

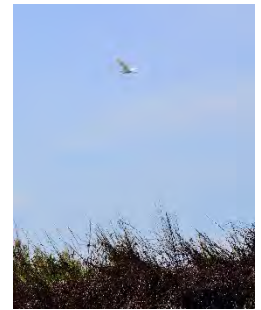
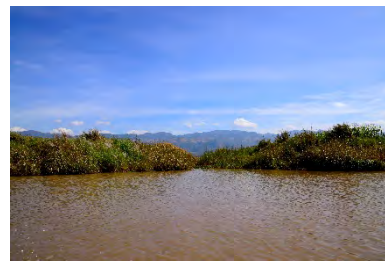
Day 7c Kalaw to Inle Lake



We continued driving for about 2 more hours and finally arrived at the Thukha jetty. Before we could board, Toe showed us a demonstration of how the Inle Lake fisherman fish. More on this later. We boarded a motorized longboat for the 30 minute boat ride to our hotel, the Inle Princess Resort. But first, Toe had to pay 10 Euro or \$10 (maybe they don't understand that is a different amount) for each of us, just to enter the lake area. Inle means small lake. It also means four because there are 4 villages, one at each corner of the lake. In fact, there are a total of 12-16 villages on the lake, most from the PaO tribe. At the far other end of lake from us, several hours away, are the villages of the Long Necked Women. We did not have enough days here to make that journey. Plus Andy and I had visited them in the village on the border with Thailand and Myanmar (read that blog for that story).



We rode past lots of non-blooming lotus flowers (what we call water lilies) and tall bamboo sticks. Only later did we find out that they were part of the floating gardens (more on this later). Birds were everywhere.



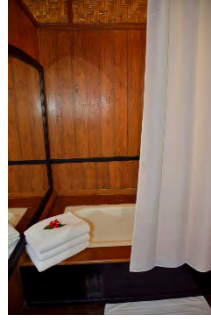
As we neared the hotel and passed a small hut, our boat slowed down and one of the hotel employees jumped onto the front with an oar. He steered the boat slowly and then started using his right leg to maneuver the oar while balancing on the edge of the boat with his left leg. He would use his hands to put the oar in the air, then use the heel of his foot to bring the oar back in and around through the water. It was amazing. I thought they were doing this especially for the tourists, but later we saw many, many fishermen doing the same thing. This is the way of the inhabitants of Inle. The boys learn this skill as soon as they begin to walk. What balance!



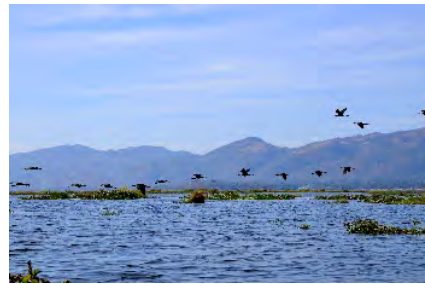
The resort is owned by a local Shan family. And of course it is right on the lake. Inle Princess Hotel is in the midst of nature surrounded by tropical gardens and lily ponds. The rooms themselves are traditional pyinkado (a Myanmar hardwood), teak and bamboo thatched houses. The dining room overlooks a large deck which overlooks the water. What a perfect place to sit in the evening, have a drink and watch the sun set.

We checked in, were greeted with a warm towel (this was the custom at all the hotels), served some tea, were escorted to our room. Each room is a hut with tall ceilings, a large bed with a canopy (later, when we returned from dinner, the entire bed was surrounded by the canopy for warmth and to keep the bugs out. It was like sleeping in a cocoon). There is a sitting area and a big fireplace. Our view is of the mountains as the lake view rooms were not available. But still beautiful.





