

Arrive at the airport for your overnight flight to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

ARRIVAL IN SAIGON

After your morning arrival you will be met and transferred to the four-star Saigon Prince Hotel to stay for two nights with breakfast. We'll take an introductory tour of the city. Highlights include the Reunification Palace where famously in 1975, a tank burst through its gates in the final defining moment of the Vietnam War. We also see the War Remnants Museum and the lively Ben Thanh market - a fascinating insight into Saigon's daily life, you can find anything here, all at extremely good prices! The colonial-style central post office is a marvellous photo opportunity. The rest of the day is at leisure.

DAY 3-SAIGON

This will be a day to remember. We visit the famous Cu Chi tunnels, a complex underground network stretching for 124 miles, which included hospitals, meeting rooms, sleeping quarters and kitchens. Begun during the last years of French rule and vastly expanded during the 1960s, the tunnels provided a base for the Vietcong from which to attack US forces within just 30 miles of Saigon. Our visit here is a fascinating insight into these troubled times: we see the tunnels themselves and examples of the many mantraps and stake pits which protected them. Despite being carpetbombed, the tunnels were never really penetrated and should you wish, you may even try out real period weapons on a firing range. We continue through rural farming communities back to Saigon in the afternoon.

DAY 4-BOARD THE RV MEKONG PRESTIGE II

Expectations rise during our drive to the Mekong Delta, its coconut groves swaying with the breeze, the countryside studded with pagodas and an amazing network of paddy fields, tended by farmers bent double and almost completely covered by their iconic conical hats; these are some of Vietnam's most enduring images. Originally called Mae Khong, 'Mother of all Rivers', huge volumes of water drain from the hinterland plains and the snow-clad Chinese Himalayas, surging along an epic 3,000-mile journey. Life here revolves around its waterways: the imposing sampans so typical of South East Asia for hundreds of years and the quintessential floating markets of longboats, which almost sink under the groaning weight of colourful vegetables.

Your cruise is the perfect way to discover and understand this fascinating and rapidly emerging corner of the world – a serene experience immersing you in its people and customs at a wonderfully gentle pace. After a stop at the picturesque Cholon market and a lacquer workshop, you board the superb four-star RV Mekong Prestige II. Your highly professional crew, imbued by the unique service ethic you find everywhere here, ensure you settle in to your spacious and beautifully appointed cabin. After an excellent lunch, your journey begins. A wonderful reality soon sinks in with your first glimpses of the amazing stilted villages and teeming river traffic animating the scene seemingly at every turn. As darkness gently falls, take your seat in the restaurant for your first dinner, offering a choice of superbly executed Vietnamese or Cambodian cuisine or international classics.

The excellent cuisine is accompanied by tasty and included local wines, beers or soft drinks. Mooring at Cai Be, the day ends with a lovely performance of traditional Mekong music and perhaps a nightcap in the balmy late evening air, bathed by the unmistakable sounds of the East.

DAY 5-CAO DAI TEMPLE

This morning we sail by local junk along Cai Be's waterfront and amazing floating market, where wily sellers dangle their wares from long poles to the myriad of smaller boats in a vibrant riot of colour and noisy bartering. We visit the remarkable French Gothic cathedral, a poignant reminder of Vietnam's colonial past. This afternoon we cruise through Vinh Long to Sa Dec with a guided stroll through the colourful local market – an interesting comparison with this morning. The highlight of the day is the intriguing Cao Dai Temple, centre of a unique indigenous religion, a fascinating combination of Taoism, Buddhism and Chinese Confucianism plus elements of Christianity, Islam and spiritualism. Bizarrely, its saints include Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Shakespeare and Winston Churchill! The temple itself is a striking combination of western and oriental architectural styles and mesmerising brightly coloured statues, overlooked by the religion's all-seeing Divine Eye – it's sure to leave you something to ponder after your visit.

Another tropical night atmospherically falls as we cruise upstream whilst enjoying another superb dinner and the kaleidoscope of truly amazing sights, sounds and scents, accompanied by the gentle waters lapping peacefully against the hull.

DAY 6-AN CHAU

One of the great pleasures of river cruising is waking up somewhere completely different, and as dawn breaks, we are berthed in remote Tan Chau near Cambodia. One of the delights of Vietnam is that so many cottage industries still thrive, offering a fascinating insight into the past. This morning we explore Tan Chau, Vietnam's leading silk centre producing extremely high quality and truly beautiful naturally dyed clothes. Slipping our moorings, Vietnam slowly recedes as we cross into Cambodia and continue into the evening with a chance to enjoy pre-dinner drinks in the lounge, before another tasty dinner. Take a stroll outside, look above and be dazzled by the luminosity of an amazing night sky, unfettered by streetlights and advertising as we cruise to Phnom Penh.

