

MEKONG RIVER CRUISE ABOARD THE AQUA MEKONG VIETNAM & CAMBODIA

Culture and civilisations have flourished around great rivers throughout history, and the Mekong is no exception. The opportunity to discover rich heritage and traditions enriched by 2,000 years of human history is what makes the Mekong river cruise one of Asia's most epic and worthwhile journeys on water.

A traveler cruising the Mekong is in close pursuit of a glorious past, retracing significant human accomplishments and cultural highs. From the flourishing of the Khmer empire between the 9th and the 15th centuries to the prominence of Theravada Buddhism in present-day Cambodia and Vietnam, this is one of the few cultural destinations on Earth best explored on a river voyage.

At the same time, the lower Mekong basin is also a cradle for nature. It is home to a wealth of fish, providing sustenance for the people and a myriad species of large waterbirds. In the verdant rice fields dotted with pockets of lush greenery, more bird and domestic wildlife species can be spotted along with the ubiquitous Brahman oxen as they diligently work the fields.

Luxury river cruise ship, Aqua Mekong, charts a path through the picturesque lower Mekong basin with expert guides on board. Navigating the Mekong river aboard this best-in-class vessel and following in the footsteps of royalty who have sailed before, this is the most enjoyable and rewarding way to experience the region.



The Mekong River is the 12th longest river in the world at 4,350km (2,703 miles), flowing from the Tibetan Plateau to the South China Sea through China, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The lower Mekong basin, encompassing Cambodia and Vietnam, is the most commonly navigated section, with local sampans and boats a common sight along with river cruise ships such as the Aqua Mekong.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

During this Mekong river cruise, guests will experience the most authentic facets of Mekong culture and ways of life while embracing the beautiful landscapes of the Mekong river basin in the comfort and luxury of the Aqua Mekong. Expert English-speaking guides will show you unspoilt nature and age-old traditions; every day on the Mekong is an opportunity to discover something new and amazing.

Tonle Sap

Cambodia is a treasure trove of cultural relics from the Khmer empire. Today, intriguing remnants of Khmer culture exist alongside ethnic tribal traditions — with stunning green hills and sprawling rice fields as backdrop.

From August to November, water from the swelling Mekong lake increases its area of the Tonle Sap by up to six times. During this time, the majority of the areas surrounding Tonle Sap become wetlands supporting a vast variety of wildlife, while the lake's many stilt villages appear to float on water as the water level rises by as much as 8m (26 feet)! During this swell the Tonle Sap lake and river reverses its flow — a natural phenomenon that must be seen to be believed.

Within the Tonle Sap, Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary is a designated UNESCO biosphere hosting a significant number of rare breeds. On board private skiffs from the Aqua Mekong, guests can expect to see species such as huge lesser and greater adjutant storks, the milky stork and the spot-billed pelican. Many of these birds make their enormous nests in trees seemingly growing straight out of the lake water.



Elsewhere on the Tonle Sap, witness the local life of people who depend on the water for their livelihood. Kompong Chhnang, one of the few “floating” villages where time seems to have stood still, welcomes Aqua Mekong guests who witness first-hand the making of palm sugar and learn how traditional Andong Russei pottery is made.

Culture

Peace and prosperity in the life-giving cradle of the the Mekong basin has led to a distinctive culture and many artforms which continue to flourish today.

The reign of the glittering Khmer empire in Cambodia lasted from the 9th to 15th century. Around the 13th century, monks from Sri Lanka introduced Theravada Buddhism to this region. Many indigenous tribes have also lived and thrived off Mekong's fertile plains for as far back as 2,000 years ago.

With Aqua Mekong, travelers take advantage of expert local guides and local connections to uncover intriguing cultural facets of the Mekong. A journey on the Aqua Mekong takes guests well beyond the region's beautiful, golden-roofed temples and ancient relics to let guests experience an authentic, seldom-seen aspect of the Mekong way of life and practices that have endured for many centuries.

Cultural highlights in Cambodia

- Watch the Khmer Apsara dance performance, a famous tradition memorialized on the fabled Angkor Wat's temple walls
- Witness artisans produce magnificent royal Khmer silverware in the silversmith village of Koh Chen, still used by Cambodia's king as gifts for visiting dignitaries today
- Visit Mekong's famed 'Silk Island', Koh Oknha Tey, to learn how artisans handcraft the traditional krama silk scarf, from harvesting silk from silkworms to dyeing and weaving the silk on massive wooden looms
- Ride a traditional ox-cart along Tonle Sap's picturesque river banks
- Receive a ceremonial blessing by a monk in the enigmatic floating village of Moat Khla

Cultural highlights in Vietnam

- Take a local rickshaw through an atmospheric town
- Ride a traditional sampan fishing boat in a bustling waterway past fishermen on long tail boats
- Learn about the intricate art of traditional mat weaving at Binh Thanh village
- Head to the top of a sacred hill where monks reside

Active Excursions

The Aqua Mekong offers concurrently running excursions, to allow guests to choose between an active outing or a more laid-back option, according to their preferences.