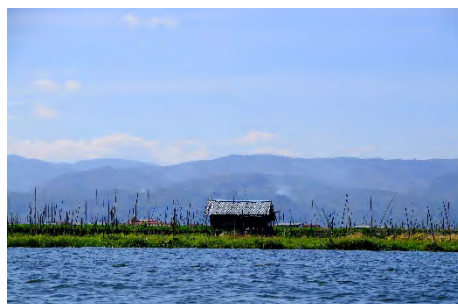
After dropping off our luggage, we almost immediately headed back out to the boat to begin our exploration of the villages and the lake. It was an hour boat ride to get to the other side of the lake. The air was warm. I could feel the sun and the wind on my face, I could hear the sound of the deep blue water lapping against the side of the boat. I could hear the pit patter of the motor. But there was no other noise. Birds would fly out of the trees or off the water as we went by. The birds were everywhere. There was no talking. Just those sounds, and sensations. Peaceful. Just you and your thoughts and nature.



Streets here are canals, or channels, like in Venice. If you want to walk, there are bridges across the channels that go from one side to another, and there are some paths along the water's edge. But everyone has a boat and that is the only way to really get places.



Boats glide through the channels and emerge onto the lake. The farther you go the more houses you see, which seem to be suspended in mid-air until you get closer and see that they are built on bamboo or wood stilts, right above the water. At the right time of morning or evening, the reflections of the houses, of the brightly colored laundry, or the boats and even of the people sitting on their stairs, reflect into the water creating beautiful palates of art.





Along the shore of the lake we could see the village houses on stilts. We could see the tall bamboo sticks of the floating gardens. We saw lots of fishermen on one foot, with the other on their oar and in their hands their fishing nets.

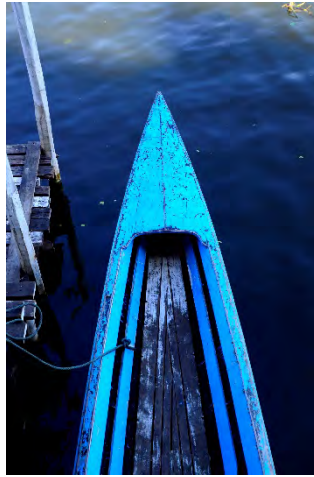


Our first stop was lunch at the Golden Kite restaurant, which turns out is Italian and Chinese. Toe had been raving about it from day one. We ate pizza. Must admit it was a nice change from Burmese/Chinese food, which is delicious, but nevertheless, a nice change.





Right outside the restaurant was a line of birds just sunning themselves. And watching us the way we watched them. Even the sounds of all the motors did not budge them.



After lunch we rode around the villages and stopped at one of the weaving places. Each village around the lake has its specialty. Blacksmiths, silversmiths, weavers. We visited the Ko Than Hlaing Silk and Lotus Weaving workshop. The weavers here are known for using lotus to weave shawls, scarfs, sarongs etc. They take the stem of the flower, cut a slit and then pull the two sides apart which reveals the “thread” inside. They placed a lotus thread bracelet on each of us. It takes a lot of lotus stems to make one shawl. And the weaving takes about one inch a day. Sometimes it is mixed with silk, but the traditional is all lotus. The colorful lotus was hanging outside, drying, and the sun shone through them making them shine like gold. The weavers were all women, and some looked that they had been weaving a long, long time. I am sure that in fact they have been doing it their whole lives. We watched them weaving and then of course, did some shopping. Good to leave some money here.





Then it was back to the boat where we floated by other boats, brightly painted homes, laundry waving in the breeze.

We floated by a temple, its steps covered with people, almost like a gathering of a social club. Mostly older men and woman sitting around tables, socializing, eating and drinking. We floated past other steps covered by women and their laundry baskets.



We floated past the floating gardens. These are gardens built on the surface of the lake, held in place by all the bamboo sticks. They are made of floating weeds and water hyacinth. They can be cut, pulled by boats and even sold like a piece of land. You can walk on some of them. They grow all their fruit and vegetables this way. The fisherman spend 6 months fishing and then then work for six months on their floating gardens. It takes extensive manual labor to form theses floating gardens as they need to gather up weeds from the bottom of the deeper parts of lake, bring them back in their boats and make them into floating beds anchored by bamboo pools. The weeds are covered with mud, and grass grows on the surface, which is then cut, dried and burned which makes it rich and fertile. As the water level changes, the gardens rise and fall.



