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Asia Taking (to) the Waters

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Harmonic Compositions

古城名园—熊本城
巍巍巨城感古今

美丽世界—伦敦基尤植物园
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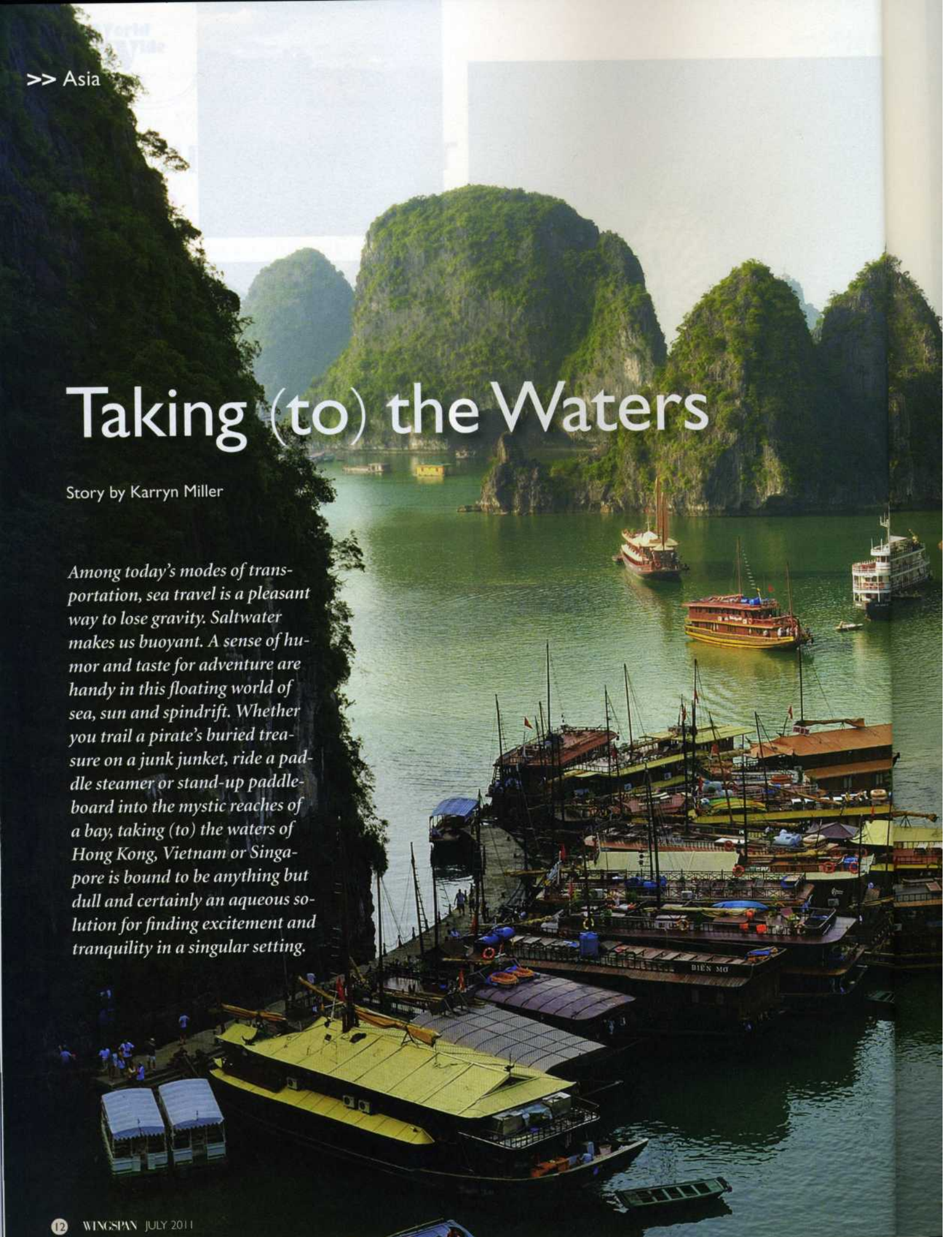
A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER



Taking (to) the Waters

Story by Karryn Miller

Among today's modes of transportation, sea travel is a pleasant way to lose gravity. Saltwater makes us buoyant. A sense of humor and taste for adventure are handy in this floating world of sea, sun and spindrift. Whether you trail a pirate's buried treasure on a junk junket, ride a paddle steamer or stand-up paddleboard into the mystic reaches of a bay, taking (to) the waters of Hong Kong, Vietnam or Singapore is bound to be anything but dull and certainly an aqueous solution for finding excitement and tranquility in a singular setting.





