

MEKONG RIVER CRUISE

7 days on RV Mekong Prestige II
March 11, 2017 - 23 Days



a world to experience



Fares Per Person:

\$8,795 double/twin

\$11,725 single

> Please add 0.3% GST.

> **Main Deck** on ship — Fares are quoted above.

> **Upper Deck** — add \$200 per person D/T; \$270 single

> **Early Bookers:** \$300 discount on first 6 seats; \$150 next 6

> **Experience Points:** Earn 173 points from this tour.

Redeem **173 points** if you book by **December 7**.

tour
a more intimate travel experience



Includes

- Transportation to/from Vancouver Airport
- Flight from Vancouver to Siem Reap, Cambodia
- Current air taxes, fees and fuel surcharges
- 13 nights hotel accommodation and taxes
- 7 nights stateroom on board Mekong Prestige II
- Cruise gratuities and cruise taxes
- Angkor temples including Angkor Wat
- Tuk tuk ride from hotel to Ta Prohm for sunrise
- Apsara dance performance
- Boat trip to Kampong Chhnang floating village
- Wat Kampong Leu & Vipassana Dhura Pagodas
- Ox drawn carriage ride
- Silk weaving workshop and visit with students at a school in Koh Chong
- Khmer Apsara dancing show
- Tour of Phnom Penh including Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda and National Museum
- Tour of Tan Chau with fishing farm, silk and woven mats workshop, and rickshaw ride
- Tour of Sa Dec with Marguerite Duras' home and Caodaist Temple
- Boat tour to French Gothic Cathedral in Cai Be
- Flight from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi and return
- Walking tour of Hanoi landmarks
- Driving tour of Hanoi
- Hanoi History Museum or Ethnology Museum
- Vietnamese traditional Water Puppet Show
- Sampan river trip through rice paddies
- Tam Coc Caves
- Halong Bay cruise on a traditional junk for one day with overnight on board and Tai Chi lesson
- Tour of Ho Chi Minh City with Thien Hau Pagoda, FITO Museum and Reunification Palace
- Dinner cruise on Saigon River on a junk
- Ho Chi Minh Cooking School
- Cu Chi Tunnels
- Flight from Ho Chi Minh City to Shanghai
- Dinner cruise on Huangpu River
- Tour of Suzhou with Lingering Garden and silk mill
- Cruise on the Grand Canal in Suzhou
- Shanghai Museum, Emerald Exhibition Centre and Ming Dynasty Yuyuan Garden
- Flight from Shanghai to Vancouver
- Group Visa for Vietnam
- Luggage handling at hotels
- Gratuities to ship staff, local guides and drivers
- Knowledgeable Wells Gray tour director
- **51 meals:** 21 breakfasts, 15 lunches, 15 dinners

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WELLS GRAY TOURS
a world to experience

RV MEKONG PRESTIGE II

The Mekong Prestige II was built in 2014 and was designed specifically to serve on the Mekong River with a shallow draft of only 1.6 metres. She has 32 staterooms and carries only 64 passengers, so this is a very intimate cruise. The staterooms have an average size of 22 square metres (236 square feet) and are located on Main Deck (included in tour fare quoted) or Upper Deck (\$200 per person extra). Sun Deck is the topmost. The ship is 68 metres long and 13 metres wide. The dining room on Upper Deck serves breakfast and lunch buffet style, and dinner with a three course menu. Local and Asian entrees are featured along with international favourites. Beer, wine, soft drinks, coffee and tea are complimentary with lunch and dinner, and a full bar is available where you can purchase other beverages.

Facilities include a pool, spa, internet, boutique shop, bubble bath pool, lounge and several bars. Electricity is 220 volts, so a converter and adapter to North American plugs is needed. English and German are the official languages on board, and shore excursions are conducted by an English-speaking guide. Laundry service is offered for a fee. The currency on board is the US dollar. All indoor areas are non-smoking and there is a designated area of the Sun Deck for smoking. Gratuities on board and for local guides throughout the tour are included. Entertainment is offered in the Panorama Lounge and includes dances and singing by local groups, cooking demonstrations, and lectures. Movies are shown here also, or you can choose from a large DVD library for personal viewing in your stateroom.

