

Mekong Princess and Avalon Siem Reap are currently among the cruise fleets offering exquisite river excursion experiences to passengers fascinated by the idea of exploring the exceptional allure of the Mekong River.



The two five-star cruises offering special excursions, such as an eight-day and seven-night cruise from Saigon to Siem Reap at the cost of \$5,000 per a suite for two, including a fine dining experience, recreational activities, and cruise tours at berths alongside Mekong River.

The Mekong Princess cruiser was designed with a length of 61.5 metres, a breadth of 9.5m, two 480-horsepower main engines, and was furnished with imported cutting-edge equipment. The construction of Mekong Princess was thoroughly supervised by Vietnam Register and representatives of foreign shipping and chartering corporations.

The Avalon Siem Reap cruise was chartered for five years by US-based Avalon Waterways, the US' leading river cruise firm, for 40-52 weeks per year.

Giang Hoang Hai, managing director of Viet Princess, shared, "What tells our river cruises and the commonly seen extravagant five-star voyages packed with thousands of passengers apart is our commitment to provide a true five star experience condensed into a smaller scale. Whilst a standardised en suite cabin offered by five-star voyages usually comes at the cost of \$1,500-2,000 for two, river cruise tours tend to charge customers twice or three times as much."

Hai added, "The Mekong River has always been in the spotlight for its tourism potential. The relaxing pace of the river flow at the border area between Vietnam and Cambodia, the rushing torrents passing over rocky reefs into Laos and Thailand are all a sight to see. Foreign cruise lines tend to pour a fair amount of investment into Vietnam thanks to this distinctive feature of the river stream."

Bui Ta Hoang Vu, director of the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism, said, "This programme is the latest tourism product that the department has paid tremendous attention to in order to promote the development of river tourism."

Additionally, Viet Princess has recently launched Saigon Princess, the first deluxe dinner cruise on the Saigon River. Departing at the early evenings, the cruise is scheduled to carry passengers alongside the Saigon River from Dragon Wharf, Saigon's commercial port, to Thanh Da-Binh Quoi Peninsula and circle back.

To date, the Saigon-Siem Reap waterway has only been exploited by five or six cruise lines. About ten lines set up pickup locations alongside the river, at My Tho and Tien Giang provinces, en route to Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

The serene Mekong River bridging the Vietnamese-Cambodian border has been one of the most desired tourist attractions, especially to foreign visitors. With around 15-20 cruises rating three to five stars, Vietnam's shipping firms and cruise lines have been making tremendous headway in promoting and conserving the river's cultural and historic values.

Source: *VIR*