Many centuries ago a mother dragon and her children descended from heaven to the turquoise waters of what is known now as Ha Long Bay. They came to help the Vietnamese fight off foreign invaders. The family of dragons sent out pearls into the sea, each emerging as a limestone island—challenging the invaders' boats. After the fighting ceased, the family and their islands remained and, as the legend goes, they now make up the haphazard mix of land and sea that is Ha Long.

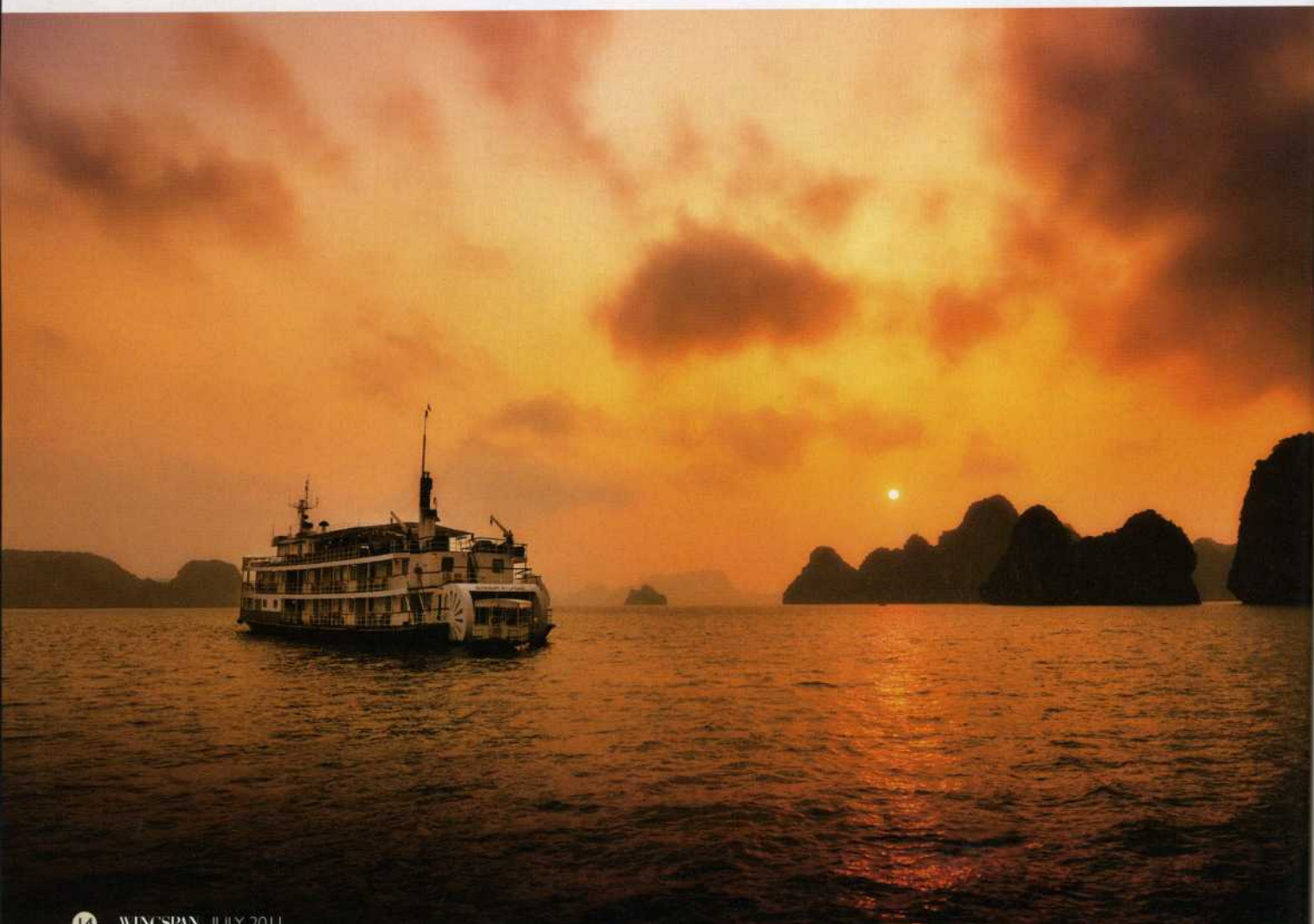
Cruising through the waters of this mythical place, it's easy to get swept away in the folktale. And it seems fitting that the boat we chose for our overnight trip also has an interesting past. The *Emeraude*, a replica paddle steamer boat, is one of a kind on the bay. The vessel's creation was by sheer



