

## DISCOVER ALONG MEKONG

### LUANG PRABANG – SIEM REAP – MEKONG CRUISE – SAIGON

16 Days / 15 Nights

#### Day 01: Welcome to Laos!

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Welcome to Luang Prabang. Upon arrival, you will be met at the airport by your guide. The guide will assist you in transferring to your hotel for check-in. Please note that the standard check-in time is 14:00. Depending on your arrival time, you may decide to add an additional tour at this point.

*Notice: Revealing clothes such as shorts and skirts above the knees and bare shoulders are prohibited in sacred places and temples.*

#### Luang Prabang:

Luang Prabang, the ancient capital of Luang Prabang Province in northern Laos, lies in a valley at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers. Inhabited for thousands of years, it was the royal capital of the country until 1975. It's known for its many Buddhist temples, including the gilded Wat Xieng Thong, dating to the 16th century, and Wat Mai, once the residence of the head of Laotian Buddhism.

Accommodation: As Selected

#### Day 02: Luang Prabang – City Tour by Tuk Tuk

(B/L)



Breakfast at your hotel

Explore the city by Tuk Tuk. The Tuk Tuk (a motorized rickshaw) was brought to Southeast Asia in 1934 from Japan and has since become an icon of the region. The classic Tuk Tuk has a sheet-metal roof covering an open frame that rests on three wheels. They're one of the most popular forms of transportation in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia, and this Southeast Asian emblem is the perfect vehicle for an open-air tour of Luang Prabang.

Depart from the hotel at 8:00 and get on the Tuk Tuk to the open-air Morning Market in the old town. There are only a few large grocery stores here; instead, food is still produced by small farming families and villages and brought to Luang Prabang from the surrounding rural areas. The guide will explain the common vegetables and fruits that are in season and pick up some snacks for later.

A short walk from the market is Wat Mai Suwannaphumaham ("New Monastery"), the National Museum (Royal Palace), and Hor Phra Bang. After the museum, travel again by tuk-tuk through more of the picturesque town to Wat Visounalath. Continue to Heuan Chan Luang Prabang for a short activity and learn how to make banana leaves and flowers.

Another short tuk-tuk ride along the Nam Khan River to Wat Xieng Thong. End the day's tour on top of Mount Phousi.

Dinner on your own account

Accommodation: As Selected

### Day 03: Luang Prabang – Pak Ou Caves & Kuang Si Waterfall

(B/L)



Breakfast at your hotel

Travel by boat to Tham Pak Ou Caves and by vehicle to the beautiful Tad Kuang Si Waterfall, stopping on the way to visit Hmong and Khamu villages. Hmong and Khamu villages have different structures and ways of life; here, we learn about their traditions and the differences between Lao, Khamu, and Hmong culture.

#### PAK OU CAVES

Pak Ou Caves, one of the most respected holy sites in Lao, have a history dating back thousands of years. Packed with over 4,000 Buddha icons, the caves, a shrine to the river spirit and Lord Buddha, are set in a dramatic limestone cliff at the point where the Mekong joins the Nam Ou River. There are two caves to visit: the lower cave called Tham Ting and the upper cave called Tham Thueng, both boasting miniature Buddhist figures that are mostly made from wood.

#### KUANG SI WATERFALL AND BEAR RESCUE CENTER

Tad Kuang Si Waterfall is the biggest waterfall in the Luang Prabang area, with three tiers leading to a 50-meter drop into spectacular azure pools before flowing downstream. The pools also make great swimming holes and are very popular with both tourists and locals. Visit the Bear Rescue Center within the Kuang Si Waterfall Park (no extra entrance ticket).

Many of the bears at the Tat Kuang Si Bear Rescue Centre were destined for bile farms or kept illegally as 'pets'. Since 2003, we've been working with the Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office to create a safe haven for these victims of the illegal wildlife trade. The bears can now relax in hammocks, play with new friends, and live a safe, healthy life.

*ADDON OPTION:* We offer an exciting chance to go behind-the-scenes. You'll hear the unique and moving rescue stories of the bears, meet the bears, help the Bear Care Team prepare their food and enrichment treats, and then watch the bears search them out and gobble them down. By taking part in this unique experience, you'll be contributing directly towards helping care for bears rescued from the illegal wildlife trade.

### KUANG SI BUTTERFLY PARK

Situated 300 m before the entrance of Kuang Si Waterfall, Kuang Si Butterfly Park is a project that was initiated in January 2014 by two passionate people from Holland. The mission was to create a research center studying and publishing about Laos butterflies, host plants, and preservation due to environmental issues in Laos. A nice little café on the pond can finish the visit with a good coffee and a delicious baguette in a beautiful setting.

