

A Land of Peace and Prosperity

Cambodia Information

Cambodia, officially known as the **Kingdom of Cambodia** and once known as the Khmer Empire, is a country located in the southern portion of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. Its total landmass is 181,035 square kilometres (69,898 sq mi), bordered by Thailand to the northwest, Laos to the northeast, Vietnam to the east, and the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest.

With a population of over 15 million, Cambodia is the 69th most populous country in the world. The official religion is Theravada Buddhism, practiced by approximately 95 percent of the population. The country's minority groups include Vietnamese, Chinese, Chams, and 30 hill tribes. The capital and largest city is Phnom Penh, the political, economic, and cultural center of Cambodia. The kingdom is a constitutional monarchy with Norodom Sihamoni, a monarch chosen by the Royal Throne Council, as head of state. The head of government is Hun Sen, who is currently the longest serving non-royal leader in South East Asia and has ruled Cambodia for over 25 years.

Cambodia's ancient name is "Kambuja". In 802 AD, Jayavarman II declared himself "King" and marked the beginning of the Khmer Empire which flourished for over 600 years, allowing successive kings to dominate much of Southeast Asia and accumulate immense power and wealth. The Indianized kingdom built monumental temples including Angkor Wat, now a World Heritage Site, and facilitated the spread of first Hinduism, then Buddhism to much of Southeast Asia. After the fall of Angkor to Ayutthaya in the 15th century, Cambodia was then ruled as a vassal between its neighbors.

Cambodia became a protectorate of France in 1863, and gained independence in 1953. The Vietnam War extended into Cambodia with the US bombing of Cambodia from 1969 until 1973. Following the Cambodian coup of 1970, the deposed king gave his support to his former enemies, the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge emerged as a major power, taking Phnom Penh in 1975 and later carrying out the Cambodian Genocide from 1975 until 1979, when they were ousted by Vietnam and the Vietnamese backed People's Republic of Kampuchea in the Cambodian–Vietnamese War (1979–1991). Following the 1991 Paris Peace Accords Cambodia was governed briefly by a United Nations mission (1992–1993). The UN withdrew after holding elections in which around 90 percent of the registered voters cast ballots. The 1997 coup placed power solely in the hands of Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party, who remains in power as of 2015.

The official name of the country in English is the *Kingdom of Cambodia*, often shortened to just *Kampuchea*. Kampuchea derives from the Sanskrit word *Kambuja* or "Golden Land" or "Land of Peace and Prosperity", as described by the Khmer Buddhist's monk Chuon Nath in his Khmer Dictionary.

Colloquially, Cambodians refer to as "Khmer's Land" or more formally "Country of Kampuchea". Kampuchea is commonly known as "Cambodia" in English and "Cambodge"/"Kamboj" in French. Kampuchea is more widely known to Easterners and Cambodia is more widely known to Westerners. The word Khmer could indicate the country, its people or its language.

Season

There are four annual seasons: cool and dry between November and February; hot and dry between March and May; hot and wet between June and August; and cool and wet between September and early November. The best time to visit is the cool season, when the weather usually benefits from a pleasant dry heat and the countryside is still green from the rains. As February turns into March, the heat begins to build until April and May, when it can be quite oppressive and uncomfortable. In May and June, the rains come and bring a measure of relief. It rarely rains all day, and mostly it will rain for an hour or two in the afternoon or evening. By early September, the heat begins to dissipate and

the evenings are cooler. Through October, the frequency of the showers slows and the humidity starts to lower. Although the wet season is low season for tourism throughout most of the region, visiting at that time does have its advantages. It is when the Angkor complex is at its most beautiful, the vegetation is lush, and the crowds are relatively thin.

Visas

All visitors, except citizens of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, need a visa to enter Cambodia. The official price for a tourist visa is US\$20 and US\$25 for an ordinary visa. Staff may try to charge more at some land border crossings, so hold out for the official price, particularly at major crossings, but don't be upset if you have to pay 1 or 2 dollars extra. Visas can be obtained at Cambodian embassies or consulates. Visas are also available "on arrival" at international airports, all six international border crossings with Thailand, some international border crossings with Vietnam, and at the main border crossing with Laos.

Shopping

When shopping, be sure to look for businesses that display the Heritage Friendly business logo. Heritage Watch has launched a campaign that aims to encourage support for Cambodia's arts, culture, heritage and development. Businesses that are giving back to the community are certified as Heritage Friendly by the independent organization and permitted to display either a gold or silver Heritage Friendly logo. Look for the logo to ensure that you are supporting socially responsible corporate citizens!

Haggling

You can get away with haggling for most anything in Cambodia, including at restaurants, outdoor food stalls, and even guesthouses. Be confident and resolute, and be prepared for emotions to run high, because as the old saying goes, "The Khmer do not lose face, they lose their temper!"

