

DECADES

CHAPTER 01

TRIP REPORT

Amber Evenings

LAOS

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

VIETNAM

4th FEB – 4th MAY 2026

We are building **a new way to travel**; for people who have the time and the appetite for it, and no longer have work getting in the way.

Building something new **means learning as you go**.

That is part of what the early Pioneers signed up for; **not just a trip, but a chance to help shape what comes next**. We can't work out what this looks like without the people who actually do it.

What we take from these first trips, the things that worked and the things we would change, sets the standard for every trip that follows. **The Pioneers who come first make that possible**.

We learned a great deal from Amber Evenings. These are the things that mattered most.

Written with the people we learned this with. Written for the people who come next.

WHAT WORKED

01

Three months does something a shorter trip cannot

There are thousands of ways to travel for two or three weeks. A fortnight at a good hotel in Greece. A yoga retreat in Bali. A guided tour that covers three countries in fourteen days and fills every hour. All of them exist, and all of them work for what they are.

What barely exists is the longer version; for people who want something more sustained, with some company along the way, a structure that helps without taking over, and someone in-region if things go wrong. You can't really piece that together yourself.

That gap is what we are building for. The three months duration is a big part of that idea.

And it worked as we'd hoped.

Pioneers built routines: a morning run, a local coffee spot, enough Vietnamese to practice with the barista. They unpacked properly, which changed how they moved through each day. They worked out for themselves what a good day looked like in an unfamiliar place, and how to put one together.

Moving through Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam over three months, they really *felt the differences* between those countries. Several described how much the trip had changed shape by the end, in ways they had not anticipated.

"I got a broad and deep exposure to Southeast Asia. The trip provided the infrastructure for that."

So we'll continue to focus on longer trips.

02

The structure supports independence, not the other way around

Most group travel works one of two ways.

Either everything is decided for you – the itinerary, the pace, the activities, when you eat and where – or you are left entirely to your own devices and the "group" is just a loose collection of people doing their own thing anyway.

We wanted something in between. Logistics handled, enough structure to feel supported, enough space to actually be independent but a community-feel for when people wanted it. The question was whether that balance would hold over three months.

It did. Pioneers who wanted to spend days alone did. Pioneers who wanted to organise their own activities did. Everyone took the initiative and went to places the itinerary did not include and named those days among their best.

The structure was there when they needed it and invisible when they did not.

"DECADES gave me the support structure and left me alone otherwise. Exactly as I prefer."

So we'll keep our structure.

03

Variety creates the conditions for self-discovery

Some Pioneers had travelled the world. Others hadn't left Europe. We designed the trip to work for both, and to offer something neither had experienced before.

The route was built around contrast.

Big cities and villages. Beach time and urban centres. Two-day slow boats, jeeps, motorbike legs, and sleeper trains.

Hot air ballooning at sunrise, cycling Angkor Wat at dawn, volunteering at a bear sanctuary, living simply with monks.

The variety was not accidental. It was the design. We believe more than ever that it's the contrast that creates the conditions for discovery.

What Pioneers actually discovered surprised us, and them.

One felt an absence once the beach chapter ended, something she had not known about herself before. Another found that physical activity sat at the centre of her most memorable days, consistently, across three months. One felt more themselves than they had in years, and when the trip ended, extended their stay by a month to spend more time with that feeling in a town they had never heard of before we put it on the itinerary. Another found something in the particular sense of being on an adventure that a plane cannot communicate but a sleeper train can.

None of that is available in more than a superficial way on a trip that lasts a few weeks. Time and variety together are what make it possible.

So we'll keep designing itineraries for variety.

04

Adventure Days: it's about doing something, together

Every location on Amber Evenings had an Adventure Day: something we organise that lasts for a day or two, and involves the group coming together to experience something collective.

The brief for each one was the same: it should be something Pioneers would not usually have found or booked themselves, it should involve *doing something* rather than observing it, and it should show off something unique about the region.

What we found was that although each day was enjoyed individually, and they were consistently the highest-rated parts of the trip, **it was the set that held the magic**. The ability to step back after three months and take in everything we as a group had experienced together.

The ones that landed best became reference points for the rest of the trip. The hot air balloon at sunrise in Vang Vieng set a benchmark in the first week that everything else was measured against. The Angkor Wat sunrise cycle and the Red Bridge cooking class in Hoi An were named independently by multiple Pioneers as highlights of the entire trip. Lan Ha Bay (our quieter alternative to Halong Bay) closed the three months together perfectly.

"All very different and all good fun. I thought there was a lot of variety and for me that is good."

So Adventure Days don't just stay, but we'll push the mix across routes to deliver these unique hands-on opportunities.

05

Travel Days are a fundamental part of the adventure

Getting between places on a typical group trip is something to survive. You fly, you transfer, you arrive. Travel is the gap between the good bits.

