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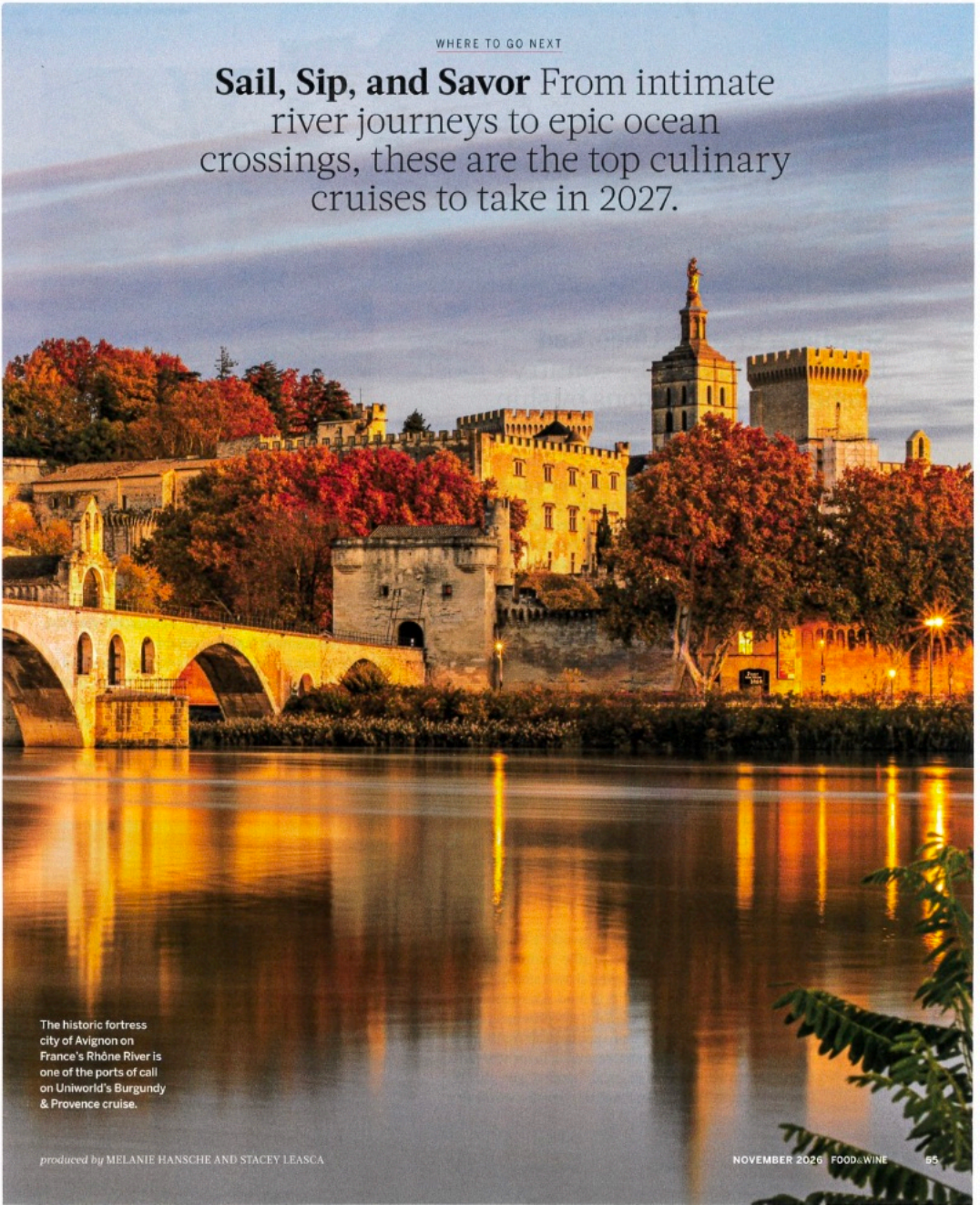


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THE BURRATA-AND-BALSAMIC-TOPPED 'NDUJA PIE AT CERES IN NEW YORK CITY (P. 80)

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Sail, Sip, and Savor From intimate river journeys to epic ocean crossings, these are the top culinary cruises to take in 2027.



The historic fortress city of Avignon on France's Rhône River is one of the ports of call on Uniworld's Burgundy & Provence cruise.

PHOTOGRAPH: FLAVIO FOGLIETTA/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

produced by MELANIE HANSCHE AND STACEY LEASCA

Mangoes on the Mekong

A sailing on Cambodia's rivers is a reminder that the most memorable luxury lies in the little things.

By Melanie Hansche

A FEW DAYS INTO MY VOYAGE on the 20-suite expedition ship *Aqua Mekong*, I spot a neatly written note on a whiteboard in the galley: "Melanie–she likes mangoes." It's a tiny, charming detail that speaks volumes, a reminder that the little things matter. And for the record, they're right: I do like mangoes.

