

ALLURING ASIA



DESTINATION

CAMBODIA

TRAVELER'S GUIDE





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Thank you.

POPULATION

Cambodia has a population of approximately 14.5 million people. Prior to Pol Pot's time and the holocaust of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia had an estimate population of over eight million. This number dropped to around five million by the late 1970s but has since rebounded due to a high birth rate and the return of refugees from Thailand.

TIME

Cambodia is GMT plus 7

VISAS

United States Citizens require a Visa. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months from the date of arrival into Cambodia.

INSURANCE

Because the standard of emergency treatment in Cambodia is not as high as in the West, it is advisable in addition to normal medical insurance, to take out a policy which covers evacuation.

HISTORY

Until the mid-19th century, the outside world knew almost nothing of the interior of Cambodia. From the 16th and 17th centuries, rumors began to surface in Europe - based on tales from Portuguese and French missionaries- about a magnificent city, hidden somewhere in the middle of the jungle. Then in 1861 French naturalist Henri Mouhot stumbled across the overgrown ruins of Angkor. The local people thought it inconceivable that their ancestors could have built the incredible temple-mountain complexes and told Mouhot they were the work of a race of giant gods.

Today, the Khmer people are very proud of their rich cultural and artistic heritage, perhaps because the cultural refinements and sophistication of their forebears stands in stark contrast to the nihilistic depravity of the Khmer Rouge era of the 1970s. Sadly, more people now associate the name "Cambodia" with the Khmer Rouge 'Killing Fields' than with Angkor Wat.

For centuries Cambodia has been in a state of continuous social and political upheaval. Since the demise of the Angkorian Empire in the 15th century; the country has been at the mercy of its much larger neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam, and of various foreign powers - China, France, the US and the former Soviet Union. This history of foreign domination is starkly overshadowed by the so called "Pol Pot time". Between 1975 and 1979, Cambodians suffered one of the worst human tragedies to afflict any country since World War II - more than a million people died out of a total population of about 7 million.

Cambodia's importance in the evolution of Southeast Asian culture and history is far greater than its limited size and political power would suggest. Lying on the trade routes between China and India, Cambodia has been the center of several powerful empires - Angkor being the most famous - and later the centerpiece of struggle between Europe and nationalist movements. The tragic history of Cambodia continues today with the ongoing struggle between democratic forces of a UN supported government, the Vietnamese desire to control events in their troublesome neighbor, and the communist war of insurgency waged by the Khmer Rouge.

THE FUNAN EMPIRE

Knowledge of Cambodian history prior to the Funan era is limited to Neolithic artifacts uncovered near Tonle Sap and Bronze Age implements excavated near Phnom Penh and the seaport of Oc Eo. Historical records begin with the rise of the Funan Empire in the 1st century A.D. until its incorporation into the Chenla state in the 6th century. Centered along the lower reaches of the Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers, and prosperous owing to its location on the east-west trade route between China and India, Funan eventually extended its political power south to the Malay Peninsula and east across most of present-day Vietnam.



Funan was among the earliest Asian kingdoms to embrace the Hindu culture which still profoundly shapes the history, art, and political landscapes of not only Cambodia but all of Southeast Asia. Although populated by indigenous peoples and by immigrants from Indonesia and southern China, Funan accepted much of its knowledge of religion and political organization from Indian merchants and theologians who arrived about 2,000 years ago. Eventually, these Hindu elements merged with original designs to create the first true Cambodian empire and the cultural godfather to Angkor.

THE CHENLA EMPIRE

The empire of Funan was slowly displaced by the rising powers of Chenla, a Hindu-based dynasty originally located near Stung Treng and in southern Laos near wat Phu. Diplomatic marriages subsequently gave rise to Chenla strongholds at Kampong Thom, in the center of Cambodia and Angkor Borei in Takeo.