Guests may want to do something more active in the morning, and something more relaxed in the afternoon, or vice versa. With groups no larger than 10, excursions are more insightful and intimate for each guest. A fleet of ergonomically-designed, low-emission sheltered launch boats — the only privately-owned fleet of skiffs on the Mekong — takes guests to shore from the Aqua Mekong, ensuring efficiency, comfort and utmost safety.



Aside from riding in tuk-tuks, the undulating elevation of the Mekong countryside is also perfect for cycling. From the Aqua Mekong, guided cycling excursions are available from Day 2 of the cruise to the penultimate day. Top-of-the-line, all-terrain Cannondale bicycles sail with the Aqua Mekong, able to tackle any terrain in comfort and safety. No two cycling excursions in an itinerary are the same, so guests can experience a different slice of Mekong life and culture with every ride.

In Cambodia, guests aboard the Aqua Mekong also have the opportunity to kayak, with the ship carrying eight double-kayaks for excursions on the Mekong's waterways. At Koh Oknha Tey, guests can paddle their way to local silk-weavers. Meanwhile, the Moat Khla floating village on the Tonle Sap lake and the Kampong Chhnang's waterways offer the chance to "do as the Cambodians do", engaging in daily life with just a boat and paddle!

No matter your travel style, the Aqua Mekong offers the most flexible river cruise itineraries with activity options for every type of traveler.



Expert Guides

Aqua Mekong's full-time, English-speaking guides grew up along the Mekong river and know its stories by heart. They have also built a solid rapport with local communities, which makes excursions pleasant, seamless and immensely insightful.

A team of four professionally-trained guides leads guests on daily expeditions aboard comfortable skiffs, navigating the Mekong and its tributaries. With an immense knowledge of the lay of the land, the guides are a friendly, reassuring presence making sure guest needs and concerns are addressed.

No matter where your Aqua Mekong itinerary takes you, these eloquent guides are happy to share their first-hand, insider knowledge of the Mekong River, Southeast Asian history, traditions and cultures. This is the difference between a guest assuming the role of just another tourist or being an explorer returning home with unforgettable, enriching memories of a lifetime.

High water vs low water

The Mekong river has two distinct seasons: low water from December to mid-August and high water from mid-August to November when there are increased flows originating from the Tibetan highlands and China. During the high water season, the Tonle Sap lake becomes accessible to river cruise ships because the Tonle Sap river connecting the lake to the Mekong swells. Guests who travel on the Aqua Mekong during this period can visit floating villages and the Prek Toal Bird Reserve. Ships can also dock on the shores of the lake, just 45-minutes away from Siem Reap.

During the eight-month low water season there is reduced flow and the Tonle Sap lake is inaccessible from the Mekong via the Tonle Sap river during this period, making the lake inaccessible to river cruise ships. That said, this period is also an opportunity to see a quieter side of local life on the Tonle Sap lake.

CRUISE OPTIONS - All itineraries are subject to change, due to weather and other conditions.

7 nights - Embark on a cultural odyssey of a lifetime on a luxury Mekong river cruise

This cruise places you in the footsteps of the legendary King Jayavarman VII, who sailed the Mekong in the late 12th century to build the grand Khmer empire. Aboard the luxury Aqua Mekong, the whole narrative of the region's mysteries and wonders unravels before your eyes as you discover magnificent carved temples, lush landscapes and rural villages where culture and craft flourishes.

Aqua Mekong's 7-night itineraries depart from Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon (Vietnam) and, depending on the month of the year, from Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Siem Reap (Cambodia).

4 nights - Go deeper into the mesmerising culture and life on the Mekong river

This Aqua Mekong cruise is an ideal addition to any existing travel itinerary of the region. Included are twice-daily excursions (walk, bike, kayak or ride a tuk-tuk) and expert guided visits to Mekong River's dynamic riverside markets, villages and holy sites.

Departures are available from Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) and Phnom Penh (Cambodia) year round, and from Siem Reap (Cambodia) in selected months of the year. All disembarkations are in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

3 nights - A brief and rewarding taste of Mekong's agrarian heartlands

This 3-night cruise on the Mekong river offers plenty to see and explore for travelers with limited time. A private fleet of ergonomic, sheltered launch boats puts the pleasure and efficiency into exploring Mekong's myriad waterways, making the most of your time in this beautiful region.

All 3-night itineraries depart from Phnom Penh in Cambodia.

