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ASIA



THREE cruises through **THREE** countries bring a showcase of wonder.

Clockwise from left: Devas
statues, Angkor Thom; Shennong
Stream, off the Yangtze River;
My An Hung farming village,
Mekong River, Vietnam



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY  BY DOUGLAS PEEBLES

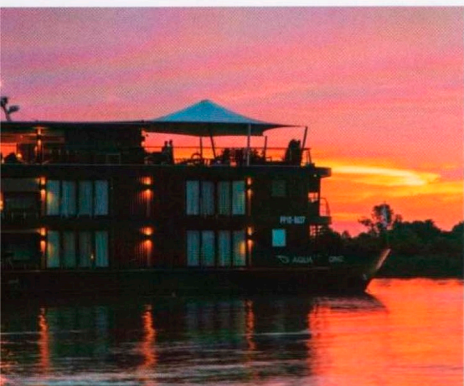
EXTRAVAGANZA

THREE CRUISES IN THREE WEEKS? Why would you want to do that?" my wife asked.

"Because we can," was the best answer I could come up with. I'd be traveling with a friend and fellow photographer/videographer who had won a trip up the Yangtze River in a travel journalism competition. For both of us, it was a long way to go for a 5-day cruise. So we also arranged a 7-day cruise down the Mekong River. The only problem was that there was a week between the two cruises we had to fill. A short cruise on Halong Bay was the answer.

Cambodia, Vietnam, and China turned out to be three very different, yet equally magical, experiences.

Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat are among more than 70 temples in the area;
Below: *Aqua Mekong* in Vietnam



CAMBODIA

OUR JOURNEY STARTED IN SIEM REAP in the Angkor region of Cambodia. The hotel was about a mile from downtown and the entertaining Pub Street restaurants and bars.



Angkor was the center of the Khmer Empire from the 9th to 15th centuries. There are more than 70 temples in the area and, in its time, it was the largest settlement in the world. In our two days, we saw eight temples.

My favorites were Angkor Wat for its massive size and the art and architecture throughout, Banteay Srei for its small size and beautiful detailed carvings, and Bayon in Angkor Thom for its large carved faces.

On the third day, we boarded Aqua Expeditions' 40-passenger *Aqua Mekong*, which boasts large and luxurious suites with floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows.

The first three days were spent on Tonlé Sap, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. *Aqua Mekong* carries its own 10-passenger skiffs, which allowed us to venture far into the Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary and visit the colorful floating fishing villages of Moat Khla and Chnok Tru. The fascinating villages include floating ice factories, stores, schools, and Buddhist temples.

On the fourth day, we left the Tonlé and enter the Mekong River. At Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, we toured the Royal Palace, the National Museum, and the grim Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

That night we crossed into Vietnam.



Udong Pagoda,
Vipassana Dhura
Mandala meditation
center, Koh Chen,
Cambodia