

VIETNAM & CAMBODIA



DISCOVERING THE MEKONG AND THE TEMPLES OF ANGKOR

WITH JUDY BRZOSKA

SEPTEMBER 8 to 20, 2010

You are invited to join our exploration of the land, people, archeology and wildlife of the Mekong Valley from Vietnam to Cambodia, ending with the amazing temples of Angkor. This 14 day tour is led by Judy Brzoska, and includes eight days aboard the Mekong Pandaw, a traditional and well-appointed river boat offering style, charm and luxury while we travel. As well as guided shore excursions as we journey along the Mekong, we have arranged private touring of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) before the cruise, and of the temples and wildlife of Angkor after the cruise.

Day 1 - Wednesday, September 8: Home City / Los Angeles or New York / In Flight

Depart your home city for your gateway city (most likely Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta or Chicago) and depart for Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam. We will discuss the best air for you which will depend on several factors including your home city.

Day 2 – Thursday, September 9: In Flight/ Saigon

Arrive in Saigon, where we are met and transferred to our hotel. Although most participants will arrive late evening, other may arrive earlier, so we have left today free to look around this interesting city if time permits, or just take it easy at the hotel after the flight.

Day 3 – Friday, September 10: Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)

Today we explore Saigon. Although the city is most famous for Americans due to the war, there is a much longer and richer history to Saigon (while Ho Chi Minh City is the official name, many even in Vietnam still refer to it as Saigon), even predating its French influence, as the Paris of the Orient. The Giac Lam Pagoda dates back to the mid 18thC, and is perhaps the finest in Vietnam. Our time here can include for those interested in the Vietnam war Reunification Hall, War Museum, the former US Embassy and the Cu Chi tunnels, about 65 Km (1 ½ hours drive) from Saigon. This complicated system of underground networked tunnels was built by Viet Cong guerillas. Tonight we enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.



Day 4 – Saturday, September 10: Saigon/My Tho/Cai Be

After registration this morning at the Hotel Sofitel Plaza Saigon we transfer to the delta port of My Tho by coach, arriving at 11am for check in followed by port and immigration formalities then settle in to our cabins on our boat, the



Mekong Pandaw. Built in the style of traditional riverboats of the area, the Pandaw and her crew offer a delightful and luxurious journey along the might Mekong River, Vietnam's lifeforce artery. After setting sail on our Mekong voyage of discovery we have lunch, then moor near Cai Be, two hours

upstream to make a fascinating trip by traditional junk to explore evergreen islands and at the former Imperial residence, the An Kiet House. Surviving members of the Kiet family will welcome us with tea and we can wander in the fruit orchards around the house. Overnight moor mid-stream Cai Be.



Day 5 – Sunday, September 11: Cai Be/ Chau Doc

We begin today by visiting Cai Be and its colorful floating market which takes place daily in front of the catholic church; further along on the river bank are local factories where rice pasta, coconut candies and other specialties are still traditionally made. A visit to a Mandarins house dating from late 19th century gives us insight into a lifestyle which has now



disappeared from Vietnam. We cruise further by sampan to Dong Hoa Hiep islet to explore the rural life and the daily activities of the delta inhabitants, seeing palm tree leave weaving, traditional wooden boat factories and fruit orchard plantations. Back on board our sampan we cruise up the Tien River where we see water hyacinths, an important Mekong delta



product used for furniture and baskets and then visit a traditional brick and tile factory. Sa Dec will then appear like a little Venice with its numerous narrow canals and various kinds of traditional activities on the banks. We disembark at the local market for a visit, then proceed to the splendid ancient house of Mr. Huyn Thuy Le, the lover of Marguerite Duras, famous French novelist and inspiration for the film L'Amant-The Lover directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud. We return to the Pandaw for lunch, then cast off for Chau Doc. En route we visit Cu Lao Gien island and a Catholic monastery, La Providence, built in 1875 by the French nuns of Saint Paul de Chartres. Cu Lao Gien became

an important Catholic centre with mission, an orphanage, school, hospice and leprosy centre that could treat 1,000 people. During the Japanese invasion the monastery was abandoned; operations were resumed after 1945 until 1977. Today Cu Lao Gian serves as a retreat for 180 retired nuns taken care of by novices.



Day 6 – Monday, September 12: Chau Doc/Border Crossing

From the main Mekong channel we travel down to Chau Doc jetty where we transfer to small boats to visit a Cham tribal village and a catfish farm. We take a trishaw ride round this fascinating town of fine French-colonial buildings and see its bustling market. Return to the ship by boat for lunch and cast off for the Cambodian border for the usual formalities. This evening we cruise up the broad Mekong channel, which even this far inland (and like the Amazon) is an



international shipping route. We moor overnight just downstream from Phnom Penh.

Day 7 – Tuesday, September 13: Phnom Penh

The capital of Cambodia still retains its French charm, but also has several impressive wats, including Wat Ounalom, Wat Phnom and the newly-painted Wat Lang Ka. Pride of place goes to the Royal Palace and to the spectacular Silver Pagoda, one of the few places in Cambodia where artifacts embodying the brilliance and richness of Khmer culture were preserved by the Khmer Rouge. The National Museum is another highlight, with outstanding displays of Khmer crafts. For the morning excursion we are delighted to have teamed up with The Cyclo Centre Phnom Penh to offer an alternative



to a conventional coach tour. The Cyclo Centre is a charity that provides basic welfare and medical services to cyclo drivers, many of whom are very poor (www.cyclo.org.uk). They provide us with trained drivers with basic English and a good knowledge of the key sights. Those who wish to join along with Judy can do so; you may also choose where you want to go and what you want to see and off you go on your private cyclo for the morning. In the afternoon an optional excursion by coach to the Killing Fields and the Khmer Rouge's grim Tuol Sleng or S21

detention centre situated in the suburbs of the city is available, followed by some relief by shopping at the Russian market or Central market. More happily, Phnom Penh has a lively night life, and we may choose to dine ashore or try one of the capital's many watering holes; a favorites being the Foreign Correspondents' Club.

