaddy Flotilla steamer was kept under full steam in midstream in case of an emergency evacuation.

To cap it all in 1885 the Burmese government fined the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation a ridiculously large sum over a trumped-up charge.

In the 19th century the world's oceans were patrolled by the Royal Navy in the name of 'free trade' whilst protectionist Burma resisted foreign pressure to open its rivers. The Glasgow and Manchester chambers of commerce demanded that she send teak and rubies downstream and receive corrugated iron and Singer sewing machines upstream. But Burma was stubborn and unyielding and her kings, earthly manifestations of Hindu deities made flesh to protect the great Buddhist faith, were convinced of their invulnerability.

They inhabited 'forbidden cities' styled the 'Centre of the Universe'. Supplicants had to take their shoes off and crawl before them. Power was total and of course democracy and "human rights" entirely unheard off. They knew nothing of the technological

Clockwise from top: on deck comfort, from the riverbank, Burmese royalty





revolutions in Europe, let alone the might of the neighbouring Indian Raj.

Naturally they were deeply insulted when British envoys defied etiquette by keeping their shoes on in their presence, and this clashing of cultures eventually led to a clashing of empires. By 1885 lobbyists in Britain, an unlikely partnership of anxious investors and liberal 'do-gooders' appalled by what we would now call human rights abuses, persuaded the foreign secretary Lord Randolph Churchill to make a final annexation.

As with the second war this was to be a river war and the Irrawaddy Flotilla was requisitioned to carry troops once again. Steamers and flats were hired from the government and escorted by armed steam launches. The flats were converted into floating barracks and there was even a hospital ship. Contemporary etchings from the *Illustrated London News or The Graphic* show the flotilla proceeding up stream, a flat, heavily curtained to keep out the sun, lashed either side of a steamer, and field guns fastened to the bows.

The Viceroy of India, Lord Dufferin, despatched General Prendergast in command of the Burma Field Force of 10,000 men. As with the second war, British preparations were extensive. An invasion plan had been devised at India Army HQ several years earlier and at Dum-Dum, the Royal Artillery armoury in Calcutta, replicas of Burmese stockades had been constructed for training purposes.

Dufferin planned a swift almost surgical strike on the 'Golden City' ordering "If your occupation of the capital of Upper Burma could be effected in a bloodless manner, it would be extremely creditable for you and far more advantageous than to the ultimate aims of the government than any number of victorious encounters in the field".

The force was so organised that the Swiss scholar Dr Forchammer was asked to draw up lists of the royal and monastic libraries to ensure that they were not damaged during the occupation.

Indeed the war was near bloodless. The flotilla assembled at the frontier town of Thayetmyo and advanced upstream on the Burmese forts of Minhla and Gwechaung. Mindon, ever sensible to the dangers of invasion had employed Italian military engineers in the construction of fortifications.

These were formidable and guarded a narrow stretch of the river to the north of the border. Gwechaung had a garrison of 1700 men but with war imminent reinforcements several thousand strong had taken up position in the area. Unfortunately Thibaw's plans fell into enemy hands. Two Italian engineers, Camotta and Molinari, on board a royal ship were surprised by the IF ships *Irrawaddy* and *Kathleen* and fled, abandoning their diaries and plans.

They had intended to scupper a specially prepared flat in the narrow channel thereby preventing the Flotilla's advance. Prenderghast proceeded to bombard the Gwechaung fort from the Irrawaddy and meanwhile sent infantry round the back of the hill. This most obvious of tactics took the Burmese wholly by surprise they and their guns were on the riverside and the fort soon capitulated. On the opposite bank the Burmese made a brave stand. Three British sepoys were lost to the Burmans' one hundred dead.

The river was now wide open and the flotilla proceeded to Mandalay where without struggle King Thibaw capitulated. On the 1st January 1886, as then bells chimed bringing in the new year, Lord Randolph Churchill raised his champagne glass and declared that Upper Burma was now a part of the British Empire. Thibaw, together with Supayarlat, his queen, were exiled to an insalubrious corner of India. Note that they were carried off by the *Thoorea* the IFC's flagship and the only triple-decker ever built. She sank later from fire and thereafter triple-deckers were regarded as jinxed and never attempted again.

To this day Burma has never got over the humiliation of being a British colony, although it established what for Burma was a rare – perhaps unprecedented – polity in which government actually served the people rather than subjugating their interests to the needs of palace power games.

Trade flowed freely and this industrious race prospered. Burma rapidly grew to become one of the richest lands in Asia. Its new capital Rangoon became known as the 'Pearl of the Orient'.

For the following sixty years till the Japanese invasion of 1942 the story of Burma, and her rise to economic supremacy in Asia, is intertwined with the operations and activities of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. Crafty Scots quickly realised that Burma was predominantly a land of rivers, and, even with the completion of roads and railways, the river remained key to the riches of Burma.

By the 1920s the IF fleet consisted of over 600 vessels from the magnificent Siam Class (the same length as the height of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon), to pilot craft and tug boats. In a normal year the company carried nearly nine million passengers without loss of life and 1.25 million tons of cargo. Irrawaddy vessels tended to have side-paddles and would tow two flats, each lashed to either side with a total beam (width) of 150ft.

The Chindwin river was pioneered in 1875, by company steam launch. As a result of this expedition a radical new design was created by Denny to cope with the shallow conditions. To balance the displacement, the paddle was situated in the stern, and the boiler in the bow. This sternwheeler type would draw only 2.5 feet of water and as the Chindwin valley was wooded, regular fuelling stations were set up so vessels were not weighed down with their own fuel.

The larger company ships had Scots masters and engineers and lascar crews from Chittagong. Lesser ships had Chittagonian masters. Head office was in Glasgow but in those pleasant days without telecommunications regional 'Assistants' were autonomous. There was one telegram a month from Rangoon to Glasgow consisting of one line only – the takings.

By the 1910s Burma had become a popular tourist destination and the Irrawaddy Flotilla were agents for Thomas Cook, travel agent to the British empire. Anyone making a tour of Burma would take a steamer from Rangoon to Mandalay, stopping to see the ruins at Pagan. Imperial travel literature from this period was rich and nearly all books mentioned the cruise, with its comfortable 1st class accommodation. Even with the advent of the railway, most travellers preferred the more leisurely river route. Somerset Maugham travelled by steamer on his 1923 Burma tour, though there is no evidence that Rudyard Kipling, who immortalised the flotilla in his famous poem about an old soldier's romantic memories, ever actually travelled with it.

The Prince and Princess of Wales (the future George V and Queen Mary) made a triumphal

progress up the river in 1906 on the *Japan* and later that year the Crown Prince of Siam toured the country on the *Siam* named in his honour. Successive viceroys all toured the country by special steamer, the last being Lord Mountbatten just after the war on the *Mingyi*, currently laid up at Pagan but still with her paddles.

In addition to passenger and cargo transport, the company operated a fleet of oil barges to carry crude oil from the Chauk area to the Syriam oil refinery for the Burmah Oil Company. Paddy was carried for Steel Brothers on specially designed paddy boats and timber for the Burmah Bombay Corporation. The company pamphlet of 1935 describes produce carried:

"Great bales of cotton, bags of rice, blocks of jade, lacquerware from Pagan, silk, tamarind, elephants sometimes, woven mats, maize, jaggery, bullocks, marble Buddhas, oilcake, tobacco, timber. Upward bound will be found various imports from Europe, motor cars, corrugated iron, condensed milk, matches, aluminium ware, sewing machines, piece goods, soap, cigarettes, cement and whisky. Every class of goods that enters or leaves Burma finds its way onto an Irrawaddy boat."

In 1934 the Irrawaddy Flotilla & Airways was set up offering scheduled services and charters - including an unusual service for devout Buddhists whereby an aircraft would encircle the Magwe pagoda seven times.

The passing of company steamers was part of river life. There were even bazaar boats, floating markets, moving from village to village – a tradition that lingers to this day. When the company changed boiler type to a single engine with only one funnel, there was an outcry amongst the Burmese who, believing it was unlucky, refused to travel on the new ships. The company was forced to add a second dummy funnel. Pregnant women believed it was particularly auspicious to give birth on a steamer; many a joke was had over the arrival of a ticketless infant.

The Irrawaddy is an untameable river – there are neither locks nor weirs to control the level. In the monsoon the water level rises 50 feet in

most places and 200 feet in the 1st Defile. Nor are there charts, for the sands shift with such rapidity that they would be out of date before the ink is dry.

But the company operated its fleet safely and efficiently through the experience of her masters and pilots and a clever and inexpensive system of bamboo marker buoys. Buoy Boats in charge of beats constantly checked and



marked the channels with buoys and the bearings with marker posts on the riverbanks. If a captain went aground he had to stay with his vessel, in the case of the Momein in 1919 for a whole year. In 1877 the Kha Byoo was caught in a whirlpool in the second defile between Katha and Bhamo. She spent three days spinning in a circle before getting free, during which time the captain's hair was said to have turned white. The Scots captains lived on the bridge and many of the river features were named after incidents they experienced at their hands, thus there was 'Becketts's Bluff' or 'MacFarlane's Folly' There were many Scottish connections. A little steamer, still running, was spotted recently called Braco, not a Burmese word but the name of a Perthshire village. The company ran a football league for its employees based in the river towns - the teams all took their names from Scottish division teams - Pakokku Thistle, Bhamo Rangers, etc. There was even a company newspaper called Flotilla News. The story of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company is a story of Scots-Burmese partnership. As the yards on the Clyde where these great ships were built stand silent, so too do the yards of the Rangoon River where they were once reassembled. In the first part of this century two wholly dissimilar nations established an unlikely rapport and shared previously unknown Wealth. The demise of the Flotilla was perhaps the saddest day of British merchant marine history - when else have six hundred ships been lost in one fell swoop? It came about not through natural disaster nor enemy action but at the hands of the

#### **FURTHER READING:**

Alister McCrae and Alan Prentice. Irrawaddy Flotilla. James Paton, Paisley 1978. Captain HJ Chubb and CLD Duckworth. The Irrawaddy Flotilla Company 1865-1950. National Maritime Museum, London 1973 Dorothy Laird. Paddy Henderson 1934-61. George Outram & Co, Glasgow 1961.

company's own officers. In 1942 before the oncoming Imperial Japanese Army they gunned holes in the great ships hulls rather than let them fall into enemy hands. It was called an 'Act of Denial', and Pandaw, as the inheritors of the IFC name, work daily to counteract it by reviving the pioneering, can-do spirit of our Scots forefathers.

### **EYEWITNESS ON THE IRRAWADDY**

"Some of the steamers that come this way are of the largest size; mailers on their way from Mandalay; cargo boats with flats in tow, laden with produce of the land; and when they come round the bend into full view of Maubin, the great stream shrinks and looks strangely small, as if it were being overcome by a monster from another world. Three hundred feet they are in length, these steamers with flats in tow, half as wide, and they

forge imperiously ahead as if all space belonged to them, and swing round and roar out of their anchor chains, while the lascars leap and the skipper's white face gleams in the heavy shadows by the wheel — the face of a man in command. And when you see this wonderful spectacle for the first time, you step on board this great boat expecting to find an imperious man with eyes alight with power, and the consciousness of

power, and the knowledge that he is playing a great part. But you are disappointed, for you find a plain man, very simple in his habits and ways with weariness written about the corners of his red eyes. Ah! They know their work, these men.... And I say nothing of the Clydesmen who rule the throbbing engines..."

Scott O'Connor, The Silken East, 1904



## INTO THE COLOURFUL HEART OF INDIA

Thought you knew the subcontinent? Not until you have cruised the Brahmaputra and Ganges Rivers, says Jane Archer.



wise woman once told me that the greatest lesson you learn from travelling in India is patience.
Sounds very philosophical, doesn't it, a saying that has passed through the centuries maybe? Actually it

was uttered with a wry smile by Ritu, my guide in Delhi, as our rickshaw driver (think bike with two seats on the back) was forced to come to a standstill, overwhelmed by the crowds packed into the narrow streets of the Kinari Bazaar, one of the city's main attractions.

On either side of the street, one after another, shop windows showed off colourful saris, ribbons, braids, jewellery; every so often there was a book shop or a food stall. As our driver struggled valiantly on, Rita told me more about this city of ancient mosques, new technology and 22 million people. I reckoned half of them were there in the bazaar!

To be honest you don't have to be in India long to discover that patience is a necessity at all times. Or to realise you have fallen in love with the colour, warmth and chaos of the place.

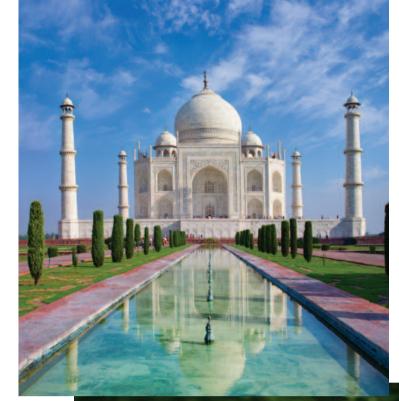
In the previous seven days, on a cruise on the Brahmaputra River, I had also learned that this is a country of incredible contrasts. In the city it is all hustle and bustle, with cars, tuk-tuks and bikes jostling for space, beeping horns, flashing neon lights and upmarket hotels, but out in the countryside there are villages that even now, in the 21st century, do not have electricity, and historical monuments that bear witness to a proud history and culture that existed in the centuries before the British Raj.

There are also Bengal tigers. I know because I saw one!

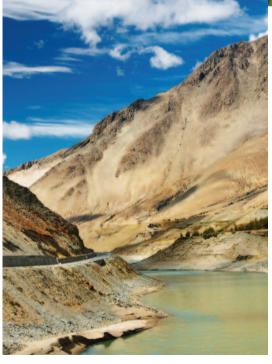
The cruise was amazing but so too was the Brahmaputra itself. Its name means Son of Brahma in Sanskrit (Brahma is the first god in the Hindu triumvirate and responsible for the creation of the world and all its creatures) and it is the fastest-flowing waterway in the world, blazing such a trail through Assam in Northeast India that the landscape changes by the hour.

Sandbanks come and go, and water levels visibly rise and fall. Majuli, once the largest inhabited river island in the world, is now the second largest due to erosion and floods (but as this is India, it still has the largest population of any river island, with some 200,000 people squeezed into its 523 square km).

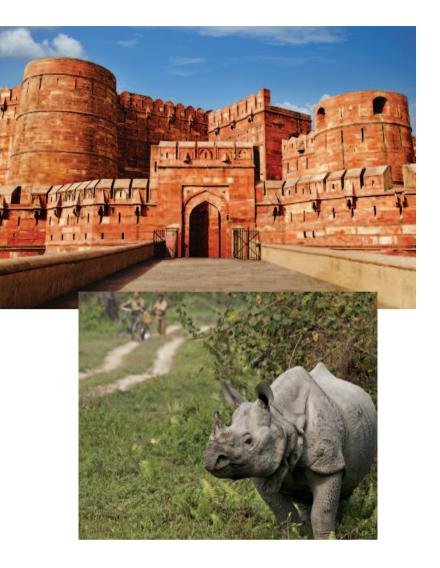
My cruise was from Guwahati to Nimati on the *Mahabaahu*, a vessel sold by Pandaw as part of a longer tour of India that also visited Delhi, Agra and Jaipur.







From top: The
Taj Mahal, Bengal
tiger, in the
highlands, The
Brahmaputra
Opposite: Agra,
One-horned
rhinoceros



She is one of just a handful of hotel boats on the river because, while it is a fabulous place to cruise, navigation is a challenge. All the way our captain had to be guided by a survey boat picking a route through the sandbanks. One evening we tied up to one (the Brahmaputra is not navigable at night) and I watched as the sand was washed away into the rushing river. Next morning the water was two feet higher and the anchor of the survey boat was submerged in deep water.

*Mahabaahu* is a friendly vessel with room for just 46 passengers and a wonderful crew who kept the cabins clean and tidy, and welcomed us back from trips ashore with cold drinks and towels. The food – mostly Indian but not too spicy to suit Western palettes – never failed to impress.

The days out, all included in the cruise price, also never failed to impress, even though they were a bit grisly at times. In Guwahati, on the way from the airport to the boat, we stopped at Kamakhya Temple, where animals are sacrificed to the goddess Kamakhya. The pitiful bleating of the goats being brought to meet their maker tugged at all out heart strings.

Tours are in jeeps that hold just three people, which is wonderful as you don't feel you are being herded and you do get a real sense of the places you are visiting. Shagzil, our cruise director, accompanied us each day, as did Payal, a naturalist. While we were sailing, both gave informative talks about the history, culture and wildlife in the places we were visiting.

After my long flight from the UK to Guwahati (via Kolkata is ideal), it was a relief to chill in the warm sun next day, as *Mahabaahu* navigated upriver. I cooled off in the boat's small pool, treated myself to a massage and kept a look-out for river dolphins (I did see a glimpse of pink, which I gather is as much as anyone see of these shy creatures). I also attended the talk to learn more about the Brahmaputra itself.

It rises near Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, flows 1,300km east through the Tibet mountains and then curls round, like the bend in a question mark, cutting through some of the world's deepest canyons, before heading south to join the Ganges in Bangladesh. Its total length is 2,980km.