Currency

The Cambodian riel and US dollar are both official currencies, with the riel only used for small transactions (i.e. below \$5). ATMs will generally only dispense US dollars, though some are loaded with both currencies. They generally charge \$3-5 per withdrawal, but Canadian Bank and Mekong Bank are fee free. ATMs are common throughout the country with a surprising penetration even into backwater towns, though if in doubt, stock up before a trip into the wild. High denomination notes are easy to break. Even in the smallest of provincial markets, traders will not flinch at the sight of a \$100 bill, just look for traders with glass cabinets filled with money (they're advertising a service rather than showing off).

Eating

While not as varied as food from neighboring Malaysia, Thailand, or Vietnam, Khmer food is tasty and cheap and is invariably accompanied by rice (or occasionally noodles). And unlike their Thai and Lao neighbors, Cambodians generally do not have a taste for spicy hot food, and black pepper is the preferred choice in cooking instead of chili peppers which are usually served on the side. Thai and Vietnamese influences can be noted in Khmer food, although Cambodians love a stronger sour taste in their dishes. The addition of prahok, the famous Khmer fish paste, is ubiquitous in Khmer cooking (although for most foreigners this is most definitely an acquired taste!). In addition to Khmer food, there are large number of Indian and Chinese restaurants, especially in Phnom Penh and large provincial centers.

Typical Khmer dishes include

Amok - Arguably the most well known Cambodian dish. A coconut milk curried dish less spicy than those found in Thailand. Amok is usually made with chicken, fish, or shrimp, plus some vegetables. It is sometimes served in a hollowed-out coconut with rice on the side.

K'tieu (Kuytheav) - A noodle soup generally served for breakfast. It can be made with

pork, beef or seafood. Flavorings are added to the customer's taste in the form of lime juice, chili powder, sugar and fish sauce.

Somlah Machou Khmae - A sweet and sour soup made with pineapple, tomatoes and fish.

Bai Sarch Ch'rouk - Another breakfast staple. rice (bai) with pork meat (sarch chrouk) often barbecued. Very tasty and served with pickled vegetables.

Saik Ch'rouk Cha Kn'yei - Pork fried with ginger. Ginger is commonly used as a vegetable. This tasty dish is available just about everywhere.

Lok lak - Chopped up beefsteak cooked quickly. Probably a holdover from the days of French colonization. Served with a simple dipping sauce made from lime juice and black pepper, lettuce, onion, and often with chips.

Mi / Bai Chaa - Fried noodles or rice. Never particularly inspiring, but a good traveler's staple.

Trey Ch'ien Chou 'Ayme - Trey (fish) fried with a sweet chili sauce and vegetables. Chou 'ayme is the phrase for "sweet and sour".

K'dam - Crab. Kampot in the south is famous for its crab cooked in locally sourced black pepper.

Don't forget Khmer desserts - Pong Aime (sweets). These are available from stalls in most Khmer towns and can be excellent. Choose from a variety of sweetmeats and have them served with ice, condensed milk and sugar water. A must try is the Tuk-a-loc, a blended drink of fruits, raw egg, sweetened condensed milk and ice.

Health

Cambodia, one of the world's poorest countries, and lacks reliable medical facilities, doctors, clinics, hospitals and medication, especially in rural areas. Any serious problem should be dealt with in Bangkok or Singapore, which do boast first rate services (at least to those who can afford them). Repatriation is also more easily arranged from either of those cities. Make sure that your insurance covers medical evacuation. The private and pricey Royal Rattanak Hospital in Phnom Penh can be trusted for emergency medical care and can treat most diseases and injuries common to the region. Naga Clinic has branches in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. It is also clean, safe and useful for minor conditions.

Local hospitals and clinics vary from mediocre to poor quality. Expect poor equipment, expired medicines and placebos of flour and sugar. In local clinics don't let them put anything in your blood and treat dehydration orally and not with a drip, as there is a risk of septicemia (i.e. bacterial blood poisoning). The same goes for blood transfusions.

The contents of a basic medical kit-such as panadol, antihistamines, antibiotics, kaolin, oral rehydration solution, calamine lotion, bandages and band-aids, scissors and DEET insect repellent can be acquired in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. The particularly fastidious should put their kits together in Bangkok or Saigon before coming to Cambodia.

Religion: Buddhism became the official national religion in 1975. Others include Hinduism, Islam and Vietnamese Caodaism.

Respect

Cambodia is a country at a crossroads. While the more heavily touristic places like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap are well adjusted to tourist behavior, people in places such as Stung Treng or Banlung are less so. Always ask permission before you take

somebody's picture, as many in the more remote areas do not like to be photographed, and some in the urban areas will ask for payment.

Dress for women is more conservative in Cambodia. While shorts are now acceptable in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, it is more respectful to wear knee length shorts or trousers when outside of these areas.

The Khmer Rouge issue is a very delicate one, and one which Cambodians generally prefer not to talk about.

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