

## Cultural & History Program

### CN11 - Life along the Mighty Mekong – 14 Days

#### Detailed Day by Day Itinerary

##### Day 1: Kunming

Arrive Kunming (various times from Hong Kong, Bangkok and Beijing). After the long flight we have a free afternoon to rest or wander around the **Botanic garden**. The streets are vibrant with shoppers, peddlers, roadside masseurs, karaoke stalls and street performers. Our sumptuous dinner will include many local specialties, including a savory herb-infused chicken served in a traditional earthenware pot.

Overnight at the Green Lake or Harbor Plaza Hotel - Kunming

Meals Provided: D

##### Day 2: Gylthang - Deqin



Fly to Gylthang. After the airport pickup, we begin the day with a visit to the largest Tibetan monastery in Northwest Yunnan **Songzanlin Monastery**. Here we enjoy a guided tour by a local Tibetan Buddhism expert who leads us through the delightful maze of different rooms. We continue along as the unpaved road passes by **Napa Hai Nature Reserve**, a wintering lake and wetland for the Black Necked Crane. The road rises up from the Gyalhang plateau to a high ridge before it drops steeply down to the Yangtze River valley, with dramatic views of Tibetan

villages clinging to the hillsides. We stop in the town of Benzilan for lunch and then continue another half hour to **Dongzhulin Monastery**, an oasis of spiritual tranquility in a magnificent site high above the Jinsha River.

From the Yangtze River (at approximately 6500 feet), the road climbs over **Baimang Snow Mountain** (approximately 13,700 feet). At the top of the Baimang Snow Mountain Pass, the watershed divides between the Yangtze and the Mekong, and we will be able to see the Meili Snow Mountain range to the west. The river gorge country in this part of Yunnan is unique in the world. Four of Asia's great rivers – the Yangtze, Mekong, Salween and Irrawaddy flow parallel to one another, creating an amazing landscape of startling ecological contrasts.

We spend the night in **Deqin** District town. Deqin is small and reminiscent of the frontier, with shops filled with items to sell to the Tibetan cowboys who come into town. Being close to the Sichuan border, we sample the famous spicy Sichuan food for dinner tonight.



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Dinner at hotel restaurant or nearby local restaurant.

Overnight at Da Sheng Hotel

Meals Provided: B L D

### Day 3: Qeqin



If the weather is favorable, we set out before dawn to witness the sunrise over Meili Xueshan at **Feilaisi**, where travelers burn incense at the thirteen chortens. We take our breakfast at the charming Ai Ming café, enjoying the beautiful view, before descending precipitously into the valley of the Lancang (Mekong) River.

We arrive at **Xidang village**, where The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has installed solar water heaters in all of the village households. We visit a local **Tibetan family** and sample their fresh yak milk tea together. Following the course of the river north, we arrive at Mingyong village and enjoy a picnic lunch at the trailhead to the **Mingyong Glacier**. Afterwards we ride horses (with the alternative option of hiking) one and a half hours up to the foot of the Mingyong Glacier. Weather permitting, we will be afforded a splendid up-close view of **Kawakarpo Peak**, the highest peak in Yunnan at 6,740 meters. In the late afternoon, we return to our vehicles and drive back to Deqin where we enjoy a well-deserved hearty dinner.

Overnight at Da Sheng Hotel

Meals Provided: B L D

### Day 4: Weixi (8 hour's drive)

Our journey today, passing by the Mekong and through the Lisu Autonomous County of **Weixi**, is along winding roads carved out of the sides of the mountains. French missionaries came here over a century ago, establishing a lovely church in the **village of Cizhong**. Next to it is the Mani, a Tibetan shrine where there are religious piles of stones left by Buddhists who want to ensure that their prayers are answered.

Overnight is at the Sanjiang Hotel - Weixi

Meals Provided: B L D

### Day 5: Weixi



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Today we spend the whole day exploring Lisu Ethnic group's time-honored way of life, and paying a visit to their **weekly market day**. We will drive to **Tongle Village** and explore the daily life.

Overnight at the Sanjiang Hotel –Weixi

Meals Provided: B, L, D

### **Day 6: Lijiang (6 hours 'driving)**

Three of Asia's great rivers pass within 50 miles of each other near here – the Mekong, the Salween and the Yangtze. We will drive beside the Yangtze today, through lush, beautiful countryside, to the charming and marvelous Ancient **Lijiang Town**. It is an idyllic place to meander the narrow cobblestone streets winding through the old city. Here we also learn more about the Naxi ethnic minority, who have been the inhabitants of the town for centuries.