Dinner on your own account

Accommodation: As Selected

### Day 04: Luang Prabang – Siem Reap

(B)

Enjoy your breakfast at the hotel. Take a walk or get some last-minute souvenirs before you check out at midday. **Your guide and driver** will meet you to assist with luggage and take you to the airport for your departure flight.

*Suggestion Flight VN931 14:40–16:10 (Price in Supplement)*

Welcome to Siem Reap. Upon arrival at the Airport you will meet your Guide and transfer to hotel for Check-in. [Standard Check in time 1400 hrs].

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

Accommodation: As Selected

## Day 05: Siem Reap – Museum & Temple Tour

(B)



Breakfast at your hotel.

Visit Wat Thmei, one of the killing field memorials, a small memorial stupa that contains the skulls and bones of victims killed during the regime of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979.

We continue the tour at the **Apopo Visitor Center** to learn about the history of conflict in Cambodia and the impact the region's landmines have on the local communities. In place to make a difference are what's known as the "hero rats." Because of their light weight, the rats have been trained to sniff buried landmines, which is a huge help in de-mining the region. Watch the rats in action at the helm of their trainers.

The day ends with a visit to the **Angkor National Museum**, an archaeological museum dedicated to the collection, preservation, and presentation of Angkorian artifacts. The collections are mainly dated from the Khmer Empire's Angkor period, circa 9th to 14th centuries, with most of the artifacts discovered in and around the Angkor archaeological sites nearby.

*Afternoon:* visit three temples. **Bakong, Lolei, and Preah Ko**, 11 kilometers southeast of the Siem Reap Market, comprise the Roluos group of monuments; they are close together and extend over an area of three kilometers (1.9 miles) east of the Great Lake.

The **Roluos group**, dating from the late ninth century, is the earliest site of the 600-year Angkor Period that is open to visitors. The three temples belonging to this important group have similar characteristics of architecture, decoration, materials, and construction methods, which combine to reveal the beginning of the Classic Period of Khmer art.

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

Accommodation: As selected

## Day 06: Siem Reap – Sun Rise Angkor Tour

(B)



An early morning pick-up at 5:00 a.m. for sunrise at Angkor Wat. Continue to see inside the Angkor Wat Temple, Angkor Park's most revered temple and the largest religious monument in the world. Inside the temple, the walls are covered with stone carvings and bas-reliefs, which are absolutely breathtaking. Your guide will explain the stories in exquisite detail and provide you with ample time to explore the inner and outer grounds of the temple. You will be transferred back to the hotel for breakfast and to relax.

Afternoon: visit the South Gate with its huge statues depicting the churning of the ocean of milk and see the ancient capital of Angkor Thom, built in the late 12th century, before we head onwards to Bayon Temple, which is unique for its 54 towers decorated with over 200 smiling faces of Avolokitesvara. Baphuon is like an artificial mountain that recently re-opened after years of restoration. Following, you may visit the Royal Enclosure, the Elephants Terrace, and the Terrace of the Leper King. Then continue to the popular temple of Ta Prohm, which is the modern name of the temple at Angkor, built in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. However, it is probably more famous for being the location where they filmed the Tomb Raider movie.

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

Accommodation: As selected

## Day 07: Siem Reap – Culture & Floating Village

(B)



Breakfast at the hotel.

A unique and unforgettable experience for those who want to do more than just see the sights is to participate in a cooking class.

Today you will learn how to make authentic, quality local food like you eat in a restaurant. You will have the opportunity to learn how to prepare traditional and delicious Khmer dishes under the guidance of a genuine professional chef, beginning with a visit to the local market. You will see the action for yourself and learn about the produce, which is soon to become your food. Step-by-step guidance will be given during the process, and afterwards, you can enjoy the fruits of your labor by sitting down to eat the meal you have prepared.

We set off to Tonle Sap Lake, where you will discover different aspects of the floating village activities, from crocodile farming to fishing farms, traditional medicine shops, boat shops, spirit houses, floating schools, and more. Then we head to the **Old Market**, which is the oldest Khmer market in Siem Reap. See vendors selling souvenirs such as clothes and jewelry.

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

Accommodation: As selected

## Day 08: Siem Reap – Phnom Penh

(B)

Breakfast at your hotel.

This morning, our driver will meet you at the hotel lobby for assistance with a transfer to the airport for the flight to Phnom Penh City.

*Suggestion flight K6106 16:00–16:45 (flight price in supplement)*

Upon arrival, your tour guide will meet and greet you and transfer you to the hotel for check-in.