Chenla survived as a united dynasty until the 7th century, when disputes between feuding families led to the creation of "Land Chenla" near the Tonle Sap and "Water Chenla" on the lower Mekong. The Water Chenla empire is famed for its use of hydraulic techniques for cultivation, a sophisticated system later exploited in the complex and highly successful systems of Angkor.

The rise of Srivijaya in southern Sumatra, and new trade routes which favored Indonesian over Cambodian entrepots, eventually made Chenla a vassal state of the

Sailendra dynasty on the island of Java. Several of Chenla's rulers spent time at the Sailendra court, including Jayavarman II, who returned to Cambodia around 800 to establish the civilization of Angkor. The political connections between Java and Cambodia explain many of the architectural and sculptural similarities between the two civilizations.

THE KHMER EMPIRE

Cambodia's most famed empire was that of the Khmers, founded in 802 by King Jayavarman II at his capital of Angkor just north of the Tonle Sap. Renowned for its brilliant achievements in art and architecture, Angkor was also an immensely powerful nation which, between the 9th and 13th centuries, controlled most of Southeast Asia from Burma to Indochina, from China to Malaysia.

The introduction of Mahayana Buddhism, which undermined the prestige of the king, combined with the extravagance of the throne, which bankrupted the nation's elaborate irrigation system, finally led to the decline and fall of the Angkor civilization in the 13th century. Angkor fell to the Siamese in 1431.

FRENCH RULE

The next 500 years - from the fall of Angkor to the arrival of the French in 1863 - was an undistinguished period marked by Siamese control and the flight of Cambodian power to various capitals. In 1863, after a series of devastating battles between Siamese and Vietnamese forces, the French seized Cambodia to counter British and Thai expansion up the Mekong River. Although the French did little to develop the country, private-sector investors developed vast rubber states while the government ensured the survival of the Cambodian state by supporting the king in a splendor unequalled since Angkorian times. It was this support of the Cambodian throne which stifled any nationalist activity comparable to that of Vietnam.

The Japanese seizure of Indochina in WW II left the French in nominal control; In 1941 they crowned the 18-year old schoolboy Prince Norodom Sihanouk the final king of Cambodia. In March 1944, Japanese forces ousted the French and persuaded Sihanouk to declare independence. The French returned after the war and in 1946 abolished the absolute monarchy, though Sihanouk remained titular head of state. Dien Bien Phu was the site of the 1954 defeat of French forces in





Vietnam. The withdrawal of French colonial forces from Cambodia led to the complete independence of Cambodia on 9 November 1953 and the triumphant return of Sihanouk to Phnom Penh. Sihanouk abdicated in 1955 - absolute monarchies being no longer popular in Asia - but he has remained the principal political leader to the present day.

THE KHMER ROUGE

Sihanouk may have enjoyed an almost semi divine status with the Cambodian peasantry, but his intractable problems with both right-and left-wing political forces led to his downfall in March 1970 and the seizure of the government by Army Commander Lon Noi. Lon Noi immediately abolished the monarchy, proclaimed a republic, and started his war against the communist rebels - nicknamed the Khmer Rouge or "Red Khmers" by the deposed Sihanouk.

The Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 and soon began one of the world's most horrific reigns of terror. To finalize their goal of a Maoist-style agrarian society, Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge evacuated the cities and forced entire populations into slave labor. Currency was abolished, newspapers outlawed, postal services halted, and the Cambodian calendar was reset to "Year Zero." During their 44-month rule, the Khmer Rouge murdered over a million people in an orgy of death unmatched since the days of Adolf Hitler. But statistics are misleading: the percentage of population slaughtered by the Khmer Rouge is an unchallenged world's record.

PRESENT SCENE

To stop the reign of terror largely ignored by the outside world, Vietnamese forces invaded and took Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979. Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia was condemned by the United Nations and unpopular with many Cambodians, who have traditionally disliked the Vietnamese, but nobody else seemed willing to put an end to the holocaust of the Khmer Rouge. Resistance to Vietnamese rule was organized by the Khmer Rouge from their bases on the Thai border and several other groups such as the Sihanouk National Army (ANS), headed by Sihanouk, and the anti-Communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), headed by Son Sann, a former prime minister under Sihanouk.

