

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY VIENTIANE



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Australian Embassy's sporting exploits



Members of the multi-national crew that participated in the annual boat racing festival in Vientiane on 9 October in the Hong Mae Ya 1 – the festival's only international entry, to help mark the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Australia relations, a collaboration between the Australian Embassy and MRC.

Australian Embassy staff in Vientiane participated in two prominent sporting activities in mid October in Vientiane and Luang Prabang provinces.

On 9 October, several Embassy staff, including Ambassador John Williams, lined up with representatives from ASEAN Embassies in Vientiane, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' ASEAN Directorate and riparian and international staff from the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to compete in the annual boat race festival on the Mekong River.

The only international crew in the festival, and the only crew on the day to include both men and women, raced in the *Hong Mae Ya 1* boat from Sikhaytha village to celebrate the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Australia relations.

Ambassador Williams said while the *Hong Mae Ya 1* had not been the fastest boat on the Mekong, the team had trained and competed with great spirit, thanks to the excellent support of trainers from Ban Sikhaytha.

“Most of the crew were sore and exhausted after our final heat, but we thoroughly enjoyed our races and are delighted to have had the rare opportunity to participate in the boat racing festival,” Williams said.

“This was a perfect event to help us mark the 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Australia relations in the Lao PDR, given the importance of the boat racing festival for the Lao people, and the uniquely Lao character of the festival. It was a privilege to be part of it.”

The team trained for nearly two months ahead of the event, with each race covering a one-kilometer down-river stretch of the Mekong.



The ASEAN-Australia 40th anniversary boat, the Hong Mae Ya 1, lines up for the start of a heat at the 9 October boat race festival in Vientiane.

On Sunday 12 October, a team of around 25 Australian Embassy staff and family members competed in the Luang Prabang half marathon “*La Procession*”, raising \$11,000 in the process for a new children’s hospital in the World Heritage listed city in northern Laos.

Ambassador Williams said he was proud of his staff for their enthusiastic participation in the marathon, and their dedication to raising funds for a worthy cause.

“My wife, who ran the half marathon, tells me there were some tired colleagues after the 21 kilometres, but plenty of exalted spirits among the team – all delighted to have been part of such an enjoyable community event,” Williams said.

“Congratulations to *Friends without Borders* for again staging such a popular and well-organised event. I look forward to joining them in January at the official opening of the new children’s hospital in Luang Prabang. They can be extremely satisfied with all their hard work in establishing this much-needed new facility.”



Australian Embassy runners at the start line for the 12 October Luang Prabang half marathon.

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