Itinerary

Saturday, March 11:

Transportation is provided to Vancouver and we stay overnight at the Fairmont Hotel in Vancouver Airport.

Sunday, March 12:

Meals: B

After breakfast at the Fairmont, we go downstairs and check in at China Eastern Airlines. We cross the International Date Line (losing one day) and change planes in Shanghai, China.

Monday, March 13:

Our flight arrives in **Siem Reap, Cambodia**, at 10 pm. Our coach and guide meet us and we drive to Saem Siem Reap Hotel for a three night stay.

Tuesday, March 14:

Meals: B

This is a day at leisure to relax and do as you wish, after the long flight from Vancouver. The hotel offers a restaurant, lounge, and large salt water pool surrounded by fragrant frangipani trees. The National Museum and night market are nearby.

Wednesday, March 15:

Meals: B,L,D

Siem Reap is home to the **Temples of Angkor**, built from 879 to 1191 AD when the Khmer civilization was at its height. They represent an astonishing and enduring architectural achievement. From the great citadel of Angkor, the kings of the Khmer empire ruled over a vast domain that reached from what is now southern Vietnam to Yunan, China, and westward to the Bay of Bengal. The structures we see at Angkor today, more than 100 temples in all, are the surviving remains

of a grand social and administrative metropolis whose other buildings - palaces, public buildings, and houses - were all built of wood and are long since decayed and gone. We wake before dawn and take a "tuk-tuk" ride to visit the jungle-entwined temple, **Ta Prohm**, at sunrise. Dawn is one of the most beautiful and haunting times to visit the temples, whose ancient sandstone blocks are gilded gold by the early morning rays. We go back to the hotel for breakfast then return to admire the rest of Angkor. Starting with the magnificent **Angkor Wat**, the largest Khmer temple and finest example of Angkorian art and architecture, we proceed to **Angkor Thom**. This royal fortified city was built by King Jayavarman VII who reigned from 1181 to 1201. The city has five impressive gates and a moat 100 metres wide. We enter via the imposing South Gate, topped with the four serenely smiling faces of Avalokiteshvara. Next, we visit **Bayon Temple**, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King. You may also wish to watch the sunset at Pre Rup Temple. After dinner, we enjoy the spectacular **Apsara Dance Performance**.

Thursday, March 16:

Meals: B,L,D

It is a short drive from the hotel to the pier at Phnom Krom. **Lake Tonlé Sap** is a large shallow lake which seasonally expands to 250 km long with a depth ranging from one metre to 10 metres. **Welcome aboard RV Mekong Prestige II** and settle into your stateroom for the week-long voyage down the mighty Mekong River. Lunch is served and we cast off for the afternoon crossing

of Tonlé Sap. Note: If the lake is too low, alternative arrangements will be made by coach or speed boat to reach the ship.

Friday, March 17: *Meals: B,L,D*
We arrive at **Kampong Chhnang**, downstream from the outlet of Lake Tonlé Sap. This is a busy rural port town with bustling markets. The life of the entire population is connected to the Tonlé Sap River with local people using the canals which criss-cross the town. We go ashore to stroll through the scenic market and ride on local boats to visit the authentic floating village. Back on Prestige, we have lunch while sailing towards **Kampong Tralach**. We travel by coach to discover the very charming Vihara of the Wat Kampong Leu Pagoda which has beautiful wall paintings and frescoes. Then we ride by ox-drawn carriage (and coach) to **Oudong** which was the capital city of Cambodia between 1618 and 1866. Erected on a hilltop, there are numerous stupas dating to the last Khmer Kings. We see the Vipassana Dhura Pagoda, a place of meditation for Buddhist monks.

Saturday, March 18: *Meals: B,L,D*
In **Koh Chong**, we stroll through this silk weaving village and visit a local workshop and a pagoda, and meet pupils in a primary school. During lunch, we cruise to **Phnom Penh** where the Tonlé Sap River meets the Mekong River. This afternoon, we explore Wat Phnom, built in 1373, after which the city was named. Dinner is on board, followed by a traditional **Khmer Apsara dancing show**.

Sunday, March 19: *Meals: B,L,D*
The capital city of Cambodia still retains its old French colonial architecture in riverside streets. A morning tour includes the **Royal Palace** and Silver Pagoda. The National Museum is another highlight, with outstanding displays of Khmer crafts. An afternoon excursion is arranged to the former High School which was converted to a detention centre under the Red Khmer's rule between 1975 and 1979. There is a shopping opportunity at the Russian Market before we return to the ship.

Monday, March 20: *Meals: B,L,D*
Leaving Phnom Penh, we cruise past the Mekong's timeless villages and river life with extensive fishing activities, then cross the border to **Vietnam**.

Tuesday, March 21: *Meals: B,L,D*
We arrive at **Tan Chau**, a remote small town on the Mekong River. We ride in small boats to visit a fishing farm, then go ashore to see a local workshop making woven mats, and take a short walk

to a silk workshop. A rickshaw ride through this fascinating town takes us back to the pier.

Wednesday, March 22: *Meals: B,L,D*
The French writer Marguerite Duras spent parts of her childhood in **Sa Dec**, a sprawling busy town on the Mekong Delta. We see the house that is a small museum for her novel, *The Lover*. We also visit a **Caodaist Temple** and take a stroll through the colourful local market. During the afternoon, we cruise through Vinh Long Province, located in the middle of the Delta region, between the two branches of the Mekong. In **Cai Be**, we tour on local boats to see the French Gothic Cathedral. We walk along the river bank and visit a manufacturer of rice paper and coconut sweets. A traditional music show follows dinner.

Thursday, March 23: *Meals: B,D*
We dock at **My Tho** and say farewell to Mekong Prestige. A transfer is provided to Saigon Airport and we fly to **Hanoi**, Vietnam's bustling colonial capital. Hanoi is described as an old-fashioned city in style, but is punctuated by the endless flow of mopeds and commerce. It is a city of peaceful lakes, tree-lined boulevards, and oriental pagodas. An area called the Old French Quarter has crumbling houses crammed into narrow alleyways that are still named after the goods that were traded there - Silk Street, Gold Street, even Fried Fish Street! Our accommodation for three nights is at The Ann Hotel. This afternoon, there is an orientation walk with our Vietnam guide, visiting Hanoi's main attractions: the Opera House, Old Quarter, Hoan Kiem Lake and Ngoc Son Temple. Tonight, savour a welcome dinner of authentic Vietnamese cuisine .

Friday, March 24: *Meals: B,L*
Hanoi is an eclectic mix that offers something for everyone. Our city tour by coach goes to some key sites: Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum and stilt house, the One Pillar Pagoda, the Presidential Palace, the Temple of Literature, the Quan Thanh Temple, the sedate Tran Quoc Pagoda and West Lake, and a museum (choose between the History Museum and the Ethnology Museum). In the evening, enjoy a traditional **Water Puppet Performance** – a unique Vietnamese art form hailing from South-east Asia's wet-rice culture.

Saturday, March 25: *Meals: B,L*
This morning, we drive to **Ninh Binh**. The first stop is at Hoa Lu, the first royal capital of Vietnam's centralized feudal state from 968 to 1009 led by three dynasties of Dinh and Le. Then we drive through the countryside to Tam Coc and take a sampan

on a river through the rice paddies to the sacred **Tam Coc Caves**. Enormous limestone karsts jut out from the green rice fields giving rise to this place's nickname, "Halong on Land". We float through three natural caves.

Sunday, March 26:

Meals: B,L,D

Leaving Hanoi, we journey east to Vietnam's greatest natural wonder, **Halong Bay**. We board a beautiful traditional wooden junk and spend a full day and night cruising among the bay's 3,000 magnificent limestone islets. We also visit a floating village and a huge cave filled with eye-catching rock formations. In the evening, when the boat is anchored in the middle of the stunning lagoon, we enjoy a wonderful seafood meal and later there is an opportunity for fishing from the side of the boat. We stay overnight on board.