After 11 years of occupation and under considerable pressure from the Soviet Union, the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia in September 1989, leaving behind a Vietnamese installed caretaker government under the control of President Heng Samrin and Prime Minister Hun Sen. Although an imposed government will never be popular, most outside observers and many Cambodians appreciate the efforts of the Vietnamese to stop the Khmer Rouge and feel that Hun Sen has been a fair and essentially effective leader.

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LANGUAGE

The national language is Khmer. The Khmer language belongs to the Mon-Khmer family, enriched by the Indian Pali and Sanskrit languages and peppered with Thai and French influence. Khmer has no tones, no tenses, and words attached to the masculine or feminine genders. Khmer has 23 vowel-sounds and 33 consonants, it is also a very specific language - for instance, there are 100 different words for types of rice. The Khmer language is written from left to right with no separation between words.

COMMON PHRASES *in* KHMER

English	Khmer	English	Khmer
Hello	Suosday	My name is _____	Knum chhmua _____
How are you?	Sok sabai cheat ay?	Yes (for man)	Baat
Thank you	Akun	Yes (for woman)	Cha
You're welcome	Muhn ay te (or) Unjuhn	No	Otay
Goodbye	Lea heuy	Where is the toilet?	Bangkun now ey nah?
Please	Soum	Water	Deteuk
I'm sorry	Sohm toh	How much for this?	Teu nis thlay pun mann?
What is your name?	Chhmua ei?		

CLIMATE

Cambodia is a monsoonal country characterized by two major seasons. Strong prevailing winds from the southwest bring heavy rains and high humidity during the rainy season from June to November. Summer months from March to June can be overwhelming to Westerners unaccustomed to the searing temperatures, which often soar above 100°F (38°C). The dry and somewhat cooler season from December to March is the best time to visit Cambodia.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE & RAINFALL

Siem Reap	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.3	0.7	0.6	0.5	1.2	2.1	3.1	3.4	3.4	4.9	1.4	0.4
Min Temp (F)	69	73	76	78	78	77	77	76	76	75	72	68
Max Temp (F)	94	94	97	98	95	93	92	91	92	90	89	89

Phnom Penh	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.5	1.0	0.9	0.7	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.6	4.2	4.3	2.3	0.22
Min Temp (F)	72	73	77	79	79	78	77	77	68	77	75	72
Max Temp (F)	88	90	94	95	93	91	90	90	87	87	86	86



THE PEOPLE

Cambodia (Khmer) stock accounts for over 90% of the total population- a strikingly high homogeneity unique in Southeast Asia and the source of Cambodia's strong sense of national identity. The Khmers belong to the Mon-Khmer ethno linguistic group, which migrated into the fertile Mekong delta from southern China, the Korat Plateau in northeastern Thailand, and perhaps from Indonesia prior to the Angkorian period. Influenced over the centuries by Indian and Javanese kingdoms, the Khmers have intermarried with successive waves of immigrants from Thailand during the 10th to 15th centuries, Vietnamese from the 17th century, and Chinese in the 18th to 19th centuries. Despite this racial admixture, Khmer stock remains the dominant feature of Cambodian society.

Prior to 1975, Cambodia's most important racial minority were the Chinese, who controlled the national economy and maintained their high degree of ethnic distinctiveness despite widespread intermarriage with local Cambodians. As in Thailand, the Chinese were able to integrate into Cambodian life without the racial tensions and government discrimination promoted in other Southeast Asian nations. In fact, many of the leading political figures in Cambodian society are of partial Chinese

extraction. All this changed in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge initiated a ruthless campaign to rid Cambodia of all foreign influence, including the Vietnamese, the West, and the Chinese, who abandoned the economic engines of the country.