Some 50% of the monsoon rain falls in the Brahmaputra valley each year, and almost half of the meltwater from the Himalayas also dumps into the river. During low season it is up to 10km wide; in the monsoon, from June to September, it is 30km wide and no longer navigable. For those four months the Mahabaahu has to be laid up.

Over the next seven days we joined worshippers praying for Lord Shiva in the inner sanctum of a Hindu Temple, visited tea plantations and watched an open-air dance performance of the story of Ramayana. We saw the remains of palaces and temples from the Ahom Kingdom that ruled Assam from the 13th to the 19th century, when the British took over, and watched monks being made up for a dance tribute to Lord Vishnu. In the Mishing village of Luit Mukh, the locals put on an impromptu dance for us and all came down to the shore (landings most days were by small craft) to wave goodbye.

And then there was Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is home to one-horned rhinos, swamp deer, elephants and around 60 Bengal tigers. Our tour there started with a 3am wake-up call because we had to get to the park for an elephant-back safari as dawn was breaking.

The animals are wary of humans in jeeps, but on an elephant you can get close to the rhino and deer, and we saw plenty of both, but sadly no tiger. That was to come next day, cruising the Dhansari River on one of *Mahabaahu's* tenders. The boat driver suddenly cut the engine and pointed. There, peering through the grass on the river bank, was a tiger, as startled to see us as we were to see him. He opened his jaws, bared his teeth, roared and was gone. It was an incredible moment that none of us will ever forget.

### HOLY WATERS ON THE GANGES

If Kaziranga is the jewel in the crown on a Brahmaputra river cruise, Mayapur is the ace card on a voyage on the Ganges, in West Bengal. This is India's holiest river, some 2,525km long, and fondly called Mother Ganga by the locals. "She gives us water to drink and a transport system; she is a gift from heaven," my guide Asif explained.

Mayapur is where, back in 1972, the Krishna Consciousness Movement set up headquarters and where more than 40 years on its followers devote their lives to peace, love, prayer and chanting Hare Krishna.

Visiting the Krishna complex was a step back to the hippy days of the 1960s and such a contrast to the rest of life along the banks of the Ganges. I visited crumbling mosques and impressive temples, and got a taste of village life in Matiari, which would have been a peaceful place were it not for the rhythmic sound of copper beaters bashing pots into shape.

I rode in horse-drawn carts, trishaws and tuk-tuks. In Murshidabad, I toured the 19th-century Italian-style Hazarduari Palace, which was built with 1,000 doors, many of them fake to confuse any miscreants trying to escape. It is now a museum housing an interesting array of pictures, furniture and weapons, including a cannon used at the Battle of Plessey in 1757.

The site of the battle, where Robert Clive of the British East India Company beat the Nawabs of Bengal and their French allies to take control of India, was one of the highlights of Pandaw's cruise on the Ganges back in September, which the company hopes to repeat in the near future.

The itinerary, cruising between Kolkata and Patna, also included two nights in Varanasi, one of the oldest continuously-inhabited cities in the world. It is also the holiest city on the Ganges and famous for the ghats that line the river, where Hindus comes to wash away their sins and cremate their dead. It's at once colourful and chaotic, happy and sad, overwhelming and magical. Miss out if you dare!



Above: The Ganges at Varanasi, below. Kolkata Victoria Memorial



Pandaw operates 7-night partner programme 'Mighty Brahmaputra' from November to March.

Cruise only prices from

USD 2,425 per person

(cabin without balcony, twin share)

Jane Archer is the UK's leading cruise journalist. As well as being Telegraph Travel's cruise expert, she writes for a variety of publications about both ocean and river cruising, and is also a regular speaker at shows. Jane spends several months a year at sea on cruises that have taken her from the Arctic to Antarctica and all points in between. She has also cruised on the world's greatest rivers across Europe, Asia and America.

#### PROFILES IN PANDAW



### Stuart Hickman

Role: Food and Beverage Manager

**Age:** 47

Nationality: Welsh/Australian

Time with Pandaw: 1 year.

What does your job involve?: I am responsible for all the dining /kitchen operations on board our ships. This entails all food/beverages on board, interactions with our passengers, the housekeeping department and also the atmosphere onboard.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?:

I have been an executive chef for 29 years from all over Australia and New Zealand to the ski fields of Andorra and super-yachts in the Mediterranean. For the last 6 years I have been in Thailand and Singapore. I come from a hotel background, so it's in my blood, with both my parents owning and running their own hotel in Australia.

What's the best part about what you do?: Being a hands-on chef and with a background of hotel service I enjoy Pandaw where no two days are ever the same. I constantly move around the ships on the Irrawaddy where the majority of our operations are based, training crew and continually meeting the guests. Pandaw's philosophy of every day being better than the last one aboard our ships drives me to keep improving the dining experience aboard for the guests.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face?: The language of course is a challenge and you find out the meaning of "lost in translation". Training aboard is very demonstrative, and assembling ingredients for recipe training can lead to getting some obscure ingredients being assembled!

What skills do you need to do the job well?: The most important thing is to enjoy your role and be service-orientated. Be available and open to guest comments and be perceptive to guest needs. You need to listen to feedback and you need to set high goals and keep working all the time to achieving them.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I hope to stay with Pandaw during this exciting time for Burma and its developing tourism industry. I will continue to develop more menus and contemporary cuisine to improve our guest experiences. We have to train the younger generation of chefs coming through the ranks to be head chefs of their own ship one day.



### Joost Paijmans

Role: Operations Director, South East Asia

Age: 41

Nationality: Dutch

Time with Pandaw: 2 years

What does your job involve?: I am responsible for the entire operation aspects in all of the countries we have ships; Thus finance, HR, guest services, ground handling, excursions, crew, safety and comfort of all guests, crew and ships, general problem-solver.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?:

I've had a an extensive career in international hospitality including hotels, member clubs, restaurants in South East Asia, Europe & the United States and eight years sea experience on large Ocean Liners cruising in the Bahamas & Caribbean.

What's the best part about what you do?: The diversity and reward. Everyday is different, encountering different challenges and the reward of finding solutions that are beneficial for all. Also the designing and setting up of new routes, countries and ships is really a tough but also interesting and rewarding job, when all goes (more or less) as planned.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face?: One of our ships got stuck for 3 days at a bridge due to flooding in the river up in Hanoi. I was onboard and together with the guides and passengers we did our best, going to local Karaoke bars where the guides would sing, inviting dragon dancers on the sundeck etc.

What skills do you need to do the job well?:

Organisation skills, reliability, approachability, honesty and transparency as well as being a good people person, the ability to take calculated risks and make quick decisions under pressure.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: The way Pandaw is growing and expanding at the moment there are plenty of opportunities. My aim for the future is to grow with the company and obtain a position that equals my years of service in the company and matches my skills and abilities as well as dreams.

## **ANOTHER**VIETNAM

Ron Emmons makes his maiden voyage on the Red River Delta

"Watch out for land mines" warned our guide Tifo as we stepped off the Angkor Pandaw to explore a village of bamboo weavers in the Red River Delta. I exchanged worried looks with fellow passengers. Clearly the Vietnam War legacy still held nasty surprises.

ut Tifo's face broke into a grin.

"There's one", he said, pointing at a steaming heap of cow dung on the path. Relieved laughter rang out from the group as we wandered into the village of Duc Thai, treading carefully to avoid these rustic hazards.

We passed some endearing scenes; a white-haired old man eager to show us the kite he was making for his grandson, a woman fashioning a bamboo effigy for a funeral ceremony, and a classroom of kids enthusiastically performing a dance. Then we entered the shady compound of a house where several generations of the same family were weaving bamboo bags, baskets and brooms. After watching them at work for a while, we were invited to taste a glass of snake wine. This excursion into a remote village of the Red River Delta was just one memorable outing of many on our 10-day Pandaw cruise, which also took in the karst islands – strange pillars formed out of soluble rock, shaped over centuries by the waters of Ha Long Bay – and Vietnam's 1000-year old capital, Hanoi.

Countless operators offer trips round Ha Long Bay, but no other company runs cruises through the Red River Delta. There is good reason for this. The river is very shallow in parts and low bridges prohibit passage to large vessels.

The shallow draught of the *Angkor Pandaw* opens up the possibility of exploring this vast, fertile area in comfort. The cruise alternates between starting in Ha Long Bay and ending below the Hoa Binh Dam on the Black River, then starting at the dam and ending among













the majestic limestone pinnacles of Ha Long Bay.

This was my first long cruise, but most of my companions were old hands. Many had been on Pandaw cruises to Burma, Borneo and the Mekong Delta, and had enjoyed themselves so much they were back for more. Over cocktails each evening the conversation ranged from Antarctica to Patagonia, from the Mediterranean to Madagascar, as the group exchanged globetrotting anecdotes.

I worried that as a newbie, I would be ignorant of some aspects of cruise behaviour, but I quickly learned there are no hard and fast rules — you just sit back and enjoy the unfolding panorama, and hop off the boat for excursions if and when you feel like it. However, one aspect of the cruise that seemed too much of a good thing were the gourmet breakfasts, lunches and dinners. The mouth-watering buffet displays were just too tempting, and I disembarked a few kilos heavier than when I boarded.

Also striking were the friendliness and efficiency of the crew, who were always on hand to greet us back to the boat, not to mention cleaning our shoes, washing our clothes, cleaning the staterooms twice a day and preparing those sumptuous buffets as well as our favourite cocktails. Yet what really makes Pandaw stand out is the design of the boats, with their teak decks and brass fittings, which make them appear to have sailed straight out of the colonial era.

After spending two nights and a day in Ha Long Bay, visiting a floating fish farm and kayaking (or being rowed — it was up to us) through a shallow cave, we set a course westwards and entered the Red River Delta. The contrast was striking. In place of towering islands, a scene of Vietnam's rapid development presented itself, in the form of piers for a

new 3-kilometre bridge linking Haiphong with Cat Ba Island and massive container ships from around the world gliding in and out of Haiphong harbour.

This juxtaposition of heavy industry with rural tranquillity was to become a theme of the cruise, as we passed huge brick kilns and shipbuilding yards, interspersed with tidy fields of corn, peanuts and passion fruit, worked by stooping farmers in conical hats. Most other river traffic consisted of long metal barges loaded with rocks, gravel or sand, presumably for construction of new roads and houses. All of them greeted us with a friendly wave, though a few bemused looks suggested that they thought we'd taken a wrong turn somewhere. This cruise had only begun a few months before, so it was possibly the first time they had seen such a vessel on the river.

This sense of novelty permeated the entire journey. At every port of call, youngsters flocked to the bank to gawk at the strange foreigners, and market vendors politely showed us their wares without any of the hard sell typical in mainstream touristic Vietnam. One of our fist visits was to see a performance of water puppets in the village of Thanh Ha, and it seemed that the entire population had come along to enjoy the show as well. We sat enthralled as the puppeteers, hidden behind a screen, manipulated puppets of emperors, dragons, turtles, farmers and fish across the waters of the village pond, using a complex system of pulleys and rods to control the puppets beneath the water.

I noticed that the village kids were more interested in the visitors than in the show, which they had obviously seen before, and peeked at us shyly from behind trees. Yet when we had a chance to take a few photos of the performers after the show, the children clamoured to get in on the act, and were





The unique landscape and sights of the Red River Delta







and stood in a long queue to enter, being carefully scrutinized by soldiers for any disrespectful dress or behaviour, before shuffling past the glass casket where Vietnam's national hero appeared to be taking an afternoon nap. Before his death, Ho had specifically requested that he be cremated and that his ashes be scattered in various parts of the country. I imagined him waking from his nap, annoyed to find his wish disobeyed.

We had time to look at a couple of the city's other main attractions before lunch — the Hoa Lo Prison Museum, better known to its former American inmates as the 'Hanoi Hilton', and the Temple of Literature, where the country's first university was established almost 1000 years ago. The dingy cells complete with manacles and heavy chains in the prison didn't look too inviting, and I was glad that I'd be spending the night in my snug stateroom aboard the boat. By good fortune, our visit to the Temple of Literature coincided with a graduation photo shoot for a large group of university students, so we were treated to a taste of the wildly enthusiastic new Vietnam in the context of the city's oldest temple compound. In the afternoon we were

free to wander, and like most others I headed straight for the city's enigmatic Old Quarter (see box, overleaf).

As we left Hanoi behind and sailed into the countryside again, I felt I was getting the hang of this cruise thing, and eagerly awaited the excursions yet to come. These included a couple of beautiful old pagodas, a traditional dance in another old temple, the UNESCO-listed Duong Lam village and a village of Muong people — one of Vietnam's minorities — as well as a short cruise round the Hoa Binh reservoir on a smaller boat.

thrilled to see images of themselves in the backs of our cameras. A few even dared to practice their English, possibly for the first time with a native speaker: "What's your name? Where you from? How old are you? Why you very fat?" and other questions we would probably rather not answer.

We had just a day to explore Hanoi - not enough to do justice to what is often dubbed 'the most Asian city in Asia', but most of our group spent a few days there before or after the cruise to take in the unique atmosphere of its various districts. We made a beeline for the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum

I was suitably impressed by the ancient architecture of the Thay and Tay Phuong Pagodas, both built around enormous pillars of jackfruit, decorated with hundreds of statues and surmounted by sweeping, upturned eaves. A large pond in front of the Thay Pagoda features one of the oldest water-puppet stages in the country as well as cute, covered bridges. At Hung Lo Temple, another structure that evoked an aura of great age, we watched traditional dances performed by local teenagers before joining them in dance called 'fish and net', in which the men danced in the centre while the women danced in a circle round them with hands clasped. Finally the women swooped in and snatched out a few 'fish', of which I was happy to be one.

Each of the villages we visited had a distinctive character, particularly Duong Lam, where we spotted our first foreigners outside Hanoi, as the village is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and easily accessible from the capital. This well-preserved village is sometimes compared to the more famous central Vietnamese mini-Venice Hoi An, and while it is not quite as grand, the brick lanes, laterite walls, wooden doors and leafy backyards create a relaxing historical atmosphere. On the last leg of our cruise, the murky waters of the Red River gave way to the clear, green waters of the Black River and the flat plain of farmland gave way to soaring mountains draped in lush vegetation. We passed the three peaks of Ba Vi National Park and dropped anchor just upstream from the Hoa Binh Dam, right beside the town centre. Eager for some exercise, I set off for a walk but didn't get very far as the local market, with its open-air barber shops, displays of flowers and vendors of everything from bamboo grubs to jeans, was a photographer's dream.

In an idyllic valley just six kilometres from Hoa Binh, we walked around a Muong village of stilt houses and marvelled



Born in Maidenhead near London, Ron Emmons studied sociology at London University before working as a volunteer English teacher in Sennar, a small market town in the Sudan. The experience gave him a taste for travel, and he has lived and worked in Venezuela, San Francisco, and Thailand Now living in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, he is much in demand as a writer and updater of guide books.

over the way these people provide for themselves using only natural materials available in the area. Their sturdy houses blended beautifully with the landscape and their banana wine tasted pretty good too. From there we headed to a jetty on the shore of the Hoa Binh reservoir and spent an hour or so cruising the waters on a smaller boat, stopping off at Thac Bo Temple and Thac Bo Cave along the way. The real highlight of this mini-cruise, however, was the fabulous view of the mountainous surroundings reflected in the dark, clear water.

On the next day, when the time came to disembark, I trudged up the steps to the bus sad to leave my newfound friends on the *RV Angkor Pandaw*. The crew would be heading back out to Ha Long Bay with a new contingent of passengers, while the rest of us were off to our homes in Fiji, New Zealand, Thailand, Madrid, San Francisco, Sussex and Florida to plot our next Pandaw cruise.

### A STROLL THROUGH HANOI'S OLD QUARTER

Begin on Hang Mam, on the eastern fringe of the Old Quarter, where tombstone carvers sit working in front of their shops. Walk west to Hang Bac and turn north on to Ma May; on the right at number 87 you'll find Heritage House, a fine example of a traditional tube house, for which the quarter is famous. Follow Ma May as it bends west into Hang Buom and duck inside the Bach Ma Temple on your right for a look at its eye-catching decorations. Continue west along Lan Ong, a street of herbalists (as your nose will attest), to Hang Vai, where bamboo pipes and ladders are the main items for sale. Go south on Hang Ga and Hang Dieu and look out for the tiny lane of Yen Thai on your left when you reach a big crossroads. Squeeze your way east along Yen Thai, then turn right (south) on Hang Manh, noting a few musical instrument shops at its northern end. At the next junction turn left (east) into Hang Bong, which leads conveniently into Hang Gai, the best street in the Old Quarter to stock up on gifts for home.

Pandaw operates 10-night 'Halong Bay & Red River' from June to March.

Cruise only prices from USD 2,600 per person (main deck, twin share)

#### PROFILES IN PANDAW



Sven Zika

Role: Global Sales & Marketing Manager

**Age:** 36

Nationality: Swiss

Time with Pandaw: 3 years

What does your job involve?: Maintaining good relationships between Pandaw and our direct clients, travel agents and tour operators, as well as press and travel writers, and supporting the reservation, product and website team.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I've worked in the travel industry for many years: for agencies and tour operators in Switzerland and the US, as well as a destination management company in Cambodia. Extensive travelling in Southeast Asia and living in Cambodia for five years have helped me to understand the area and people we work with.