Day 8 – Wednesday, September 14: Phnom Penh to Tonle River

Early this morning (so don't have too heavy a night clubbing!) we sail the Tonle River which connects Tonle Lake with the



Mekong and Bassac Rivers that merge at Phnom Penh. Our first stop is Preak Dom Bridge, from where we travel by coach to Kompong Chhnang where we can see the rich tapestry of Cambodian rural life. This is a busy rural port town with bustling markets. We make a truly wonderful motor boat excursion into the lakeside wetlands that form the mouth of the river where a stunning variety of birdlife may be seen, and also



the great fish traps. Tonle Sap is one of Cambodia's and Southeast Asia's prime waterbird sites. Once again we return to the ship for lunch time. We make a late afternoon departure from Kompong Chhnang heading towards Phnom Penh, mooring overnight mid river.

Day 9 – Thursday, September 15: Kompong Cham (Mekong River)

We glance by the capital Phnom Penh in the early morning to change pilots, and then stop at the little-known Chong Koh silk weaving village for a morning walk at leisure. We cruise past the Mekong's timeless villages and river life with extensive fishing activities. In the afternoon we stop at Peam Chi Kang village to visit the wat (where the splendid village racing boats are stored) or monastery and school. We have some personal leisure time to explore this peaceful and friendly community.

Day 10 – Friday, September 16: Kompong Cham Area

This morning we journey upriver to the hilltop pre-Angkorian temple of Wat Hanchey. Dating to the 8th century, these ancient brick structures characterize the architecture of the Chenla Empire which predated the glories of Angkor. We sail back downstream over lunch for an exploration of the Kompong Cham Area, traveling by bus to the 12th century Angkorian temple of Wat Nokor. This colorful temple is unique in Cambodia, as a modern Wat is set within the ruins of an ancient temple. We continue to the eco village of Cheungkok supported by the French-Cambodian NGO AMICA and the Kampong Cham orphanage, supported by Pandaw ProBono.

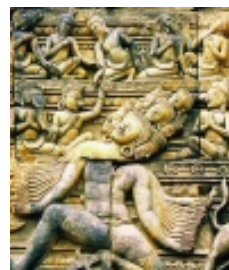


Day 11 – Saturday, September 17: Kompong Cham / Siem Reap

Sadly we bid farewell to our river boat, and the crew, many of whom have become friends over the last week. We transfer at 8am to Siem Reap, stopping at Kampong Thom, enjoying a packed lunch and refreshments before arriving at Siem Reap



around noon. We check into our hotel, and have some time to relax. This afternoon we visit the first of the temples that comprise the lost city of Angkor, undiscovered by Western archaeologists until the late 19th century. Ever since has continued to amaze all who see it for the first time: neither words nor pictures do it justice. Had it been located in the Mediterranean basin it would have been one of the eight wonders of the world. Angkor Wat, the main temple, is the cultural home of the Khmer people and its form, in various guises has appeared and is still on the national flag. The temple itself is visually, architecturally and artistically breathtaking; the pinnacle of Buddhist architecture. Its massive three tiered pyramid crowned by five beehive-like towers (stupa) rising 65 meters from ground level. Angkor Wat is a legacy of the might that was once the Khmer Empire, a detailed history of which has been carved into the many walls of this fortified temple. The temple is accessible by a giant stone causeway across the 200 yard wide moat, itself an incredible feat of engineering, to the west face of the Wat. Sunset will find us taking in the serene (some say romantic) view of Angkor Wat from Bakheng Hill.



Day 12 – Sunday, September 18: Angkor Area

Today continues our exploration of the temples of Angkor. Our exact itinerary will depend on a number of factors, including our timing and temples seen yesterday, weather, and how the day itself progresses. However, we'll likely start with the South Gate of Angkor Thom, then see the Bayon, the tower temple Baphoun, the Terraces of the Elephant and Leper King, and Thommanon. Ta Keo, Ta Promh - the jungle-covered ruin left as is to show how westerners first saw Angkor, Banteay Kdei and Sras Srang will also be part of our day, as well as the heavily decorated Banteay Srei.



Day 13 - Monday, September 19: Angkor area/ In Flight

Although we have been able to see numerous birds and other wildlife over the last two days, today we are guided to sites near Siem Reap for wildlife, with more time devoted to this often neglected aspect of Cambodia. As with the previous two days our guide is from the Sam Veasna Centre, which we visit, named after a dedicated researcher responsible for the protection of important conservation sites in Cambodia, including Sam died at the age of 33 doing fieldwork which included both determining important conservation areas, finding important wildlife populations (including the Eastern Sarus Crane, virtually extirpated in Southeast Asia) and bringing conservation values to local people. While we'll still be taking in cultural aspects of the area, including some temples, for those who prefer to continue with the archeological aspect of Cambodia, or would just like to explore on their own, alternative touring can be arranged. Late tonight we fly out of Siem Reap as we begin our journey back home. (We have retained several hotel rooms so we can clean up before our departure tonight.)



Day 14- Tuesday, September 20: In Flight/ US Gateway City/ Home City

We arrive back in the US today, clear customs and immigration in our gateway city, and fly to our home city, taking with us many memories of our epic journey along the Mekong, the amazing architecture of Angkor, the exotic wildlife and of course the friendship, both shipboard and in the villages and towns, we have encountered.



Upper Deck Cabin: \$2870

Main Deck Cabin: \$2670

Includes all meals from Breakfast Day 3 until Dinner Day 14.