

Above the Fray Introduces

Village Textile Tours of Hill Tribe Vietnam and Laos

A Culturally-Immersive, Hands-On Textile Adventure

Textile expert, author, and adventurer Maren Beck invites a select group of no more than eight textile lovers to join her for a 20-day village-focused exploration of the traditional silk, hemp, and cotton textiles and the independent textile artists of northern Vietnam and Laos. The small group ensures an intimate view and ability to participate in small village life outside the typical tourist venues.



You will be immersed in two distinctly different cultural areas with distinctly different traditional textile arts:

First, we'll venture to northern Vietnam's Lao Cai Province, to the small villages of Hau Thao and Ta Phin, and visit the traditional hemp and cotton artists of the Black Hmong and Red Dzao people. These artists are renowned for their hemp and cotton cloth, and we will explore, hands-on, the details of their indigo-dyes, wax-resistant batik, and embroidery hand-work. People of this rapidly modernizing region still wear their traditional clothing, and we will sleep and eat in home-stays with Maren's artist-friends.

Second, we travel to NE Laos' remote Houaphan Province, home of the Tai Daeng and Lao Loum people and their silk-weaving traditions. We will base ourselves in Xam Tai – home to some of the world's most beautiful and intricate silk textiles – staying with long-established friends who are the 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.

As bookends, we explore the bustle of old-town Hanoi, Vietnam and the beautiful World-Heritage city of Luang Prabang, Laos. We celebrate our final evening together at Kuang Si waterfall in a beautiful garden guesthouse.



Tour Leader: For 14 years, **Maren Beck** has been developing intimate relationships in several small villages in northern Laos and Vietnam with artists who still participate in their textile traditions. In 2007, Maren and her spouse Joshua Hirschstein formed an import and educational business, Above the Fray: Traditional Hill Tribe Art, intent on introducing the traditional textile art of the region's independent artists to a broader audience. They are the authors of **Silk Weavers of Hill Tribe Laos: Textiles, Tradition, and Well-Being** (Thrums Books), the 2018 gold-medal winner of the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Awards for travel. The book introduces the silk-weaving art of Xam Tai and the traditional artists with whom we will be staying.

Maren's dedication to embrace, document, and teach about the textiles, culture, and character of these independent 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. In the bottom-right photo, Maren learns to hand-reel silk with her friend Seuk.

For details, contact Maren: 541-686-4285; maren@HilltribeArt.com. Visit Above the Fray: www.HilltribeArt.com.

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

- **We have a smaller impact** on the village. Smaller groups have an enhanced ability to engage with the local population in a myriad of ways, from fitting into a family's home for a workshop to sharing meals and social time.
- **Smaller groups form tighter bonds** as everyone gets ample attention and front-row participation, whether we are dyeing silk with a local expert, walking through a village exploring the handmade looms, or joining in the making of a home-stay meal.
- **Opportunities increase.** We fit a smaller vehicle (better access). We fit into the food booth at the local market (better pho). In sum, we can be in more places, share more quality time with the locals, and be more spontaneous and "present" in our interactions.

Now booking tours for 2019: February 15 - March 6 and October 11 - 30

photos by Above the Fray