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

Accommodation: As selected

## Day 09: Phnom Penh

(B/D)



Breakfast at your hotel.

A discovery tour of Phnom Penh. At 8:00 a.m., you will be met by your driver and guide. Gain insight into the recent dark history of Cambodia at the **Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum**, a former school converted into a detention center during the Khmer Rouge. Visit the equally harrowing Killing Fields of **Choeng Ek**. These are tough visits, but important for learning about the country's history.

Lunch at your own account.

Afternoon, visit **Wat Phnom**, a beautiful hilltop temple with manicured gardens, followed by the **Royal Palace** and **Silver Pagoda**, named for the 5,000 silver tiles that cover the pagoda's floor, known for its collection of gold, silver, crystal, and bronze Buddha statues.

Dinner on a cruise and an overnight stay on the cruise.

Accommodation: On Board (Superior Cabin)

Day 10: Phnom Penh – Border Crossing – Tan Chau

(B/L/D)



Welcome on board with Heritage Line for your Mekong River adventure. After you have checked in, we invite you to a highlight of this cruise before we lift the anchor. The lounge is set up for an eye-and ear-catching lecture about modern Cambodian history, held by our friend and local expert, Mr. Jean-Michel, a professor from the Royal University of Phnom Penh. He has studied the subject extensively and is more than happy to share his first-hand knowledge and surprising insights. The lecture takes about an hour before we set sail southbound towards the Vietnamese border.

The rest of the morning and the whole afternoon are at your own disposal. From now on, you can turn into cruise mode and hopefully experience the relaxing influence of the cadence this mighty river emanates. The afternoon is perfect for massages, relaxation on a terrace deck sunbed, or private balcony kick-backs. Conjure up a spell to merge with the river and float into a state of mild bliss.

You also may like to visit the bridge, as the captain always has a little story to share about "his" river. Or, if you are curious to learn more about Khmer gastronomy, join a culinary workshop to sharpen your knowledge about local cuisine.

As you sip drinks and nibble on treats during afternoon tea, we approach the border and finally arrive in Vietnam. From here, it is just a short distance to Tan Chau, a pleasant, slow-paced border town with a sizeable Chinese, Kinh, and Khmer community. We moor near the city with views of the riverbanks.

Accommodation: On Board (Superior Cabin)

Day 11: Tan Chau – My An Hung – Sa Dec

(B/L/D)



Welcome to the fish sanctuary of Vietnam.

Once we arrive onshore, we hop on “xelois” to see Tan Chau’s vibrant town life. A “xeloi” is a local vehicle that is still used as a taxi in this area. Your personal Xeloi driver slowly navigates through the streets to observe all the workshops, houses, and shops while feeling the laid-back vibe of this place. We stop at the colorful, local market near one of the town’s temples. This is a great opportunity to interact with the vendors of this friendly town and try your hand at bargaining with them.

To see what Tan Chau is famous for, we board local boats and head to a floating fish farm. You are about to get an exclusive look into the world’s largest inland aquaculture industry. Each of the floating structures has netting hanging down into the water to enclose the fish, which are raised and fed on a daily basis. The region’s specialties are tilapia and basa catfish, or *Pangasius*, which is unique to the Mekong River basin and rapidly gaining popularity on the international seafood market.

Back on board and before lunch is served, you may take a dip in the pool. After the meal, our expert guides offer a presentation about life in the Mekong Delta as the ship continues to My An Hung, near Sa Dec province.

My An Hung Village is a wonderful example of a real local village in the Mekong Delta. Time stands still here, and we receive wonderful insights into the private household of a local family and visit the seasonal vegetable fields to see what they are currently cultivating. We are invited to their house for a Vietnamese tea tasting. Vietnamese tea is often bitter, so locals sweeten it with honey, a regional delicacy also produced by our hosts. The family then presents a huge variety of fruits growing in the delta, freshly cut from the tree. And as an artist group performs a traditional, artistic dragon dance, we snack on these “vitamin bombs.”

The sun sets, and the light now bathes everything in a golden hue. The surrounding natural beauty is a perfect backdrop for a riverbank gathering with cocktails and dancing with the crew in this remote, secluded location.

Accommodation: On Board (Superior Cabin)



Day 12: Binh Thanh Island – Cai Be – My Tho

(B/L/D)



This morning, the vessel arrives at one of the larger islands in the vast stream of the Mekong, Binh Thanh Island. Several communities have settled here and make their living by growing water hyacinths.

