

IN CONVERSATION WITH PAUL STRACHAN, PANDAW FOUNDER

Paul Strachan, founder of river cruise line Pandaw and author of 'The Pandaw Story', talks to the editor



In 1995 Paul Strachan revived the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company in Burma and pioneered river cruising for the first time since the war.

Glasgow-born Paul Strachan claims to be an expert in "how not to run a business". He prefers not to do things by the book and cheerfully admits to mistakes and misjudgements. Both add colour, conflict and sometimes comedy to his book, 'The Pandaw Story'. Published in 2015, it provides a detailed account of reviving Burma's Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. Now trading as Pandaw, it offers luxury river-cruise adventures in Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, China and India.

and immerse themselves in indigenous communities. As pioneers of river travel over the past twenty years, our experience allows us to tailor our varied programs with expert guides to make the most of your visit to these incredible countries.

What book has most inspired you to travel and see the world?

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom by T.E. Lawrence is still a book I reflect back on and clearly remember reading it while in Mandalay in 1984.

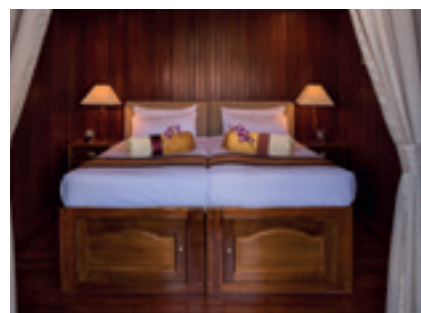
Tell us your favourite cruise route and why?

My firm favourite is The Chindwin in Burma which is a tributary of the Irrawaddy, flowing for 700 miles through contrasts of forested hills, rocky narrows and great open spaces from its source in the Patkai Hills of Northeast India. Riverside villages here remain unchanged with time and some of the best art treasures in ancient wood carved monasteries can be found, Mingkin being the oldest and most beautiful. Navigable from its confluence with the Irrawaddy to Homalin, water levels can rise over a hundred feet during the monsoon and drop to just three feet in low water season. This keeps other tourist boats away as only Pandaw can navigate such shallow waters.

What is the essence of a Pandaw cruise? How would you describe it to a friend who was interested in taking a Pandaw cruise?

Pandaw recaptures the golden era of personalised travel along the rivers of Southeast Asia, exploring rural riverside communities, their history and temples. Guests are enchanted by our beautiful small shallow-draft ships, hand-crafted in teak and brass with large shaded decks and only five to 30 cabins. This creates a friendly and informal atmosphere on board.

We offer a diverse choice of expeditions throughout Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and even China. Travelling on these inland waterways allows guests to enjoy the contrasting landscapes



We receive such fantastic comments and feedback about the Pandaw crew, what's your secret?

Our small ships create a family environment for Pandaw employees. Crew and staff enjoy being part of this community and successive generations are also working with us. We have a policy to recruit locally, enhancing the authentic service and cuisine offered on board. Employees follow an intense training program covering hospitality, language and etiquette. They take pride in welcoming you back on board from an excursion with a chilled flannel and refreshing cocktail!

Our expedition managers are constantly carrying out reconnaissance on the routes they sail in search of undiscovered locations for inquisitive guests to explore. Our varied excursion programs and mountain bikes are provided to help you get in touch with local communities and to step off the beaten tourist track.

What differentiates you from your competitors in the region?

The charm of our Pandaw ships made of natural materials with large shaded deck and beautiful cabins creates a truly Asian experience. There is no compromise on comfort. Your dining experience is a gourmet journey through Eastern flavours and locally grown produce. Pandaw is in tune with the local culture rather than offering an international voyage on a large impersonal cruise liner. Our knowledge of the rivers we sail is unrivalled and only Pandaw can explore beyond the boundaries of conventional travel because our ships are specifically built for these rivers.

As a historian and long-time supporter of Burma, is now a good time to travel?

Yes this is a great time to explore Burma as the country has never been more open to travel with so many new areas opening up. There is so much to see and do throughout the contrasting regions, from the Himalayas in the north to the tropical beaches in the south.

GIVE AWAY!

We're giving away 5 signed copies of Paul Strachan's 'The Pandaw Story'.

For your chance to win, visit www.vjv.com/fourcorners and answer the following question (terms & conditions apply): How many miles does the Red River flow?



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BURMA



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