

# CLIA DESTINATION FACTSHEET

## EXOTICS RIVER CRUISING (ASIA)



Angkor Wat temple complex

### BEST TIME TO GO/WEATHER

This varies according to the region and weather, ranging from the wet season, when the weather may be too monsoon-like for cruises, with a risk of flooding, to the dry season when low water levels can cause issues.

The **Lower Mekong** is mostly year-round, though the dry season from November to April is regarded as the prime time, while on the **Upper Mekong** the season is from September to May.

**Yangtze** sailings run from April to November, with the spring months of April/May and autumn months of September/October regarded as the peak periods when the weather is at its best.

In India, cruises along the **Ganges** are generally offered from October to March, with February regarded as the best month. The summer is regarded as too hot and humid, though some sailings operate then because it is only possible to sail to Varanasi in August and September when water levels are high.

In Assam, **Brahmaputra** sailings are from November to April, with the best opportunities for wildlife viewing from January and is at its best in March and April.

The best time to cruise the **Irrawaddy** is during the dry season from November to February when humidity levels are lower, while the main season for cruising Vietnam's **Red River** is April to November.



Laos, Luang Prabang by the Mekong River

### 10 REASONS TO CRUISE HERE

**Tropical adventures** – sail through dense jungle encircled by mountains, past teak riverside houses on stilts, ornate pagodas and tumbling waterfalls. Haggle for bargains at floating markets and catch a ride in plodding ox-cart taxis or revving tuk-tuks through dusty towns.

**Temples and traditions** – spot gleaming gold temples dotting the jungle along Myanmar's Irrawaddy River; watch lines of saffron-robed Buddhist monks queuing for their morning alms; and devout pilgrims bathing and worshipping in the holy waters of the Ganges.

**Rural life** – leave the modern whirl of the 21st century behind and step back in time at remote villages where daily life is slow-paced with farmers tending paddy fields and locals trading in fishing or local crafts such as silver-smithing and lacquerware.

**Historical treasure trove** – from the murderous regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia and dark days of the Vietnam War to India's colonial past and stories of invading Japanese soldiers in Myanmar (Burma) during World War Two.

**Unesco wonders** – Cambodia's 12th century Khmer temples at Angkor; Myanmar's sacred plain at Bagan dotted with temples and stupas stretching as far as the eye can see; India's Kaziranga National Park, home to the world's largest population of one-horned rhinos; and Laos' wonderfully-atmospheric former capital Luang Prabang.

**Frenetic cities** – from the scooter-filled streets of Ho Chi Minh City and the markets and barterers of Kolkata to the neon-rich skyline of Shanghai and bustling streets of Cambodian capital Phnom Penh.

**Cultural melting pot** – dive into a rich seam of disparate tribes (there are more than 130 in Myanmar alone), diverse beliefs and traditions, different religions and fascinating legends.

**People power** – among the most memorable experiences are local encounters, popping into schools of excited children to hand out pens and notepads; visiting villagers' homes to see how they live; snapping up keepsakes from markets; and the fascinating observations of everyday life.

**Spicy flavours** – savour the taste of local specialities as riverboats serve curries and other local dishes adapted for Western palates (so not too spicy) or sample local cuisine on excursions.

**Exotic escapism** – venture into areas where tourists rarely go, where there are few or no roads and where locals, unused to seeing Westerners and particularly those who are blonde or fair-skinned, will stop and stare and even want selfies.

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### RIVERS

- Brahmaputra
- Ganges
- Irrawaddy
- Lower Mekong
- Yangtze
- Upper Mekong
- Red River



### Mekong

**Lower Mekong:** Vietnam & Cambodia

**Upper Mekong:** Laos, Thailand & Myanmar (Burma)

**Temples of Angkor** – located near the city of Siem Reap, this collection of ancient Khmer temples dates from around the 9th to the 15th centuries with the centrepiece, Angkor Wat, famous as the world’s largest religious complex.

**Ho Chi Minh City** – formerly known as Saigon, this Vietnamese metropolis buzzes with energy and an intriguing history with main attractions including the Reunification Palace, War Remnants Museum, Notre Dam Cathedral and French colonial-style Central Post Office.

**Cu Chi Tunnels** – the network of underground passageways close to Ho Chi Minh City, used by the Viet Cong against US forces during the Vietnam War stretch for around 150 miles and some are open to visitors.

**Luang Prabang** – enchanting and evocative, the French-accented former Lao capital sits between the Upper Mekong and Nam Khan rivers, it’s streets filled with beautiful villas and Buddhist temples that add to the dreamy atmosphere.



### Yangtze | China

**Beijing & The Great Wall** – the Chinese capital blends ancient and ultra-modern with the walled Forbidden City reflecting its imperial past, while the vast and notorious Tiananmen Square stands as a testament to China’s Communist rulers. Stride out to walk along a section of The Great Wall, a 45-mile drive away.

**Three Gorges** – dramatic misty mountains dominate this stretch of river, with Qutang Gorge regarded as the most spectacular, Wu (Witches) Gorge as the most beautiful for its lush terrain, and Xiling Gorge, the longest at around 45 miles.

