THE MEKONG RIVER is not only a literal source of food—serving as a watery host for plants, fish, and other sea creatures—but it also sustains the production of food through the irrigation of fields along its path and through the transportation of supplies and products.

If you were to travel along the Mekong River, you would encounter a veritable cornucopia of cuisines and tastes—salty, sweet, sour, and spicy. Nearly every type of food can be found. Rice and fish are certainly two of the most popular staples. For instance, there is fried rice, sticky rice, yellow rice, jasmine rice, glutinous rice, and perfumed rice; rice crackers, rice jelly, rice paper, rice powder, rice pudding, rice soup, rice vermicelli, and rice wine. You find your fish salted, smoked, steamed, stuffed, stir-fried, or deep-fried. There is an assortment of fish pastes, fish stews, fish soups, and fish curries. The foodways of the Mekong region are as rich and varied as the peoples who live along the river.

(Above) Among the Dai people in Baoshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China, residents of different villages gather to celebrate the harvest with a sumptuous feast, known as the Bai Jia Yan (hundred families banquet). Residents of the sponsoring village make all the dishes. Photo courtesy China Yunnan International Culture Exchange Center

(Below) While selling many varieties of vegetables, this vendor weaves textiles in the market of Ban Saphay village, Sanasomboun District, in southern Laos. Photo by Outtala Vanyouveth, courtesy Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution thanks Thermador for assistance with this display.