

COOKING AND CATS AT INLE HERITAGE

Experiences | Inle Lake



OVERVIEW

Spend the morning at Inthar Heritage Home, a lovingly reconstructed Inthar-style abode, modelled on the former home of the Inle Heritage organisation's founder. Unofficially serving as Inle Lake's cultural hub, this two-storey stilted building celebrates the unique culture and creative depth of the region through architecture, art, people and food. As part of Inle Heritage's mission to reintroduce pure-bred Burmese cats, a section of the ground floor currently serves as the home and playground of a small number of these silky-smooth, copper-coloured felines. For cat lovers and cooking enthusiasts, this experience will ensure a purr-fect start to the day.



PACE

Easy going



TOUR PERIOD

Half day (morning)



HIGHLIGHTS

- Awaken your senses to the elements as we travel using a motorised long-tail boat to Inthar Heritage Home.
- Source the ingredients required for today's class from Inle Heritage's very own organic vegetable garden.
- Cook alongside an experienced chef whom specialises in Shan cuisine.
- Having finished your creations for lunch, spend some time in the company of former Myanmar royalty (in the form of a Burmese cat).
- Admire colourful and locally created works of art in the first-floor art gallery.



ITINERARY IN DETAIL

Shortly after finishing breakfast, meet with your guide who'll escort you directly to your private long-tail boat. If there's still a lingering sense of tiredness, have no fear, this 30-minute or so transfer will be sure to awaken and invigorate the senses.

Located at the very bottom of Inle Lake, Inthar Heritage House is effectively the headquarters of Inle Heritage's operations. As per their mission statement, 'Inle Heritage is a not-for-profit organisation that preserves the cultural and natural wealth of the Inle region and helps it to thrive as a place to visit, work and live'. They achieve this through myriad fun and socially beneficial activities ranging from a Shan cooking course to the promotion of local artwork and the reintroduction of Burmese cats.

Although it looks like it has stood for more than one hundred years, the stilted two-storey building was in fact erected in 2009 using mostly reclaimed wood and is a faithful reconstruction of the founder's former family home.

Before starting the lesson, and assuming there's enough time, we'd recommend taking a look inside the room adjacent to the restaurant area – this is a recreation of U Saung's room, the founder's grandfather, and the owner of the house Inthar Heritage House was modelled. Inside you'll find black and white family photographs, a small library and a Buddhist shrine.

Having met with your chef, he or she will hand over a seasonally inspired menu and provide a general overview of today's lesson. Examples of dishes you can expect to rustle up include an Inthar-style green bean salad with roasted peanut powder, a fish soup with roasted rice powder and mint, and a Shan-style chicken and potato curry. Not wanting to disappoint anyone with a sweet tooth, a simple traditional desert will also be prepared at the end.

For us, the thing that makes Inle Heritage's cooking class stand out from any other is the freshness and chemical free nature of the ingredients used. Knowing where food comes from and how it has been grown is an important part of the organisation's ethos. Get a better sense of this by exploring the organic garden; this is used not only to supply vegetables and herbs to the cooking classes and restaurant, but also to educate the community about good farming techniques in an area where pesticide and fertiliser use is a major issue.

Back in the kitchen and with vegetables in hand, prepare the ingredients and start cooking following a step-by-step explanation from the chef. Having plated your dishes, sit down to enjoy a leisurely lunch in the restaurant. Once finished, make your way back downstairs to meet with Phyu Ley and her other friends.

It is thought that the Burmese cat breed may have existed in Myanmar for over 1000 years. According to historical records, they were kept as royal pets and occasionally by monks in monasteries and temples. When the Konbaung Dynasty fell to this British, it was observed that King Thibaw kept 40 coloured cats in his palace. Due to Myanmar's relative isolation, the breed was protected until at least the early 20th century. As a result of interbreeding with other cats, most probably brought over by the British, it is believed that there were no Burmese cats by the time of the Second World War.

Fortunately, several cats were taken back to breeders in the UK and the United State in the early 20th century. These included Wong Mau, the famous progenitor of all American Burmese cats. From these exiled pure breeds came all modern Burmese cats, including the ones you'll meet today. Keep an eye out for *Apochi*, or "Bitter Old Man", he's not a fan of newcomers but when you find his soft spot, he'll be sure to let down his barrier.

Before leaving, we'd also recommend taking a look inside the gift shop, art gallery and aquarium; this is particularly interesting experience as it aims to educate visitors about the native fish of the lake, as well as the non-native species threatening their very existence. Seeing as over twenty species of the lake's snails and nine species of fish can be found nowhere else in the world, raising this awareness is an incredibly important task.

Having said goodbye to the Inle Heritage team, transfer back to your hotel, or continue exploring Inle Lake with the help of your guide and boat driver.



INCLUSIONS

- Transportation to/from hotel in a private long tail-boat (complete with chairs, cushions, umbrellas and blankets)
- English speaking tour guide (for other languages, please enquire)
- Lunch at Inle Heritage
- Drinking water and hand towel



EXCLUSIONS

- Inle Lake zone fee
- Accommodation
- Anything not mentioned



NOTES

- The featured tour assumes you will depart in the morning, with the cooking class start time being 10:30. There is however a 16:00 slot available, which we would not advise unless staying at Inle Heritage overnight (the lake is not safe to navigate in low light).
- The Burmese cats occupy a section of the ground floor and an island outside – there will be no sign of them outside of these areas.
- The duration of the transfer to / from Inle Heritage will vary depending on the location of your hotel.
- All profits from the Inle Heritage Restaurant and its activities will go towards the Inle Heritage Hospitality Vocational Training Centre.
- Blankets are provided on the boat in winter months only - the mornings tend to be extremely cold.
- Umbrellas are provided on the boat all year round to protect you from the sun, splashes of water and cold air.
- A supplementary fee may apply on certain days - Tour Mandalay will inform you of this beforehand.

www.tourmandalay.travel

Find us on:

