



The ugly truth about Vietnam's floating markets

By Dinh Tuyen, *Thanh Nien News*



A trader on Cai Rang floating market dumps vegetable peels into the river. Photo: Dinh Tuyen

As the first rays of the sun shone down, some foreign tourists on a boat were enjoying the cool air and bustling trade at Cai Rang floating market in Can Tho city until they saw something gross.

A man on a boat docked in front of them was pulling his pants up: he had just defecated into the river below.

They went barely 30 meters before they saw a man on another boat urinating into the river.

Hong, the woman piloting the tourist boat, said, "It's the 'rush hour' that lasts from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. when people relieve themselves."

"All the people – around several hundreds – who live on boats here relieve themselves directly into the river."



A man pulls his pants up after defecating into the Cai Rang River. Photo: Dinh Tuyen

They also dump all types of rubbish, from vegetable peels to nylon bags and foam boxes, into the Cai Rang every day.

As the garbage collection team has not been around yet, the tourists could see trash floating on the river. Rubbish was clogging the propellers of tourist boats and their pilots had to clean them before continuing with their trip.

As one of the largest floating markets in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, Cai Rang, where around 350 boats sell a variety of fruits and vegetables among other things, attracts 500-700 tourists every day, most of them foreigners.

People often say, "You can't say you've been to Can Tho until you've visited Cai Rang floating market."

But experts warn the market would no longer be a tourist attraction if pollution issues are not fixed.

Nguyen Van My, chairman of Ho Chi Minh City-based Lua Viet Tours, said, "Cai Rang and other floating markets like Nga Bay and Phong Dien are the 'treasures' of the Mekong Delta as they have kept a distinct trade culture afloat for generations."

To preserve these markets, it is imperative to change traders and residents' habit of dumping rubbish and relieving themselves in the water, he said.

Many tourists said they were disappointed after visiting Cai Rang.

Miller, a Briton, said, the floating market was not attractive as it was advertised, it was polluted and there was not much on offer that was interesting.

"I won't come back."



A woman tries to persuade foreign tourists to buy coconut water and soft drinks in Cai Rang floating market. Photo: Dinh Tuyen

Nguyen Duy Minh, director of the Cai Rang District Tourism Center, said the habit of discharging human waste directly into the river is not easy to change.

He said his center once built a public rest room on a raft but locals refused to use it.

"Now we are drafting a plan to preserve the floating market, under which rest stops and public toilets will be built by 2017," Minh said.