Overnight at the Zen Garden Hotel – Lijiang

Meals Provided: B L D

### **Day 7: Lijiang**



Northwestern Yunnan is the most biologically rich temperate ecosystem in the world. The man who studied, recorded and reported this richness to the world in scholarly fashion was an American named Joseph Rock. **Joseph Rock** lived in the Naxi **village of Yuhu** (meaning Jade Lake) during the 1920s and 1930s, and he is now a legendary figure among the Naxi.

This morning we drive to Yuhu Village, a traditional Naxi village largely constructed of stone, which still looks similar to the way it did during Rock's time. The house in which Rock lived has been converted into an interesting museum devoted to setting forth his fascinating life. After visiting the museum, we take jeeps (or mount horses if we prefer) for a 3-4 hour ride over a mountain crest into the undisturbed and pristine **Wenhai Valley**. As we ride up the mountain, we have a superb view back over the Lijiang Valley. We take our lunch at the house of a local villager. During lunch, we will also have the chance to meet the village Bimo, who is versed in the Dongba religion.

After lunch, we learn about both village life and TNC projects in this area. Our jeeps then pick us up and take us back to Lijiang in time for some relaxation prior to dinner.

Overnight at the Zen Garden Hotel - Lijiang



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Meals Provided: B L D

### **Day 8: Lijiang**

Today is a day of exploration of Lijiang's Naxi Culture. We start by visiting the picturesque **Black Dragon Pool** and walking through the lovely surrounding park. From there we visit the **Dongba Institute**, where Naxi traditional Dongba writing is being taught in order to revive understanding of and pride in the traditional culture. The Dongba classics are manually copied pictographic writings that are both rich in content and also known as the only pictographic writing still in current use in the world. There, the young students will become our teachers as they share their classroom and teach us the basics of their script.

We will enjoy lunch at Lashi Hai in the home of a local farmer - Ailuwan.

After lunch we drive to **Haixi village** (a TNC project site) and visit the **Haixi Elementary School**, where the students demonstrate to us how they use biomass as an alternative energy, a system introduced with the help of TNC. Fuel wood consumption for household cooking and heating is one of the area's chief threats to biodiversity; a family of four uses nearly 6 tons of wood each year. Fuel-efficient stoves and biogas units can dramatically reduce the back-breaking hours villages must spend collecting wood each week, as well as reduce the amount of indoor air pollution found in area homes. At the same time, the use of alternative energy is helping protect some of China's last primary forests. Fuel-efficient stoves, in combination with 4-in-1 biogas units (like the one we will be visiting), can reduce fuel wood use by up to 75%.

Returning to Lijiang, and after freshening up in our hotel, our guide leads us through some of **the back alleys of the old town**. Then we are free to stroll on our own around the town until dinner. Wander through the winding narrow lanes of old houses, shop for traditional Naxi crafts, or relax at one of the many riverside cafes with a cold beer or warm cup of fresh local tea.

Overnight at Zen Garden

Meals Provided: B L D

### **Day 9: Lijiang - Shopping and Cooking Day**

Today we will have a special, relaxing day to experience local people's daily life through our eyes and hands - cooking and shopping.

In the **bustling local market** we will peruse stalls filled with unfamiliar vegetables and spices, while mingling and sharing this daily market experience with the locals. As we browse the myriad ingredient options, our expert chefs explain the function each spice plays in Chinese/Naxi cuisine. Once we have made our purchases, we head to the kitchens, where the chefs instruct us on how to prepare some of the regional specialties.



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Interpretation and explanation will be provided by an expert chef and lecturer on Chinese cuisine. As we listen and observe, Chinese chefs demonstrate the relevant techniques to us. Eventually, **we prepare and enjoy our own Chinese meal**, supplemented by the dishes of our chef teacher. The cooking would be done at a kitchen or at a **Teahouse**, adjacent to a tranquil lake. One of the best places to learn Chinese culinary arts.

After dinner, which we cooked by ourselves, we drive to the airport to take a one-hour short flight to Jinghong (one evening flight available). Lying beside the Lancang River (Mekong), **Jinghong** is the capital of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Region

Overnight at Jinghong hotel

Meals Provided: B L D

### **Day 10: Jinghong to Ganlanba**

This morning, we drive 25 km eastward along the Mekong River to **Ganlanba**. Here we will visit one of the liveliest **markets** in the area, where local people trade everything ranging from fruit and spices to clothes. After lunch in the market, we walk around and explore the nearby villages.