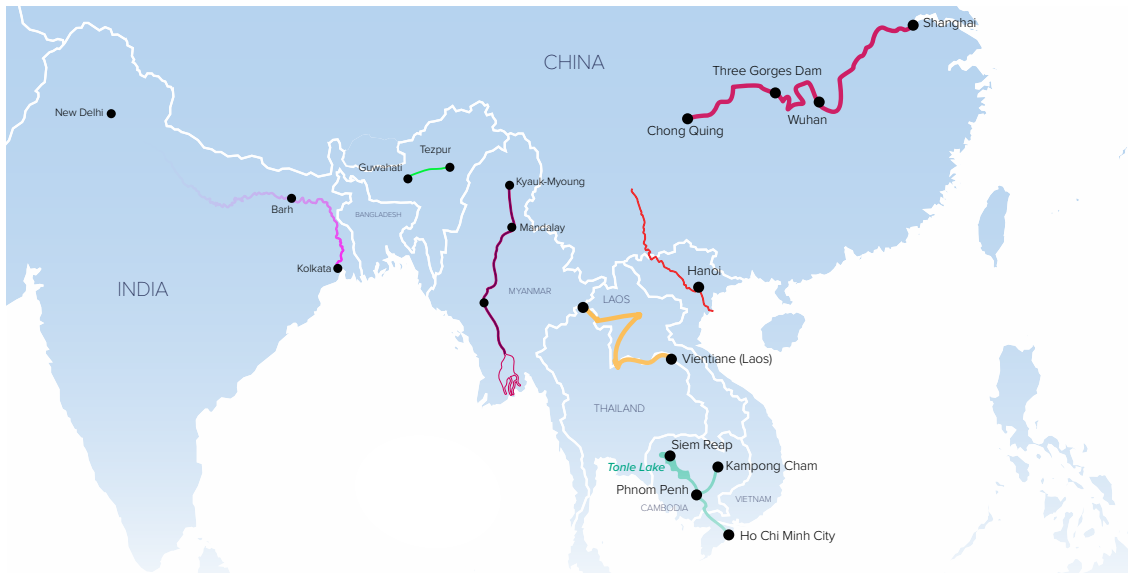
**Xian & Terracotta Warriors** – the ancient walled city is renowned as the starting point of the Silk Road, but its most famous attraction is the collection of 8,000 or so clay soldiers that make up its subterranean life-size army of Terracotta Warriors.

**Shang-hai** – this pulsating metropolis is famous for its high-rise skyline, but behind the futuristic veneer is a cosmopolitan mix of colonial-era architecture, Buddhist temples, historic gardens, wonderful Art Deco haunts and the sweep of the atmospheric Bund waterfront.



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### Ganges (& Lower Ganges/Hooghly) | India

**Varanasi** – here beats India’s spiritual heart. This is where life and death meet in the most evocative way, while colours and rituals assault the senses as thousands of Hindu pilgrims descend to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges River.

**Kolkata** – this Bengali metropolis was the former capital of the British Raj, which has left a legacy of grand colonial piles, including the stately white marble Victoria Memorial, in addition to a line-up of forts and palaces.

**Taj Mahal** – one of the world’s most iconic buildings and regarded as the ultimate monument to love, this magnificent marble mausoleum at Agra is one of the key draws of India’s Golden Triangle, along with Delhi and Jaipur.

**Delhi** – India’s sprawling capital comprises the temples and narrow streets of historic Old Delhi, where the famous Red Fort is located. Conversely, expansive boulevards and high-rises make up the modern face of New Delhi, which has a more European feel.



### Brahmaputra | India

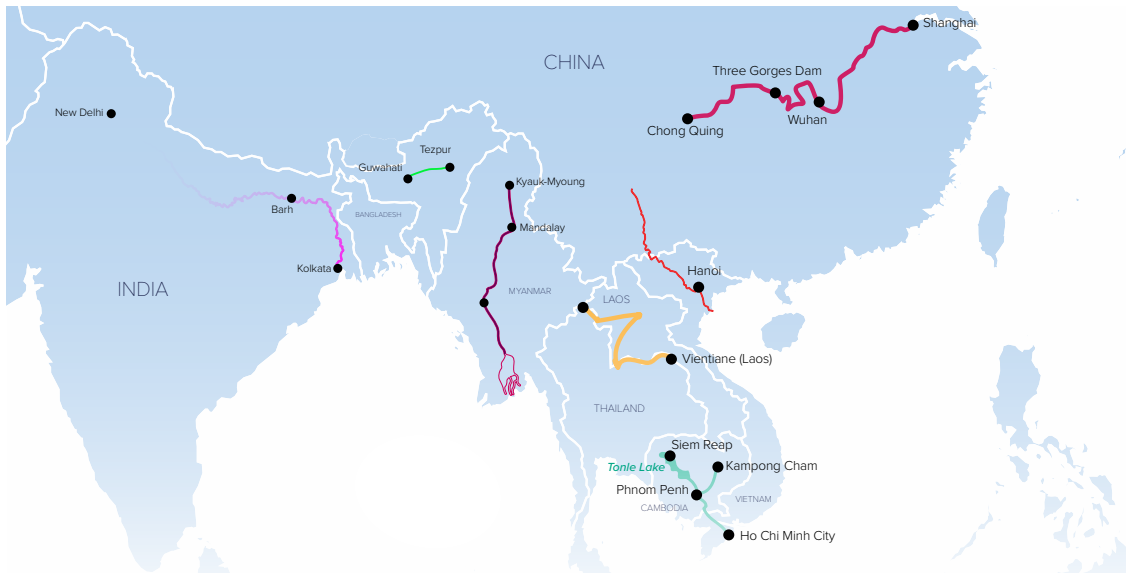
**Kaziranga National Park** – stretching to the banks of the Brahmaputra River, this 166-square mile tropical wilderness is famed as being home to the largest collection of Indian one-horned rhinos, but if you’re very lucky, you may get a rare sighting of the park’s resident tigers.

