

# MAGICAL MEKONG

A WWF Expedition with Stuart Chapman, Representative,  
WWF-Greater Mekong Program/October 19–27, 2017

Optional Angkor Wat Extension/October 27–29, 2017



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit Tram Chim National Park, where WWF has taken a unique approach to preserving and restoring the park's natural state.
- In Phnom Penh, Cambodia's bustling capital, discover its rich French colonial past and visit the local WWF office.
- Explore Tonle Sap Lake, one of the richest freshwater fishing grounds in the world and home to entire floating villages.
- Cruise in comfort aboard the newly launched 205-foot Aqua Mekong, with options to pedal and paddle portions of the trip.
- Join the optional Siem Reap/Angkor Wat extension to marvel at the sprawling complex of ancient temples.

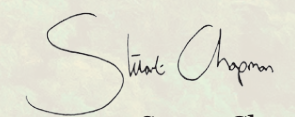
Dear Friends,

I invite you to join me on a fascinating Mekong River adventure through the southern delta of Vietnam and Cambodia. These countries hold a special place in my heart. I am proud to have worked in the Greater Mekong since 2008, when I moved to Laos to take the position of Conservation Director for WWF's Greater Mekong Program. This region holds irreplaceable riches—ranging from rare wildlife in spectacular natural landscapes to communities with distinct cultural heritages.

Beginning in Saigon, we will cruise towards the border with Cambodia. Along the way we will visit Tram Chim National Park, with tremendous biodiversity, including over 230 bird species and 130 fish species. In Phnom Penh, we will visit cultural sites and WWF's office before continuing on to Tonle Sap Lake. Tonle Sap Lake is home to one of the last refuges in Southeast Asia for large water birds like spot-billed pelicans, milky stork, black headed ibis and the elusive masked finfoot. In Siem Reap we will complete our cruise or join the optional Angkor Wat extension.

I look forward to personally introducing you to this spectacular river, the people who depend on it for their way of life, the wildlife that rely on its waters, and my colleagues across the region working to protect its future.

Sincerely,



Stuart Chapman



## WWF Expert Trip Leader

As Representative for the WWF-Greater Mekong Program, **Stuart Chapman** delights in sharing his deep experience and unparalleled passion for the Mekong River—and the people and animals it supports—with others. A graduate of the first professional conservation course in the UK, Stuart has parlayed his childhood ambition of working in nature into a dynamic career with WWF of more than

two decades. Spending time with Stuart may turn up stories from training park rangers in a Chinese panda reserve early in his career to cracking down on illegal wildlife trafficking as head of the WWF-UK Species Program. Since 2008, Stuart has focused his considerable conservation skills on protecting the fascinating-yet-fragile ecosystem of the Mekong region, as well as establishing a new WWF office in Myanmar in 2014.

## ITINERARY

### Day 1, October 19: Arrive Saigon, Vietnam

Upon arrival in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), you will transfer to the Park Hyatt Saigon for an overnight stay.

This afternoon enjoy an introductory tour of Vietnam’s commercial capital, a city of extraordinary energy. Start at the Reunification Palace, which remains almost exactly as it was during the “Fall of Saigon.” Continue to the Notre Dame Basilica, then visit the post office to see the exquisite hand-painted maps. Stop at the War Remnants Museum, which houses an important though graphic exhibit. This evening enjoy a celebratory welcome dinner and meet your fellow travelers.

*Overnight Park Hyatt Saigon (D)*

### Day 2, October 20: Saigon/Mekong River

This morning is at leisure. This afternoon we will depart on an hour and a half vehicle transfer to My Tho dock. Upon arrival, we will board the Aqua Mekong for our seven-night cruise. Settle into your elegantly appointed river-facing room and begin one of life’s most memorable and photogenic adventures. Ascend to the Observation Deck, to take in the view of the swaying palms and bustling waterways of My Tho. Over the coming days, the Aqua Mekong sails along one of the world’s great rivers, the Mekong, towards remote natural and cultural destinations visited by only a few.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong (B,L,D)*



AQUA MEKONG

### Day 3, October 21: Mekong River (Sa Dec)

Though we are in the heart of Vietnam, French colonial architecture abounds as we step back in time with a tour on foot around the river town of Sa Dec. Discover the fresh produce and exotic spices on sale at the local market as we make our way to the colonial house once occupied by the French writer Marguerite Duras. You may also choose to spend some time shopping at the Binh Thanh mat weaving market.