What's the best part about what you do?: The ships, the people, the destinations and selling a great product. It's exciting to be working for a pioneer. Pandaw was the first on the Irrawaddy in 1995 and first on the Mekong in 2003. Look at the traffic on those rivers now! In 2015 we were pioneering the Red River in Northern Vietnam, and this year in February it will be the Mekong to China.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face?: Selling Pandaw to the right guests. We are a five-star product, but not a floating resort. You could call it "soft adventure" on the remote rivers of Asia. You have all the comfort, great food and trained staff, but we do not provide swimming pools, flat screen TVs and mini bars. It's all about travelling in colonial style; how it used to be on the ships of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. Also, ships can get stuck on sand banks, that's all part of the experience. And the whole of Burma can suddenly run out of tonic water, as happened in 2014!

What skills do you need to do the job well?: Industry and destination knowledge, efficiency, flexibility.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I became part of the new London team when we opened the office in September 2014. I enjoy being in Europe, but I hope that Pandaw will bring me back to Asia one day



Nwe Su Hlaing

Role: Rangoon Office Manager

Age: 42

Nationality: Burmese

Time with Pandaw: 14 years

What does your job involve?: I take care of paperwork, secretarial duties, communications with the ships and ground support to the ship operations. I look after ground and land arrangements and am currently responsible for financial operations in Burma.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I got the job just after graduating from university, when Pandaw Cruises was the only river cruise in our country. While at university, I worked as a hotel receptionist, where I fell in love with the world of tourism.

What's the best part about what you do?: The variety! In 14 years, I have had many different roles. In my current position satisfaction comes from the operation running

smoothly with careful handling.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face?: Coping with changing government regulations!

What skills do you need to do the job well?: Ability to learn from experience, and English language skills. We are all using different languages in different back offices in different countries, and that's our essential communications tool.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I love Pandaw and I hope to go on developing my skillset with them. We get happy, smiling passengers who want to come back again, that's the best kind of feedback!

### THE LAST FRONTIER

Photographer and diplomat Barry Broman ventures to remote Burmese Nagaland to discover an ancient tribal society whose long resistance to modernity is under increasing siege.

fierce collection of tribes inhabiting remote mountains along the India-Burma border, the Naga are one of the great hill tribes of Southeast Asia. Most live in the state of Nagaland in India where they were mainly converted to Christianity during British colonial rule. As many as two million Tibeto-Burman speaking Naga reside in India with a far smaller number residing in north west Burma around the rugged, undemarcated, border between the Paktoi Mountains and the Chindwin River.

The Naga are famed for their traditional practice of head-hunting (see panel), a custom frowned upon by the British, except during the Japanese invasion of India in 1943 when the Naga were happy to resume their old ways to help repel the Imperial Japanese Army. These days travelers to Nagaland need not fear for their heads; the last reported head-taking was in 1983.

During colonial days the British rarely ventured into the remote, inhospitable Naga hills on the Burmese side of the border, and blank areas in their maps indicated that this was "Unadministered Territory". Little has changed and barely any outsiders are permitted into an area that has sparse roads and few amenities for travellers. In recent years the Government of Burma has organised, with the cooperation of the various tribes that make up the Naga group (16 or 17 are officially recognised), annual "new year" celebrations in December called *Kaing-Bi* during which a growing number of foreign visitors are allowed to witness the gathering of the tribes in all their finery.

These events provide a rare opportunity for the tribes to meet one another and appreciate each other's distinctive clothing. Communication can be a problem as, apart from a common pidgin, they speak mutually unintelligible languages (there are up to 36 Naga tongues). Such gatherings were unthinkable in the past, as any tribal interchange was usually of a hostile nature.

I am lucky enough to have attended two *Kaing-Bi* events, one at the Thankhul Naga village of Layshi in the hills West of Tamanthi on the Chindwin. The other was at Lahe, a Lainong

Naga village West of Hkamti. Although Lahe is the administrative seat of the Naga Self-Administered

Zone (as designated in 2008), Hkamti is the biggest town on the upper Chindwin, and site of one of the few airfields in the region.

Different groups attended each festival as there are no roads in the hills and the tribesmen and women sometimes had to walk more than a week to the event. To encourage attendance the Burmese government provides substantial gifts

including rice and other foodstuffs. On arrival, Naga women are given T-shirts to cover their bare breasts and men are given shorts to replace their loincloths.

The Naga are an attractive people who cover themselves in distinctive body cloths, their main source of protection against the cold which in the high country in December can drop to freezing. The hills are pristine and beautiful. There is no logging as there are virtually no roads. Tigers still roam the hills but their numbers are dropping thanks to poachers. The same applies to the once-feared rhinos who are now almost extinct. The fauna of the region can readily be seen adorning the





headdresses of the Naga male which are varied and quite elegant. The cane helmet of a skilled hunter will display black bear fur, wild boar tusks, hornbill feathers, and a chinstrap of

tiger claws. Wild elephants can still be found, although their numbers too are dropping, the direct or indirect victims of Chinese buyers, who pay well for wild animal skins, ivory, or body parts used for traditional medicine.

The Naga are also skilled trappers and hunters but their guns tend to be homemade flintlocks. Large deer called *sambaur* and smaller barking deer are favorite targets along with semi-wild *mithan*, a forest ox that provides meat for the new year's festivals which feature a

lot of dancing and singing at night around huge bonfires. The men, fortified with homemade beer or Mandalay rum, wield long and lethal-looking knives (*dah*) as they sing of past head-

hunting victories. They reminded me of American Indians of the  $19^{th}$  century performing a war dance.

Watching some ferocious Thankhul Naga warriors dancing

around a fire, I was told by a young Naga Christian from India that they were singing about the taking of heads after the defeat in June 1944 of the Japanese at the pivotal Battle of Kohima, a Naga village in India a few hundred miles from the Burmese border. I chose not to pass on this information to the several Japanese tourists at the festival.

The annual gatherings help to open Nagaland to the outside world as well as to introduce Naga of disparate tribes to each other and assist all of them to

connect with the government. Health care and education are slowly advancing, and more Naga are coming down from the hills to work along the gold-rich Chindwin river. Some have

"Naga ladies seek to outdo each other with their traditional dress and decoration... men often wear brass necklaces depicting one or more human heads."







Naga girls and women display their finery at a gathering of the tribes

been converted to Christianity and Buddhism while animism still holds sway in the high country.

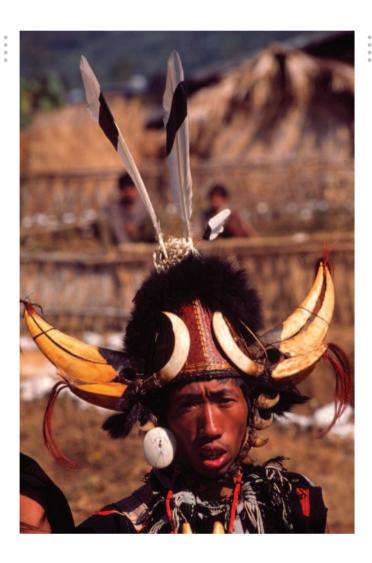
Despite their fearsome reputation, all Nagas now are essentially farmers who cultivate terraced fields and tend cattle. But while the Naga are no longer at war with each other, care is taken when billeting the various tribes at the *Kaing-Bi* not to house traditional enemies too close to each other. All men go about armed with their long knives, and the liquor flows freely. The Konyak Naga from the north, for example, are known for their fighting prowess and no one wants to test that. The Heimi Naga from Niansao, wearing their distinctive grey and black body cloths are famous for their past (one hopes) practice of human sacrifice so no one trifles with a Heimi.

Lainong Naga from Lahe, one of the celebration sites, hunt game armed with ancient black powder flintlock rifles and powder they make themselves. Skulls of past forest kills adorn the huts of the best hunters while human skulls can still be found in the homes of village chiefs far from the Chindwin. To feed the hundreds of Naga, Burmese officials, and foreign tourists, the ministry of tourism import by truck large amounts of rice and other staples including Mandalay Rum (imported since 1885, the year Britain conquered Upper Burma). Local

beef is provided by killing the free-ranging *mithan* with a spear stab into the animal's heart. Then the butchers go to work with their *dah*. The meat is quite tasty when spiced with local herbs and chillis.

The Naga ladies seek to outdo each other with their traditional dress and decoration. High marks go to the Hachi girls sporting bright textiles, flowers in their hair, heavy metal arm bands and necklaces of old Indian silver coins from the days of the Raj. Some older Naga, including women, have facial or body tattoos but this custom is dying out. Men often wear brass necklaces depicting one or more human heads representing the body (or head) count of foes slain in battle. Some of these were earned by ancestors but most are modern replicas worn by wannabe warriors.

When Britain ruled Burma they recruited ethnic minority males for the military, correctly assuming that lowland Bamar (Burmans) would not want to fight for a conquering country and that they could become a problem if armed. The tribals had their own issues with the Bamar. Over the decades many tribes were converted to Christianity and many men with a tradition of head-hunting became capable and loyal soldiers of the Queen (or King).



#### **HEADS YOU WIN...**

Traditionally, Nagas believed that the human soul resided in the nape of the neck and could only be set free by beheading, while the spiritual being, located in the head, brought good fortune. Heads of enemies and fallen comrades were collected to add to those of the community's own ancestors. Some tribes

decorated their faces with tattoos of swirling horns to mark success in headhunting. Trophies were hoarded in each village in the men's meeting house, or *morung*, which also served as the boys' dormitory.

A good example were the Kachin of northern Burma who not only fought for the British but also for the American spy organization, the OSS, behind Japanese lines in the Second World War. The Naga, however, were deemed too primitive, too remote, and too indiscriminately bellicose to accept the discipline required by the army and were never actively recruited.

That is now changing as Naga are better educated and more used to travel beyond their native hills. The man in charge of one of the new year celebrations was Lt. Col. Ru Saw Kyu, a Makuri Naga and the senior Naga in the Burmese Army.

More and more Naga are going to school now including advanced studies beyond secondary school. There are few travellers on the Chindwin River where the Naga are now mixing with Bamar, Shan, and other ethnic groups. The main town on the upper Chindwin is Hkamti where there is an active Naga population as can be seen daily in the bustling market where hill products such as wild honey, fresh meat from mithan and sambaur, and Naga crafts can be found. Remote villages still produce woven body cloths in traditional patterns and a few of these make it to river markets. There are also specialised shops in Mandalay and Yangon, notably at the Scott Market. My personal favorite shop is Naga Shop located at the weekend market (Jatujak) in Bangkok, Thailand which carries a wide variety of tribal crafts including textiles, metalwork, and basketry from the Naga and other ethnic groups. My favourite Naga textile was one I bought literally off the back of a Thankhul Naga elder during a new year festival at Layshi. He had been partying with a group of friends when I found them and in my basic Burmese successfully negotiated the sale of his distinctive red and white cloth tightly woven in two-ply wool (probably in India). He assured me he had many more body cloths at home and wished me good fortune with my new purchase.

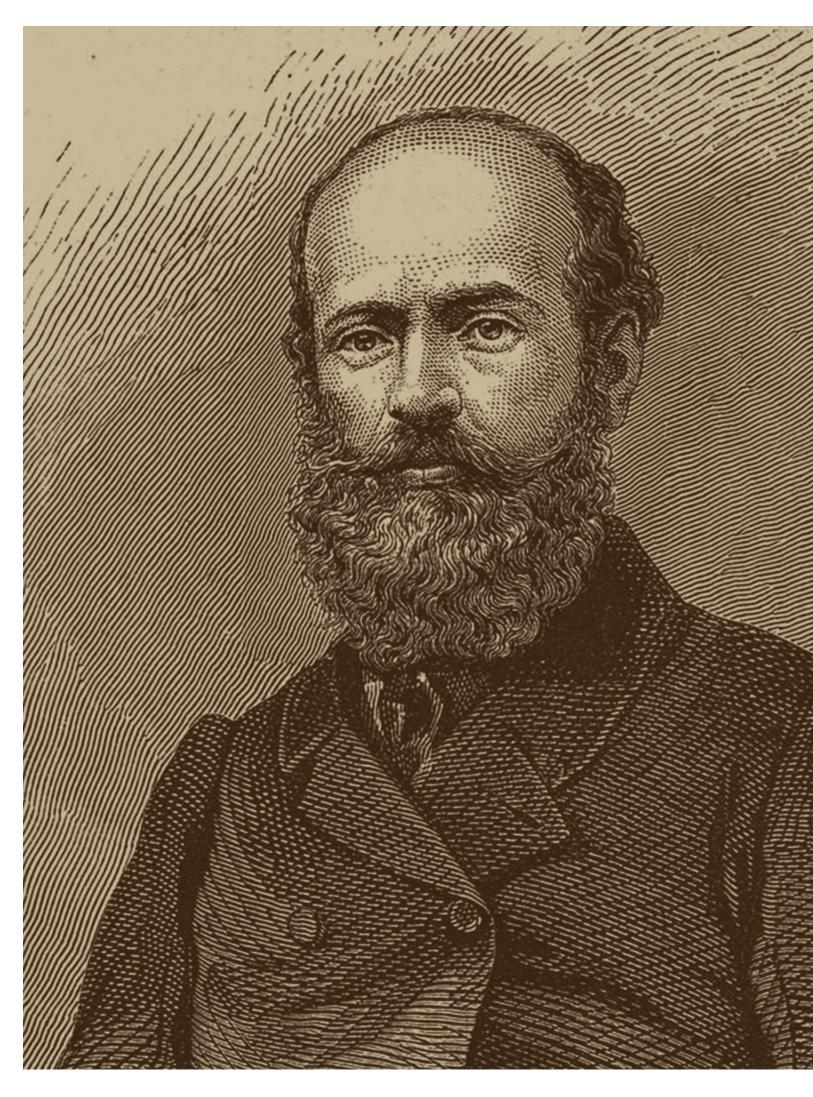
As Nagaland opens up and change comes to a land forgotten by time, those who want to experience the old ways of these engaging, interesting tribal folks need to move quickly. But they also need to move at the gentle pace of a shallow draft Pandaw river boat as it plies the Chindwin River up to remote Nagaland.

Pandaw operates 7-night 'A Voyage to Nagaland' every September.

Cruise only prices from USD 2,975 per person (main deck, twin share)









### GREAT GDEA,

Pandaw's pioneering Mekong voyages fulfill the dream of visionary explorer Henri Mohout writes Paul Strachan

### n 2003 the *RV Mekong Pandaw* made her inaugural voyage on the Lower Mekong from Vietnam to Cambodia.

Defying the advice of consultants, lawyers, diplomats and numerous and numerous others, we confounded the sceptics who assured us we would never make it. Pandaw was the first river cruise operator to cross a river border between two countries who had been at war with each other in recent memory.

Earlier, test voyages delays on the border could last up to forty eight hours as we negotiated Byzantine officialdom on both sides: quarantine officers, immigration, customs, port agents, police, military to name but a few. Sometimes we had as many as fifty officials at a time, seated in the bar, being served endless placatory cold drinks.

It was ever the case that officialdom can be as obstructive to riverine navigation as topography. In 1866 the first 'scientific' expedition led by French naval officers Doudart Lagrée (1823-1868) and Francis Garnier (1839-1873) likewise experienced delays at the hands of local rulers as they attempted to pioneer the





'River Road to China'. In Lagrée's case the delays could last for months as they awaited passports or the favour of officials. *La grande idée*, the 'Great Idea' as it was known at the time, was to ascend the Mekong from Saigon and eventually to reach China.

Though the expedition of six naval officers and sixteen assistants called itself 'scientific' exploring archaeology, botany, ethnography and other areas of scientific interest along the way, the primary purpose was to find a navigable route to China.

A trade route to China likewise motivated the British in the same period as they pushed up through Burma, annexing territory after territory. The British would claim they took Upper Burma to stop the French from gaining control of the route to China in 1886. Twenty years previously the 1866 Mekong expedition was partly inspired by similar fears, in this case of the British seizing the upper reaches of the Mekong. By 1886 the Raj had extended Burma's border through Keng Tung state to the banks of Mekong.

It is ironic that neither the French nor the British realised their dream of 'opening' China. Entire countries were seized in the pursuit of this ultimately futile South-East Asian 'Great Game'. Bhamo, the northernmost outpost of the Irrawaddy, set close to the Yunnan border, never materialised into 'the Chicago of the East' as it was once dubbed. As the French discovered in 1866, navigation of the Mekong from Laos to China was impractical on account of numerous rapids and dangerously fast waters. It would take a later empire in our own times truly to exploit these river roads.

It is extraordinary that even as late as 1866 there was a very limited geographical knowledge of the Mekong beyond a vague notion that it went to China. The English editor and author Joseph Conder (1789-1855), in the 1830 Southeast Asian volume of his epic world geography Modern *Traveller*, posited that the three great South-East Asian rivers - the Mekong, Salween and Irrawaddy – all flowed down from some vast lake situated somewhere in south-west China. Henri Mouhot (1826-1861), the first to broadcast the grandeur of Angkor in the West, visited Luang Prabang in Laos by an overland trail from Thailand in 1861, dying of malaria whilst preparing to sail downstream. His recently

rediscovered grave is a short tuk-tuk ride from the Laotian capital.