Cham Muslims were horribly persecuted during the Pol Pot regime, when, according to some experts, half of their population was exterminated and over 80% of their mosques destroyed. The survivors regard Chur Changvra near Phnom Penh as their spiritual center and follow their traditional roles as cattle traders, silk weavers, and butchers (Theravada Buddhism prohibits most Khmers from slaughtering, though not consuming animals).

Cambodia's Khmer Loeu, or Upland Khmers, traditionally lived in the forested hills of the northeast until the Vietnam War forced many down to the plains and into more sedentary lives. Today, the surviving groups not assimilated into modern Cambodian society include the Saoch in the Elephant Mountains, the Pear in the Cardamom Mountains, the Brao along the Lao border, and the Kuy in the far northwest. Like other tribes in Southeast Asia, these peoples are animist, seminomadic farmer who practice slash-and-burn agriculture.



CHANGING MONEY

You can easily change your money in Phnom Penh and Angkor, but don't count on changing it in more remote places. There you are better off taking US dollars. As a general rule with Cambodia: Dollars in 20, 50 and 100 denominations are the most useful form of currency and get you the best rates. Whatever currency you take though make sure the notes are as new as possible and don't have any writing on them. Notes in bad shape will not be accepted.

It is recommended to change to all US dollars before you arrive to Cambodia. Dollars are their second currency so changing any currency to dollars is inevitable anyway, you may as well do it at home at a place you trust.

Make sure you spend all the Cambodian cash or exchange it back before leaving as other countries are sometimes unwilling to exchange Cambodian currency for their local currencies.

TAXI

Anywhere in the world even a savvy traveler can be taken advantage of by a taxi driver and Cambodia is no exception. To avoid problems it is wise to never accept a ride with anyone who does not have a working meter and a displayed license. One way to have a good Taxi experience is to ask your hotel where to find a legitimate taxi. You may be able to get a business card of a reputable taxi driver that you can either call when needed or arrange to pick you up at a predetermined time and place.

SAFFETY & CRIME

Be very cautious when walking in the countryside: land mines and other Unexploded ordnance is a ubiquitous hazard. DO NOT TOUCH. It is not advisable to walk around after dark. Petty theft is a serious problem in Phnom Penh and other towns.



CURRENCY

The monetary unit of Cambodia is the riel. The riel is an extremely soft currency. The American dollar serves as an alternative currency, accepted and quoted by most hotels and restaurants in the country.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are accepted at the hotels.

TIPPING

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants. Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

Airport porter/hotel bellboy:

\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

Your tour guide:

\$10.00 - \$ 12.00 US per person per day.

Driver/assistants:

\$ 6.00 - \$ 7.00 US per person per day.





ETIQUETTE

As in all Buddhist countries in the region, it is important to make sure your arms and legs are covered when visiting wats or religious sites.

It is considerate to ask permission before entering the main sanctuaries and take off your shoes.

When sitting down, your feet should point away from the altar and the main image.

If talking to a monk, one's head should be lower than his. A small donation is often appropriate.

PHOTOGRAPHS

It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs, Some people may take offense.

Form of Address

Old men are addressed as “ta” and old women “yeay”, but those of your own age can be called by name.

Greeting - Cambodians use their traditional greeting - the 'wai', bowing with their hands held together. As a foreigner, shaking hands is perfectly acceptable.

In Private Homes - It is polite to take your shoes off on entering a house and a small present goes down well if you are invited for a meal.

General - Try not to pat children on the head. To beckon someone, use your hand with the palm facing downwards, Pointing is considered rude.

COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone

Country code: 855. Public telephones are available in post offices, hotels and shops displaying a telephone unit sign and at roadside kiosks. To call Cambodia from the USA/Canada dial 011 + 855 + Area Code + Phone Number.

Mobile Telephone

Roaming agreements exist with some major international mobile phone companies. Coverage is good in larger towns and cities throughout the country with sporadic coverage in rural or mountainous areas. Mobile telephones make up 81% of telephone usage in Cambodia not just due to the convenience of having a cellular phone but the cost advantages of constructing cellular relay towers over wiring the country with fixed phone lines.

