



Cruising the Rivers of Cambodia in Luxury While Basking in Pool and Spa

Simon Marks

On November 8, AmaWaterways was featured in an article published by the International Herald Tribune, the Global Edition of the New York Times. Written by Simon Marks, Executive Editor at The Cambodia Daily and freelance reporter for the International Herald Tribune/New York Times, it provides an interesting look at the booming river cruise industry in Cambodia and Southeast Asia.

When he saw an Internet news release from AmaWaterways' Los Angeles PR firm, generated through Expert Click's NewsReleaseWire service, about the impending launch of AmaWaterways' second ship on the Mekong, the MS AmaLotus, he saw an opportunity for a business story on a topic he had been wanting to write about.

In early August, Simon Marks contacted Promotion in Motion about going aboard the new ship during the dignitary filled inaugural cruise to gather information for an article. On September 15, after a host of back and forth communications, he found himself on the MS AmaLotus, while moored in Phnom Penh, for a tour of the new ship and a chance to sit down with AmaWaterways' Chairman and co-owner, Jimmy Murphy, President and co-owner, Rudi Schreiner and Geoff McGeary, owner of the APT Group, an Australian travel company and partner of AmaWaterways.

With tourism on the rise from river cruising, in Southeast Asia generally and Cambodia specifically, the AmaLotus launch provided Marks an ideal chance to delve into AmaWaterways' Mekong operations and the river cruise industry around the world.

The New York Times.com online edition, entitled *Arriving at the Temples of Angkor Aboard a Luxurious River Cruise Vessel*, appeared on November 7 while the International Herald Tribune print edition appeared the next day under the headline *Cruising the Rivers of Cambodia in Luxury While Basking in Pool and Spa*.

Simon Marks was thoroughly impressed by the MS AmaLotus, telling Promotion in Motion "it is the most luxurious ship on the Mekong, that is for sure" The first portion of the story, quoted below, reflects that and sets the stage to explore AmaWaterways and the global river cruise industry.

“PHNOM PENH — Gliding through the water almost soundlessly, the ship drifted toward a small landing stage and quickly threw down the gangplank. An elderly man in swimming trunks lounged next to the boat's swimming pool. Another sipped from a glass of whiskey as he watched the city approach from his private balcony.



The cruise ship AmaLotus offers luxuries like spa treatments, a gym and a swimming pool.

This was no ordinary vessel. Unlike the more traditional fishing boats and ferries that ply the waterways of Southeast Asia, the AmaLotus, a cruise ship that began operating in September, contains luxuries like spa treatments, a gym and a swimming pool.

At 92 meters, or 302 feet, in length and capable of holding 124 passengers, the AmaLotus is one of the latest cruise ships to start ferrying tourists between Siem Reap in Cambodia and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam on the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers. “

After that Marks went into how river cruising had only recently come to the Mekong after growing dramatically in Europe over the last ten years. He quoted an official from CLIA, the Cruise Lines International Association, who said that "the river cruise industry is growing fast worldwide as baby-boomers in United States, Europe and Australia enters retirement and looks for new travel experiences"

After the Rhine-Main Canal in Southern Germany was completed in 1992, linking the Rhine and Danube Rivers together, a new era of European river cruising was launched. As the new millennia began AmaWaterways, founded in 2002, began building ships for North American consumers with more amenities and bigger staterooms and it has been growing exponentially ever since.

Big ship cruisers, having exhausted all their options, flocked to river cruising and, for the first five years, 80% of AmaWaterways' clients were of that ilk. Jimmy Murphy, Chairman and co-owner of AmaWaterways, has said more than once on radio shows that he was right about river cruising for the wrong reason, at least initially. Based on 50 years in the tourism industry, as founder of Brendan Vacations in the late 1960s, Murphy surmised that river cruising would be popular and that those who had grown weary of coach touring would be AmaWaterways' client base. Instead they got the big ship cruisers and then word began to spread, with millions more still unaware of the nature and history of the current river cruising trend.



Focusing on the Cambodian tourism industry, Marks noted that it has increased to 2.5 million annually, from 1.5 million, in the last seven years and that the "large waterways make the country a natural fit for companies on the hunt for new markets" Rudi Schreiner,

President and co-owner of AmaWaterways, told Marks that "for us, it's an upscale market" AmaWaterways, based out in Los Angeles, has a 50 percent stake in the AmaLotus along with Indochina Sails, a Vietnamese cruising company.

He went through the AmaWaterways pricing during low and high season and then moved on to environmental issues and the hiring of locals to work on the ships. The article reported that river cruising in Cambodia isn't a year round industry since ships can reach Siem Reap, the northern most destination for

AmaWaterways in Cambodia, only between September and January "when the water level in the Tonle Sap, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, is high enough to let them pass"

Using diesel engines has raised concerns of pollution that AmaWaterways and other companies are seeking to confront, but progress is slow and "there is still a long way to go until standards reach those being enacted in Europe" With 70 percent of Cambodia's total protein intake through its fish, it is vital to keep the waterways from becoming polluted through the "release of nitrogen oxides, produced when diesel fuel is burned, can lead to acidification in water and soil"

The last issue was that money spent in Cambodia on tourism enhances the local population. AmaWaterways Chairman and co-owner Jimmy Murphy noted that this "is one of the hard parts: making sure that tourists arriving in Cambodia—that the money they spend works its way down,"

Marks, keenly tuned into the Cambodian business scene, wrote that with 57 people working on board the AmaLotus only ten were from Cambodia, although they were making considerably more than the national average. He sees huge potential for the river cruise industry in Southeast Asia and thus a boom for Cambodia as aging baby boomers from Western countries begin to travel more.

Simon Marks finished his fine article with a quote that goes to the heart of the river cruising demographic: "The type of customers you find on here are quite interested in learning things," said Geoff McGeary, the owner of APT Group, an Australian travel company that has a share in AmaWaterways. "They haven't come on this trip to lie on their back in the sun. They're out to see things and learn things while they still can"



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