He was not the first Westerner to "discover" Cambodia and ancient Khmer civilisation. Portuguese and Spanish mercenaries and missionaries had been active in the region since the 16th century and in 1555 one Father da Cruz wrote an account of Cambodia and his travels on the Mekong.

In 1641 a Dutch merchant, Van Wuysthof, likewise travelled to Phnom Penh by river. Other than that, knowledge of the river and region was sparse. The political situation did not help, with the Kingdom of Siam [now Thailand] dominating many of the Lao principalities and present-day northern Cambodia.

Rebellions were frequent and interstate wars rife. The Lagrée expedition

"It is extraordinary that even as late as 1866 there was a very limited knowledge of the Mekong beyond a vague notion that it went to China."

took nearly two years — with numerous delays caused by a combination of navigational issues, bureaucracy and ill health.

After lavish entertainments at the court in Phnom Penh, a paddle launch took the expedition up as far as the Sambor rapids in northern Cambodia. Several months were spent between here and the Khone Falls, including an overland diversion to Angkor and the exploration of various tributaries on the Laos-Cambodia-Thai border. Transferring to pirogues, or dug out canoes, portage was necessary around the rapids. Here the expedition covered a mere mile a day slowed down by the transfer of supplies, which included 700 litres of wine and 300 of brandy. After Vientiane the expedition got into trouble again as the river grew faster and the rocks sharper around Pah Lay on the way to Luang Prabang, as captured in the sketches of expedition artist Louis Delaporte (1842-1925).

Again portage was necessary. At Luang Prabang the expedition could relax

in the delightful court atmosphere, no doubt considerably titivated by bare-breasted Laotian ladies. There was a tear-jerking moment when they discovered Mouhot's dog, left behind seven years before with the passing of its master and now adopted by a Lao family.

On the Burma borders there were further delays at the hands of the Keng Tung sawbwa [chieftan] who insisted that Lagrée travel to his capital far inland. Money became an issue as their stock of silver bars ran low; it was necessary to cut back on food purchasing further weakening the expedition members. On crossing into China they became caught up in the muslim rebellion that had then engulfed Yunnan. Lagrée now became seriously ill and Garnier took over command, leading the expedition as far as Dali and exploring the upper reaches of the Red River that flows down to Hanoi. As with the Mekong, they found little to encourage commercial navigation. Left behind, the 45-year-old Lagree was to die and be buried at Hui-tse. Garnier and the remaining members of the expedition were likewise seriously ill but eventually returned by way of the Yangtze River, the first explorers to see and chart the upper Yangtze since Marco Polo 600 years previously.

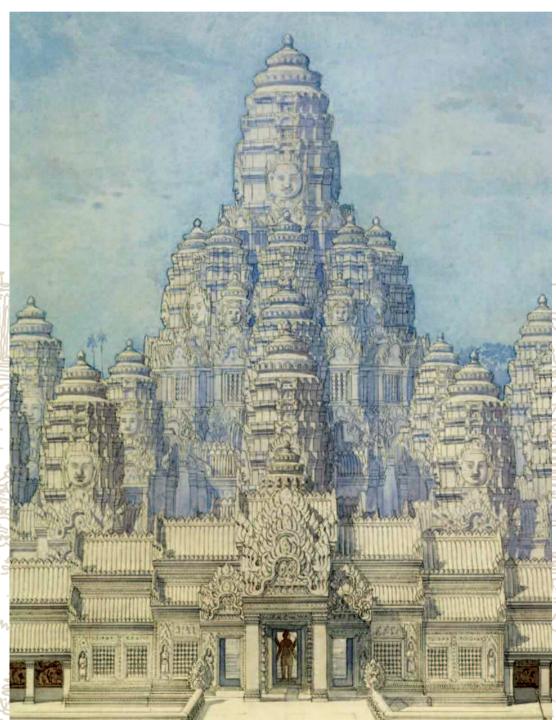
Assisted by various remote Catholic missions they eventually reached Shanghai and by the end of 1868 they were back in Paris.

In addition to a number of 'scientific' discoveries the overriding conclusion of the expedition was the impossibility of navigation on the Mekong. Yet this was the age of the Suez Canal and other grands projets and Garnier remained optimistic that one day these hazards might be surmounted. "...Once the European has overcome this problem, once he has penetrated into these lands, you will see an economic revolution whose effect will be felt in the old world. We would have tea and silk at half their present price". As the French established its protectorate over Indochina, river navigation did indeed improve. Steamers connected Saigon with Luang Prabang and a fourteen kilometre railway connected Cambodia to Laos around the Khone falls. French officials stationed in Laos complained that it took longer to sail from Luang Prabang to Saigon than Saigon to Paris.





Above: sketch of pavillion from Mohout's Angkor expedition. Above right: The Lagrée Garnier expedition. Right: Conjectural drawing of the Bayon at Angkor by Louis Delaporte





However the 'Great Idea' remained elusive as it does to this day.

That may change as Chinese influence over South-East Asia intensifies. Ironically, nowadays it is the Chinese seeking to find faster routes to the sea rather than the European powers trying to break into China. Controversy rages between environmentalists keen to protect the Mekong deep pools, with their giant catfish so essential to local livelihoods, and navigators keen to blast away the craggy narrows between them.

The Laotian government plans six large hydro dams that will include locks to enable ships to pass; dams would certainly control the release of water maintaining a less seasonally-variable depth but again the environmental impact of such projects is inestimable. Ultimately one wonders if a system of locks might bypass the Khone Falls on the Cambodia-Laos border, that might be far off but not beyond the engineering abilities of the Chinese who have accomplished similar grandiose schemes. Already the stretch from China down to the Thai riverine port of Chiang Saen has been improved with blasting, buoyage and charting.

Currently this is as far as Chinese vessels descend, trading with Thailand rather than attempting to reach the sea. Another irony is that whilst Chinese power and influence push for greater navigability on the Upper Mekong,

Chinese projects on the Lower Mekong are actually disrupting navigation. In Cambodia a number of new road bridges 'donated' by China have been built well under regulation height. This may be the construction companies stinting on materials to make greater profits, but the failure of the Cambodian government to enforce bridge heights severely impedes the passage of larger, higher vessels on these stretches. Pandaw has been affected by this and forced to consider new routings.

By 2011 there will be at least ten luxury passenger cruise ships on the Lower Mekong. A short-sighted Cambodian government has not considered the impact of so many road bridges on tourism earnings.

It may even be that the great fear of Lagrée and Garnier – that the China trade would come to flow through Burma, rather than follow their 'Great Idea" of the Mekong – has now actually come to pass.

Where the British failed the Chinese succeed. A recent visit to the northern part of Burma revealed new rail links from the Irrawaddy at Katha to China, and an oil pipeline cutting through the mountains to the deep water port of Sittwe. Chinese eyes now look west rather than east. A port in the Indian Ocean shortens a bulk carrier's journey from the Middle East to China by over a week. There are also strategic implications – no need to pass

through the easily-blockaded Malacca Straits. As an outlet to the world's oceans, Saigon is after all in Vietnam and the Vietnamese communists have never seen eye to eye with their Chinese comrades.

At Pandaw we remain faithful to the vision of Lagrée and Garnier. Following in their intrepid footsteps, we were the first tourist boat operator on the Lower Mekong in 2003 and now have three vessels operating there.

The next step is the Upper Mekong. Recent research visits show that, despite the many challenges of navigation, a small, highly-powered vessel would be able to make a passage between Vientiane in Laos and Chiang Saen in Thailand for at least eight months of the year. Here the scenery is quite unlike that of the Lower Mekong. Mountains soar all around and the river tumbles in a wild torrent, through rapids and gorges. Jagged rocks rise all around giving the landscape an almost surreal cast.

There is much to see and do along the way, a highlight being Luang Prabang – surely the most delightful stopping place in South-East Asia.

It is conceivable that one day we will offer a month's cruise all the way from Saigon to Xinghong, through six countries with a break at the Khone Falls to transfer by road from vessel to vessel. That, anyway, is our own 'Great Idea'.





Pandaw operates 7-night 'Mandalay Pagan Packet' from July to March

Cruise only prices from USD **1,550**per person (main deck, twin share)

### UPSTREAM<br/>INTO THE PAST

Distinguished American Burma scholar Donald Stadtner hitches a ride with Pandaw to satisfy his passion for the glories of the country's art and architecture.

urma enjoys a special place in Pandaw history since it was here that that the colonial-era Irrawaddy Flotilla Company was revived in 1995.

Defying layers of Burmese red tape and his friends' best advice, the indefatigable Paul Strachan single-handedly resuscitated not only the company name – which was easy – but also

revived the standard of service that this venerable Scottish company had achieved since its founding in 1865. Paul's vision began by restoring a boat made on the River Clyde in Scotland which belonged to the fleet that was scuppered just before the country fell into Japanese hands early in 1942. This craft was called the *Pandaw* and the five subsequent ships constructed after 1995 were

modelled on this classic boat. It was also in Burma that two Pandaw ships were converted into 'floating hospitals' for relief work occasioned by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, their shallow drafts permitting them to weave in and out the lower delta where larger boats failed. The unique fifteen-day sailing schedule on the Irrawaddy combines key historical spots with breath-taking natural scenery and wildlife. As the Nile is to Egypt or the Ganges to India, the mighty

Irrawaddy gave birth to Burmese civilisation, with all of its major ancient capitals located on its shores or nearby. The same river also proved its undoing in the 19th century when it served as the principal 'avenue' for advancing British troops that took Mandalay in 1885.

The river springs from the distant Himalayas, with melting snow in the spring. By the time of the monsoon rains dissipate in October, the river is at full spate and the countryside is lush with greenery. Burma is also a favourite spot for migratory birds, such as the ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), a species of goose. This is known as the *hamsa* bird in old Buddhist literature and is even the centre of a legend in Burma in which the Buddha spots two

migrating hamsa and prophecies the future of modern Pegu, or classical 'Hamsavati', near Yangon.

Proceeding upriver we begin in Prome, or modern Pyay, north of Yangon. The Buddha himself alighted in Prome on one of his many aerial missions to Burma. On the river bank the Buddha bestowed three hair relics to a pair of merchant brothers, a myth resembling the one underlying the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. These relics are now thought to be in the Shwesandaw Pagoda, located on Prome's highest hill.

From the pagoda platform commanding views of the river unfold. Near Prome is the largest ancient brick walled city in Burma, known as Thiriya-kittiya, founded by an ethnic group

known in later Burmese history as the Pyu. The city arose

by the 5th century, stimulated in part by influence from India. A museum houses the finest collection of Pyu sculpture, depicting Buddhist and Hindu deities. Stone inscriptions at the site are based on Indian scripts but the Pyu language itself has defied interpretation since its discovery over a hundred years ago. And there is little hope that the Pyu language will be 'cracked', like Linear B which unlocked

Mycenaean Greek. In this sense, Pyu civilization remains shrouded in enigmas, explained by our guide from the ship.

Highlights further up river include Thayetmyo, the former frontier town that demarcated the border between Upper Burma and British Burma in the 1850s. An unexpected survival is the oldest golf course in Burma. Sailing further we halt at two riverside forts designed by Italian architects for the Burmese kings in the 19th century. Our next stop is Sale, a small town known for its celebrated wooden monastery with sculpture depicting scenes from the beloved jatakas, or the tales of the Buddha's previous lives. These number 547 in the Pali canon but only the last ten are the most revered. These *jataka* carvings are among the most inventive late 19th century sculpture in all of Burma. All of the characters,

men, women, children and animals, are carved nearly threedimensionally, and are placed in late colonial Burmese settings.

We soon reach one of Burma's chief attractions – Pagan, a veritable 'temple-city' with over 3,000 brick temples, stretching as far as the eye can see up and down the river and deep into the countryside. The majority were established between the 11th and 13th centuries, before the capital shifted north to the Ava region, near Mandalay.

The architects at Pagan were masters of the so-called 'true arch' which enabled them to create large open interior spaces; this was in marked contrast to the Khmers at Angkor who relied upon the corbelled arch. Khmer architects were unable to span large spaces, since they were restricted by the limitations of the corbelled arch. This explains why the sanctums of Khmer temples, like Angkor Wat, are small while the interiors of many Pagan temples are spacious. Pagan's most famous monument is the Ananda, set just outside the city walls. Its interior walls boast a unique series of eighty stone sculptures illustrating the Buddha's life, from his miraculous conception to his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. The four huge central wooden Buddhas, always attracting pilgrims, are a photographer's dream.

Other temples, such as the Kubyauk-gyi, are known for their fresco painting, with hundreds of *jataka* identified by ancient captions in Mon. Such a frenzy of temple building was fuelled by

the belief that one accumulated merit by donations to religious foundations. In this sense, Pagan is a field of merit.

Pagan is also famous for lacquer ware and we visit a workshop to appreciate the complex process. The Pandaw has also supported a number of restoration and conservation projects at Pagan, such as at the Nandamannya Temple. Our next stop is the village of Yandabo which is known for traditional pottery kilns. The clay is carefully prepared and then thrown on the potter's wheel — with vessels emerging instantly before our eyes from mere lumps of clay! The pots are sun-dried and then stacked, by the hundreds, in open circular pits which are fired by charcoal and straw.

Once the pots are baked, the stack is then disassembled and the pots are carried down to the river for transport in small boats. Walking through the village one feels the rhythms of life that have scarcely changed over hundreds of years. Yandabo is also the site for two major Pandaw achievements over the last decade, the village school and a dispensary. These were among the first such projects Pandaw began in Burma and have tangibly changed the lives of local families.

Mandalay is the only big city on the river, providing a contrast to the small villages and modest towns that we have visited. It was made the capital of Burma only in the 1850s, by King Mindon. His son and successor, King Thibaw, did not see out his reign since British troops took the city without firing a shot, at the end of 1885.





The wooden palace was destroyed in the Second World War but reconstructed in the 1990s.

Mandalay's most sacred site is the Mahamuni Temple which enshrines a huge metal Buddha seized in a military campaign in western Burma. It was hauled hundreds of miles across mountains and then floated by barge upstream to the capital which was then Amarapura, just south of Mandalay. Devotees by the hundreds, sometimes by the thousands, make offerings to this Buddha which is enshrined in the centre of the compound. Pilgrims culminate their visit by affixing small patches of gold leaf directly onto the image. So much gold over the years has been applied that the original metal sculpture is completely concealed, apart from the face which is smooth as the day it was created, washed and dried daily by select individuals.

Mandalay is famous for crafts and we visit a workshop specializing in tapestries, known as *kalaga*. We also see how the gold leaf is prepared, small bits of gold hammered repeatedly over hours until it is less than paper thin.

A few miles north of Mandalay on the opposite bank is the massive Mingun Pagoda, Asia's largest brick monument. It was begun in 1791 and finished in about 1812. An earthquake in 1838 created massive fissures on all four sides. Most believe that the pagoda was abandoned unfinished, without its tower, by a fickle and debauched king, but my research suggests that the building, as we see it, may have been considered completed by its builders in 1812. Nearby is Burma's largest bell, suspended by a metal support system built in the old dockyards of Dala, across from old Rangoon. Another unique monument at Mingun commemorates Mount Meru, the centre of the Buddhist universe. This structure is surrounded by concentric ascending rings, symbolising seven mythical ranges. Mingun is also associated with a revered monk,

known as the Mingun Sayadaw, who was able to recite the entire Pali canon at a Buddhist synod held in Rangoon in the 1950s. This had never before been done in Burma and its taking place at the same time as the synod electrified the country. A statue of this legendary monk is near the bell.

Further north is the village of Kyaukmyaung, famous for its glazed pots. Unlike the open kilns at Yandabo, these are proper brick kilns and not open pits. They are fired by three types of wood: dried wood, drift wood fished out of the river, and bamboo. Each wood has different properties and so the kiln master calculates



exactly when to feed each different type of wood into the kiln. The kilns are famous for large partially glazed jars, over a meter in height, which are shipped all over Burma, mostly for water storage. These were once taken throughout India and Southeast Asia and

were known as Martaban jars, since many were exported from Martaban, or Mottama, near modern Moulmein. Some are in museums in Europe.

Near the end of the trip we visit Katha, an isolated little town associated with George Orwell's years in Burma. In the jungle nearby we take a short trek to locate a working elephant camp. We emerged into a clearing in the pouring rain to see a huge, bellowing tusker fording a stream at terrific speed, with water splashing this way and that. I never realised that elephants could move that fast or were that agile. The small mahout was sitting astride this massive powerful animal beneath him, all the while puffing on his cheroot, kept dry by this wide brimmed hat. My camera battery had gone dead that morning, but this image springs to mind every time I see an elephant. No one, apart from the mahout, are allowed to mount the elephants, since they are 'working elephants' and uncomfortable with strangers. Indeed, our guides told us to keep a distance.

Above Mandalay the population thins out and the vegetation on the banks becomes nearly impenetrable. Another highlight is the famous Second Defile, where the river narrows into a gorge, with rocky crags on either side. This portion of the river was an old favourite of British explorers, painters and later photographers.