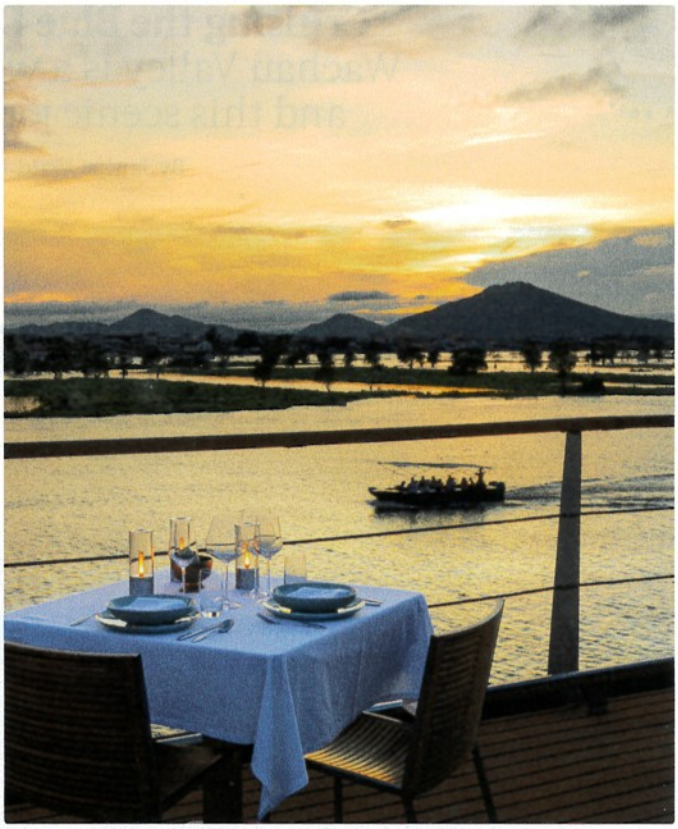
I had arrived in Cambodia a few days earlier. After taking note of the roadside fruit vendors that lined our route into Phnom Penh as we transferred to the ship, their stalls piled high with jackfruit and peak-season mangoes, I mentioned my intention to gorge on as many as possible to our driver. By the time I boarded, the crew knew me not just by name but by my fondness for the king of fruits.

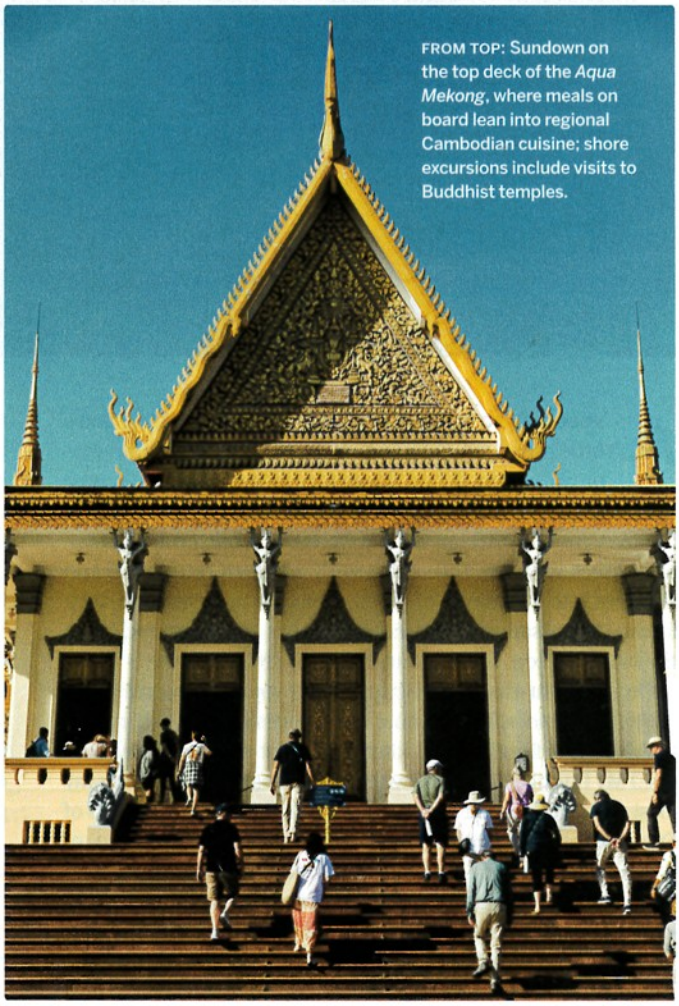
Over the next four days, as the ship navigates sections of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers, I am wooed by a knowing smile and a small plate of sliced mango at every meal. It first arrives after a steaming bowl of Cambodian breakfast pho, the aromatic broth perky with lime and green onion. At lunchtime, sweet, ripe slices chase a bracing salad of sour pomelo, tender squid, and lemongrass, or stir-fried mud crab with local, green, citrusy Kampot peppercorns. After a family-style dinner of crispy sea bass with a punchy three-flavor sauce (sour tamarind, sweet palm sugar, and salty fish sauce) and plump king prawns seasoned with turmeric, extra mango appears with velvety coconut ice cream or black sticky rice for dessert. While there is only one restaurant on board, its menus change daily, offering a full-throttle embrace of exactly where we are.

Nothing is left to chance. Guest transfers take place via skiff so the feeling of escape is always present. The stylish, dark wood-paneled suites have floor-to-ceiling windows but no distracting televisions. There are no room keys, reinforcing the feeling of staying at a friend's lavish vacation home. Daily laundry service is complimentary, a boon while traveling through a tropical climate.

Each morning, we leave the ship by 8 a.m., traveling by van, tuk-tuk, or bicycle past lotus fields and rice paddies to villages where traditional crafts such as silversmithing, silk weaving, ceramics, and palm sugar production remain part of daily life. We return to the ship for lunch before heading out again later in the afternoon.

A few days later, back on U.S. soil, craving something sweet after lunch, I realize that I'd come home with an unreasonable expectation that someone might bring me a sliced mango after every meal. *(Four-night* Aqua Mekong *Explorer Cruise from $4,760, aquaexpeditions.com)*





FROM TOP: Sundown on the top deck of the *Aqua Mekong*, where meals on board lean into regional Cambodian cuisine; shore excursions include visits to Buddhist temples.

PHOTOGRAPHY (FROM TOP): STEVIE MANN/COURTESY OF AQUA EXPEDITIONS, YVONNE KREUZMAYR/COURTESY OF AQUA EXPEDITIONS