This afternoon visit the Mekong village of My An Hung. Walk through verdant plantations and be welcomed into a local’s home to taste local fruits and hear traditional folk songs and enjoy dances performed by the villagers.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong (B,L,D)*

### Day 4, October 22: Mekong River (Bassac River/ Tram Chim National Park/Chau Doc)

This morning we will visit Tram Chim National Park, one of the most important remaining expanses of wetlands in Vietnam,



DAVID P. FRAZIER / DANITA DELMONT

where WWF is working to restore natural water flows, sustain fisheries and protect wildlife. Board skiffs for a 45 minute ride into the canal that leads to the entrance to the reserve. At the entrance we will disembark the skiffs and board local boats to explore the reserve. If you wish, there is an 18 km bike ride back to the boat through some beautiful vistas.

Back on board the Aqua Mekong, sail to the village of Chau Doc. Head to the shore by skiff and then by road to Sam Mountain, the highest point in the Mekong Delta. Make the easy climb to the mountaintop for captivating views of the surrounding rice fields. Return to the boat to relax, enjoy a traditional Khmer massage or learn to cook Mekong inspired dishes while we cross the border into Cambodia.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong*

*(B,L,D)*

### **Day 5, October 23: Mekong River (Bassac River/ Vinh Xuong Border)**

This morning, cruise north toward the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. This area is known for a series of “silk islands”



*As much as any other place on Earth, the Mekong captures the imperative of finding ways to meet the needs of people without destroying the planet that sustains us all.*

**Carter Roberts**  
President and CEO, WWF



AQUA MEKONG

along the river. Visit one of these villages to wander among the weavers looms and learn how silk is made. We may also explore the riverbank by bicycle, riding past Buddhist temples and thatch houses perched on wooden stilts. After lunch onboard, return to the shore and head towards the tamarind trees of Preah Prosop. This remote village has changed very little over the last several centuries.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong*

*(B,L,D)*

### **Day 6, October 24: Mekong River (Tonle Sap River/ Phnom Penh)**

This morning visit the WWF offices in Phnom Penh to learn about the important conservation work in the region. Set out by motorized tuk-tuks to take in the city’s sites, including the 1866 Royal Palace and the Silver Pagoda, housing the 17th century Emerald Buddha, a life-size gold Maitreya Buddha adorned with 9,584 diamonds. Continue to the National Museum of Cambodia, housing the world’s largest collection of Khmer art.

You may also tour Tuol Sleng, preserved as the Museum of Genocide—a chilling reminder of a horrible period. Head outside the city to the infamous “Killing Fields” at Choeung Ek where 17,000 people were detained, tortured and later exterminated. Dinner this evening includes a traditional Khmer Aspara dance performance.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong*

*(B,L,D)*



KEREN SU/DANTIA DELMONT

To register or if you have questions please contact Eliza Quanbeck at (212) 627-1950 or [equanbeck@absolutetravel.com](mailto:equanbeck@absolutetravel.com).

**Day 7, October 25: (Phnom Penh/Koh Chen/Kampong Chhnang)**

This morning visit Koh Chen, a silversmith village known for its fine craftsmanship. Keep an eye out for their famous silver bowls, regularly chosen by Cambodia's King as gifts for visiting dignitaries. Later today, visit the village of Kampong Chhnang or the "Port of Pottery", named for archeological findings dating back to the 6th century.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong (B,L,D)*



**Day 8, October 26: Mekong River (Kampong Chhnang/Tonle Sap Lake)**

Explore the remote communities around Tonle Sap Lake, the largest body of freshwater in Southeast Asia. A designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the lake is one of the richest inland fishing grounds in the world. Visit the village of Chhnok Tru and explore their ice factory and learn from the locals what it's like to live in a town where schools, churches, pagodas, karaoke bars and police stations all float.

After lunch, tour the floating village of Moat Khla (accessible only by water) and attend a Buddhist blessing ceremony.

*Overnight Aqua Mekong (B,L,D)*

**Day 9, October 27: Mekong River (Tonle Sap Lake/Siem Reap)**

Early today we'll be joined by a local WWF representative to set off by skiff into the Prek Toal Core Bird Reserve, one of the largest waterbird colonies in Southeast Asia. It is also the last refuge in Southeast Asia for large water birds like the spot-billed pelican, milky stork, black headed ibis and the elusive masked finfoot. Return to the Aqua Mekong and sail for the last leg of our cruise. Say our goodbyes, disembark from the Aqua Mekong and transfer to Siem Reap. Upon arrival you will be transferred to the airport for your international departure or join the optional Angkor Wat extension to marvel at the sprawling complex of ancient temples.

*(B)*

*The Greater Mekong is truly extraordinary because its mosaic of islands, flooded forests, and deep pools has given rise to a rich biodiversity and perhaps the strongest link between a river and a people anywhere on the planet.*

Stuart Chapman,  
WWF-Greater Mekong  
Representative



## Optional Siem Reap/Angkor Wat Extension

**October 27: Mekong River (Tonle Sap Lake/Siem Reap)**

Following disembarkation from the Aqua Mekong, transfer to the Park Hyatt Siem Reap and check-in for our two-night stay. Siem Reap is home to Angkor Wat, once the cradle of a highly complex civilization that controlled the greater part of Southeast Asia for four centuries. Erected before 1150 AD, this temple-complex is unquestionably one of the wonders of the ancient world, and represents one of the most intricate and dramatic religious structures ever conceived by the human mind.

This evening, learn about Angkor Wat with one of the world's leading academics on the archaeology and reconstruction of the temples, Dr. Damian Evans, who will bring these ancient wonders to life, as a faculty member of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney and founding member and Deputy Director of the Greater Angkor Project.

*Overnight Park Hyatt Siem Reap (D)*

**October 28: Siem Reap/Angkor Wat**

This morning begins at Ta Prohm, a temple engulfed by vines and tree roots over the course of centuries. Stop by the temple of Ta Nei and Srah Srang, for a light breakfast. End the morning at Ta Keo temple, admiring its five-tiered pyramid structure.

After lunch in Siem Reap, travel by road to the Victory Gate of Angkor Thom, continuing on to Bayon at the center of the ancient city. A short drive from Siem Reap, visit a colorful contemporary pagoda to understand the importance of Buddhism in these rural communities. Continue to the Western Baray. An impressive engineering feat, this man-made reservoir was integral to the Angkorian rice irrigation system which we will explore by boat. This evening, relax in a private country villa in a tranquil village north of the Western Baray. Enjoy sunset drinks before a special dinner with a traditional Khmer orchestra.

*Overnight Park Hyatt Siem Reap (B,D)*



## WHAT TO EXPECT

*The physical activity level is moderate on this expedition, with the option to participate in more strenuous activities including biking and kayaking. Travelers must be able to walk unassisted a minimum of 2 miles over rough and uneven ground, as well as tolerate daily active excursions in potentially hot and humid conditions. We also visit cultural sites that include climbing steep and uneven stone steps to the top in order to view the surrounding landscapes. Travel by vehicle and boat may be over variable conditions that can sometimes be quite bumpy.*

## October 29: Depart Siem Reap

Enjoy a sunrise tour to witness the breathtaking view of Angkor Wat temple, the best place for photography. Continue to explore the central complex and bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat, one of travel's remaining great adventures before returning to the hotel for a late breakfast. Relax the rest of the morning or choose to visit local artisans and galleries. After touring, you will be transferred to the airport for our international departure flights home. (B)

*Day to day touring may evolve and change. A final program will be issued prior to departure.*

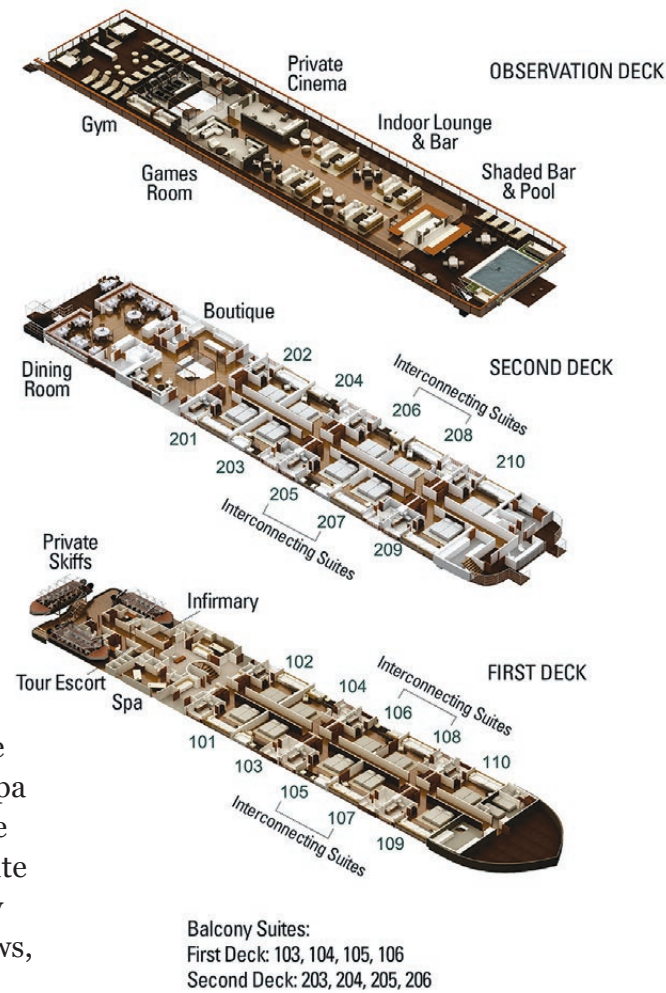


## ABOUT THE AQUA MEKONG

The Aqua Mekong has 20 suites, but our group will not exceed 30 guests to provide an intimate expedition.