Monday, March 27:

Meals: B,D

As the sun rises over Halong Bay, join a **Tai Chi lesson** for some morning exercise. Later, we explore a beautiful limestone grotto, then relax on the junk while cruising back to the dock. A transfer is provided to Hanoi airport and we fly to **Ho Chi Minh City** (also known as Saigon), the largest and busiest city in Vietnam with a population of 8 million people. It is a city of amazing contrasts: elegant new international hotels, exclusive restaurants, and trendy bars side-by-side with roadside noodle stalls, street children and vociferous cyclo drivers. There are elegant colonial French boulevards and buildings, the Cathedral and the riverfront, next to ramshackle wooden shops. We stay two nights at the Bay Saigon Hotel.

Tuesday, March 28:

Meals: B,L,D

On our full-day tour of Ho Chi Minh City, we learn about its turbulent past and get a glimpse into the fascinating variety the city has to offer. In the morning, we head to Cho Lon, the city's Chinatown district, and discover the markets and shops of the area, and also visit **Thien Hau Pagoda** which is dedicated to the goddess of the sea. Next, visit the **FITO Museum**, known as the first Museum of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine. With nearly 3,000 items relevant to traditional Vietnamese medicine, the FITO museum is a fascinating place to explore Vietnamese culture. This afternoon, we see the **Reunification Palace** that was the former residence of the President of South Vietnam until April 30, 1975. Next, visit Notre Dame Cathedral and the Central Post Office that are

some of the best examples of French colonial architecture. Finally, we enjoy a dinner cruise on an Indochina junk on Saigon River while admiring the skyline of this cosmopolitan city.

Wednesday, March 29:

Meals: B,L

We drive to the **Ho Chi Minh agricultural villages** and see buffalo, cows, fish, prawns, and mushrooms. Then you can try your hand at being a farmer, either in the rice paddies or a garden. At lunch, a master chef presents a **cooking show** in front of us and we dine on his creations. This afternoon, we explore the infamous **Cu Chi Tunnels**, an underground labyrinth of passageways used by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War (or "American War" as it is called there) as protection against American air raids. If you are inclined, you can even crawl through sections of the tunnels to better understand what life was like for the Vietnamese soldiers during wartime. The rest of the day is leisure time to explore Ho Chi Minh City on your own, or relax at the hotel. We keep our rooms until midnight, then go to the airport. Our flight on China Eastern leaves at 2 a.m. (this flight operates only once a day).

Thursday, March 30:

Meals: B,D

The flight arrives in **Shanghai** at 7 a.m. and we go straight to the Wyndham Bund East Hotel which has been specially booked for early check-in. Today is free time until evening when we take a **dinner cruise on the Huangpu River**. On one bank is The Bund, a landmark of Shanghai. Lining the boulevard of the waterfront are grandiose western-style buildings dating to the early 19th century. On the other side is the cosmopolitan skyline of the new Shanghai including the soaring landmarks of the Shanghai Tower, completed in 2015 and 2nd tallest in the world, and the Oriental Pearl Tower.

Friday, March 31:

Meals: B,L,D

We spend the day in **Suzhou**, known as the "Garden City" due to its many classical gardens, renowned for their charming natural beauty and harmonious construction. First, we stroll through the **Lingering Garden** which is among the finest gardens in China. Suzhou is also known as "Venice of the East" because of the many canals, ponds and streams. We take a cruise along the **Grand Canal** to view life along China's golden waterway in its heyday. Then, visit a silk spinning mill and learn how silk is created from mulberry-munching

silkworms to produce the finest thread and cloth. Before heading back to Shanghai, we take a walk along **Tiger Hill**, one of Suzhou's scenic attractions containing the Tiger Pagoda and Sword Pool.

