



# THE MYSTICAL MEKONG RIVER

By Jennifer Pelaez

**T**ruly the “Mother River of Southeast Asia,” the Mekong River has been sustaining civilizations through the centuries, melding the rich cultures of Cambodia and Vietnam in what was once known as Indochina. Today, this part of the world has a certain allure and authenticity making it a remarkable destination worthy of exploration. One of the ways to experience the scenic and culturally distinctive lands that lie along this remarkable river is to embark on a river cruise that provides daily guided outings to explore quaint riverside towns and floating villages and witness first hand the colorful markets and temples while glimpsing into the lives of the amiable village workers and families along the way.

From the tranquility of Cambodia to Vietnam’s bustling cities, CFM by CroisiEurope has 4 vessels in the region offering several itineraries, from 3 day discovery sails to longer 8 day

cruises from Siem Reap to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) with a visit to Phnom Penh. The ships are small and able to navigate inaccessible areas and call at tiny villages allow-

ing guests the opportunity to see the day-to-day lives of the inhabitants of the Mekong as the ship makes its way along its sinuous and muddy waters. Among these authentic colonial style boats is the Toum Tiou II, a ship designed in the local traditional style harmoniously blended with French colonial inspiration. Charming and comfortable, it is fully paneled in Cambodian tropical teak and palm wood with 14 cabins and a spacious dining area. The meeting point and heart of the boat is its lovely outdoor sitting area with an elegant wooden deck and canopy with loungers, a per-

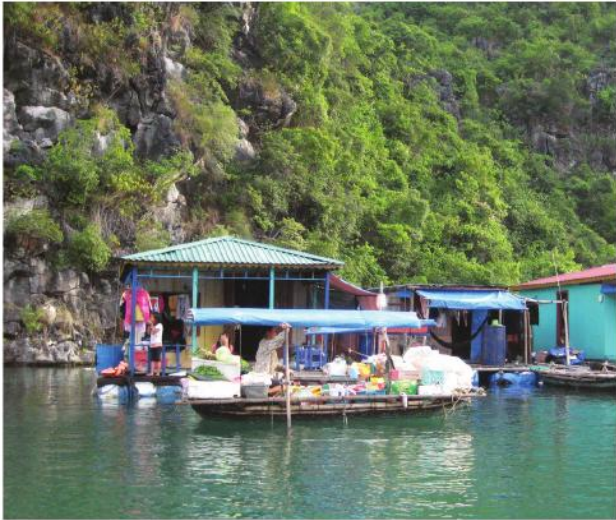




fect spot to watch the stunning sunsets and take in the countryside of spectacular tropical landscapes while sailing past local fishing boats and rice paddy-fringed banks.

The morning and afternoon excursions are well-planned and include adventures like ox cart rides, visits to Buddhist pagodas and remarkable temples, pottery factories, and touring of floating villages and local markets, which allow visitors to discover the rustic way of life, history, and culture that make this such a unique part of the world. The last stop before crossing the border into Vietnam is at Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, where splendid wide tree-lined boulevards flank the impressive Royal Palace. After a guided tour of the picturesque and grand complex, a divergent and somber visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum, a detention and torture center chronicling the Cambodian genocide, reveals a sliver into the painful history and hardships that have so gravely affected their society. Spend the remaining hours of the day scouting the lively streets filled with shops selling exquisite hand-crafts, massage parlors, and res-

taurants. Afterwards, head back on board for an evening of traditional entertainment before cruising over the border into Vietnam. The cities of Sa Dec, its claim to fame as the setting for *The Lover*, a semi-autobiographical novel by Marguerite Duras later made into a film, and nearby Vinh Long offer a glimpse into the industry in the region with a visit to a brick factory and a look at fruit orchards and some of the traditional farming methods and tools. In



sharp contrast to these quiet cities, the cruise comes to an end at the pulsating city of Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon. Upon disembarkation, arrange a private guide to customize your sightseeing according to your preferences. And what better way to explore the city like a local, on motorbike. Tiger Tours specializes in innovative motorbike custom itineraries and pride themselves on offering authentic recommendations and informative professional guides. Visit the Reunification Palace, the site of South Vietnam's defeat, and tour the architectural marvels like the Central Post Office and Notre Dame Cathedral. Get further acquainted with this lively city at your own pace and cover the myriad of markets around town while soaking up some of the city's youthful energy. It is the perfect end to your spectacular journey of history, culture and adventure.

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