

FRIENDS OF DOLPHINS

Experiences | Mandalay



OVERVIEW

The critically endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin, although not indigenous to Myanmar, is a beautiful mammal easily identifiable thanks to its blunt forehead and nose; records are said to date back to ancient Chinese scriptures from 800AD when they were referred to as “river pigs”. At that time, it is thought this rare aquatic species inhabited the water as far west as India and as far east and south as Papua New Guinea. Sadly however, numbers have now reduced so drastically that they can now only be found in three of the world’s rivers; the Irrawaddy in Myanmar, the Mekong in Cambodia and Laos, and the Mahakham in Indonesia. It is likely that a population of less than 60 remain in the Irrawaddy, and 80-100 in each of the Mekong and Mahakham rivers.

With increased reports of dolphins being washed up on the banks of the Irrawaddy as a result of pollution and electric fishing, there is clearly more that needs to be done to raise awareness and protect the population of this near-extinct species. NGOs such as the Harrison Institute and WCS are doing a great job with this, but to better increase national awareness, and support the villages the dolphins have fished cooperatively with for centuries, they are now turning to tourists for help.

Although dolphin sightings cannot be guaranteed, this tour will take you far outside of Mandalay to the fishing village of Hsithe. Here you will meet with the cooperative fisherman, their families and other villagers, with the aim of learning about their lives and the challenges they and the dolphins face. With myriad wildlife to spot and the chance to cast a traditional fishing net, this is an extremely fun and immersive experience that will ensure your money helps to make a difference.



PACE

Easy going



TOUR PERIOD

Full day



HIGHLIGHTS

- Escape the hustle and bustle of Mandalay for a day.
- Take a boat short boat journey from Singu to Hsithe fishing village.
- Spend some time at leisure in the Hsithe Destination Centre, a shaded oasis ideal for wildlife spotting.
- Meet with a cooperative fisherman to learn about their way of life and the challenges they and Irrawaddy dolphins face.
- Learn how to cast a traditional fishing net.
- Explore Hsithe village with a member of the cooperative fisherman's family.
- Put money into the hands of the villagers by purchasing souvenirs from Hsithe Destination Centre's gift shop.
- Perhaps spot a dolphin; unfortunately, this cannot be guaranteed.



ITINERARY IN DETAIL

The journey from Mandalay to Hsithe will take approximately two and a half hours by car so we're afraid, an early start is unavoidable. Along the way you'll pass plenty of local scenery, with the distant marble mountain providing a welcome back drop.

On arrival into Singu, board the waiting boat and travel downstream to the village of Hsithe; although we can't guarantee they'll make an appearance, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for Irrawaddy dolphins.

After mooring up at Hsithe, head straight for some shade in the village's recently constructed Destination Centre; here you'll find a brief overview of what the Harrison Institute and its partners are trying to achieve, details of the village, and numerous photographs of birds and other wildlife that inhabit the area. The centre is also stocked with a small selection of quality souvenir items, all of which have been designed and produced by the villagers themselves.

When you're ready, meet with a cooperative fisherman to learn how to prepare and cast a traditional fishing net. After watching a live demonstration, those keen to do so will get the chance to attempt two or three trial throws in the centre's garden; we'd recommend starting with the smaller sized net first until you get the hang of it. Shortly after, we'll then take a boat across to the opposite bank to test out our newly acquired skills in shallow water. Seeing as the technique takes a long time to master, it's likely the experience will provide many laughs and great photo opportunities for all involved!

Return to the centre to cool off and enjoy a simple home cooked lunch, before heading out to explore Hsi the village with a member of the cooperative fisherman's family. This offers a wonderful opportunity to observe their rich cultural practices and diverse agriculture, gain a first-hand insight into home-based industry, experience monastic life and naturally interact with members of the close-knit community.

We will then return to the boat via the Hsi the Visitor Centre, which will be the last chance we'll get to purchase any local handicrafts. Some items you can expect to find include carved dolphins, dolphin summoning sticks (fisherman tap these on the side of their boats to communicate), recycled cement bags, mini fishing nets and local produce such as mango jam, honey, cheroots and spices. There is no middle man, so any money spent here goes directly into the villagers' hands.

Set sail for a short distance upstream and reconvene with your driver. Once again, keep a close eye out for dolphins along the way.



INCLUSIONS

- Transportation to/from hotel in an air-conditioned vehicle
- Village conservation fee
- Return boat journey from Singu to Hsi the
- Local lunch
- English speaking tour guide (for other languages, please enquire)
- Drinking water and hand towel



EXCLUSIONS

- Mandalay zone fee
- Any services not mentioned



NOTES

- There is no guarantee you will see dolphins on this tour, but your involvement will help with conservation efforts and provide much needed monetary support to the fisherman that cooperatively fish with them.
- Packing a pair of binoculars for this tour comes highly recommended.
- The lunch provided is simple and authentic in style.
- You will be expected to remove your shoes when entering religious sites such as the village monastery.
- A supplementary fee may apply on certain days – Tour Mandalay will inform you of this beforehand.

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