

The Nam Ou: from Nong Kiew to Luang Prabang

The rivers of Laos were once the primary means of transportation, however improved roads have led to a decline in their importance. The Nam Ou was once one of the principal waterways in this network. It flows from the Northern Phongsaly province down until it joins the Mekong just before Luang Prabang. Most locals now take the bus from Nong Kiew to Luang Prabang since it is slightly shorter and almost half the cost leaving the boat for the tourists. I had enough bus travel and since this was one route where boats run regularly even in the dry season

I opted for the scenic, more leisurely, and slightly more risky boat. The water is very low this time of year and that means the margin for error in some rocky sections is small. I was talking to an expat Canadian on the bus to Nong Kiew who informed me that he talked to a traveler who was on a boat a few days earlier that sunk dumping all of its occupants and their luggage into the river. Preparing for the worst I stuffed all my electronics including my laptop in to my dry bag (water proof backpack). It is supposed to be a water proof seal but I really didn't want to test it. For the most part the ride was scenic and relaxing I was able to stretch out my legs a luxury not always available on a bus. We came to a section of rapids that required a hard left and then a hard right. We made the hard left, but the hard right, well not quite. The boat captain frantically tried in vain, with a bamboo pole, to stop the momentum of the boat as we hit the rocks. My camera and money belts went instantly in to the dry bag and I sealed as thoroughly as I could given the possible time constraints, hence no pictures. Fortunately, it appeared there were no holes in the boat, but it still required a hasty abandoning of the ship to get the boat off the rocks. The captain and his one man crew were then able to maneuver the boat off the rocks. Miraculously there was no damage to the boat and we were able to continue on our way arriving safely to Luang Prabang.



Nam Ou, near Nong Kiew.



Nam Ou, near Nong Kiew.



Boat I took to Luang Prabang



Nam Ou



A shallow stretch where the local kids were enlisted to help push, Nam Ou.



Fisherman where the Nam Ou joins the Mekong.



Mekong river near Luang Prabang