**Golden Triangle** – discover the essence of India on this classic route that combines Agra and the Taj Mahal with India’s capital Delhi and Jaipur in Rajasthan, known as the Pink City with its collection of pale terracotta-coloured forts and palaces.



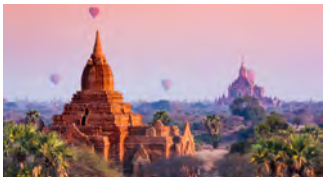
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### Irrawaddy | Myanmar (Burma)

**Bagan** – arguably the biggest draw of Irrawaddy cruises, the ancient capital is famous for around 3,000 temples and stupas, or shrines, spread across a vast plain – a spectacle best admired on early morning hot-air balloon rides.

**Yangon** – known as Rangoon under British rule, this is the biggest city in Myanmar (Burma) where the focal point is the magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda. Swathed in gold plate and studded with precious gems, it gleams unmistakably on the skyline.

**Mandalay** – Myanmar's second city sits on the Irrawaddy nearly 360 miles north of Yangon, surrounded by temple-covered hills and with markets, mosques and gold and silver workshops adding an atmospheric charm.

**River life** – golden-domed temples peeping out from the tropical terrain, dusty villages of stilted houses, fascinating markets of exotic fruits, spices and insects (for eating) and fishermen laying out their catch.



### Red River | Vietnam

**Halong Bay** – famous for its collection of 1,500 jagged limestone karsts that have Unesco World Heritage status. They are best explored by kayak or fishing basket boats that sail into sparkling grottoes and tucked-away tiny islets which give this region a magical aura.

**Hanoi** – this French colonial city still carries a heady Gallic ambience fuelled by wide boulevards and peaceful lakes dotted with pagodas, as well as the imposing mausoleum of President Ho Chi Minh.

**Hoa Binh** – gateway to north-western Vietnam and known as the cradle of the Muong ethnic culture, the mountainous landscape of forests, hot springs and caves makes it ideal for hiking.



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### 10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

- 1. Spot the difference** – get up on variations between the rivers. Do you want to tick off major cities, museums, shops and famous sights, spot wildlife or delve into jungle-filled interiors far off the beaten track and away from civilisation where passengers are unlikely to even see other tourists.
- 2. To stay or not to stay** – cruising offers a hassle-free way to travel between some of Asia's most interesting cities, making it easy to bookend sailings with stays before and after. Shorter cruises, including the Yangtze, are often packaged as part of a tour of China.
- 3. Different durations** – some sailings, such as the Yangtze or Irrawaddy may be just a few nights but built into longer tours lasting two weeks or more, while most cruises tend to be at least a week. Ganges and Brahmaputra cruises may be twinned with Golden Triangle tours of India.
- 4. Watch the seasons** – this varies between rivers with Mekong sailings running virtually year-round, though Irrawaddy cruises generally operate from autumn to spring. Low water levels at certain times of the year can affect cruises along the Ganges and Upper Mekong.
- 5. Jet-set and jetlag** – travelling to Asia through key cities enroute such as Dubai, Doha, Bangkok and Kolkata opens up potential for additional stays to or from your cruise. With the large time difference, it also gives more time to acclimatise too.
- 6. Fit and nimble** – Asian river cruises are more adventurous than their European counterparts as the infrastructure tends to be rudimentary, so guests need to be more agile. Boats often moor alongside muddy banks, where the crew cut rough steps in the earth, and trips ashore often involve walks along uneven terrain and rough tracks.
- 7. Stock up well** – if guests forget their AirPods, mislay their phone chargers or break their hair straighteners, they can't expect to replace them on the rivers unless they're in one of the major cities. Some riverboats may carry basic toiletries, but that's about it.
- 8. Don't be dressy** – life is casual and there's no pressure to dress up or change for dinner, though there's generally one evening when people might make more of an effort, but it's still very low key.
- 9. Prepare for the unexpected** – occasionally boats may run aground on a sandbank or floating debris may damage the propeller, causing a delay as the boat gets fixed. Don't worry – it all gets sorted out and simply adds to the feeling of adventure.
- 10. Watch your weight** – joining some cruises involves taking local or regional flights that may not have the same baggage allowances as international services, so be sure to check to avoid extra charges at check-in.