

# A COLOURFUL WILDERNESS

Experiences | Loikaw



## OVERVIEW

Travel deep into the mountain ranges south of Loikaw to the remote village of Htay Ko. Predominantly inhabited by the Kayaw tribe, easily distinguishable thanks to their brightly coloured pink garments, a trip here will be sure to suit the real adventure enthusiast, or those simply looking to get off the beaten track. With the help of a community guide, we'll aim to provide you with a non-intrusive insight into the Kayaw people's age-old customs and traditional beliefs.



### PACE

Medium pace



### TOUR PERIOD

Full day



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Wind your way up and down mountain road, passing jaw-dropping natural vistas en route.
- Explore Htay Ko with the help of a community guide, one of the best ways of getting under the skin and ensuring the people you cross paths with feel relaxed
- Eat lunch inside the home of a local resident
- Take a leisurely stroll through the village
- Visit a surprisingly grand catholic church (considering the remote location)
- Treat your ears to the sounds of an antique frog drum and buffalo horn
- (Optional) Get your initials engraved on a ceremonial metal necklace
- (Optional) Dress in traditional Kayaw clothing



## ITINERARY IN DETAIL

Due to the long distance, an early start will be required. It takes approximately two and half hours to reach Htay Ko, with at least half of that involving a slow and steady ascent up undulating mountain track. There will be plenty of opportunity to stop along the way, giving you time to marvel at the wild and luscious green jungle scenery – it's said that tigers inhabited the valleys not long ago, but have moved on now due to gradual, although small scale deforestation. In spite of this, it still feels incredibly remote and that sense is only going to continue until we reach the village.

Our first stop will be a visit to the community guide's house. Tour Mandalay purposely employ the services of this individual to make sure the touring is non-intrusive, in-depth and to ensure someone is available to translate to / from the Kayaw dialect. Even though Loikaw's only a two and half hour drive away, for the majority of the village's inhabitants, the town's just as foreign and out of the way as Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai in nearby Thailand. Similar to the hamlets of Pan Pet, rice wine is regularly offered to visitors, so it's probably best to expect that a few pots will be coming your way.

With no set order, the aim of today is to leisurely explore the village with your community guide, whilst learning about the Kayaw tribe's age-old customs and traditional beliefs. Although we can't guarantee you'll get to see everything, past tours have included; watching a lady get fitted with a replacement brass leg coil, discussing Catholicism and hunting with a farmer and mother of four, observing a live frog drum demonstration, visiting the house and workshop of a jeweller and talking about the meaning of life with a coffin maker. Should you wish to purchase a necklace from the jeweller, it's possible to request for the initials of your name to be engraved into the metal. Thankfully the coffin maker does not offer the same service!

At some point, a simple lunch will be served consisting of steamed rice, foraged vegetables and a selection of meat.

The village's most impressive landmark is without a doubt the Catholic church. Although it looks a lot more aged than it actually is, no thanks to the mould and unforgiving tropical climate, the sheer size of it pays testament to the village's fervent belief. To the back of the building is where you'll find an antique frog drum, of which there are only very few left in working order, a selection of musical buffalo horns and other prized community possessions.

The remainder of the afternoon will be spent visiting villager's houses. Not wanting to get in the way of their day to day responsibilities, we will only stop at homes that provide the community guide with prior permission, or communities members he or she is well acquainted with. This helps to ensure that the experience is not contrived and the host feels comfortable (as they should do in their own home).

Whilst exploring, be sure to keep an eye out for 100-year-old plus silver rupees. Used by the British during the occupation, many tribes in the region have kept hold of them for ceremonial and decorative use.

If you're taken by the colourful Kayaw dress, your community guide will be happy to escort you to a house where you can try on a selection of garments. You won't find many stockists elsewhere in the country, so this will be a good opportunity to pick up something unique. It will also help you to blend in better for the remainder of your time here.

After saying your goodbyes, travel two and a half hours back to your hotel using the same road you came in on – good light is needed, so apologies in advance if it feels too early (it will vary depending on the time of year).



## INCLUSIONS

- Transportation to/from hotel in an air-conditioned vehicle
- Entrance fees
- A simple, locally sourced lunch
- English speaking tour guide (for other languages, please enquire)
- Drinking water and hand towel



## EXCLUSIONS

- Having your name engraved on a necklace
- The purchase of any suggested souvenir items



## NOTES

- This is a suggested routing and it may be necessary for your guide to adapt the arrangements due to unpredictable elements that are out of Tour Mandalay's control
- A supplementary fee may apply on certain days – Tour Mandalay will inform you of this beforehand
- Festivals in this region are not uncommon and sometimes they happen unannounced. If this is the case, it might not be possible to carry out every excursion featured

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