Internet

Internet is available in many areas of Cambodia, in major hotels, and there are Internet cafes in many main towns and cities.

Post

Postal services in Cambodia are notoriously unreliable. Prohibited items you cannot mail are coins, banknotes, currency, and securities payable to bearer, traveler's checks, platinum, gold, silver, precious stones, jewels, expensive jewelry, or other valuable articles. First class mail cannot contain any dutiable article. Post cards can take from months to a year to reach their destination. You may want to consider mailing postcards, letters, or purchases either before your arrival to Cambodia or while you are on the next leg of your journey

Media

Cambodia's media is a bright spot amongst Southeast Asian countries becoming its most liveliest and free. Since emerging from the control and influence of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnam-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea regime, the Cambodian media sector has seen the establishment of numerous radio, television and print media outlets, although intimidation by both government and private interests have limited the Cambodian media's influence.

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ELECTRICITY

220 volts, 60 cycles in Phnom Penh, 110 volts, 50 cycles in some other towns. Power cuts and power surges are commonplace -flashlights come in handy.

WHAT TO PACK

Dress is normally casual in Cambodia. Take cool casual clothes. Cambodians are very modest and it is preferable for women to cover their arms and legs, Particularly when visiting wats. You will also want to have sunglasses, mosquito repellent and a hat to protect you from the sun. Public restrooms in Cambodia typically do not have toilet tissue so you may want to carry a small amount.

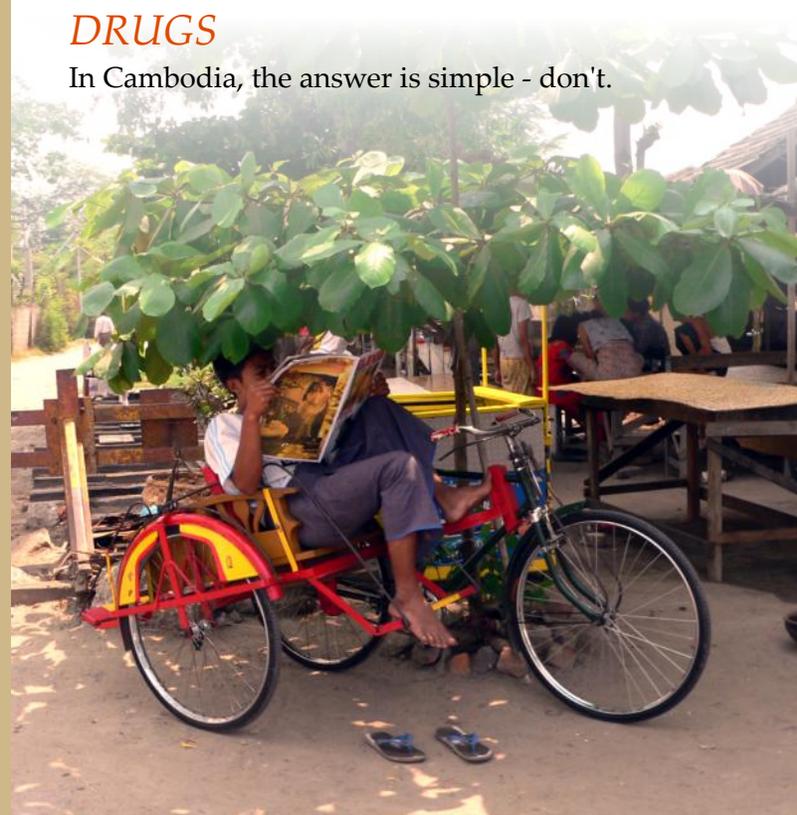
Due to restricted weight limits on all the Domestic flights (20kg or 44 pounds) it is recommended that you travel light.

HEALTH

Vaccinations are not required for entry to Cambodia, but Immunizations against cholera, hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus, and polio are recommended.