We exclusively visit one of these untouched areas. By wandering through the village, we get a deep understanding of native life. One of the local artisans, for example, demonstrates the entire process of traditional mat-making. You can try weaving yourself. We also meet a local elderly couple who share their story of living on this island. They are always happy to chit-chat with our guests.

Back on the ship, lunch is served, and we sail towards Cai Be. Cai Be is a charming town that is famous for its Catholic French church and the manufacturing of traditional crafts and food products. The once enormous floating market of Cai Be gets smaller year by year since trading on the water is continually shifting towards modern markets. However, you can still see boat-to-boat trading of local goods, such as fruits and agricultural products, and imagine what this must have looked like on a larger scale. We learn from our guide about the long-lasting trading culture and how each boat has a special marker to let buyers know what goods they are selling.

By local boat, we sail along the green canal network and watch the farmers working in the fields. A visit to a workshop shows us the manufacturing of rice paste, rice paper, rice cookies, and rice wine. Cai Be's surrounding areas are covered by palm trees, which is why the region is also famous for the production of coconut candy.

Back on board, our crew invites you to a farewell event and to enjoy some cheerful moments before dinner, including music and Cambodian dancing together with the team. Savour your final dinner aboard and relive the week's adventures in your mind's eye with a glass of wine at the open bar.

Accommodation: On Board (Superior Cabin)

Day 13: My Tho - Saigon

(B)



Enjoy your last breakfast aboard your floating home. We will disembark the ship after breakfast and take a bus transfer from My Tho to the drop-off point in Saigon. It is only around 70 kilometers on the highway. You will arrive in Saigon by mid-morning. We hope you enjoyed this fascinating river cruise, just as our crew does every single time. Moreover, take the enchanting memories and friendships along with you that will linger on with the stories of this amazing river.

Upon arrival, you will be met at the stop point. The guide will assist you in transferring to your hotel for check-in. *(Standard check-in time is 14:00.)*

Afternoon, depending on your available time, take a short city tour with colonial structures, including **Notre Dame Cathedral**, built in the late 1880s by French colonists; it is one of the few remaining strongholds of Catholicism in the largely Buddhist Vietnam currently being renovated, which we can only view from the outside; and the **Central Post Office**, constructed when Vietnam was part of French Indochina in the late 19th century.

We will also visit **Thien Hau Pagoda** in Cho Lon, a Chinese-style temple located on Nguyen Trai Street in Cho Lon (China Town).

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

## SAIGON

'Commonly referred to as Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City is Vietnam's largest city and undisputed commercial capital. It is a dynamic city that is currently enjoying the fruits of Vietnam's economic boom; lavish hotels, decadent restaurants, and trendy nightspots are continually added to the cityscape. Yet against the backdrop of new-found confidence, frenetic development, and urban bustle, the boutique charm of Ho Chi Minh City still lives on amongst the tree-lined boulevards, quaint wooden shops, old temples, and colonial architecture.'

Accommodation: As Selected

Day 14: Full Day Cu Chi Tunnels – City Tour

(B/L)



Breakfast at the hotel.

Transfer to the Cu Chi district. Leaving the city behind, the scenery changes to views of rice paddies, villagers drying noodles by the side of the road, and other scenes typical of southern Vietnam.

Arrive and start the visit to the famous **Cu Chi Tunnels**, which consist of an incredible underground tunnel network constructed by Vietnamese resistance fighters (Viet Cong) during both the French and American wars. Start the visit with the Ben Dinh or Ben Duoc sections of the tunnel. Here you can imagine what it was like to be a guerrilla complete with Russian Carbine rifles and AK 47's.

Return to the city. Lunch at a local restaurant

This afternoon, you head to the **Reunification Hall** to visit the residence of President Ngo Dinh Diem of the former South Vietnam until 1975 (1960s–April 1975s). Here you will have the opportunity to view formal meeting rooms, private bedrooms, and war situation rooms 10 meters beneath the earth's level. This address today still holds many important functions in HCMC. You will learn important historical facts about this building.

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Next, visit the **War Remnants Museum**.

Finally, the tour ends at the famous **Ben Thanh market**, where you may practice your bargaining skills and pick up some souvenirs before being returned to your hotel.

Dinner on your own account.

Accommodation: As Selected

**Day 15: Ho Chi Minh City Free & Easy****(B)**

Breakfast at the hotel. Today is free at leisure.

Lunch and dinner are on your own dime.

Accommodation: As Selected

**Day 16: Ho Chi Minh City - Departure****(B)**

Enjoy your final breakfast at the hotel. Take a walk or get some last-minute souvenirs before you check out at midday. Your driver will meet you to assist with luggage and take you to the airport for your departure flight.

End of Service.