The entire experience is reminiscent of staying at a boutique hotel, with modern amenities, and excellent dining and spa facilities. There are magical views of the Mekong from the observation deck as well as a plunge pool, sun deck, private theater, and indoor and outdoor lounges. All the superbly designed and spacious suites have floor-to-ceiling windows, air-conditioning and en suite bathrooms.

Equipped with four private skiffs and expert guides, the boat will serve as our home base for onshore excursions to venture into the mangroves, explore narrow tributaries, and visit remote villages. These excursions will provide unique experiences in lesser visited areas along this scenic and fascinating stretch of river.



## RESERVATION INFORMATION & TRIP DETAILS

*Dates:* October 19–27, 2017 (Optional Angkor Wat Extension: October 27–29)

*Cost:* \$9930 per person, based on double occupancy. \$2495 single supplement.  
(Optional Angkor Wat/Siem Reap extension—\$980, single supplement—\$225.)

*Group size:* Limited to 30 participants.

*Included:* All accommodations, including hotel taxes and service charges; surface transportation; privately guided sightseeing; meals as indicated in day-by-day itinerary; airport transfers; government fees and local handling charges; travel permits where required; admission fees; pre-trip travel document packet.

*Not included:* Travel to and from the start/end points of the trip (starting in Saigon and ending in Siem Reap); alcoholic beverages; passport and visas fees, items of a personal nature (phone calls, souvenirs, internet, etc.), airline baggage fees; optional travel insurance; anything else not specified as included.

*Payments:* A deposit of \$1,000 per person is required in order to confirm all services. Final payment is due 90 days prior to international departure. Payment may be made by personal check or credit card. Following full payment, your final travel documents will be forwarded to you at a maximum of two weeks prior to your departure from the U.S.

*Cancellations & refunds:* Deposits are refundable less an \$800 per person service fee until 90 days prior to the scheduled tour departure. Within 90 days of departure, deposits are non-refundable. Cancellations are subject to the following penalties of the full tour price:

- Between 90–45 days of scheduled tour departure: 50% penalty
- 44 days or less of scheduled tour departure: 100% penalty

*Travel insurance:* Trip insurance is highly recommended but not required. A quote will be provided at the time of booking.

*Booking flights:* Our tour operator, Absolute Travel, has a full-service air department that can book your flights between your home and Saigon and Siem Reap and your home. A small service fee applies.

*Passport and Visas:* Passports must be valid for 6 months after the date that travel commences and must have sufficient pages for entry/exit stamps and visas.

*Terms and Conditions:* A complete tour contract will be forwarded upon receipt of a deposit. The contract outlines all terms and conditions pertaining to the booking, and must be signed and returned to Absolute Travel no later than 60 days prior to the scheduled tour departure date.

### About Absolute Travel

Absolute Travel is an award-winning company of trusted, passionate travel specialists who create private journeys to inspiring destinations. Their expertise, knowledge, and personal relationships allow them to design once-in-a-lifetime trips filled with insider experiences, unsurpassed service, and on-the-ground spontaneity. In addition to creating life-changing trips, Absolute Travel is committed to protecting the world's wild places and the creatures and traditions that make it worth exploring through their philanthropic arm.

The Aqua Mekong has been privately chartered for no more than 30 WWF guests. In the event that a minimum number of WWF guests is not reached, the trip will still proceed with Stuart Chapman as the WWF expedition leader, however Absolute Travel and Aqua Expeditions reserve the right to include additional passengers.

**For reservations, please contact Eliza Quanbeck at Absolute Travel at 212.627.1950 or equanbeck@absolutetravel.com.**

To register or if you have questions please contact Eliza Quanbeck at (212) 627-1950 or equanbeck@absolutetravel.com.

The voyage of discovery  
is not in seeking new landscapes  
but in having new eyes.

—MARCEL PROUST



Building a future in which people  
live in harmony with nature.  
[worldwildlife.org/expeditions](http://worldwildlife.org/expeditions)