chance when in 1999 the founders saw an old postcard of a paddle steamer on Ha Long Bay. It was called *Emeraude*. After a tireless search—which included sending 1,200 letters to people with the same family name as the original owners—the descendants of the first *Emeraude*'s creators were found. The original boat shipped freight and offered pleasure

Vietnam

Cruising the Bay



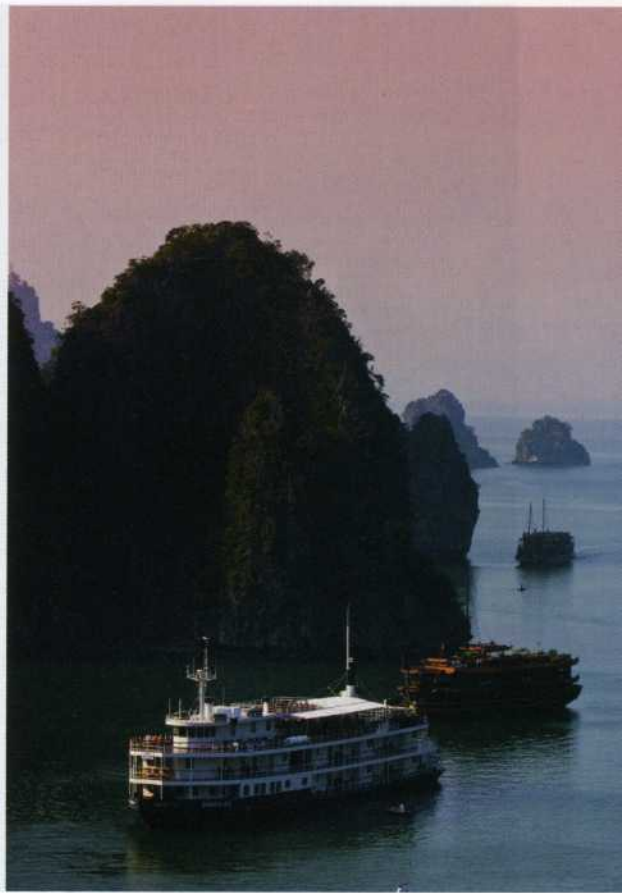
cruises at the start of the 20th century, when the waters were still part of Indochina. The new *Emeraude*, which was inspired by that glimpse of a postcard, hit the waters early in the 21st century and continues to make regular trips out into the bay.

Similar to the original vessel, the decor follows a French colonial style. But this rendition

is slightly more luxurious, with 37 cozy cabins; a spacious restaurant offering buffet meals; and a sun deck rimmed with sun loungers, cane chairs, and comfy dome-like seats with a prime view of the unfolding scenery.

Given its size (56 meters long) a trip on the *Emeraude* is a slightly more private experience than that of staying on a smaller Chinese junk. It also gives guests a taste of another part of Vietnam's history, specifically France's influence over the country.

Like the other boats on Ha Long, the *Emeraude* follows the popular tourist route, taking in some of the UNESCO World



Heritage site's most well-known spots. The difference about the *Emeraude* is that the crew tries to give visitors a sense of remoteness and calmness, despite the huge number of travelers who are ever-present on the bay. It has its own private dock, meaning that you don't need to navigate through the crowds at the bustling port nearby. At the first destination, Surprise Grotto, the boat stays out in the water (away from the overcrowded port of the island). Visitors can either stay on board or take a smaller boat to shore to see a grand limestone cave with two large chambers and a ceiling reaching close to 30 meters in height.

The *Emeraude* includes other little extras like kayaking, early morning tai chi, and an open-air viewing of the 1992 film *Indochine*. Guests can take part as they please or keep to themselves and just soak up the legendary panorama.

The *Emeraude*:
(+84-4) 3934-0888, www.emeraude-cruises.com

Photos: Emeraude Cruises, pp. 12-14, 15 (top right);
left, www.talbotimages.com

Photo: Karryn Miller