Burma is of course a poor country. But it is rich in history, culture, and natural beauty. It is also far less explored than other parts of Asia. Waking up on the river to the sounds of migratory birds overhead or sharing the sun sets at Pagan with friends, sundowners in hand, are experiences that mould us in ways that we come only later to fully appreciate. But mould us they do and in directions that we sometimes don't always understand. In this sense, the river awakens parts of us that we have yet to explore. So much of our potential remains dormant, waiting to be jump started to life by fresh experiences. The American poet Robert Frost urged us to 'take the road less travelled' in the choices we make in life. And in some ways the Irrawaddy is 'the river less travelled.'

Dr Donald Stadtner was for many years an Associate Professor at the University of Texas, Austin, after completing his PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. His publications include *Ancient Pagan: Buddhist Plain of Merit* (2005) and *Sacred Sites of Burma* (2010). He has conducted many study groups to Burma (Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, Los Angeles County Museum, the World Affairs Council, and The Smithsonian Institution). He now divides his time between the San Francisco Bay Area and research trips to India and Southeast Asia.



Above: Map of Burma showing the principal Pandaw ports of call

Below: Pagan temple





## "INTREPIDITY FOR THE PANAMA HAT-WEARING CLASSES,,

## Country Life editor Clive Aslet takes Pandaw's slow boat up the Irrawaddy to Katha

"It's not supposed to do this," said Paul Strachan. We were in Mandalay, and he was standing on the deck of the latest addition to the 15-boat Pandaw fleet of river craft. It was raining. The many golden stupas of the monasteries on the other side of the Irrawaddy, which ought to have been sparkling in the Burmese sun, glimmered feebly through the mist.

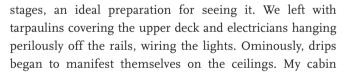


eanwhile, the deck of the boat resembled a theatrical production, not quite ready for the opening night. The builder of the boat we should have

travelled on – brand new – had apparently gone

bankrupt. But when the receivers refused to release it, Mr Strachan didn't give up. Instead, in the spirit that built the Empire, he remembered that he had a shallow-draft barge, previously used as a floating clinic by his Pandaw charity for a project in the Irrawaddy delta. He had just eight weeks to turn it into a waterborne boutique hotel, with a superstructure of teak. Then northern Burma caught the tail end of a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal, and it poured.

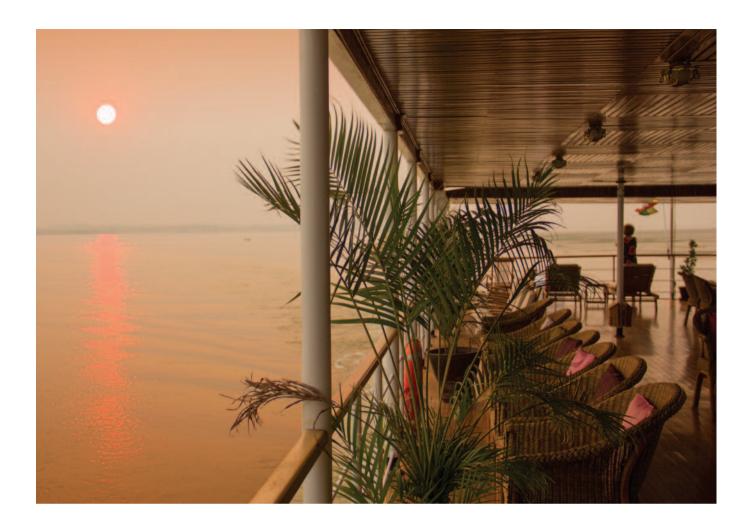
But the show had to go on, and timetables to be respected, if we were to reach Katha – the settlement where George Orwell wrote his 1934 novel *Burmese Days*, and where his house was said to survive. The journey upriver was, in its early



remained dry, although the bathroom was puddled. Other passengers were less fortunate. Over dinner we discussed what might be done to keep the bedding from getting soaked. It was then that we hit the first sandbank. The dining table shot forward. New drips appeared (they went down my neck). In the kitchen, 10 plated trios of Mandalay desserts flew off their shelf and were shattered. I was in bed when we struck the last of the sandbanks and so did not feel it. The others went down like skittles.



Now, you might think this was an inauspicious start to a holiday. That would be to misjudge the spirit of the Pandaw clientele. They're sufficiently mature, as well as flush, to enjoy travelling in comfort but retain a zest for adventure and an appetite for discovering new places. Pandaw



offers intrepidity to the panama-hat-wearing classes and does it, on the whole, very well.

Bruises healed, and the sun burnt off the fog that hung about the river for the first couple of mornings. Within 48 hours, normality – or what passes for it, on a river boat in the great emptiness of the upper Irrawaddy – resumed its sway. Before the next season, another deck will have been added to the boat – and no doubt they will have remembered to insert the layer of tin beneath the floorboards, which (forgotten this time in the hurry of completion) is the Burmese method of sealing decks.

Politically, Burma may be troubled but to the visitor it is a place of calm. Buddhist calm, you might say, because the evidence of Burma's principal religion is all around – although they hedge their bets by also propitiating the forest and house spirits called Nats. Shrug off the neuroses of the digital age. You can't check your email every few minutes: there's limited Wi-Fi. Nor is there a mobile signal for European phones. When, in desperation, I bought a local Sim card, it wasn't the right sort, either for my phone or any other. A week cut off from the outside world? After a moment's panic, I realised that this is one of the greatest of modern luxuries. Breathe deeply. Meditate. Focus your mind, as I was advised, on the air going

in and out of your nostrils.

For this is an intensely spiritual country. You can see that from the bewildering number of pagodas along the riverbank. During his lifetime, every Burmese is expected to spend at least two sessions as a monk; the first, when he's nine, accompanied by a big party – a kind of Buddhist bar mitzvah. Every morning, around 6am, shaven-headed monks, in robes the colour of (though obviously not dyed with) oxblood, walk barefoot through towns and villages begging food from local people. They don't ask; the donors, who have removed their sandals, request permission to give, for the privilege gains them credit in the next life. (Nuns, also shaven-headed, wear pink; they are allowed to handle money, buy raw ingredients and cook.) Chanting, broadcast endlessly from loudspeakers, can be part of the aural background.

Britain's monastic age ended in the 16th century – and the Burmese landscape has a suggestion of England as it must have been then. It's a peasant agriculture. Carts and horses are pulled by oxen. Wooden dwellings, their rooms open to the public gaze, are thatched with rush. Occasionally, a small television flickers, but few homes have electricity or running water. Devoid of most modern conveniences and practically cash-free, the villages are lit up by the smiles of children. The







66

I could hardly believe the peace of the Irrawaddy. Or the beauty. Each sunrise and sunset is a living Turner



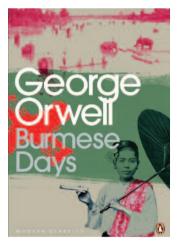
scene resembles that of a Willow Pattern plate, with women in pointed bamboo hats carrying baskets of fruit suspended from a pole. Prince Charles, get there quick, before corrupt businessmen grab the land, as I'm told they are beginning to do.

I could hardly believe the peace of the Irrawaddy. Or the beauty. Each sunrise and sunset is a living Turner. As dear old Ratty knew on another river, the riverbank and its ways provide a fund of interest, from the boatmen sounding the water's depth with poles to the sight of other boats that have got stuck on the treacherous and shifting sands. The raucous putterputter of local river craft becomes a familiar sound.

But some traffic passes in majestic silence. Rafts of bamboo – used for scaffold poles, columns, baskets, hats – are floated to the cities by nothing more than the current. The men responsible for the cargo live on top of it, in huts, during a journey of several months. "On the road to Mandalay," wrote Kipling, the "flyin'-fishes play," (not that the poet actually got to the town). I didn't see them, but instead caught sight of dolphins, which fishermen summon by knocking on the side of their boats, then reward with the by-catch after fish have been driven into their nets. Mud flats, made fertile by the annual floods, when the Irrawaddy rises by nearly 30ft, grow







Left: Down time working elephants and offspring enjoy a snack between shifts

sunflowers, peanuts and neatly arranged plots of vegetables. In the British era, Burma exported more rice than any other country on earth. Settlements nestle among betel palms and the domed rain trees that were imported under the Raj. Towards diesel-smelling Bhamo, on the Chinese border, the mountains of the 2nd Defile are majestic.

While poor people gain credit for the next life by giving rice, potentates endow monasteries or build pagodas. We stopped at Mingun, where one of the Burmese kings wanted to obtain the maximum credit by building the biggest pagoda ever. He did not get further than the plinth – a huge brick structure, on a par with Battersea Power Station, now cracked by earthquakes. It deserves to rank as one of the Wonders of the World. The bell for the pagoda, cast in 1808, is supposed to be 14 times the size of the biggest bell at St Paul's. We weren't the first tourists to have visited these sites, to judge from the number of women who scurried down to the water's edge when we arrived, wanting to sell us necklaces and fans. But elsewhere the sight of white-kneed Westerners wearing shorts was sufficiently novel to cause giggles.

Tradition runs deep here. Statues of the Buddha become blobs under the burden of gold leaf, beaten tissue-thin by craftsmen in Mandalay and applied by the devout. Dried fish is weighed on balance scales and taken home in a wrapping made from a forest leaf. Shy women pedal at ancient sewing machines, their faces decorated with a miracle-working paste made from ground wood. They wash their clothes in the river,

as well as themselves. Men still wear the sarong-like longyi. Smoke from the wood and charcoal hearths used for cooking perfumes the air – the fire brigade being summoned, perhaps, by a bell made from half an unexploded shell left over from the Second World War.

At Kyauk-myoung, we watched 50-gallon water jars being made. They're fired in kilns primed with the driftwood that is a by-product of the iniquitous logging that has stripped Burma of half of its mature teak forests since 1988; the discarded branches are washed down to the Irrawaddy by monsoon rains. The glaze of the pots is made from lava combined with the lead from old car batteries.

Elephants thrive in Burma, despite the deforestation. We visited a working elephant camp outside Katha to see them and their oozies (mahouts). I felt the breath as gently whistling trunks lifted bananas from our hands.

Country roads are so dire that a river boat is a practical, as well as privileged, way to penetrate the heart of Burma. Go quickly, though. Plastic bags are beginning to replace forest leaves. In Mandalay, where I stayed at the Hotel by the Red Canal and borrowed a bicycle, there are a few cars. The horses and traps that would have been a familiar sight a few years ago – and still are at Katha – have gone. In their place have come motorbikes, fuelled by petrol sold in vegetable-oil bottles. One of the less picturesque scenes on the river is that of a nickel mine, run by the Chinese.

In Katha, 150 miles from where we began our cruise, it's a miracle that Orwell's old home – brick with teak verandas – has survived; buildings age quickly in the harsh Burmese climate and maintenance is unknown. The writer wouldn't be sorry that it's crumbling, though: he hated the place and the boozy oafs and catty women who met in the tennis club.

But the anti-imperialist would be dismayed to see that another empire, an economic one, is rising. Orwell's compatriots, working in the teak forests, managed them sustainably. Burma's mighty neighbour, China, not to mention the prevailing Burmese regime, is less considerate of its natural resources – and fragile beauty – than the Raj.

Clive Aslet is editor-at-large of Country Life. This article appeared first in The Daily Telegraph

Pandaw operates 7 and 10-night 'Upper Irrawaddy' cruises from September to March.

Cruise only prices from USD 2,800 per person (main deck, twin share)

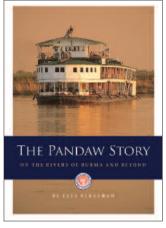
# ARIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

THE PANDAW STORY

Roddy Forsyth considers the extraordinary story of how one man's obsession with a long-forgotten Scottish enterprise in Burma gave birth to a unique travel experience

THE PAMDAW STORY
ON THE RIVERS OF BURNA AND BEYOND





THE PANDAW STORY Paul Strachan

Kiscadale Publications, £12.99.

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e Scots can be strangely careless with our dramas. How many of us knew about the Gretna Disaster of 1915 until its centenary? Virtually nobody, in my experience. Yet it has been called the *Titanic* of British

railway accidents – killing at least 227 people in a carnage involving five trains. A similar forgetfulness folded over the wreck of the *Iolaire*, the worst peacetime loss of life in British waters since – yes, the *Titanic* again. In the first minutes of New Year's Day 1919, the Admiralty yacht *Iolaire* sank with the loss of 205 servicemen demobilised after the First World War, when it struck the Beasts of Holm, a reef close to the entrance of Stornoway Bay. Many of the dead had glimpsed the lights of home for the first time in years just before the ship foundered. Again, the tragedy barely registered beyond its locality, although John McLeod produced a fitting account – *When I Heard the Bell* (Birlinn Press) – on the ninetieth anniversary in 2009.

Both calamities occurred on the fringes of Scotland at a time when the country was awash with bereavement and grief. Still, it defies belief that such events would have vanished from view had they occurred in Edinburgh or Glasgow, never mind the Home Counties. And then there is the extraordinary tale of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (IFC). This is arguably the greatest uncelebrated Scottish epic, a tale of the biggest privately owned river fleet in history, administered from Glasgow along the lines of a self-contained local authority on Burma's main transport artery between 1865 and 1948. At its peak, in the 1940s, the IFC had 650 vessels on the Irrawaddy. The river bisects Burma along its 1350 mile length, of which about 900 miles is navigable between its mouth in the Andaman Sea and Bhamo in the northern Kachin State, where it meets the overland trail to China. The Irrawaddy is powerful, wide, shallow and capricious, switching course dramatically from season to season to present a severe test for mariners and shipbuilders alike.

The problem was solved on the Clyde – where shallow draught paddle steamers were prefabricated for reassembly in Rangoon – and in the choice of Scottish commanders and engineers. The larger IFC vessels could contain multitudes of

up to 4200 deck passengers (the *Titanic* carried 2224 passengers and crew) and in the 1930s the *Flotilla* carried nine million people – equivalent to 75% of the Burmese population of the time. The spectacle of those powerful ships plying the Irrawaddy, tethered to 250-feet long flats which bore teak logs and general cargo and which could also ferry 24 elephants at a time, is a potent image of the British Empire in its pomp. Nemesis arrived in 1942 in the form of the Imperial Japanese Army and when it became clear to the IFC officers that Burma was lost, they faced the excruciating choice of preserving their fleet to the advantage of the enemy or scuttling the vessels.

Over a few days in the spring of 1942, a small group supervised by the fleet manager, John Morton, shot through the thin hulls of their flotilla with Bren guns and sank more than 500 ships. Meanwhile, a column of IFC staff, their families, plus Burmese employees and servants, set off on an incredibly arduous overland trek to Imphal on the Indian border and reached safety just ahead of the advancing Japanese troops. Most of the refugees assumed that they would return to Burma if the war ended favourably for the British. It did, but the newly independent Burma became an introspective state, tourism evaporated and the heyday of the IFC receded into fast fading memory. It would have been consumed by obscurity but for Paul Strachan.

From personal experience of Strachan, I do not imagine he will mind if I suggest that he is a maverick and adventurer and the sort of Scot who would have flourished while Burma was a province of the Indian Raj. You can judge for yourself from his memoir *The Pandaw Story*, an account of an infatuation with the country which began when, at the age of 18, Strachan took a gap year from his work at John Brown Engineering to live in a socialist work camp outside Prome, where he helped build a gas turbine power station.

The Burma encountered by Strachan was a closed country, except to those who, like him, were granted access through occasional foreign aid projects which the government of General Ne Win permitted, despite the junta's suspicions. He paints a beguiling portrait of Rangoon society with its abundance of lending libraries and teashops, where gentlemen scholars discussed Burmese translations of Dostoevsky and









One man and his dream: On board and on shore scenes from the first 20 years of Pandaw

Tolstoy. Such a genteel ambience, however, was the benign by-product of a profound resistance to change – and fear of foreign interference – imposed on the Burmese people by a succession of repressive regimes, the most sinister of which was the Orwellian-sounding SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council). SLORC was the military's response in 1988 to mass demonstrations by students protesting against ethnic conflict and a stagnant economy.

SLORC's leaders called an election in 1990, but were stunned by the landslide victory of the NLD Party, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, who was promptly placed under house arrest. Strachan's account of this period is illuminating, not merely in the surface detail of a suddenly efficient military bureaucracy energised by young officers parading in Ray-Bans and trim uniforms, but also in what he describes as the 'voluntary amnesia' of the Burmese people, who have never established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to exorcise the spectre of SLORC's brutal repression of dissidents.

By the time SLORC seized power Strachan and his Spanish wife Roser had, in the argot of the Raj, gone native, despite periods of enforced exile when their chances of imprisonment – or worse – increased abruptly. Strachan is proud to have been the first western publisher of Aung San Suu Kyi but his admiration for her does not extend to the call she made for a comprehensive boycott of the country while she was shut away at home. He testifies to the deprivation

suffered by ordinary Burmese while SLORC's principals were sheltered from anything approaching discomfort.

Strachan's principal engagement with Burma occurred through his revival of the concept of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, under whose name he inaugurated river cruises – the first for foreigners since before the Second World War – during the brief period of liberalisation during the mid-1990s. He began in 1995 with a locally built ship which literally began to fall apart within six months. For the next two years, Strachan recounts, he was able to carry enough passengers to break even, but only just. At which point in his narrative, he reveals that an article by this correspondent in the *Daily Telegraph* 'filled the ship for the whole of the next season'. The things one learns.

