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UNIWORLD
BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISES

Timeless Wonders of Vietnam, Cambodia & the Mekong



15	2
DAYS	COUNTRIES

Two of the most beautiful, historic, and friendly places in all of Asia, dynamic Vietnam and pastoral Cambodia, are intriguing studies in contrast. Each possesses its own unique charm and social traditions, its own tragic history and complex past. Ho Chi Minh City offers a heady mixture of old and new, often surprising visitors with its charm. As the lifeblood of Southeast Asia, the Mekong teems with colorful floating villages. Phnom Penh, Cambodia's thriving capital, is fast-forwarding to the future yet retains a provincial intimacy. And colorful Siem Reap provides the gateway to the vast UNESCO-designated jungle temple complex of Angkor Wat.

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Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi

Day 1: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Arrive at Tan Son Nhat International Airport. If you have arranged a Uniworld arrival transfer, you will be greeted by a Uniworld representative and transferred to the Park Hyatt Saigon. Tonight, consider popping out to explore the lively Ben Thanh Night Market or one of the city's quintessential evening cafés—either choice would mark a splendid start to your adventure.

Day 2: Ho Chi Minh City



Experience how ancient history melds with the boisterous present in Vietnam's largest city, where skyscrapers tower over ancient temples and motorbikes putter along picturesque alleys.

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Dynamic Ho Chi Minh City

A landmark in Vietnamese history is the first destination on your panoramic city tour today, as you travel the city's busy streets, passing elegant buildings and bustling shopping centers. On April 30, 1975, a North Vietnamese army tank crashed through the gates of the building now called the Reunification Palace, symbolizing the downfall of the South Vietnamese government and the end of the Vietnam War. It's a modern structure, commissioned in 1962 by the president of South Vietnam after his own air force tried to kill him by bombing the 19th-century French palace that had stood on the site. As you will see when you step inside, he intended to enjoy living here: It has a cinema and a nightclub—and, not too surprisingly, a spacious bomb shelter. A few blocks away, two monuments from the colonial days still stand: the lofty General Post Office, designed by Gustave Eiffel (of tower fame), and, across the street, twin-towered Notre Dame Cathedral, built entirely with materials shipped from France. Your motorcoach will carry you past other remnants of French colonialism—the Ho Chi Minh Municipal Theater (also known as the Saigon Opera House, built in 1901 and modeled on Paris's Petit Palais) and the City Hall (based on the Hôtel de Ville in Paris)—as well as the contemporary American consulate. But the day includes more than sightseeing: Visit a lacquer showroom to learn a bit about the history and cultural significance of a craft that has been practiced in Vietnam for at least 700 years before enjoying lunch on your own.

Ho Chi Minh City is famous for the excellence of its food, which reflects, inevitably, a certain French influence combined with the unique flavors of the region.

Day 3: Ho Chi Minh City, Transfer to My Tho (Embark), Tien Loi (Ben Tre)



Today's featured excursion provides a fascinating glimpse of the Viet Cong's vast network of incredibly narrow tunnels dating back to the Vietnam War. Following lunch, you'll be taken to the *Mekong Jewel* or the *Mekong Mystique*.

Featured excursions included in your journey

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Vestiges of War—Cú Chi Tunnels

Explore a fascinating aspect of Vietnam's long struggle to free itself from Western control. Begun by the Viet Minh on the outskirts of Saigon in 1945, as shelter from French air raids, these tunnels were expanded in the 1960s by the Viet Cong, who extended them for many miles. A network of booby-trapped tunnels led to underground chambers where people lived—in considerable privation, generally—wounds were treated and children were taught. Only a small stretch of this network is open to the public, but if you're venturesome, you may climb down into a tunnel for an up-close look (and we do mean close—don't expect to stand upright).

Following lunch, you'll be taken to your ship—your elegant home for the next seven nights—and set sail on the beautiful Mekong. Onboard your ship this evening, savor a delicious Vietnamese-themed dinner.

Day 4: Tien Loi (Ben Tre), Vinh Long, Sa Dec



Today, you'll witness the hustle and bustle of delta river life on a unique excursion created exclusively for Uniworld guests, where you can see how local farmers weave sedge hats, decorate bonsais, and more. Back onboard, savor an authentic Vietnamese meal this evening.

Featured excursions included in your journey

Village Life on the Mekong

Step aboard a sampan—the style of this vessel is traditional, but the one you'll board is much more luxurious than those generally used on these waters—and join the locals journeying by water to their daily work and activities. Our first stop is Tien Loi, an island inhabited by just seven families who have settled peacefully on the river. We'll meet locals who make sedge woven hats and decorate bonsais for their gardens. Next, we'll visit a village where the primary business is tree drafting, which fills the island with a unique landscape of "baby trees." Every year, this island produces millions of small plants to be distributed to farms and gardens throughout Vietnam. Finally, try your hand at rowing a boat down an untouched canal.

Day 5: Sa Dec, Gieng Island, Hong Ngu, Cruising the Mekong River

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Following breakfast, continue your journey via sampan, where you'll observe the daily routines of the villagers in Sa Dec. Visit a colorful temple, the home of Mr. Huynh Thuy Le, and then venture to Gieng Island, where you'll experience how a local family makes incense sticks and the conical hat.

Featured excursions included in your journey

Sampans and Romance

Take to Sa Dec's narrow canals just as the locals do. Children frolic in the water, fishermen ply their trade, and women care for their families. From here, you'll head into town, where you will visit a colorful Cao Dai temple on the riverside before making your way to the romantic, lacelike Huynh Thuy Le House, a late-19th-century home made famous by best-selling French novelist Marguerite Duras. Duras spent her teen years in Sa Dec, and her prize-winning novel, The Lover, is said to be based on her doomed love affair with Huynh Thuy Le, the son of a wealthy Chinese landowner.

Next, witness a performance of the "Unicorn Dance" (a southern Vietnamese take on the more widely known Lion Dance) at the Kiến An Cung pagoda. After, you'll sail from bustling Sa Dec to serene Gieng Island to visit a village where hundreds of sampans and rowing boats are made daily. A ride aboard a unique motor cart will bring you through this charming island, where you'll also get to see how one local family makes incense sticks and *non la*, the famous conical hat.

Day 6: Hong Ngu, Cruising the Mekong River, Phnom Penh



Visit the local island village of Hong Ngu, a major producer of the traditional Khmer scarves located not far from the Vietnam-Cambodia border. Since they're woven in many homes around the village, you'll have the opportunity to see the process first-hand. You'll also stop at a local temple dedicated to a unique religion founded in this area of Vietnam, Hoa Hoa.

This afternoon, you'll cross the Vietnamese border, and tomorrow you'll awake in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city, for the next leg of your exciting journey.

Featured excursions included in your journey

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Daily Life on the Great Delta

In the Mekong Delta, hardworking residents live and labor on the water, harvesting what the delta gives them and turning it into products they can sell to earn a living or food they can eat, wasting nothing. Today you'll get a taste of this way of life on the island village of Hong Ngu. In Hong Ngu, many of the villagers weave traditional Khmer scarves to be exported to Cambodia, and you'll have the opportunity to see how the scarves are made. Some villagers are also embroidery artists and display their creations in and around their homes. Next, stop at a temple devoted to Vietnam's homegrown religion Hòa Hảo. Your final stop before returning to the ship: meeting a local family in their home for an authentic look into life on the delta.

Day 7: Phnom Penh



Today, you'll discover the thriving capital of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. It stands at the juncture of three captivating rivers and represents a dizzying blend of architectural styles—French colonial, Khmer, modern, and everything in between. Here, you'll find an alluring riverside esplanade amid numerous bewitching Buddhist temples, palaces, and artifacts.

Featured excursions included in your journey

Cambodia's capital—Phnom Penh

A tuk tuk will whisk you down wide boulevards laid out by French colonial administrators in the 1860s, when Cambodia was part of French Indochina, past old French-influenced buildings, beautiful pagodas, and (with a bit of luck) saffron-robed monks, on your way to the Royal Palace. Spacious grounds—you might notice a resemblance to formal French parterres—are home to a group of structures featuring classic Khmer architecture. Each one has a specific function: The Throne Hall, with its spires and flying celestials, hosts royal coronations, while the Moonlight Pavilion was intended as a venue for dance performances (but is now used for receptions). The famed Temple of the Emerald Buddha, commonly known as the Silver Pagoda, boasts a floor-covering of 5,329 silver tiles. In the center of the pagoda are both an emerald and a gold Buddha statue (the latter of which is studded with nearly 10,000 diamonds). You'll also tour the National Museum, which features an incomparable collection of the nation's archaeological and artistic treasures. Following the museum visit, hop back on a tuk tuk for an orientation tour through Phnom Penh, ending at the pier. Your guide will point out stops of interest along the way to give you ideas on how to spend your afternoon at leisure in town.

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Day 8: Phnom Penh, Cruising the Mekong River, Angkor Ban



Today's featured excursion may be the most profound and memorable experience of your entire journey. You'll learn about the infamous Killing Fields of the Khmer Rouge and visit a former school-turned-prison that is now a genocide museum.

Featured excursions included in your journey

The Killing Fields—Tragedy and Reconciliation in Cambodia

It's hard to reconcile the pastoral serenity of the orchards and rice fields surrounding Choeung Ek with the horrific mass executions that took place here during the brutal reign of the Khmer Rouge, yet the memorial stupa filled with the skulls of Pol Pot's victims tells the tale. These were the Killing Fields, where more than 17,000 men, women and children were slaughtered and buried in mass graves. First, however, they were tortured in Security Prison 21 (also known as S-21), a former high school on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, now the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, which you will also visit today. The guards and staff of the prison were mostly adolescent males—aged 15 to 19—among whom was a young photographer whose job was to document the prisoners. Though many of his photos were destroyed, 6,000 of them remain, displayed on the walls here; as you look at these portraits, you'll see grief, fear, and defiance—and you'll be heartbroken to learn that out of the thousands held here, only seven survived. Those who were killed at Choeung Ek were just a small fraction of the almost two million Cambodians who died in a three-year period between 1975 and the beginning of 1979.

Day 9: Angkor Ban, Wat Hanchey, Kampong Cham

If yesterday was an exploration of Cambodia's dark past, today is a celebration of the country's bright future. You'll meet young children at a local school and friendly villagers in their homes, and have a rare opportunity to receive an unforgettable water blessing from local Buddhist monks.

Featured excursions included in your journey

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Cambodia's Vibrant Cultural Life

Be ready to answer questions when you visit a local school—because the children love to practice their English—and deepen your understanding of Cambodia when you meet villagers in their homes. You may encounter more children when you stop at a beautifully situated temple complex on a hilltop. Wat Hanchey has incredible views of the Mekong River—you get a real sense of just how huge the river is as you see it stretch into the distance, looking more like a great lake than a river. The complex itself is a remarkable mixture of the ancient and the new: An eighth-century Angkor temple and a modern Buddhist temple share the area—along with playful gibbons and enormous, colorfully painted concrete statues. Before your departure you'll receive a traditional water blessing from the local monks—one of the most personal and touching moments you'll experience on this journey.

To mark the end of this special day, and to commemorate your last evening onboard the ship, you'll be treated to a decadent Cambodian-themed dinner. Take your place in the dining room and enjoy delectable dishes prepared in the style of those once served to Cambodian royalty.

Day 10: Kampong Cham (Disembark), Transfer to Siem Reap



You'll disembark in the morning and transfer via executive motorcoach to Siem Reap, the gateway to Angkor, the legendary archaeological site. You will enjoy three nights at the Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort, minutes away from the famed temple complex of Angkor Wat.

Featured excursions included in your journey

City Tour & Artisan Visit by Remork

Climb aboard a remork (motorcycle rickshaw) for a relaxing tour of the streets of Siem Reap, with stops at several places of cultural significance along the way. See the 12 statues of Angkorian Army chiefs that stand in the Royal Palace Park and experience the colorful atmosphere of Pub Street before visiting a beloved monastery where locals and visitors alike flock to pray for good fortune, longevity, and a bright future. Next, your remork will whisk you away to the the workshops at Artisans Angkor, which promote the resurrection of traditional Khmer crafts. Hand-carved sculptures, lacquer work, silk paintings, and more—all locally made by hand in the traditional way—are available for purchase at the shop.

Day 11: Siem Reap

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Today is a bucket list kind of day as you explore the ancient temples of Angkor Wat, a gigantic religious complex that is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Featured excursions included in your journey

Angkor Wat Temple

Every aspect of Angkor Wat had religious meaning to its builders 900 years ago: the great rectangular moat, the main gate facing the west, the towers topped with stone lotuses, the huge smiling stone heads, the layout of the lanes, and buildings. The largest religious monument in the world, magnificent Angkor Wat is the single most recognizable landmark in Cambodia. It is simply breathtaking in both size and scope and boasts the longest continuous bas-relief in the world. Although Angkor Wat is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its importance is so immeasurable that several other conservation organizations have been enlisted to help ensure its protection. And yet, Angkor Wat is just one piece of this enormous complex at the heart of the ancient Khmer Empire (which ruled this region between the ninth and 12th centuries). It was part of a roughly 250-square-mile (64,749-hectare) city that has largely disappeared into the jungle, though excavation efforts are ongoing (recent laser imaging has revealed another, even larger nearby city under the jungle floor that was linked to the temple city).

Day 12: Siem Reap



Today you will enter the spectacular remnants of Angkor Thom, the royal city. Built during the heyday of the Khmer dynasty in the 12th century, this extraordinary complex of Hindu and Buddhist monuments was once lost to the world for many years, hidden under dense jungle vines.

Featured excursions included in your journey

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Apsara Show and Dinner

After an exciting day of sightseeing, you'll get to experience an exciting Apsara dance show in the theater at your hotel. Apsara is the traditional Khmer dance form that tells stories and conveys messages using ornate costumes, graceful movements, codified facial expressions, and distinctive hand and foot positions. The many Apsara figures that adorn Angkor and pre-Angkor temples you've just visited testify to the dance form's long and esteemed history. After, enjoy a delicious dinner of Cambodian specialties at a local venue.

South Gate Angkor Thom, Bayon, and Ta Prohm

Today you will enter the spectacular remnants of Angkor Thom, the royal city. Once a huge, square city, Angkor Thom was founded in the 12th century by King Jayavarman VII after his people's previous capital had been overrun by the Chams. You can still see the defensive measures that surrounded the city—in fact, you'll enter through one, crossing over the moat and passing between the stone figures lining the lane leading to the intricately decorated south gate in the great wall around Angkor Thom. The king's palace, made of wood, has long since vanished, but the ruins that remain are astonishing, including the pyramidal temple of Bayon, with the enormous carved heads that have become an iconic symbol of the Angkor archaeological area.

You'll have some time for lunch on your own before heading to the amazing "jungle temple" of Ta Prohm. Unlike the other Angkor temples, which have been painstakingly excavated and restored, Ta Prohm has been left almost as it was found. Massive trees grow like magic out of stone walls and roofs, their tentacle-like roots pouring over doorways and stretching across courtyards. This man made wonder has been reclaimed by the jungle over the course of many centuries, and exploring it is sure to bring out the adventurer in you.

Day 13: Siem Reap, Fly to Hanoi



Enjoy free time in Siem Reap before your included flight to Hanoi. Then, check in to your luxury accommodations, the Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi Hotel.

Day 14: Hanoi

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Hanoi's elegant boulevards are lined with trees and handsome buildings, as you'll see on today's fascinating tour of the city. At the same time, this lively cultural center—Vietnam's capital city—is replete with bustling streets, food vendors, museums, and historic sites, making for an intriguing study in contrasts that rivals any other metropolitan destination.

Featured excursions included in your journey

Hanoi City Tour

Spend the day exploring a city some call Asia's most beautiful. You'll visit a complex honoring Ho Chi Minh, founder of modern Vietnam. Also on the agenda: the Temple of Literature, originally built as a Confucian temple in 1070 AD. Six years later on the same grounds, Vietnam's first university was founded. Today, you can experience the tranquility of its beautiful gardens and pavilions. You can see another aspect of Vietnam's history if you step into one of the dank cells at the notorious "Hanoi Hilton," as Hoa Lo, a French colonial-era prison, was known to the American pilots who were held there as prisoners of war during the Vietnam War.

Day 15: Hanoi



Check out of your luxury hotel. If you have arranged a Uniworld departure transfer, you will be transferred to the airport for your flight home.

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