

Above the Fray Tours: Feb/Mar 2025

Village Textile Tours: Hill Tribe Laos and Vietnam

Culturally-Immersive, Hands-On Textile Workshops

Regional textile expert, author, and adventurer Maren Beck invites a select group of textile enthusiasts to join her for village-based, hand-on workshops and cultural adventure that explores the traditional silk, hemp, and cotton textiles and the independent textile artists of hill tribe Laos and Vietnam. A small group ensures an intimate view and ability to participate in small village life outside the typical tourist venues.



***Explore Village-Raised Silk, Hemp, and Cotton:
Preparation of Fibers, Natural Dyes, Weaving, Embroidery, Batik, Ikat***

Vietnam + Laos: February 21 - March 12, 2025 ~ 20 days/nights
Start in Hanoi, Vietnam; end in Luang Prabang, Laos

First, we visit northern Vietnam's Lao Cai Province, home to the Hmong and Dzao people, many of whom still create and wear their traditional decorated clothing. Staying with long-established artist/friends in the Hmong village of **Hau Thao** and the Dzao village of **Ta Phin**, we will explore, hands-on, the details of locally-raised hemp and cotton preparation, indigo-dyes, weaving, wax-resistant batik, and embroidery.

Second, we travel to NE Laos' remote Houaphan Province to visit and learn from the Tai Daeng and Lao Loum people who still lead lives devoted to their millennia-old silk-weaving traditions. We will base ourselves in **Xam Tai** – home to some of the world's most intricate silks – staying with long-established friends who are leading regional experts in sericulture, silk-reeling, natural-dyeing, textile design, and floor-loom weaving. Prepare to reel your own skeins, get your hands deep in the dye-pots, ogle a variety of traditional looms, and enjoy the company of some talented artists.

Along the way, we explore the bustle of old-town **Hanoi, Vietnam**, the haunting stone relics on the **Plain of Jars**, the beautiful World-Heritage city of **Luang Prabang, Laos**, and more.



photos by Above the Fray

- Accommodations are comfortable and clean, and vary from fine hotels to established homestays.
- Travel is in a private van with a/c.
- Meals are traditional, fresh, unique, and delicious.
- Our workshop leaders, translators, and hosts are friendly and experienced.
- Maximum group size: 8

“The trip was a textile enthusiast’s dream. I liked all of the travelers and loved the wide range of experiences.” J.T.

Learn at the Source: Our hands-on workshops are in the villages and at the homes of local, independent textile experts.



Village workshops with local, traditional textile experts include:

In Laos:

- ✦ silk reeling and preparation
- ✦ dyeing with fresh indigo, lac, and other locally-harvested natural-dye materials
- ✦ cotton ginning and spinning
- ✦ ikat preparation and tying
- ✦ discontinuous supplemental weft weaving on a floor loom*
- ✦ traditional Katu back-strap weaving*

*so each participant can sit at their own loom, this workshop will be enjoyed at Craft Centers in Luang Prabang

in Vietnam:

- ✦ hemp peeling, splicing, and cloth preparation
- ✦ wax-resist batik
- ✦ fermented indigo dyeing
- ✦ Hmong and Dzao traditional embroidery
- ✦ hemp weaving

Plus visits to museums, waterfalls, historical sites, temples, educational centers, and more...

Maren's tour attracts both experienced textile experts and general textile enthusiasts. While textile zeal is highly recommended, hands-on textile experience is not required to fully participate in all workshops.

Tour Leader/Organizer: For 18 years, **Maren Beck** has been studying SE Asian textiles and developing personal relationships in several small villages in Laos and Vietnam with artists who continue their textile traditions. In 2007, Maren and her husband formed an import and educational business, Above the Fray: Traditional Hill Tribe Art, to help support, promote, and celebrate the traditional textile art of the region's independent artists. They are the authors of **Silk Weavers of Hill Tribe Laos: Textiles, Tradition, and Well-Being**, the gold-medal winner of the 2018 Benjamin Franklin Awards for travel. The book introduces the silk-weaving art and artists of Xam Tai, Laos with whom we will be staying. See Maren in the far right photo above, second from left.

Maren's 18-year dedication to embrace, document, and teach about the textiles, culture, and character of these independent village artists offers tour participants a uniquely personal, immersive experience with the extraordinary beauty, creative processes, and cultural significance of the regional textile art and its leading artists.

Above the Fray's small group ethic (max: 8) assures a deeper, more culturally-immersive experience:

- ***We have a smaller impact*** on villages, and an enhanced ability to engage with the local population in a myriad of ways, from fitting into a family's home to sharing meals and social time.
- ***Smaller groups form tighter bonds*** as everyone gets ample attention and front-row participation.
- ***We are not beholden to the crowded, sales-driven tourist sites/shops***, and rather enjoy the calm of traditional village life, spending quality time with local artisans and their families.
- ***Our workshop leaders are fairly compensated for teaching time and materials***, and any textile purchases are voluntary.

Cost: Vietnam + Laos (20 days, 20 nights): \$5200 + r/t airfare [to Hanoi, Vietnam; from Luang Prabang, Laos*]

Includes all transportation, accommodation, food, workshops, and translator/guide fees.

Private room (not available all nights): add \$600. If registering as a single traveler, we can often facilitate a shared room option.

*Post-tour flights from Luang Prabang, Laos -> Hanoi, Vietnam are available for ~\$200.

Tours anticipated in February/March of 2026 and 2027.

For a detailed information and enrollment packets, contact Maren at 541-485-9386, or email: maren@HilltribeArt.com.