

Welcome to the Mekong Region

The Mekong. It's an exotic name guaranteed to fire up the imagination. Riding high on the global hot list, it is home to such iconic sights as Angkor Wat, Halong Bay and Luang Prabang.

A River Runs Through It

One of the world's great rivers, the Mekong winds its way down from the foothills of Tibet to the South China Sea, encompassing some of the most diverse backdrops in Asia. Its dramatic journey southward takes in remote national parks and immense waterfalls in Laos, traditional towns and 21st-century cities in Thailand, freshwater dolphins and forgotten temples in Cambodia and a patchwork of emerald greens in Vietnam's Mekong Delta.

Old Asia, New Asia

Experience old Asia and new Asia jostling for space. One minute it's Bangkok, riding the Skytrain to a state-of-the-art shopping mall, the next it's an elephant careering through the jungle in Cambodia. In the cities, the pace of life runs at a dizzying speed, matched only by the endless rush of motorbikes and call of commerce. In the countryside, life seems timeless, the rural rhythms the same as they have been for centuries, with pyjama-clad peasants tending the fields and monks wandering the streets in search of alms.

Memorable Journeys

Travelling in the Mekong region is as much about the journey as the destination, although it is not always as smooth as the brochures would have you believe. Float down the river by slow boat from Huay Xai to Luang Prabang, passing by distant minority villages in a land that time forgot. Ride a bicycle around the ancient temples of Angkor. Or explore the bustling backstreets of old Asia from the comfort of a *cyclo* (bicycle rickshaw). Experience some rough with the smooth for the real flavour of the Mekong region.

The Spirit of the Mekong

Quench your thirst for adventure with some adrenaline-fuelled activities in the jungle before relaxing on a beautiful beach overlooking the South China Sea. Delve deeper to discern the mosaic of ethnicities and learn about their cultures and lifestyles. The people are irrepressible, the experiences unforgettable and the stories impossible to re-create, but sometime during your journey, the Mekong and its people will enter your soul. Go with the flow and let the Mekong's spirit course through your veins.



Why I Love Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos & Northern Thailand

By Greg Bloom, Author

My love affair with the Mekong region began in July 1997. An overnight bus from Bangkok and the next morning I'm in Vientiane. It's traffic- and tourist-free – the opposite of Bangkok. And it's surely the most relaxed place on earth. The next month is a somnolent, seemingly interminable journey north to Muang Sing, along misty mountain roads and swollen rivers coloured caramel by the monsoon. Inevitably, I would return to the region. I now live in Cambodia, where the icons of Mekong life – exuberant temples, radiant green rice fields, glistening water buffalo, sugar palms and mangosteens – are on full display. I returned to Laos for the first time in 16 years to research this book. It's still the most relaxed place on earth.

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