Strachan later achieved his Irrawaddy epiphany when he casually boarded a derelict vessel which had become home to squatters, complete with naked children and vagrant pigs. An old sailor was still at hand, though, and disclosed that the ship had been built in Scotland and had once been glorious in shining brass, long since melted down. 'It was then that lightning struck – we would restore her to her Clydebuilt glory,' writes Strachan. He and Roser did exactly that, at which point the narrative embarks on a voyage which includes womanising captains with a taste for Ruritanian uniforms, squadrons of sarcastic Swiss female travel agents and disappearing pursers. It also traverses a Kafkaesque world where official







Top team:
Pandaw's service
standards are the
result of years of
hard work.
Left: Paul
Strachan charms
the locals

approval depends on a volatile mix of bribery, deferment to power, the placation of endless egos and observance of complex religious rituals.

Burma's feared Military Intelligence cadres operated as mini-Mafias. One of their extortion rackets ensnared an innocent, shy young Burmese girl working in Strachan's office. The absence of a single, trivial document led to her being sentenced to seven years in prison, despite Strachan's diligent bribing of lawyers, prosecutors and judges. She was released after a year but her family was shattered. Strachan's commercial rivals tried to sabotage the IFC – and almost succeeded – while he was embroiled in trying to remedy the miscarriage of justice.

He survived, nevertheless, as did he and Roser when their adoption of a Burmese boy – officially sanctioned but subject to the usual sinister variables – forced them to smuggle Toni (now 17 and at school in Scotland) out of the country with the covert aid of the French ambassador. Strachan stuck firmly to the principle of sustainable tourism and his passengers explored the riverbanks by bicycle – sturdy Chinese boneshakers – in contrast to the Land Cruisers favoured by later incomers, like the American proprietors of what he refers to as 'Gin Palace Cruises'. Ultimately, rather than lease from the Burmese government, he built his own ships and extended his river cruises into Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

His apotheosis came in May 2008 when Cyclone Nargis struck the Irrawaddy Delta, killing 150,000 and leaving 2.5 million homeless. Western aid agencies who had heeded Aung San Suu Kyi's entreaties had no infrastructure in Burma. Strachan converted his vessels to hospital ships, enlisted the help of a British medical charity, raised \$750,000 through an appeal to former passengers and recruited Buddhist monks for their experience of distributing rice to supplicants. The Pandaw

Family Box was devised, a start-up kit which included plates, cooking utensils, candles, matches, towels, mosquito nets, instant noodles and rice, plus a couple of longyis, the ubiquitous cloth worn skirt-like from the waist.

He bought up low-price pharmaceuticals made under licence in China and India. The high-capacity water treatment plants on Strachan's ships ensured clean supplies to the endless stream of supplicants who were sustained by noodle soup dished out at the feeding stations on deck. Meanwhile, the stupefied, but still paranoid, ruling regime refused to accept aid from two American destroyers moored off the coast. The flow of the Strachans' emergency efforts was sustained after some sort of normality was restored. Their Pandaw Hospital Ship still operates in the Irrawaddy Delta and they have built seven clinics in areas so poor that there is no other medical provision for 250 miles. They support two orphanages and have constructed 10 schools with more to come.

All proceeds from *The Pandaw Story* go towards the upkeep of these projects, an entirely fitting means of celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the 'old Flotilla' of Kipling's verse. Pedants be warned – proof reading is not one of the author's strengths. This is a text in which one can jump on a 'plain' to escape the rigours of our old friend, 'Marital' Law. That reservation aside, Strachan narrates an account of buccaneering antics in a country whose association with Scotland gave birth on both sides to romance, devotion and self-sacrifice. An auld acquaintance has once more been called to mind but it should be far better known in the country which produced those estimable Irrawaddy mariners, amongst whose company Paul Strachan can claim a merited place.

## PANDAW'S RIVERS

The definitive guide to the waterways we love.

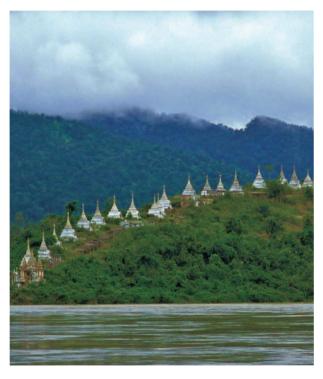


## **IRRAWADDY**

The Irrawaddy in Burma ranks as the 55th longest river in the world at 2,170km but is in the top ten rivers in terms of discharge at 13,000 litres per second. The river begins at the confluence of two rivers in Kachin State and discharges into the Andaman Sea through a vast 10,000 square mile delta.

The river is navigable year round for 1,600km from Rangoon to Bhamo and for part of the year for another 200km as far as Myitkina close to the confluence. The main tributary is the Chindwin River. In the monsoon the average rise on the low water level is 30m but in the 1st defile it is double this. There are three defiles between Mandalay and Myitkyina, the most spectacular of which is the second defile below Bhamo. Between here and the Delta the river varies hugely from mountains to plains. In the defiles the width is but a couple of hundred feet but in the plains it can be miles wide. In the low water season sand islands appear, many farmed on a seasonal basis, and navigation channels become serpentine and often hard to find.

Pandaw operates several vessels on the Irrawaddy with services connecting Rangoon to Bhamo.

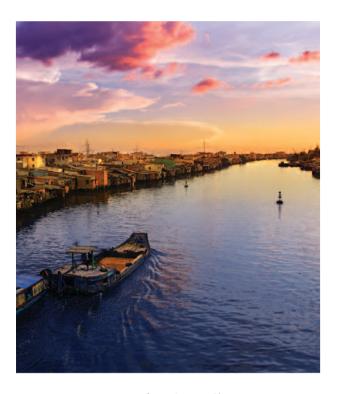


## **CHINDWIN**

The Chindwin flows down from the Burma – Assam border area, its waters rising from the Himalayan foothills. It is the main tributary of the Irrawaddy and is 1,207km long. Of this about 1000km is navigable in vessels that have the shallowest drafts in the world, designs perfected by the Irrawaddy Flotilla in the 1880s that we continue to use to this day.

The Chindwin flows through remote areas with few roads or cars, where most communities are connected by the river. Above Homalin we are in Nagaland where until quite recently the Nagas specialised in shrinking the heads of their human quarry. This is the loveliest of rivers but treacherous to navigate and larger ships can only venture up there in the monsoon and then with difficulty.

Pandaw operates the ultra shallow-draft *Zawgyi*Pandaw throughout the dry season between Monyaw and Homalin and in the monsoon as far as Hkamti.



## **MEKONG**

The Mekong or "Mother of Water" is the 12th largest river in the world flowing 4,350km from SW China to discharge into the sea through a vast delta in Vietnam. Discharging 16,000 cubic meters per second this great beast of a river actually flows through or along the edge of six countries: China, Laos, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Navigable approximately 3,000km in high water from Saigon to Stuc Treng in Cambodia and again above the Cambodia Laos border that is formed by the impassable Khone Falls, the river is navigable for again from Pakse all the way to Jinghong in China. In French colonial times it was said that officials taking up postings in Laos it took longer to sail up the Mekong from Saigon to Luang Prabang than from Paris to Saigon. In fact, the French built a railway round the Khone Falls to connect steamer services above and below.

This is a river of great cultural and bio-diversity. However, both ways of life and the ecology of this vast region will be affected by the construction of a number of new dams. Seven are planned for Laos with one nearing completion, through which our ship passes in a specially constructed lock.

Though flowing through six countries there is a far greater human diversity than merely six nations as numerous minority groups and hill tribes have settled along the banks, from the Chams in Vietnam to Akas, Lisus, Shans, Dai and many others the further up you go. All this makes for a fascinating ethnography.

Pandaw operates three ships on the Lower Mekong and Tonle rivers through Vietnam and Cambodia and from Laos to China on the Upper Mekong.



## **TONLE**

The Mekong's main tributary is the Tonle River that flows down from the great Tonle Sap or lake in central Cambodia that is 100km from end to end and in the rains quadruples in size flooding the surrounding plain. The Tonle river changes direction twice a year: when the monsoon arrives the flow from the Mekong backs up to the central plain and when the rains end the river reverses direction and empties the flood back out into the Mekong.

Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, sits astride the confluence of the Tonle and Mekong rivers and is our home port on the Lower Mekong.



## **KWAI**

Notorious for the horrific prisoner of war camps from the Second World War, largely through the film <code>Bridge</code> over the River Kwai, starring Alec Guiness, few realise just how lovely a river and its area are. There are in fact two Kwai rivers, the Kwai Yai and the Kwai Noi that merge at Kanchanaburi, where the modern replacement of the wartime bridge is. There is much to see and do in the area with a steam railway, a tiger sanctuary, Buddhist caves and grottos and a clear fresh river you can swim in.

Working with our Thai partners, we offer a short river expedition of just four nights, on a former Pandaw, that explores this area. A few hours drive from Bangkok this is an attractive build-on to any South-East Asia itinerary.



## RED RIVER

The Song Hong or Red River rises deep in the Yunnan mountains of south-west China to flow 1,149km across Northern Vietnam and discharge into the Gulf of Tonkin. It is an ancient trade route and was route by which French explorers in the 19th century penetrated Yunnan, eventually reaching Kunming. Hanoi, capital of Vietnam straddles the river and close to its mouth lies Halong Bay, with its dramatic scenery.

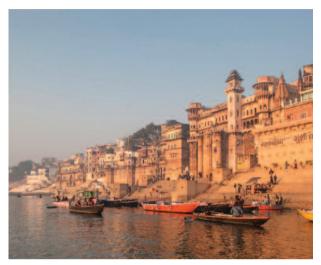
Using the *Angkor Pandaw* in 2015 we set up a remarkable river adventure connecting Halong Bay through various canals and tributaries to connect with the Red River and continue upstream to mountainous areas beyond Viet Tri and up the Lo River, one of the main tributaries. There can be no better way to explore Northern Vietnam.



## **YANGTZE**

The 3rd longest river in the world, the Yangtze flows 6,300km from the Tibetan plateau to discharge into the East China Sea at Shanghai. She also has the third highest discharge rate (31,900 cubic meters per second) after the Amazon and Congo. Much of China's history, culture and

economy has developed along this river system. It drains one fifth of all China and remains home to one third of the population. The Three Gorges Dam is the largest engineering project in the world and rather than disrupt river cruising, it has become a major draw in itself. The river is in fact navigable by sea-going vessels for its first 1600km and it is to the upper reaches from Chongquin and the Gorges that most river cruisers head.



## **GANGES AND HOOGHLY**

The 34th longest river in the world at 2,620km, the Ganges rises central Tibet, flows down through the Himalays to form the Gangetic Plain of North India eventually to discharge into the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh. The Hooghly river connects the Ganges to Calcutta with a ship lock as part of the Farraka Barrage that diverts water away from Bangladesh. The Ganges is the cradle of Indian civilisation and is sacred to Hindus. To bathe in the waters of the Holy Ganga is a form of purification and to be cremated at the Ghats of Varanasi the ambition of every living Hindu. The river was used for navigation in British colonial times with steamer services between Calcutta, Patna and even higher. Massive irrigation schemes later diverted waters and the construction of of railways and later roads with low bridges effectively killed river transportation and the navigation channels silted up.

Iin recent years much has been done to improve navigation and Patna can be reached year round and at certain times Varanasi too. A river expedition on the Ganges is really the only sensible way to see India avoiding now congested roads and all the other inconveniences of travel today in India. There is much to see along the way – historically, culturally and for bird and wild life. This is a river that offers rich experiences. Pandaw works with the Assam Bengal Company which provides excellent services.

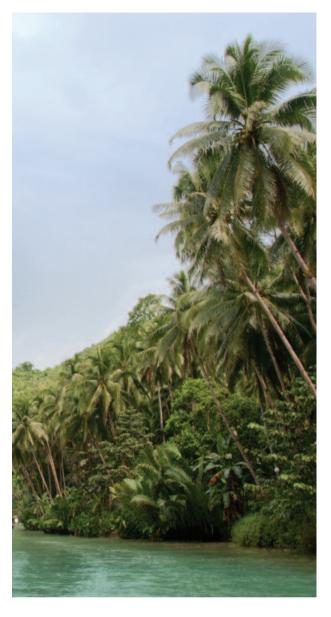


## **BRAHMAPUTRA**

The 29th longest river in the world at 2,948 km long the Brahamputura has a discharge of 19,200 cubic litres per second. This puts it in the top 10 when it comes to water volume. Indeed, this is a big river and was the only river on Earth clearly visible from the moon during the Apollo missions. Flowing down from central Tibet through the legendry Tsang - po Gorges the river opens out as it enters Assam to flow across that state and then through Bangladesh to outflow through the vast Sunderbunds Delta, merging with the Ganges, as they discharge into the Bay of Bengal.

Little navigated on today, in colonial times steamer services operated as far as Dibrugarh. The river in places can be up to 20 miles wide and in the monsoon floods the entire Assam plain. Indeed, East Bengal is not called the wettest place on the planet for nothing and has the world's highest rainfall.

The river is so vast that any river expedition undertaken can be movingly wondrous as you pass through this great emptiness of water, sand and shoal. There is not a lot of human activity but that means the wild and bird life are profuse. We work with a partner whose ship visits all the main national parks including Kaziranga.



## **AMAZON**

The Amazon is now recognised as the longest river in the world just beating the Nile by a few kilometres though this has been much debated. She certainly has the highest discharge in the world at 219,000 cubic meters per second. With her main tributaries she flows through seven countries: Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Guyana. In Brazil the river discharges into the Atlantic through a 200km wide mouth. There can be no doubt this is the greatest river system in the world with an extraordinary ecology and environment.

The river is navigable on sea-going ships for 1000km as far as Manaus and there are several areas of specialised river expedition in different Amazonian countries. We are currently sailing in Brazil out of Santarem on the *Amazon Dream* and have plans for further expeditions in Ecuador and Peru.



# ALL IN THE FAMILY...

andaw fans have always known that the best kind of luxury river cruising is not a passive or overly sedate experience. Our cruises are geared towards the young at heart, whatever their age.

Ever the pioneer, we are now taking this approach even further by introducing a new range of Family Friendly Cruises, a selection of departures in Burma and Indochina especially designed to cater to families. There's even a Christmas cruise, for those who cherish family togetherness at this time of year, but who are looking for a radical alternative to turkey, tantrums and TV specials watched from the sofa.

Time was when travel in Asia catered for the generational parallel universes of comfortable retirees or of intrepid youthful backpackers, and never the twain shall meet.

They do now. Pandaw is breaking the mould by offering a selection of departures that show how Burma and Indochina are great destinations for families of all ages to enjoy together. Our ships are ideal for this new kind of adventure cruising, offering a range of child and teenage-friendly activities, including onboard movie nights.

A specially revised programme of shore excursions has been designed for children to enjoy, and we take care to serve up great food that we know the kids will love. We even offer cooking lessons.

For the adventurous youngsters who like to test themselves, we lay on shore excursion challenges. To burn off some of that energy while expanding their cultural horizons, we offer cycle tours of the major sites, either as individual families or in groups of the same ages.

The main cruises so far are, in Burma, the Mandalay Pagan Packet, departing on 30th July 2016, and a special Christmas departure on 24th December 2016.

In Indochina, there are the Classic Mekong cruises aboard the *Mekong Pandaw* departing 6th August 2016 and 7th January 2017.

Our family cruises offer great value and we are stretching the definition of "child" as far as it can go, to include anyone up to the age of 18 years old. Children under 4 travel free if sleeping in a cot in the same cabin, while children from over 4 years up to 18 years old earn the following discounts:

- 1 adult and 1 child 1 cabin child receives50% reduction from the adult price.
- 2 adults and 1 child 2 cabins 1 cabin with no single supplement and 50% reduction for the child.
- 2 adults and 2 children 2 cabins 50% reduction for both children.
- Larger family groups prices on request.

**See** www.pandaw.com/family-friendly-river-cruises/ **for further information.** 



#### PROFILES IN PANDAW



Nong Saomony

Role: Spa Therapist/Masseuse

**Age:** 33

Nationality: Cambodian

Time with Pandaw: 5 years.

What does your job involve?: Looking after the health and wellbeing of our passengers. Although I'm not a doctor, I am able to make them feel relaxed to the point of falling asleep. Looking after the beauty needs of our lady guests with pedicure, manicure and nail care.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I use to work at the Queen Grand Spa in Phnom Penh, where they brought a trainer in from Thailand. We learned from them the technique of how to do massage in the Thai style. After I stopped working with them I started at a new place called Ti Ti Spa, then at Sokun Palace where I worked for about two years before I started with Pandaw.

What's the best part about your job? Using massage to understand and respond to the needs of our guests.

#### What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?:

Some of our guests have had surgery or have some implants, which make it inadvisable to administer the strong and deep massage that they might ask for. If I cannot follow what they want I have to explain to them how the massage could adversely affect them. Some are ok about it, but others are clearly unhappy about it.

What skills do you need to do the job well?: We must have good technique based on an understanding of human anatomy, muscles and nerves, and which of these affect the vital organs like the brain and the heart.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: In this job is we need to use all of our energy so I don't have much to spare for thinking about the future if I want to keep up my standards. But I do occasionally dream about my own spa



## Houm Phan

Role: Captain of the Laos Pandaw

**Age:** 55

Nationality: Laotian

Time with Pandaw: 2 months

What does your job involve?: I drive the ship and take care of safety of the passengers, crew and the small fishing boats around. I supervise maintenance of the engines.