Saturday, April 1:

Meals: B,L,D

This morning, we visit the **Shanghai Museum** to see ancient Chinese art, furniture and jade, and the Emerald Exhibition Centre. This afternoon, we walk along the famous **Bund**, a kilometre-long boulevard beside the Huangpu River. Lined by colonial European architecture, this area captures the western influence of the old days. We continue to

the bustling shopping district of Nanjing Road, then to the **Ming Dynasty Yuyuan Garden** which is considered one of the four greatest Chinese gardens. After our farewell dinner, we go to Shanghai Pudong Airport for our China Eastern flight which leaves just before midnight. We regain the day lost as we fly east across the Date Line and arrive in Vancouver at 7 pm. Accommodation is again at the Fairmont YVR.

Sunday, April 2:

Meals: B

Transportation is provided back to Victoria.

Tour Notes:

Currency & Expenses: The US dollar is widely accepted in Cambodia, Vietnam and China. You can change US dollars to local currency at banks or exchange offices. Gratuities have been included for all group meals, guides, drivers and the ship's staff. As this tour has been planned and priced 8 months before departure, it is possible that exchange fluctuations could affect the fare, in which case you will be notified of the increase or decrease. Airlines can add fuel surcharges or taxes can increase anytime.

Documentation: A passport is required, valid 6 months after return date. A visa is required for Cambodia and can be obtained individually online in advance (\$30 fee). A visa is required in advance for Vietnam and Wells Gray Tours will apply for a group visa; the \$110 per person fee is included in the tour fare. A visa is not required for China, as the stay in Shanghai is less than 72 hours.

Triples: Triples are not available on this tour due to the bed layout on the ship.



Activity: This tour is rated as Activity Level 2 but there are some days that could be rated as Level 3. Please be aware that some days could be rigorous activity, but you may be able to opt out. It will be necessary to climb many stairs, walk on uneven surfaces, walk at least a kilometre, and stand for an extended time on walking tours, if you are going to participate in all activities and see everything in this itinerary. Some riverside villages do not have docks, and the boat pulls up to the river bank for you to get off. This tour is not suitable for anyone requiring a walker. There can be long walks in the large airports and you are urged to request assistance at check-in if this could be a concern. If you are not able to participate in Activity Level 2, Wells Gray Tours recommends that you bring a companion to assist you. The tour director, drivers and local guides have many responsibilities, so please do not expect them, or your fellow travellers, to provide ongoing assistance.

Tour Policies

Payments: A deposit of \$1,000 per person is requested at time of booking and the balance is due December 7, 2016.

Discounts: Early bookers receive \$300 discount on first 6 seats and \$150 on next 6 seats for booking early with deposit. The discount is not offered after December 7.

Cancellation Policy: Up to August 31, 2016, your tour payments will be refunded less an administrative charge of \$50 per person. From September 1 to December 7, 2016, the cancellation charge is \$400 per person. From December 8, 2016 to January 5, 2017, the cancellation charge is 40% of the tour fare. From January 6 to February 7, 2017, the cancellation charge is 80% of the tour fare. After February 7, there is no refund.

Fare Changes: Changes to currency exchange rates or taxes and surcharges from airlines and other tour suppliers can occur at any time and are beyond the control of Wells Gray Tours, therefore Wells Gray Tours reserves the right to increase fares due to such changes up until the time of departure.

Travel Insurance: A Comprehensive Insurance policy is available through Wells Gray Tours and coverage is provided by Travel Guard. Policies purchased at deposit include a waiver of the pre-existing condition clause for medical and cancellation claims, otherwise policies can be purchased no later than at final payment. Please contact us for details.

Tour 25: This is a Tour 25 departure, meaning capacity of tour is limited to 25 participants or less, a more intimate travel experience.

Photo Credit: Mekong Prestige II

e-points: This tour earns 173 e-points. Each time you travel on a Wells Gray tour, you earn Experience Points, or e-points. One e-point equals \$1. Redeem your points on select tours or accumulate enough points to earn a free tour! Redemptions offered until December 7.

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