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Most people know of Cambodia as home to the crowning glory of Southeast Asia – the magnificent temples at Angkor Wat, but visitors are often surprised at how much more this small country has to offer.

Angkor Wat is simply unmissable, but take a little more time to explore Phnom Penh, the exciting, bustling gateway to the country; Tonle Sap lake, the largest in Southeast Asia; Sihanoukville, an increasingly chic beach destination; and Mekong River town Kratie, where lucky visitors may spot endangered Mekong river dolphins. For those wishing to learn more about the country's recent history, Tuol Sleng prison and the 'Killing Fields' of Choeung Ek provide a chilling insight into Cambodia's darkest hours.

Cambodia is at once captivating, enchanting, confronting and inspirational. The country has emerged from a tumultuous period of civil war with a renewed sense of creativity and optimism. Be charmed by its friendly, welcoming people, and explore the country's rich heritage, from religious monuments and colonial-era architecture to a thriving art scene.

Phnompenh

The Cambodia's commercial and political hub. It is also the gateway to the temples of Angkor in the west, the beaches of Sihanoukville on the southern coast and the hill tribe minority in the Northern Province. Revitalized capital city with temples and French colonial architecture blended with a cosmopolitan restaurants, hotels, and night life scenes. The capital of Cambodia dates back to an event in the year 1327. It is said that a rich widow named Don Penh found a tree with 5 Buddhas in it. She thus founded a pagoda, Wat Phnom Don Penh, The Monastery on the Hill of Lady Penh. In 1434 the city founded some years earlier by King Ponhea Yat was finished. In 1866 it became the capital. Following its recent traumatic history, parks, gardens and elegant villas are now being restored, tree-lined boulevards still reflect the elegance of the city's French colonial past, and camera-clicking tourists sit in pedicabs ("cyclos") which weave their way leisurely through the increasing numbers of cars and motorcycles. This pleasant scene, coupled with the current bustle of optimistic commerce, belies the chilling fact that the city stood abandoned and empty from 1975-1979 during the forced evacuation by the detested Khmer Rouge



Tuol Sleng Museum

Originally built as a secondary school named Tuol Svay Prey High School in 1960, during the reign of Preah Batnorodom Sihanouk. The Khmer Rouge converted this into a torture and interrogation centre to extract 'confessions' of anti-government sentiment. Many victims were women and children incarcerated along with the 'suspected' father. Documents recovered indicate that over 17,000 persons had been imprisoned there between 1975 and 1978, only seven of whom are known to have survived. The others, once the 'confession' had been extracted under torture, were transported to Choeung Ek for execution. Records show that the highest figure was on 27 May 1978, when 582 persons were sent to their death. The museum was established in 1979 after the Vietnamese invasion, and the Khmer Rouge's meticulous photographic records of their victims are exhibited as tragic testimony to those who suffered and died in their hands.

Choeung Ek Execution Area

15km southwest of the city centre is one of the many sites of Khmer Rouge mass executions. The exhumed skulls of some 8,000 souls, arranged by sex and age, are displayed behind glass panels in the Memorial Stupa, which was erected in 1988. Although some were killed and buried at Tuol Sleng, most victims were driven out to Choeung Ek at night by truck. Some were made to dig their own graves before being clubbed to death with any heavy instrument available. In addition to those exhumed, another 43 pits have been left undisturbed and the final shocking total can only be guessed. The pleasant orchard setting does little to dispel the horror engendered by this grim sight, as Choeung Ek is just one of thousands of recorded mass grave sites throughout the country, and is by no means, the largest. On May 9th each year a memorial service is conducted at the stupa, in memory of the estimated 1.7 million people who died during the genocide.

Royal Palace & Silver Pagoda

Built in 1866, the site contains various buildings of interest, including the Khmer-style Throne Hall, now used for special ceremonial occasions. South of the Throne Hall are the Royal Treasury and the Villa of Napoleon III, built in Egypt in 1866, for the opening of the Suez Canal, and was later presented to the Cambodian king as a gift. The famous Silver Pagoda, originally constructed of wood in 1866, was expanded in 1962 by King Sihanouk who had the floor inlaid with 5,329 solid silver tiles, hence its name. The most revered image is the Emerald Buddha, made of Baccarat crystal and dating back to the 17th century. Behind it, another Buddha statue was cast in 1906, utilizing 90 kg of gold, and decorated with 9,584 diamonds. Cabinets along the perimeter contain gifts presented to royalty and dignitaries. Along the inside of the recently restored 600-metre external wall is a colorful mural depicting scenes from the Reamker, the Khmer version of the Ramayana.

National Museum of Arts

North of the palace grounds, the building was designed in Khmer-style, in 1920, by a French architect, and contains important artifacts and sculptures from the Angkor era and earlier

Wat Ounalom

Built in 1443 to enshrine a sacred hair of the Buddha, and located north of the National Museum of Arts, this temple is considered the seat of Cambodian Buddhism. When the Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh in 1975, they vandalized the building and murdered the Abbot along with many of the 500 monks who lived there.

Wat Phnom

On a hill to the north of the city, and restored or reconstructed in 1434, 1806, 1894 and 1926, Wat Phnom is a symbol of the capital city Phnom Penh and regularly used for prayer, small offerings, and meditation.

Independence Monument

It commemorates the end of French's rule over Cambodia in 1953. The one hundred nagas and motifs can be seen in historic, cultural and modern day. It is also used to commemorate the souls of fallen to combatants who down their lives for the country's freedom.

Oudong

Located to the north approximately 40km from Phnom Penh , and located on a hill overlooking vast plains, this site is famous for cultural patrimonies and used to be a capital city between 1618-1866.

Phnom Tamao Zoo

This recently opened zoo and wildlife rescue centre, 40km outside the city, was set up to preserve and rescue rare and endangered local wildlife including tiger, lion, deer, bear, peacock, heron, crocodile and turtle. Eighty hectares of the total area have been established as a national zoo and up to 1,200 hectares have been reserved for its future extension and development.

VISA CONDITION AND FEES

For most foreign visitors, entry visa for Cambodia are obtainable at Cambodian Embassy or consulate abroad or upon arrival at both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap International airports at the cost of US\$20. For overland crossing visitors visa is obtainable at these borders check-points:

- Cham Yeam (From Trat, Thailand)
- Pailin (From Thailand)
- DOUNG, Battambang (From Thailand)
- O'Smach (From Thailand)
- Choam, Anlong Veng (From Thailand)

- Bavet (From Moc Bai, Vietnam)
- Kaom Samnor (From Chou Doc, Vietnam)
- Kaom Samnor (From Chou Doc, Vietnam)
- Dong Kralor (Laos)

Two passport-size photos and at least 6 months validity passport are required to obtain visa. Tourist visa can be extended for another month at the cost of US\$15. One month business visa are also available and cost US\$25 but can be extended indefinitely. Please note that other check point with Vietnam such as: Phnom Den (Tinh Bien) and with Laos: Veurnkham are also international check points but visitors need to obtain visa prior to arrival at these borders. This information is true as of June 2005, and is subject to change without prior notice.

CLIMATE

The climate can generally be described as tropical, hot and humid with average temperature is around 27°C. There are two distinct seasons: the Rainy season and Dry Season. Dry season is divided into two sub-seasons: cool and hot.

The Rainy season: June - September (27°C - 35°C)

The Dry season:

- The cool season: October – February (17°C - 27°C)
- The hot season: March – May (29°C - 38°C)

The best time to visit Cambodia is in cool season, however even in rainy season, it doesn't rain much normally one or two showers in the afternoon. Visit Cambodia in rainy season is more greenies and less crowded and most of the time, travelers could enjoy off peak rate offer.

CURRENCY

The local currency is Riel although US Dollar is widely accepted in Cambodia. The exchange is around US\$ 1 – 4,100 Riel (as of July 2005), Traveler Cheque and major credit card: Visa, Master and American Express are accepted in major business establishment with a bank charge of 4% per transaction.

BUSINESS HOUR (GMT+7)

Most of offices open from 07.00 till 12.00 and from 14.00 till 17.00, Monday-Friday and Saturday morning. Banks run from 8.00 till 15.00.

KHMER SOUVENIR SHOPPING

The Krama (cotton scarf) is one of the best typically Cambodian souvenirs. This multi-purpose material, similar to a sarong, is used for bathing, cleaning, protection from the sun and many other uses in Khmer life. The Krama has become a popular tourist gift along with Khmer silk and silver.

ELECTRICITY

110 - 220 volts.

TRAVELING IN CAMBODIA

The quickest and most comfortable mode of domestic travel to major tourist destination is by flying. However traveling by coaches and boat although consume more time but offer an exciting experience, more scenery and more involvement. Van and car rental is recommended for touring in the city and outskirts. cyclos (tricycle) and motor taxis and taxi are available within the city.

AIRPORT TAX

Departure tax for international flight is \$25 payable in USD. For domestic flight is \$6 from Phnom Penh and other provincial airport.

HOW TO GET TO CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh and Siem Reap cities are still considered to be the major gateways to access to and from Cambodia.

Direct flight to Phnom Penh are available from Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Taipei, Vientiane, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Pakse, and Seoul.

Direct flight to Siem Reap are available from: Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh, Singapore, Pakse, Kuala Lumpur, and Seoul.

The major airlines operating to and from Cambodia are: Thai Airways, Silk Air, Malaysia Airlines, Dragonair, Bangkok Airways, Lao Airlines, Vietnam Airlines, China Southern Airlines, Eva Air, Jet Star Asia, Air Asia, Korean Air, Asiana Airlines. Domestic carriers are: Siem Reap Airways and Angkor Airways.