

Above the Fray Tour 2024

Village Textile Tour of Hill Tribe Laos and Vietnam

Culturally-Immersive, Hands-On Textile Ventures

Regional textile expert and author Maren Beck invites a select group of textile enthusiasts to join her for village-based, hands-on workshops and a 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 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 23 - March 13, 2024 ~ 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, varied, 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 homes of local, independent textile experts.



Village workshops with local, traditional textile experts include:

- 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 work at their own loom, these workshops will be enjoyed at craft centers in Luang Prabang

- 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...

Our tours attract 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 with many talented traditional textile artists in small villages in rural Laos and Vietnam. In 2007, Maren and her husband formed 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 visiting. See Maren in the far right photo above, second from left.

Maren's dedication to embrace, document, and teach about the textiles, culture, and character of these independent village artists offers tour participants a uniquely personal, immersive view of 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, which enhances our 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. Many of our workshop leaders work in their personal homes.
- ***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 - and each other.
- ***Our workshop leaders are fairly compensated for teaching time and materials***, and any textile purchases are voluntary.

Cost: Vietnam + Laos (20 days, 20 nights): \$4800 + 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 \$500. 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 ~\$170.

Contact us about future tour dates.

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