

Destination Information Guide

CAMBODIA



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WEATHER

The ideal months are December and January, when humidity is bearable, temperatures are cooler and it's unlikely to rain. From February onwards it starts getting pretty hot, and April is unbearably so. The wet season (from May to October), though very soggy, can be a good time to visit Angkor, as the moats will be full and the foliage lush - but steer clear of the northeast regions during those months as tropical monsoons can occur.

TIME ZONES

Cambodia is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) +7:00.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

PASSPORTS: For International travel, U.S. and Canadian passports must be **valid for at least six months** from date of departure, containing at least 3 blank pages are necessary.

VISAS: Many countries require travelers to obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Travisa to process required visas. You will find the necessary forms from Travisa's website at: **www.travisa.com**. Please use account code JP1551, and follow the directions.

Important: Even if you do not need a visa prior to departure, please check your passport well in advance of departure to insure:

- 1) It is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa/entry stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

Please note: pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

Note: Remember to carry with you in a safe place photocopies of all important documents in the event your passport or other documents are lost or stolen. Also, it's a good idea to have a passport photo with you. As a tourist, you will need to produce your passport when booking in at hotels, changing money or travelers' checks and prove your identity whenever requested by a policeman.

AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Upon arrival, proceed through immigration and baggage claims and customs.

Then, Big Five personnel or their representatives will meet you outside the customs and assist you with your baggage, escort you to your hotel, and assist with check-in.

Departure tax: All departure taxes are included in the price of the ticket.

CUSTOMS INTO CAMBODIA

Duty Free: Passengers 18 years and older are allowed to bring the following items duty free: Tobacco: 200 cigarettes or equivalent amount, Liquor: 1 opened bottle, Perfume: reasonable amount for personal use. Currency: must be declared on arrival.

Prohibited Items: All narcotics (hemp, opium, cocaine, morphine, heroin, etc.), firearms, obscene literature, pictures or articles. Like most Asian nations, **penalties for drug trafficking are severe.**

US CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. Regulations frequently change. For more information, you can write the U.S. Customs Service, Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044, or go to the homepage for Customs & Border Protection at www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml.

HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

International travelers should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. If you wear prescription glasses or contact lenses, it is advisable to bring an extra pair and cleaning fluid. The same is true for any medications you take regularly; bring enough to last the length of the trip.

Currently, there are no required vaccinations. As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles and a one-time dose of polio for adults are recommended.

Yellow Fever: There is no risk for yellow fever in Southeast Asia. A certificate of yellow fever vaccination may be required for entry into certain of these countries if you are coming from countries in South America or sub-Saharan Africa.

Malaria: your risk of malaria may be high in some of the countries in this region. See your health care provider for a prescription anti-malarial drug.

Rabies, if you might have extensive unprotected outdoor exposure in rural areas, such as might occur during camping, hiking, or bicycling, or engaging in certain occupational activities.

Typhoid, particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region. Typhoid fever can be contracted through contaminated drinking water or food, or by eating food or drinking beverages that have been handled by a person who is infected. Large outbreaks are most

often related to fecal contamination of water supplies or foods sold by street vendors

Cholera: a cholera vaccination certificate is not an official condition of entry to Vietnam, however, cholera is a serious risk in this country and precautions are essential.

Other Risks: Bilharzia (schistosomiasis) is present in the delta of the Mekong River. Avoid swimming and paddling in fresh water; swimming pools which are chlorinated and well maintained are safe. Japanese encephalitis is a risk in Hanoi and in rural areas. A vaccine is available and travelers are advised to consult their doctor prior to departure. Hepatitis A, B and E occur; precautions should be taken. Dengue fever can be epidemic; cases have doubled in the south of Vietnam in 2006. Filariasis is endemic in some rural areas. Dengue fever can be epidemic; cases have doubled in the south of Vietnam in 2006.

Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel. Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

Proper Attire: Light clothing that is loose-fitting, easy to wash, made from natural fibers is the best clothing for the region. Please be sure to observe appropriate dress codes when visiting religious sanctuaries, buildings, sites, or palaces, where modesty is the rule. If you are inappropriately dressed, you may not be allowed to enter. Casual clothing is acceptable for tourists, but when visiting special places **do not** wear short shorts, halter-tops, or muscle shirts. Women visitors are not expected to wear skirts, but miniskirts and revealing shorts may be viewed as impolite. For December and January, a light jacket is often necessary in the lowlands - more warm clothing may be needed if traveling in the highlands. Most towns have markets where you can buy a warm jacket for a fraction of the price you would pay at home. All Mekong countries sell sarongs of some form or another that can double as scarves, dressing gowns and towels.

Footwear: Bring sandals or slip-ons to take off easily when entering temples, but you will want to bring proper, well-fitting shoes for mountain climbing or trekking.

Laundry Service: You won't need to bring much clothing because all hotels, no matter how small offer a laundry service or can at least arrange someone to launder your clothes for you. In many cases, this may be done by hotel chambermaids, free of charge. All towns have laundry services and will usually return your clothes to you within 24 hours. Please remember that you should normally wash your own undergarments. The service is inexpensive although the turn around time in many cases will depend upon the weather. No sun means it takes longer for the clothing to dry.

LUGGAGE

*For general baggage information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials.*

Luggage restrictions change frequently for individual carriers as well as in the industry as a whole. In this security conscious era, they may change without notice. It is always best to call the specific airline prior to departure for the latest information. The information in the Travel Handbook is intended as a guideline.

MONEY

Riel (KHR; symbol CR). Notes are in denominations of CR100,000, 50,000, 20,000, 10,000, 5,000, 2,000, 1,000, 500, 200 and 100.

Currency Exchange: US Dollars are widely accepted and exchanged as are Thai Baht close to the Thai border, but other currencies are generally only recognized at banks. There is no need to change money into Riels.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs: Credit cards are now more widely accepted in upscale hotels, shops and restaurants catering to visitors. There are ATMs in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville. It is always best to carry cash (US Dollars if necessary) in small denominations.

Traveler's Checks: Limited acceptance. Traveler's checks are generally not recommended. Traveler's checks in US Dollars can be changed at banks and some hotels, but can be difficult to change outside major cities.

Banking Hours: Mon-Fri 0800-1500. Some banks are open on Saturdays until 1200. **Private shops:** Many shops and stores are open 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., seven days a week. Department stores are generally open from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 or 9:00 p.m.

LANGUAGE

Khmer is the official language and spoken by 95% of the population. Chinese and Vietnamese are also spoken. French was widely spoken until the arrival of the Pol Pot regime and is still taught in schools, but English is now a more popular language to learn among the younger generation.

Telephone: Country code: 855. Prepaid telephone cards are available in post offices, hotels and shops for public phones around Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

Mobile Telephone: Roaming agreements exist with many international mobile phone companies. Coverage is good in major towns and cities and patchy elsewhere.

Internet: Available in some areas. Internet cafes are available in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and other major towns.

ELECTRICITY

220 volts AC, 50Hz. Two-pin plugs are in use. Power cuts are frequent. Large hotels and businesses have generators. Outside Phnom Penh, electricity is often available only in the evenings from 1830-2130.

FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water for drinking, brushing teeth, cleaning contacts or making ice should first be boiled or otherwise sterilized. Drink bottled water and other beverages and make sure the labels are in tact. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Rice and fish are the basic food items among the Khmer people. Famous classical Khmer specialty widely enjoyed up to now are: Nhaom (comprised of vinegar, dried fish and herb and vegetable); Kor Kor (normally cooked with fish and a mix of vegetables); Amok (fish cooked in coconut); Samlor Machu (vinegar soup cooked with fish and mixed with a variety of vegetables). Other dishes cooked with pork, chicken, beef are also the main diets.

Chinese and Western menus are commonly available in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

Note: If you have food allergies or are on a special/restricted diet, please notify your travel agent or our office in advance, so that we may try to comply with your needs. Also, please advise your travel agent or our office if you have any mobility restrictions, so that we may inform our representatives accordingly. They will always strive to accommodate you to the best of their ability

TIPPING

Tipping should be done at your discretion and as a reward for good or exceptional service.

For general tipping guidelines please refer to:

www.cntraveler.com/travel-tips/travel-etiquette/2008/12/Etiquette-101-Tipping-Guide

SHOPPING

Cambodian artisans are very skilled and there is no shortage of articles to buy. Unique to Cambodia is the krama, a checked scarf made of cotton or silk. Silk is still hand-woven in Cambodia and is a 'must buy' either as lengths of material or in the form of scarves, bags or purses. Silver boxes are traditional souvenirs, many in the shape of animals, which were either used in ceremonies or to hold betel leaves. **Visitors are advised that there are strict controls on the export of antiques - stone carvings in particular.** The export of antiques is subject to approval of the Ministry of Culture. Visitors can find wood carving, paper maché masks, stone copies of ancient Khmer art, brass and bronze figurines and oil paintings in markets and shops on main avenues. Traditional clothing for both men and women is the krama, a long, narrow checked silk or cotton cloth. Jewelry is generally not up to international standards for design and workmanship, and buyers should use caution when purchasing gold and gems. *Bargaining is essential for all shopping to obtain reasonable prices.* Reductions of up to 20 percent are possible. National Center of Disabled Persons and Wat Than Showroom in the capital city features a wide range of local handicrafts by the Cambodian people with disabilities. Woven, stamped and carved products decorated and designed in unique style are made of silk and cotton fabrics, rattan, bamboo, wood and clays. The markets in Cambodia are always a great source of souvenirs. Try the Central Market, in Phnom Penh, which is well worth a visit as it sells clothes, gifts and gems. Gems are a particularly good buy for small stones, but only spend large amounts if you know what you are buying.

CUSTOMS IN CAMBODIA

Sensitivity to politically-related subjects in conversation is advisable. Women should keep their shoulders covered and not wear shorts when visiting pagodas.

Photography: Permitted, with certain restrictions, such as photographing military installations, airports and railway stations. Ask permission before photographing people, especially monks.

VISITING RELIGIOUS SITES

- Remember to show respect when touring religious sites. EVERY image of Buddha, large or small, ruined or not, is regarded as a sacred object. **Never** climb onto one to take a photograph or do anything that might indicate lack of respect.
- Buddhist monks are forbidden to touch or be touched by a woman, or to accept anything from a woman's hand. If a woman must give anything to a monk, she first hands it to a man, who then presents it.
- You may wear shoes when walking around the compound of a Buddhist temple, but not inside the chapel where the principal Buddha image is kept.
- In a Muslim mosque, men should wear hats and women should be well covered with slacks or a long skirt, a long-sleeved blouse buttoned to the neck, and a scarf over the hair. All should remove their shoes before entering the mosque and should not be present if there is a religious gathering taking place.
- Never point to anything, even casually, with your foot; use your finger instead. When standing or seated, never angle your foot in such a way that it is conspicuous or that the sole is visible. This is considered very rude.

INTRODUCTION TO CAMBODIA

With ancient temples, empty beaches, mighty rivers, remote forests, and with the exception of Angkor- only a handful of tourists- Cambodia offers impressive natural scenery. The word is out about Cambodia and its rich culture. It has emerged from the decades of war and isolation that made it known for atrocities, refugees, poverty and political instability, and now Cambodia is drawing travelers by the busload to its magical Angkor temples. Cambodia is back on the Southeast Asian travel map.

RELIGION & TEMPLES: The state religion of Theravada Buddhism was first introduced to Cambodia during the days of the great Angkor kingdom and prospered. For centuries, monks were the only literate people residing in rural communities, and filled the important role of teachers. However, in 1975, the Khmer Rouge massacred the majority of monks and destroyed most of the temples and it was not until after the Vietnamese invasion that Buddhism was openly practiced.

ANGKOR WAT: Built to honor the Hindu god Vishnu, is the world's largest religious building. It took some 50,000 artisans, workers and slaves, and nearly 40 years, to complete. The temple forms a rectangular enclosure measuring 1,500 meters by 1,300 meters surrounded by a moat 200 meters wide. The main entryway to Angkor Wat is a paved avenue nearly half a kilometer long, ornamented with balustrades and fringed by artificial lakes. Inside the outer walls, the structure climbs over three levels to a central core topped by five almost

pineapple-shaped towers. Virtually every surface in the maze of chambers and courtyards is richly decorated with low-relief scenes of legends, wars and everyday life, enhanced by carvings of nearly 2,000 apsaras, or celestial dancers. The amazing structure as a whole is best viewed in soft light.

THE BAYON: At the centre of Angkor Thom (literally "Great City"), which forms the heart of the Angkor complex as it is today. This inner city is surrounded by a moat, and approached at the four cardinal points via huge stone gates and causeways flanked by statues of gods and giants. The Bayon forms a three-tiered pyramid with 54 towers, each dominated by over 200 huge, 4-metre high, mysterious faces facing out to the north, south, east and west. Each mystically serene countenance, with closed eyelids and faint smile, represents a Bodhisattava (fully enlightened being) who delays entry into Nirvana to aid the spiritual development of others. The structure is rich in decoration, detailing scenes from battles, religious rituals, and everyday life. On approaching from a distance, it resembles a rather formless initially disappointing jumble of stone, but inside, the visitor discovers a maze of galleries, towers and passageways on three different levels. Under the sightless gaze of the ever-present faces, it is here, particularly if alone, that many tourists experience a feeling of profound spiritual awe. There are several other sites of interest within Angkor Thom, including the Terrace of the Elephants and the Terrace of the Leper King. At its height, the city had a population of nearly one million, and its 9 square km area was comparable in size to anything in Europe at that time.

TA PROMH: If Angkor Wat and the city of Angkor Thom are best known for grandeur and majesty, then to the east, the temple and monastery of Ta Promh wins hands down for sheer dramatic effect. Unlike most other monuments, Ta Promh has been left the way it was originally found. The ancient structure is thus still gripped by massive strangler fig and banyan tree roots ("sponges") giving the feeling of discovering the archeological treasure for the first time. One can relive the emotions of the French naturalist Henri Mouhot when he came across it hidden in the jungle in 1860. At its peak, over 70,000 people, including high priests, monks, assistants, dancers and laborers, populated this vast 600-room monastery. The structure measures 145 by 125 meters and contains a maze of courtyards and galleries, many impassable because of the dense overgrowth of creepers and roots.

PRAH KAHN: Another temple that has been left to creeping jungle, with huge trees and multi-colored lichen infiltrating the structure's stone corridors and often gloomy interiors. Although it is not as visually arresting as Ta Prohm, this fascinating temple is formed in a cross by a long 200-metre central passageway cut by another wide perpendicular corridor. Both of these have networks of smaller passages, which themselves open to breezeways, courtyards, and rooms of all sizes. Although the central portion is fairly clear, exploring the outer passageways becomes increasingly adventurous with fallen stones, surreal looking tree roots, and tiny apertures leading into almost pitch dark interiors.

BANTEAY SREI: Approximately 25 kilometers from the main complex, this relatively small 10th century monument in pink sandstone is dedicated to Shiva. Its perfectly proportioned decoration and detail with exquisite sculptures, lintels, and friezes, makes it one of the oldest and most aesthetically beautiful. Almost every surface is a masterpiece of superb detail, each one it seems, more beautiful than the one before.

PHNOM BAKHENG: Built on the highest hill in the area and offering spectacular views, especially at dawn and sunset, this small but attractive temple makes an ideal start or end to the day's sightseeing, although most tourists congregate here toward dusk

EAST MEBON TEMPLE & THE BARAY LAKES:

One of the Khmers' most notable hydrological accomplishments was the West and East Barays, huge, perfectly rectangular artificial lakes covering 14 and 16 square km respectively, and used to irrigate thousands of acres of surrounding farmland. A temple was built in the middle of each lake, and since East Baray was drained, the East Mebon Temple is now easily visited. West Baray (2 km wide & 8 km long) is still filled with water. The boat service is accessible to the west Mebon Temple which is in the middle of the west Baray. East Mebon, however, is a fascinating site, best known for the almost life-size stone elephants on the corners of its tiers. Since each one appears to have been hewn from a single block of stone, the task of carving and transporting such huge pieces must have been tremendous. Smaller stone figures flank the stairways leading up to the central elevated platform. From here, the bed of the lake, now a fertile paddy, stretches below you in every direction.