We made a deliberate choice to do it differently. Slow boats taken by locals. Overnight sleeper trains. A motorbike leg along a mountain pass. Longer, slower, more involved than the obvious option. And in almost every case, the travel itself became part of what people remembered.

One Pioneer said **train journeys made her feel like she was *properly travelling***. Another described the slow boat into Laos as one of the **best two days of the entire three months**. Moving through a landscape by river is a different experience of a country than arriving at its airport. That difference registered, consistently, across the whole trip.

So we'll continue to find exploratory ways to travel through each region.

06

A host who is present when it matters, and absent when it doesn't

In our early research to explore what DECADES should become, we heard that having someone to meet you in arrivals when landing into a new place for the first time would be invaluable. Likewise if there was an emergency, or you got poorly, or just needed someone experienced in solo travel to bounce ideas around with how to spend your time.

Our Pioneers are fully capable and often experienced travellers, so the balance was a careful one.

We did away with all ideas of the tour guides people know and love from the 2 week guided tours people take, acknowledging that our Hosts would have a different role to play over three months, and that our trips run with a much more independent format. We're not trying to tick off a long list of sites, we're trying to help you live really differently for a long period of time.

What Pioneers told us was that our host got it right.

She was there during a medical situation, on complicated travel days, and when something needed sorting. The rest of the time, she got on with her own days and left Pioneers to get on with theirs.

"She was there as a reassuring presence. She wasn't on top of you all the time saying 'oh, can I do something to help you' — but she was there."

So the host stays, and our hiring criteria likewise.

**WHAT WE'LL DO
DIFFERENTLY**

01

The end of the route needs space to breathe

We got the shape of the route mostly right. The exception was the end.

Two things compounded each other.

The back-to-back city time wore people down. And cities demand a kind of active engagement, constant novelty, decision-making, that gets harder the longer you have been on the road.

Amber Evenings finished with three major cities in sequence: Phnom Penh, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi. And they arrived at the point in the trip when Pioneers had the least capacity for them.

What Pioneers described wanting was somewhere quieter before the trip closed. Somewhere the pace dropped and the scenery changed.

To their credit, they organised it themselves: a night away in the Vietnamese countryside that became one of the genuine highlights of the final weeks, exactly the kind of thing the structure of the trip is designed to make possible.

We're making a change here.

For future Southeast Asia routes, we will be adjusting the design to make sure the final weeks balance environments to match the energy of having been on the road for months, not weeks.

02

We'll help you prepare yourself

Before departure, Pioneers had thought carefully about what to pack, which vaccinations they needed, and what the weather would be like. That's the easy part.

What most pre-departure programmes don't touch is the individual side of a long trip: what it actually feels like to be away for three months, what kind of traveller you are, and what you need from your days to feel good in them.

The Pioneers who got the most from Amber Evenings tended to arrive with some version of a personal framework; a rough sense of what fills them versus drains them, what a good day looks like, how much solitude they need and how much company. Not a rigid plan. More clarity about themselves meant they could make decisions quickly and confidently when a day opened up in front of them.

That kind of self-knowledge usually comes from experience. We want to help shortcut it.

There is also an emotional shape to three months that is worth knowing in advance. The first weeks are packed with excitement and novelty. There is almost always a period in the middle that feels harder; quieter, more internal. The final weeks bring their own complexity: tiredness and reluctance to leave, often at the same time. None of this is a problem. But arriving knowing it is coming makes it easier to move through.

We're making a change here.

Going forward, pre-departure preparation will include work to help you understand your own travel style, what to expect from yourself at different points in the trip, and what kind of support you might want to ask for along the way.

03

We'll help you prepare to travel with people you don't know yet

Three months with a group of strangers is a different proposition from a fortnight. The group finds its rhythm, it always does, but how quickly, and how smoothly, depends partly on preparation.

We had made a start here, equipping Pioneers with shared agreements about 'how to travel together' and an official code of conduct. But there is more to do, and the more interesting work is not about rules.

One thing we would rather say clearly than imply: we select for people who want this kind of travel, not for how well a group of strangers might get along socially, because no process reliably predicts that. What you share with the other Pioneers is the ambition for this kind of trip, an openness to the world, and a genuine curiosity about what's out there. How you relate to each other personally will vary.

Navigating that is part of the experience. We will help you prepare for it before you leave - together.

We're making a change here.

What we want to create is a session before departure where the group builds something together: a shared language for what each person needs, how to communicate it, and how to navigate the moments when people want different things. The likely shape of those ups and downs. How to say what you want without it becoming a negotiation.

Every trip we run produces findings like these; things that worked and things that would be done differently.

The Amber Evenings Pioneers gave **honest, detailed feedback**. This is our honest response.

Publishing this report is part of what **our commitment to *creating this for you*** looks like.

That exchange, between the people who travel and the company that builds the conditions for it — is part of **what it means to travel with DECADES**.

TRIP END.

The next trip leaves soon. [Explore here.](#)

DECADES

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