

## TROPICAL TRAVEL PROPHYLAXIS MINI-SURVEY

Last Autumn I joined a group of twenty travellers on a physically demanding journey from the Golden Triangle in Northern Thailand, down the Mekong River through Laos and on to Cambodia. At a pre-travel meeting questions were asked about vaccinations and I became aware that there were many differing views and recommendations on which medications should be used, especially for malaria. The NHS website recommends the following immunisations, boosters and medication for Indo-China: diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis A, typhoid and anti-malarials. It also suggests considering prophylaxis against influenza and pneumonia (for elderly travellers), tuberculosis, rabies, hepatitis B and Japanese B encephalitis. Ironically, although mosquito-borne dengue fever is prevalent the website makes no mention of it - because there is no available prophylactic. Ignorance is bliss!

The group comprised 6 men and 14 women aged between 50 and 90, most of them seasoned travellers. I thought it would be interesting to know exactly what they used so I devised an anonymous questionnaire which I handed out half way through the journey. Eighteen were completed and returned. All but one had most of the suggested immunisations and none thought they suffered any side effects. Eighteen took anti-malarials, including two doctors from Northern Ireland who took Lariam which is no longer recommended for use in the UK. Again, almost no side effects were reported except two who felt queasy and one with increased heart rate. They paid between £23 and £130 for their medications.

All the travellers used mosquito repellents and most took precautions with food and personal hygiene. I believe two travellers took nothing, but they did not return their questionnaires. No-one became seriously ill.

The only concerns mentioned about the medications were the exorbitant price of Malarone for malaria and one worry that no dengue fever prophylaxis was available. One traveller organised her own homeopathic remedies with advice from Helios: She used China, Ars Alb, Malaria, Typhoidinum, Hepatitis A 30, Jetlag comp. (Arn, Elect. And Rad B), Infl/Bac and Anas Barb.

And what did I do? I decided not to use any prophylaxis but to put my trust in my kit of 50 remedies. I used just one dose of Ars Alb 30 after a dubious meal and 3 doses of China 30.

So what conclusions can be drawn? Perhaps only that most people follow medical advice and very few suffer any consequences for doing so. And that older travellers are astonishingly robust.

If anyone would like the complete results of the survey please email me on [jane.hurley@virgin.net](mailto:jane.hurley@virgin.net).

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