THE RULUOS GROUP: Lying approximately 10 km from Siem Reap town, is a cluster of three 9th century temples, namely Prah Ko, Bakong and Lolei. Being the oldest in Angkor, and ostensibly the site of the capital at that time, they are interesting in their own right, particularly Bakong, which is the best preserved of the three. Stairways lined with stone lions lead up the five tiers of the pyramid shaped structure, terminating in a sanctuary on top. Eight small sanctuaries also encircle the base, an architectural concept common to many other Angkor temples.

SELECTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides are produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Barnes and Noble, www.barnesandnoble.com, and Longitude Books, www.longitudebooks.com, have collections of books, searchable by country.

LUCKY CHILD: A DAUGHTER OF CAMBODIA REUNITES WITH THE SISTER SHE LEFT BEHIND

by **Loung Ung**

After enduring years of hunger, deprivation, and devastating loss at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, ten-year-old Loung Ung became the "lucky child," the sibling chosen to accompany her eldest brother to America while her one surviving sister and two brothers remained behind. In this poignant and elegiac memoir, Loung recalls her assimilation into an unfamiliar new culture while struggling to overcome dogged memories of violence and the deep scars of war.

In alternating chapters, she gives voice to Chou, the beloved older sister whose life in war-torn Cambodia so easily could have been hers. Highlighting the harsh realities of chance and circumstance in times of war as well as in times of peace, *Lucky Child* is ultimately a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and to the salvaging strength of family bonds.

ANGKOR : CAMBODIA'S WONDROUS KHMER TEMPLES

by **Dawn Rooney, Peter Danford (Photographer)**

The great legacy of the ancient Khmer civilization, the temples of Angkor were built between the ninth and 15th centuries and cover an area stretching across 77 square miles in northwest Cambodia. This beautifully illustrated book contains a comprehensive monument-by-monument guide to the sites, detailed maps and plans, plus information about ten newly accessible temple complexes.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF CAMBODIA

by **Helen Ibbitson Ibbitson Jessup**

An essential, authoritative, and up-to-date introduction to the art of Cambodia, and a vivid glimpse into a world that continues to challenge travelers. Legendary tales of kings and princes, wars, conquests, and unions with gods and goddesses—all these are portrayed in the spectacular friezes, reliefs, and stone carvings for which Cambodia has become justly renowned. The enormous variety of styles and influences, both sacred and secular, that are expressed in Cambodian art make this one of the most surprising and rewarding of all Southeast Asian cultures.

WHEN BROKEN GLASS FLOATS: GROWING UP UNDER THE KHMER ROUGE

by **Chanrithy Him**

Chanrithy Him vividly recounts her trek through the hell of the "killing fields." She gives us a child's-eye view of a Cambodia where rudimentary labor camps for both adults and children are the norm and modern technology no longer exists. Death becomes a companion in the camps, along with illness. Yet through the terror, the members of Chanrithy's family remain loyal to one another, and she and her siblings who survive will find redeemed lives in America.

HISTORY OF CAMBODIA

by **David P. Chandler**

This clear and concise volume provides a timely overview of Cambodia, a small but increasingly visible Southeast Asian nation. Hailed by the *Journal of Asian Studies* as an "original contribution, superior to any other existing work," this acclaimed text has now been completely revised and updated to include material examining the early history of Cambodia, whose famous Angkorean ruins now attract more than one million tourists each year, the death of Pol Pot, and the revolution and final collapse of the Khmer Rouge. The fourth edition reflects recent research by major scholars as well as Chandler's long immersion in the subject, including new material covering the challenges facing Cambodia today.

CAMBODIA IN PICTURES

by **Margaret J. Goldstein**

A small nation in Southeast Asia, the Kingdom of Cambodia is known for its beautiful, lush landscape, grand temples and palaces, and for its brutal past. After a series of occupations, Cambodia won independence in 1953 only to have power seized by the Khmer Rouge—Cambodian communists. During the next four decades, more than two million citizens were executed, died of starvation or disease, or fled the country. Despite these horrors, a stable government has been established and Cambodians look forward to a peaceful and prosperous future.