#### What previous experience prepared you for the job?:

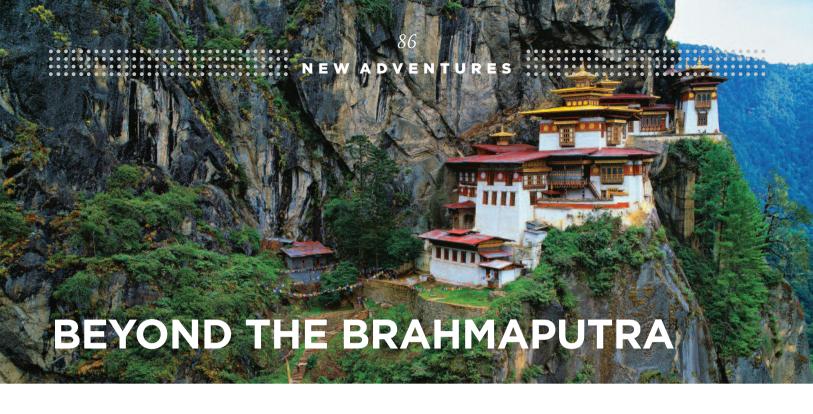
Laos Pandaw used to be a cargo ship carrying cement, timber, construction equipment and even elephants from Thailand to Luang Prabang. Pandaw came and asked me if I wanted to sell the ship, which I was happy about, as I got to be the captain, and earn more money. I have 30 years of experience on the Mekong, including 10 years on small boats and 20 years on the cargo ship. I have a spiritual relationship with the river. When we pass areas that have spirits, I show respect and offer sticky rice and lao lao [rice wine] to the spirits who live there, throwing the offering into the river. When we moor on a sandbank, we make an offering to the spirits to get permission to stay. We know the areas that spirits live from ancient folklore. If we keep the them happy, they keep us safe.

#### What is the biggest challenge you had to face so far?:

Keeping up to date on river characteristics and water levels as the Mekong is a constantly changing environment. The most danger lies in the wide berth river basin areas where the depth is very low and hard to read. The rapid passages may appear more dangerous but they tend to be easier to navigate as the fast waters dig out a trough in the river bed.

What skills do you need to do this job well?: You need to be safety-minded. You need to be in tune with your ship and the systems on board, and to know what your boat can handle.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I want to stay with Pandaw forever. I want to stay here working on this boat and I want a big, luxurious house for my wife and family!



Our upstream departures on the great northern Indian thoroughfare the Brahmaputra, aboard our partner ship the MV Mahabaahu, are ideal to combine with tours to Bhutan, the Golden Triangle or, new for 2016, the colourful Hornbill Festival in Nagaland.



#### **DISCOVER BHUTAN**

The fortuitous scheduling of direct flights from Paro to Guwahati make it possible for us to combine (for a very reasonable tariff) a visit to the ancient kingdom of Bhutan, one of the world's most intriguing countries, with an exciting river expedition on the Brahmaputra. And what an incredible journey this is: from the colonial grandeur of Kolkata we fly to Paro and discover Bhutan's famous cliff-top monasteries, soaring mountain peaks and Bhutan's unique way of life.

14 nights (including 7-night Brahmaputra cruise) from US\$ 5995 per person sharing a twin room/cabin without a balcony.



#### THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Following your expedition on the Brahmaputra, enjoy a 6-night tour of the Golden Triangle visiting most popular cultural gems including historic Delhi, Agra, the Taj Mahal and the imposing capital of Rajasthan, Jaipur. We also stay for one night at the Dera Village Retreat, offering the chance to discover villages in the Aravalli Hills, home to the Meena Tribal people.

13 nights (including 7-night Brahmaputra cruise) from US\$ 3916 per person sharing a twin room/cabin without a balcony.

# EXPERIENCE NAGALAND'S HORNBILL FESTIVAL STAYING AT THE ULTIMATE TRAVELLING CAMP

The Hornbill Festival is a wonderful opportunity to understand the people and culture of Nagaland, with festivities including traditional Naga morungs

exhibition, sale of arts and crafts, songs, dancing, archery, indigenous games, Naga wrestling, herbal medicine stalls, food stalls, flower shows, beauty contest, fashion shows and concerts. Traditional arts are also displayed with paintings, sculptures and wood carvings. Our exclusive programme includes domestic flights to/from Kohima and 3-nights at the luxurious Ultimate Travellers Camp set amidst beautiful scenery where you stay in designer tents, with ensuite bathrooms, crisp linen and the services of your very own butler. Enjoy a drink of the local rice beer, savour delicious tribal recipes and participate in celebrations of the unique Hornbill Festival.

Special departure 27th November 2016 – 10 nights (including 7 night Brahmaputra cruise) from US\$ 6495 per person sharing a twin luxury tent/cabin without a balcony.



## EXTEND YOUR JOURNEY WITH OUR EXCLUSIVE PRE OR POST CRUISE EXTENSIONS

Pandaw offers an expanding rate of competitively priced pre or post cruise packages specifically designed and timed to combine with your Pandaw cruise. All packages are bookable online at www.pandaw.com.

We also offer tailor-made pre and post extensions. Simply email us with your requirements and we will provide a competitive quotation.

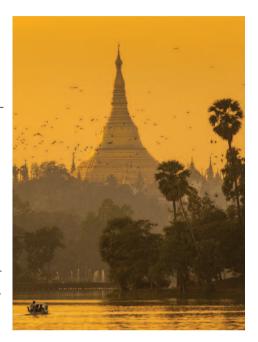
## **BURMA**

Although Burma has seen much change in recent years, there are still only a few first class hotels available for the discerning traveller. As our relationships with hoteliers span many years, we are able to get rooms that other cruise operators cannot get access to – particularly in peak season.

In Rangoon, we feature the excellent centrally located 5\* Shangri La Hotel, with an included visit to the stunning Swedagon Pagoda, transfers and domestic flights if your cruise departs from Mandalay or Pagan.

Up country, we offer a 2-night or 4-night extension to Inle Lake staying at the elegant lakeside located Santarum Resort including all excursions and connecting domestic flights. And in Mandalay, we have a long-standing partnership with the best hotel in the city – the Mandalay Hill Resort from where you can take an enjoyable refreshing walk to the summit of Mandalay Hill.

With vastly improved domestic airlines services and schedules there are many more 'off the beaten track' areas to explore such as Arakan, Shan and Kachin states – or a stay at Ngapali Beach, Burma's undiscovered tropical gem.





## VIETNAM, CAMBODIA & LAOS

From our Classic Mekong cruise explore Angkor Wat (voted the world's leading attraction by users of www.tripadvisor.com) in the company of knowledgeable guides. And on our Saigon extension, tour the incredible Cu Chi Tunnels where Viet Cong guerrillas lived underground during the Vietnam War.

On the Upper Mekong, take a short (included) flight from Vientiane to the fascinating Plain of Jars, or spend a few days exploring the scenic beauty and hill tribes in Northern Thailand. Our new programme on the Mekong to Jinghong, China has enabled the chance to discover colourful Yunnan Province, from Lijiang to Dali to the famous Stone Forest and the spring city of Kunming.

A very popular extension to our Halong Bay & the Red River programme is our visit to the delightful mountain village of Sapa where you'll meet the local tribal people.



## PANDAW PARTNER PROGRAMMES

Many Pandaw clients book our cruises in Asia year after year, particularly as we are constantly seeking new rivers and itineraries for you to explore and enjoy.

But, as they say, the world is your oyster and in response to requests from past Pandaw travellers, we have developed programmes in other parts of the world on specially selected vessels owned by Pandaw partners.

In India, we offer the Brahmaputra River on the *MV Mahabaahu*, a ship specially built to navigate this remote and mighty river. We also offer cruises on the Hooghly and Ganges on the *MV Rajmahal*.

In Brazil, we have combined a stay in Rio and the awe-inspiring Iguacu Falls with a 9-night cruise on an authentic Amazon River boat – the *Amazon Dream*. And in Ecuador we offer a unique combination of a cruise on the Napo River with a visit to the incredible Galapagos Islands.

Details of all Pandaw partner cruise programmes are available on www.pandaw.com.

Please note that our partner ships are NOT of the same design and style as a Pandaw owned ship. However, we are very careful to select and inspect all the partner ships we work with to ensure they are of the appropriate quality.

Another major difference between our partner ships and owned ships is that we do NOT include drinks or crew gratuities on our partner programmes.

# EXTENDING YOUR CRUISE ADVENTURES IN CAMBODIA

Discover the beautiful Kirirom National Park or Koh Rong Island

With several new resorts and lodges now in operation, it is now possible to complement your Pandaw cruise with a trip to the lesser visited Kirirom National Park or the beautiful 'Robinson Crusoe' island of Koh Rong on our new pre/post cruise adventures.



## EXPLORE KIRIROM NATIONAL PARK (2 NIGHTS)

Kirirom National Park (meaning Happy Mountain) extends over the eastern part of the Cardamom Mountains and has many footpaths and trails to explore through the forests leading to scenic lakes and dramatic waterfalls. In less peaceful times, the park was also once used as a refuge by the fanatical communist guerillas the Khmer Rouge. Your base is a bungalow room (king size bed and en-suite bathroom) at the ecofriendly V-Kirirom Resort set amidst a forest of pines.

2 nights from US\$435 per person

(twin share)

## DISCOVER KOH RONG ISLAND

Koh Rong is the second largest island of Cambodia and a paradise for those seeking an authentic island experience – the feel is rather like the Thai islands in the 70's. Four village communities live on the island: Koh Tuich, Doeum D'keuw, Prek Svay and Sok San. Your 2-night stay is based in a beach chalet at the beautiful and peaceful Soksan Beach Resort where you can enjoy a wide range of activities: visits to a local village, fishing, scuba diving, kayaking, trekking, cooking classes or simply just relaxing on the beach.

2 nights from US\$350 per person

(twin share)

More cruise extensions are being added in 2016. Please see www.pandaw.com for the latest offers.

## SUITE SATISFACTION



While we're proud of the fact that all Pandaw guests receive five-start treatment, we have responded to demand from agents and passengers to cater for those seeking a little bit more. The result? We now offer new spacious top deck suites at the front of the *Pandaw II* and the *Mekong Pandaw*.

These spacious onboard apartments (360 square feet, or 33 square metres) offer a private balcony, a lounge area with sofa, double or twin beds, a well-stocked mini bar, tea and coffee facilities, in-room expresso machine and a fruit basket on arrival. They also include the option of a third bed in the lounge area. Suite guests also have the option of house wine with lunch and dinner.



Pandaw boasts some of the most knowledgeable guides and most developed onshore excursion programme in Burma, but we also know that some people value their independence when not onboard.

Because of this, and as part of our commitment to supporting more active, healthier and greener holidays, we invite our passengers to take to two wheels, to make their own discoveries. A great way to do this is by bike though the pagodas and temples of Pagan, or by exploring Indochina's scenic countryside and friendly villages at your own pace. We are pleased to announce the introduction of high quality mountain bikes on all Pandaw ships, for all departures. Pandaw crew will advise on the best routes to follow for independent exploration of the local area and, if required, a member of the crew will accompany you on your cycling adventure.

Bikes on board can be booked online at www.pandaw.com for \$25 per bike per cruise. Once booked, the bike will be available for your use throughout your river expedition. Please note bikes are not bookable once on board ship. Cycle helmets can be provided.

### PROFILES IN PANDAW



## Bui Huu Hau

Role: Captain of Bassac Pandaw

Age: 34

Nationality: Vietnamese

Time with Pandaw: 6 years.

What does your job involve?: As Captain, I am responsible for the safety of all the passengers and staff on the ship. Every day I have to work with my crew members to set the ship's speed and course, monitor its position, and avoid hazards to make sure that everything is under my command, and everyone onboard enjoys every single minute of sailing along the Mekong river with my highly-qualified team.

#### What previous experience prepared you for the job?:

After graduating from the Hang Giang Vocational College in Ho Chi Minh City, majoring in waterways navigation, I spent many years sailing across the Vietnamese waters with cargo transport until I applied to Pandaw for the position as Vice Captain on *Indochina Pandaw* in 2009. A year later, in 2010 I was promoted Captain, and since then my life has been taken up with river journeys between Vietnam and Cambodia.

#### What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?:

There are lots of challenges that every Captain in the world has to face, and I am no exception. Handling the ship while entering or leaving ports is one, or manoeuvring the ship in a narrow and confined channel is another. But the biggest challenge is always from Mother Nature: I can handle most things but strong winds are a nightmare. In the monsoon season, there is lots of rain and wind while cruising along the Mekong river, so piloting skill becomes even more essential to ensure a safe journey.

What skills do you need to do the job well?: To be good at navigation - maths and physics come into it, as well as having a deep interest in boats, travel and naval science. Being comfortable socialising with passengers onboard is also a plus.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: To start my own business one day. But I am fully committed to participating in the development of the Pandaw Cruises in the coming years.



## Ko Win Hlaing

Role: Chief Purser of Pandaw fleet

Age: 46

Nationality: Burmese

Time with Pandaw: 13 years

What does your job involve?: Taking care of the food and beverage, housekeeping and all aspects of the day to day running of a ship. I led the Pandaw Charity's response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008 when we realised that we had the ships, the teams and the supporters to be first in and last out of the Irrawaddy Delta disaster zone. We created the Pandaw Family Box, containing essentials to be distributed to the victims of this terrible storm.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I trained at the Savoy Hotel, a five-star hotel in Rangoon.

What's the best part about what you do?: Improving on the job. We like new challenges and new adventures and thinking up new programmes to show the culture, history, and village life on new passenger routes. It's interesting to make cruise schedules, and to do presentations to the rest of the team on new products and charity operations to explain to the passengers.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face so far?:

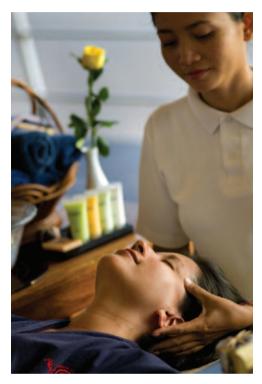
I'll never forget it. It was September 2008 near the confluence of the Chindwin River with the Irrawaddy. At about 19:10 hours a strong Tornado hit *Pandaw 4* but luckily the ship was not damaged beyond the roof tarpaulin and some broken items.

What skills do you need to do the job well?: Mostly the ability to keep on improving.

**Any hopes and dreams for the future?:** To help improve our internal reporting systems.

## FLOAT OFF TO SPA HEAVEN

To enrich the Pandaw experience even further, our cruises now offer that little bit extra: the opportunity to put yourself into the skilful hands of our highly trained spa therapists at our luxury onboard spas.



In addition to well-equipped gyms for your daily (or occasional!) workout, the unique onboard Pandaw River Spa offers head massage, foot massage and body massages in dedicated areas on each ship.

Competitively-priced treatments range from \$14 to around \$70 for longer sessions. Word of mouth has ensured that demand is high,

so it pays to book in advance.

Thos Rotana, one of our massage and spa therapists tells *Pandaw Magazine*: "We have two new beautiful spa treatment rooms on our refitted *RV Mekong Pandaw*. Why not pamper yourself with an oil massage or traditional Khmer massage after a busy excursion day, or even enjoy a mani pedi [manicure and pedicure] on the sundeck?"

"Our spa menu is extensive, offering various ways to stimulate and relax the mind and the body. A session with our operatives is sure to awaken the senses, reduce stress, smooth the muscles, boost the circulation and promote deep relaxation."

While a Pandaw cruise offers sensational sights and flavours as you progress up or down the river, these can be complemented by the deep sensory relaxation that

comes from surrendering yourself to the delights of these little oases of well-being, where the lingering fragrance of flowers mixes with the aroma of natural essential oils, herbs, and spices.

Guests can choose from the selection of treatments given by our therapists, who are trained by Pandaw's own in-house instructor, including the classic Khmer [Cambodian] full body massage; a dry massage partly focused on pressure points while increasing blood circulation. Without any of the strenuous stretching and pulling sometimes associated with Thai massage, you will soon find yourself drifting into a state of total relaxation.

The back and shoulder massage, a powerful oil massage, eases the strains and "knots" in your body, relieving the tensions that result in headaches.

Our foot reflexology treatment pinpoints areas of the soles of the feet to stimulate other parts of the body, whereas the luxurious Khmer hand & foot treatment gives an exceptional feeling of wellness, in addition to beautifully groomed hands and feet.

Finally, the full oil massage is best known for increasing the circulation, calming the nerves, toning the muscles and lubricating the joints. The benefits are increased alertness, elimination of bodily impurities, softer, smoother skin and increased stamina through the day. Catering for ladies and gentlemen of all ages, our staff are well-trained in working with existing medical conditions.



#### PROFILES IN PANDAW



Albert Eland

Role: Guest Services Manager

Age: 47

Nationality: Dutch

Time with Pandaw: 1 year

What does your job involve?: I am responsible for all activities on board, how the crew interacts with our passengers, the housekeeping department and also the general atmosphere.