DAY 7-PHNOM PENH

Called the 'Paris of the East' during colonial times, Phnom Penh has preserved much of its wonderful rustic charm, elegance and French allure. Sightseeing includes an exciting cyclerickshaw ride to the dazzling Royal Palace and the Silver Pagoda, followed by a chance to witness exceptionally beautiful Khmer craft in the National Museum. In homage to Cambodia's tragic recent history, we next visit the haunting Tuol Sleng Genocide museum. Phnom Penh has some excellent markets offering fine silks, spices and high quality lacquer work, providing the perfect opportunity to hone your bargaining skills.

This evening you will be entertained by a traditional Apsara performance, where talented silk-clad dancers will dazzle you with their graceful poise and intricate hand movements, originally designed to entertain the gods. We moor overnight, enabling easy exploration of the city late into the evening, where the bustling markets, teeming street restaurants and hawkers sell literally anything, enhancing the electric ambience so typical of the emerging Far East.

DAY 8-PHNOM PENH

After another delightful breakfast, we arrive at Koh Chong, a delightful silk weaving village visiting a particularly impressive pagoda before returning to Phnom Penh for an afternoon at leisure. You can explore its intriguing corners such as Wat Phnom, symbol of the city, perhaps the remarkable Russian market, or just relax and absorb the teeming river life.

DAY 9-LOUDONG

This morning we cruise into the heart of Cambodia on the Tonle River, a Mekong tributary which astonishingly changes its direction of flow between wet and dry seasons. A remarkable ecosystem here is home to 20,000 plants species, 1,200 birds, 800 reptiles and amphibians plus 430 mammals, with 1,300 new species having been discovered since 1997. Next we visit historic Oudong, the country's former capital nestling at the foot of Phnom Udong, a wooded hill with impressive Buddhist spiritual monuments towering above the trees, marking the final resting place of the Khmer kings. This afternoon we visit the peaceful Vipassana Dhura Pagoda, a revered place of meditation, followed by the charming monastery of Wat Kampong Leu, renowned for its extraordinary wall paintings. We return by traditional local ox cart, experiencing the leisurely pace of life still pervading this wonderful country.

DAY 10-FLOATING VILLAGES

Kampong Chhnang is a busy, rural port town noted for its bustling markets and mesmerising canal network. Boarding traditional long-tail boats we visit its picturesque floating village where life is conducted entirely astride the river, before a stroll through the picturesque market, a cacophony of sounds, smells and vibrant colours.

This afternoon, our final cruise crosses the Tonle Sap (Great Lake), in the rainy season South East Asia's largest lake and critical to Cambodia's biodiversity, with its fish staggeringly supporting 3 million people. You may see crocodiles and turtles plus a huge variety of birdlife. Adapting to the seasonal climate, fascinating floating villages have evolved where homes and markets plus workshops, schools and surgeries amazingly rise and fall with the water level. Because of these changes our own itinerary from day 9 to 11 may vary (the cruise described above is based on a high-water itinerary).

DAY 11-SIEM REAP

Early this morning our river cruiser glides to a final halt, berthed in Siem Reap at the head of this stunningly beautiful lake. We say our fond farewells to the splendid crew as you continue your exploration of Cambodia where you stay for three nights at the four-star superior Borei Angkor Hotel with breakfast. It's extremely comfortable with two restaurants, a large pool and spa. The rest of the day is at leisure.

DAY 12-ANGKOR WAT

Today we see the haunting soft morning light over the eerie temples of Angkor. Encircled by verdant steamy jungle, shrouded in mist and with a tropical dawn chorus reverberating in the air, this is

something you will never forget. We visit the huge, fortified 13th-century city of Angkor Thom with its five monumental gates and 91-metre wide moat; its centre contains one of Angkor's most astonishing sites, the temple of Bayon. Crowned by over 50 towers, each with four colossal carved heads looking out in every direction, this is an extraordinary masterpiece of Khmer art. One of the most intriguing sites is the smaller temple of Ta Prohm which has been left in its natural, unrestored state, with giant tropical trees bursting through the ruins, their roots entwined like vast tentacles across the moss-covered, weathered walls and roofs.

Late in the afternoon we see the immense temple of Angkor Wat, one of the largest religious structures in the world. The main entrance faces west to catch the rose-red glow of the setting sun, a truly magical time of day.

DAY 13-FREE DAY

Our last full day in Cambodia is at leisure for you to enjoy the swimming pool and facilities of your hotel, or simply explore the excellent markets and restaurants of Siem Reap.

DAY 14-RETURN FLIGHT

At the appropriate time you transfer to the airport for your flight to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) from where you connect with your return flight to the UK.