The fascinating Dai minority people occupy all the villages around Ganlanba. Dai culture, which has its own written language, has been in existence for more than 2,000 years. Compared to the majority Han Chinese, the Dai practice Theravada Buddhism, which is predominantly associated with Southeast Asia. The clothes of the Dai are also truly unique—the women wear brightly colored garments and jewel-collared short skirts. We meet with a local family to see their **traditional Dai wooden house** and chat with them over a cup of tea. Afterwards, we continue our drive to the **Tropical Botanical Garden in Menglun**, in which thousands of tropical and subtropical plants from Xishuangbanna and abroad can be found. We explore this fascinating garden in leisure before heading back to Jinghong in the late afternoon and indulging in a delicious **Dai barbeque welcome dinner**.

Overnight at Jinghong hotel

Meals Provided: B L D

### **Day 11: Jinghong to Xiding Village**



Today we drive one and a half hours to the west to join a local **Thursday market** in **Xiding village**. Here we can enjoy the local market atmosphere, noisy with the sound of a thousand conversations - weighing items, gauging quality and haggling over prices. Vendors (most of them Ai Ni women) set out



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their wares on carts, tables and ground cloths. We will see cabbages stacked up high, along with white sacks of red chilli peppers, bitter melon (which looks like oblong honeydew) and fern curls. Shoppers buy long strings of noodles, live fish and feisty chickens in round straw baskets. Mingling in the market are Dai women in bright floral designs, Hani women with large baskets held by wood pads on their shoulders and straps across their foreheads, and Bulang women in black headdresses. A trip to the market will truly give you a feeling for the rhythm of life in rural Xishuangbanna.

After lunch we drive to the trailhead where we begin our **two-day hike**. We start our hike up the mountain to get a bird's eye view of the scenery in the surrounding area, before passing through lush tropical forest with stops at Ai Ni villages (or Hani villages). The Ai Ni (Hani), the second largest ethnic group in Xishuangbanna, have their own spoken language but no written one. Their religion is a mix of ancestral and animist worship. Dai villages are usually in the lowlands along rivers or streams, but the Ai Ni tend to live on high ground. As we enter the villages, we see thatch-roofed dwellings perched on bamboo platforms that seem too shaky to walk on, yet are surprisingly sturdy! We visit several villages throughout the day before reaching **Manlai village**. We spend the night in Manlai village and have a traditional Ai Ni dinner with a local family before sitting down to chat with family members over a cup of tea. Our **homestay** tonight is in the village.

Overnight at Manlai village

Meals Provided: B L D

#### **Day 12: Manlai Village to Mangang Village**

We wake up early to misty fog in the village, which dissipates as the morning progresses. After an early breakfast, we set off for the Hani **village of Mangang**. Today's hike is a long, but easy, five to seven hours passing through several terraced fields to see the way local people utilize the mountain to grow tealeaves, corn and sugar cane. During harvest time, villagers can be seen in the fields busily chopping down ripe sugar cane. A picnic lunch will be arranged, and we hike on afterwards reaching Mangang village where we stay overnight.

Overnight at Mangang village

Meals Provided: B L D

#### **Day 13: Mangang Village to Jinghong**

After breakfast, we leave Mangang village, 2.5 hours hiking back to the trailhead and drive back to **Jinghong**. The afternoon is free for us to explore Jinghong, shop and rest up before our farewell dinner tonight. For the people who want to continue the journey to Laos, they will drive to Guanlei port next day. For the people who want to end in Yunnan, they can take the next morning flight to Kunming.



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Overnight at Jinghong hotel

Meals Provided: B L D

**Day 14: Jinghong to Kunming**

Today, we will take morning flight to Kunming and catch flight back home

Meals Provided: B



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### Quotation for group (more than 4pax, guaranteed group departure)

2008

Land Prices (CAD)

Dates	06-19Apr	11-24May 07-20Sep 12-25Oct	09-22Nov	
Land cost: 4-22pax	2,475	2,475	2,375	
Single supplement	740	740	740	

#### Flights

Call for international air.

Call your tour expert for tailor-made your private journey

#### Triple Discount

Additional discount of \$200 applies for children under 12 sharing a triple with two adults. The discount is for the child only.

This program does not provide half-board service.

#### Price includes:

- Domestic economy flights and airport taxes.
- Land transfers for whole trip
- All accommodations on a twin-sharing basis, at the hotels specified in the itinerary where available
- All admissions and activity expenses as noted on itinerary
- Meals, drinking water, and soft drinks during meals as program indicates
- All programs as per itinerary
- Private tour guide and driver
- Tour leader service along the whole trip when group size is bigger than 10pax.

#### Price excludes:

- Discretionary gratuities for drivers, local guides, and staff
- Expenses of personal nature, e.g. mini-bar, laundry, telecommunications, alcoholic beverages etc.
- Travel insurance
- Excursions not included in the itinerary
- International flights and airport taxes
- GST