What previous experience prepared you for the job?: I've worked in the travel industry for 18 years. From being a tourleader to running a hotel and even setting up a complete new travel company specialised in Laos travels. I started in the Gambia, West-Africa in 1997. My previous jobs gave me the opportunity to live in Turkey, Sri Lanka, Australia, Nepal and for the last eight years I lived in Chiang Mai, Thailand. I love being in Asia, the people here are so friendly and it is nice to work with them.

What's the best part about what you do?: I'm not cut out to stay in an office all day. With Pandaw that will never happen, with so many ships running on different rivers. I need to travel a lot to visit the ships. The end of 2015 I was in the Golden Triangle to setup our new Laos Pandaw ship on the Upper Mekong. I had to go shopping in 3 different countries for this ship. It turned out well! I believe we set a new standard of quality on this ship. Candlelit dinner on deck, a nice lounge area, spacious cabins... or maybe it is because the views every day along the river are stunning. I don't know what it is, but it's a must-see! In 2016 I will have to go back because we've decided to build a second ship for the Upper Mekong.

What's the biggest challenge you've had to face?: Every day is a challenge with Pandaw. There are so many things happening. We have ships stranded on a sandbank, food orders arriving late, building of new ships, the list goes on. I had a big challenge a few months ago in Laos during our first Laos cruise. I went shopping with our purser in Luang Prabang for wine & champagne. It took a long time to find a supplier and finally we found nice French wines and Taittinger Champagne. We loaded it on a tuktuk and went back to the ship. From the street level we could not see the ship because it is blocked by trees. We've unloaded everything and went towards the ship to get some crew to help us carry the wines and champagne onboard. When we had a clear view we didn't see the ship. We were sure this was the right spot but no Pandaw in sight! We just looked at each other and starting

laughing. We did't have Laos simcards yet so we could not call the crew. Finally the purser went walking along the riverbank to find the ship while I was guarding the 10 cases of wine and champagne. It looked funny, me sitting there on the roadside with all this wine and champagne. Luckily the purser found the ship downstream. The captain found a better spot where our passengers could walk up the riverbank easier than the place we were moored before.

What skills do you need to do the job well?: The most important is to be a people person. I need to get feedback from our passengers of how they experience the ships, so whenever I visit a ship I always ask the passengers to tell me what the like or don't like onboard. That feedback is essential to keep improving the services.

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I hope to stay with Pandaw for a long time. We have so many new ships coming and are still expanding into new rivers and countries. Now I am opening a new office in Pagan, Burma. From there it will be easier to supply our ships and for me to go visit the ships. Every day is a new challenge and I love challenges.



What's the biggest challenge you've had to face?:

hospitality and skills in managing people.

own restaurant one day.

Looking after some difficult passengers occasionally!

What skills do you need to do the job well?: A feel for

Any hopes/dreams for the future?: I'd like to manage my

# OF THE WORLD



In response to requests from Pandaw clients, we are continually seeking new rivers for you to explore. With our expert knowledge of river cruising in remote areas of the world and an understanding of what you like best about a Pandaw trip, we are ideally placed to offer quality river cruise itineraries with carefully selected partner ships. Please note that on Pandaw Partner Ship programmes drinks and crew gratuities are NOT included in the prices.

## THE AMAZON & THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Explore the mighty Amazon on a cruise on the Napo River bordering Ecuador, Colombia and Peru. Your base is our partner ship, the very comfortable and stylish *MV Anakonda* with spacious en-suite staterooms, excellent cuisine, contemporary public areas and wide observation decks from where you can admire the fauna and flora of the magnificent rainforest.

Each day will reveal wonderful encounters with both living nature and the local tribes and villages we visit. We will discover Yasuní (the largest of Ecuador's continental National Parks), a wild and untamed region in the heart of the Ecuadorian rainforest. We will climb observation towers to enjoy unique perspectives of the forest and explore back water rivers escorted by otters and turtles. We will enjoy guided walking tours into the forest learning about the wonderful flora that makes up the eternal green of Ecuadorian Amazonia. Our Amazon adventure can be easily combined with either a hotel or cruise ship based extension exploring the incredible Galapagos Islands.

#### DEPARTURES FROM APRIL 2016 TO DECEMBER 2017.

- 9 nights including a 7-night cruise on the Napa River and 2-night stay at the 5\* Marriott Hotel, Quito from US\$4995 pp sharing a twin room/main deck cabin.
- 4-night extension exploring the Galapagos Islands (including flights from Quito to the Galapagos Islands) from US\$2795 pp sharing a twin room.





#### PANDAW PARTNER CRUISES



## THE TIMELESS NILE

Travel 600 miles aboard the luxurious steamship SS Misr, from Aswan to Cairo.

At certain times of the year when the water levels allow, it is possible to sail the River Nile all the way from Aswan to Cairo, an incredible 12-night journey of some 600 miles.

Along the way, the traveller will discover the great ancient civilisations that once ruled with beautiful and timeless land. From Lake Nasser and the Temples of Philae to Thebes and the magnificent Valley of the Kings. Discover Tutankhamun's Tomb, Queen Hatshepsut Temple and the dramatic Temple of Luxor as you continue downstream towards the ancient Pyramids. What makes this journey unique is that the sites that flank the undiscovered Nile between Luxor and Cairo can only be reached by a select number of river vessels. And there is much of interest to explore: from the stepped pyramid at Meidum; a mud-brick pyramid of Amenemhet III at Hawara, Tuna el-Gebel (the necropolis of the city of Hermopolis, sacred to Hermes); the former capital Tel el Amarna (built by pharaoh Akhenaten), Beni Hassan, Abydos, Amarna and Denderah. And then the finale as you arrive, memorably, in Cairo, and visit the greatest Pyramids of them all. A quite unique travel experience awaits.

We are pleased to offer a wonderful journey aboard the beautiful, luxurious steamship *SS Misr*, one of the most romantic ships sailing the Nile.

Special departure - 29th April 2017 - cruise only - 12 nights from US\$ 4495 per person sharing a twin main deck cabin.



## RIVER CRUISING IN AFRICA

Cape Town, Victoria Falls & the Zambezi

Working with our partners in South Africa, we are pleased to offer the chance to experience the thrill of a river cruise on the Zambezi and Chobe rivers. Imagine waking up to the warmth of the African sun to observe a panorama of elephants, buffalo, giraffe, crocodiles, rhino and other wildlife breakfasting on the river bank.

Our partner ship, the *Zambezi Voyager*, has a very low draft, enabling her to explore further on the Chobe River and onto the mighty Zambezi. Here, there is so much to enjoy. The ship is ideally suited to photographers with a small sun deck from where to capture the beautiful landscapes, the big African skies and stupendous game. Over 390 exotic bird species can be seen from the river including the swamp nightjar, African Skimmer, Luapula, the half-collared Kingfisher, Slaty Egrets and the Western Banded Snake Eagle; it's an ornithologist's paradise! Our journey also includes fascinating walking tours to the friendly local villages. And as with Pandaw cruises, enjoy a Sundowners on the observation deck admiring the nature's beauty in the glow of a glorious sunset.

We combine our African river cruise with 3 nights in Cape Town including a day exploring the nearby winelands and a 2-night stay at the iconic Victoria Falls Hotel including a guided walking tour of the magnificent falls.

#### Departures from September 2016 to December 2017.

Passengers will enjoy 10 nights from US\$ 5995 per person sharing a twin room/cabin including 3 nights at the 5\* Cape Grace Hotel, Cape Town, flights from Cape Town to Kasane, 5-night river cruise on the Zambezi and Chobe Rivers, land safari into Chobe National Park and 2-nights at the Victoria Falls Hotel.



## OTHER DESTINATIONS

If you have any suggestions for river adventures you would like us to feature, please do let us know. Please email information@pandaw.com

## THE PANDAW FLEET

### P CLASS AND K CLASS

The original P class ships were built by Yarrows of Glasgow in the late 1940s to replace the ships of the old Irrawaddy Flotilla Company lost in the war. The design was based on earlier 1930s designs with side paddles and the addition of a flying bridge. All the ships had a name beginning with the letter P and one of these was the original *Pandaw* that we acquired in 1998 and lovingly restored. The P class ships with their broad beam and shallow draft were all deployed on the Bhamo to

Mandalay routing. The K class dated back to the 1880s and were stern wheelers to reduce draft, their boilers placed in the bow to improve trim. Smaller than the great line steamers of the age, the K class ships were used on the Chindwin and upper reaches of the Irrawaddy. We have, where possible, reused the old IFC names and many of these original K class had fascinating histories in times of war and peace.



### ■ PANDAW ||

Pandaw II was our first ever new-build back in 2001. Though our oldest ship she is still young in river terms – her prototype the old Pandaw is now over sixty years old and many ships in this fresh water environment are at least 100 years old. She was built in Rangoon at the Dawbone dockyard, then belonging to the Marine Department. In those days there was no electricity and numerous generators surrounded the growing hull powering the welder's torches. Timber mills were rare too and great tree trunks would be delivered to the dockside and be cut into planks on the spot. The result was magnificent and remains so to this day.

Pandaw II remains the stately queen of our fleet, if not of the entire river. This is the one ship that has not been fully refitted, partly because the crew have treated her with such loving care and attention that she does not need a refit, and partly because she is something of a cult ship with a considerable following. We want to preserve the original Pandaw cabin with their real ship's berths and the old door and window arrangement rather than the French windows of our other P class ships. We have though bowed to demand and have created three splendid suites out of six old cabins that run across the forward upper deck.



#### **TONLE PANDAW**

Modelled on Pandaw II and originally called Pandaw III, the Tonle saw a year's service in Burma in 2002/3 before being sent under tug-tow to the Mekong where she has done continuous service between Saigon and Kampong Cham ever since. With her gorgeous upper deck saloon, observation decks and formal dining room this ship is an old favourite and has a rich ambience. In 2012 she was fully refitted and the number of cabins reduced to just twenty-eight in order to create a professional spa, gym and library on the lower deck. She is not a small ship but despite her size she has a shallow draft and can usually get up river into low water areas when other vessels are stuck well below. This ship is currently on permanent charter to Viking River Cruises and apparently gets the highest passenger rating of any ship in their fleet.



### **MEKONG PANDAW**

Built in Rangoon in 2003 she was sailed round to Saigon under her own power and many a drama occurred, as described in Paul Strachan's memoir The Pandaw Story. This ship was designed specially for the Mekong and unlike our other P class ships does not have a flying bridge. The reason was so she could get under a road bridge. She did actually scrape under on her maiden but it was so scary that Strachan, then standing on the bridge, never dared attempt it again. As a result, we ended up with this incredible 750 square meter teak deck that even has a full size billiard table.

The MP, as she is affectionately known, is our most spacious ship with wider promenades, a larger dining hall and more public space per passenger than any known ship afloat. That is a fact.

In 2013 she was refitted and lower deck cabins removed in favour of a professional spa, gym, library lounge and office. She is quite justifiably the most splendid ship on the Mekong and the envy of anything that floats by.



### ORIENT PANDAW

The first ship we built in Vietnam in 2008, the OP has seen service in four countries now – Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysian Borneo and now Burma. Where next? And in each of these countries she was re-commissioned according to local religious rites – Confucian, Budddhist, Animist and now she is a Buddhist again in the Golden Land. Despite clocking up such a huge mileage the Orient chugs along as if fresh from the yard. Her design was based on the Tonle Pandaw, which was copied in every detail by the Vietnamese and indeed this design has been repeated three times on her three – all larger thirty cabin vessels.



### INDOCHINA PANDAW

Sister to the Orient and Bassac, the IP was built in Vietnam in 2009 and transferred over to Burma in 2011. Currently on charter to Viking River Cruises and plying between Mandalay and Prome.



## BASSAC PANDAW

The third of these rather grand Vietnamese sisters, along with the Orient and Indochina, and the only sister remaining on the Mekong. She is a good looker though, and turns many a head as she ploughs in state across the Delta or into the bustling hub of the Phnom Penh port. Currently on charter to Uniworld.



### KATHA PANDAW

This was a radical new design, based on the old K class used in Burma from the 1880s on. This ship is the third Katha to run on the Irrawaddy. The first was built at Dalla in 1887 but lost on the Chindwin in 1889. The second was built by Denny of Dumbarton in 1904 and decommissioned in 1937 and the third was built by us in Vietnam in 2012.

We ran her a year on the Mekong before sending to Burma. With only two decks these smaller K class ships have lower air draft so can get under bridges and supposedly a shallower draft, though in fact the Vietnam ship yards were not as successful in achieving this as the Burmese yards and later Burmese-built K class ships achieved remarkable reductions in draft.

The Katha general arrangement was radical in that we eliminated the formal indoor dining room. This led to great protests from regular passengers and indeed from our staff. In the end all agree it is far more pleasant to eat outside than in a stuffy, noisy enclosed dining room and the bugs are really not that bad. Up river in Burma it can be a little cold in winter but currently we deploy this ship in Middle Burma where the cold is less of an issue.



### **ANGKOR** PANDAW

Sister to the Katha and from the same yard delivered in 2013, the only difference with the Katha is an enclosed air conditioned dining room insisted on by an American charterer. Originally on the Mekong in 2015 we transferred her to the Red River in North Vietnam. In fact the enclosed dining room has proved useful as it can be cold up there in winter.



#### **KINDAT** PANDAW

The original Kindat was built in 1886 by Yarrows in London and sank in 1920. She was named after a small Upper Chindwin town. Following experiments with the Katha and Angkor Pandaws, in this build we perfected this concept of a two deck shallow draft vessel and repeated the formula again with her sister the Kalaw.

What we managed to produce in 2014 was a very shallow draft vessel that could go just about anywhere anytime that was big enough to carry 30-40 passengers with lots of outdoor deck space. We did this by reducing weight and stripping both hull and superstructure down to the bare essentials.

We had found with the experimental Katha that about half our passengers want to eat outside and the other half inside so we created a flexible bistro space offering passenger indoor or outdoor dining depending on inclination, often prompted by the season. This makes for a very happy ship!



### **KALAW** PANDAW

Sister to the Kindat and identical in design the Kalaw was launched with her in 2014. Kalaw is named after the PS Kalaw launched in 1917 and sunk in 1942 in the War. Paul Strachan witnessed the salvaging of the Kalaw in 1998 and managed to acquire her name plate and bell, the former of which has been reused on her namesake. Again this ultra-light ship combines one of the shallowest drafts on the river with one of the highest passenger space ratios afloat.



#### ZAWGYI PANDAW

We acquired this Z craft in 2008 and fitted her out as a floating clinic as part of the Cyclone Nargis relief effort. Returned to us by the NGO she lay redundant for some time then in 2014 the ship yard building the Kha Byoo got into difficulties and this ship was going to be late. We mobilised our Mandalay build team and in a matter of four weeks had built an entirely new superstructure with six small but very comfy cabins and the vessel was able to operate and no passengers turned away.

In 2015 we added an upper deck with further cabins and a flexible bistro area in addition to the observation saloon on the main deck. The Zawgyi wins the prize for the shallowest draft in the fleet at 2.5ft and therefore we have her deployed on the treacherous Chindwin River niftily negotiating treacherous shoals.



### KHA BYOO

This nine cabin K class was completed in 2016 and is currently serving as the Pandaw Academy training ship at Pagan. Like so many of our K class ships the Kha Byoo was named after the Denny built ship launched in 1882 and sunk in 1925. In the year of her launch under a Captain Clasin she was trapped in a whirlpool in the Middle Defile and went round and round for three days and three nights. During this time Captain Clasin's hair turned completely white. We take on interns from amongst the local villages and offer training in hotel skills.



#### KALAY PANDAW

The Pandaw baby, with only four cabins on the main deck, one stunning upper deck, owners suite and lounge/dining room. Very low draft, ideal for sailing well 'off the beaten track'. Available for family or small group charters.



### **LAOS** PANDAW

Seeing the quality of this ship it is hard to believe it was built in a hurry. There are no proper ship yards above the Khone Falls and we could not persuade our Vietnamese builders to assemble a ship trucked in bits on the river bank. We tried our Rangoon builder and he also preferred not to take the commission. By January 2015 we were taking bookings and selling out for November but still had no ship. In a panic, Paul Strachan flew to Vientiane and took a taxi down to the river bank and boarded the first cargo ship he saw, a 40 meter barge used to carry heavy loads of cement and rice up to China. She had two 400hp truck engines and was just the thing for tackling the terrifying fast flow of the Upper Mekong. The captain was the owner and agreed to terms. He also agreed to stay on as skipper and is still there. He immediately took her up to the Golden Triangle, a week's sail away.



## **MY ANDAMAN** EXPLORER

This classic motor yacht was built in Norway in 1963 as a Norwegian coast guard vessel. She was sold to an Italian millionaire in 1998 who opulently refitted her. Acquired by Pandaw in 2015 this timeless 'suites only' ship is operating in South-East Asia coastal waters. From October to April she will be on little known Burma coasts and from July to September the astoundingly beautiful Indonesian archipelago. After a minor refit she will commence operations out of Bali in July 2016.



Pandaw Photo Competition entry by: Len Chapman

## **CONTACT US**

For full information on our latest itineraries, prices and to BOOK ONLINE, visit www.pandaw.com.

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