DRUGS

In Cambodia, the answer is simple - don't.



SHOPPING

Sculptured Reproductions

Cambodia has excellent reproductions and copies available at reasonable prices. The intrinsic skill of craftsmen – using the same locally mined stone used to build the ancient temples – produces sculptures of such quality that, with artificially induced weathering, have even fooled some experts. There are also bronze copies of small statues, Buddha figures, heads and apsaras for sale. These can be exported freely, but if you pass through Thailand on the way home, remember that the export of Buddha figures from that country is not allowed.

The Krama

The krama is the typical and ubiquitous locally worn chequered scarf. Uniquely Khmer; inexpensive, and immensely practical.

Weaving Silk

Weaving Silk in Cambodia is still handmade using traditional methods with the pattern dyed into the threads before the silk is woven, thus the task of dyeing and weaving a single piece can take several weeks. Older silk pieces (pre-1970) are increasingly prized.

Weavers can be seen in action at the historic silk centre of Koh Dach outside Phnom Penh. Some nice handiwork comes from Kompong Cham, Takeo and Kandal provinces.

Wood Carving

A traditional, if sometimes heavy, addition to your baggage allowance are carved wooden apsaras (nymphs), and a variety of other attractive and decorative wooden items, including furniture, which can be shipped home. Since the quality and maturity of the wood dictates its value as much as the handiwork, care in selection is needed, especially for more expensive items, so shop around.

Words of Wisdom-Buyer Beware

Bring your purchases home with you. Unless you are prepared to wait a prolonged period of time, do not have it shipped -- not even by air freight.

Do not purchase expensive goods of supposed high quality unless you are absolutely sure of what you are buying.

Unless you are an expert in gems, antiques, artifacts, etc., you should not assume that it is of the highest quality or value.

Always take the time to read the charge slips for credit card purchases before you sign them. This may seem obvious; but in the excitement of making a foreign purchase, travelers sometimes overlook this and are unpleasantly surprised when they return home and are billed by the credit card company. Taking a few moments to review the charge slip before signing it (and computing the exchange rate to be sure you are charged the right amount) can save you headaches later.



FOOD

Rice is the central ingredient of any meal. Dried, salted fish is the most common accompaniment. Cambodians eat poultry, beef, pork and game. An-sam chruk is a Cambodian favorite: a fat roll of sticky-rice filled with soybean cake and chopped pork. Khao phonne, a noodle dish, is also a popular Cambodian meal.

It is often said that Cambodian food is just Thai food without the chillies, but that is somewhat unfair. While it is true that Cambodia has been heavily influenced by its neighbors, both Thailand to the west and Vietnam to the east, and even by the French colonists from the past, there is also a distinct Khmer cuisine which shouldn't be forgotten or minimized.

The main meat source in Cambodia is freshwater fish from its many waterways including the mighty Mekong and also seafood from the Gulf of Thailand. Other meats such as beef, pork, chicken and duck are widely available but more expensive than fish.

An Indian influence shows in the curries which are similar to Thai curries but without the intense spiciness. A Chinese influence can be seen in the fried rice and fried noodles served everywhere. That said, the fried noodles may not look like Chinese fried noodles. They are usually employed as a bed on which stir-fried beef and vegetables is laid, and then a topping of scrambled eggs is added. The French influence shows up in the ubiquitous baguettes with pâté. Vietnam shows up in dishes like 'loc lac' which is marinated, cubed beef stir-fried with a soy sauce. It is usually served on a lettuce leaf and garnished tomato and onion, sometimes topped with a fried egg.



UNIQUE FOODS

Famines and hunger in the past have taught the Cambodians to eat almost everything. Often this was out of sheer necessity, but some of the more unusual edibles have become part of Cambodian food culture because they were discovered to be delicious. Strange foods, by western standards, include locusts, field rats and snakes, but perhaps the most popular, seen in markets and on the streets, are the large deep fried, marinated spiders known as Skuon spiders.

FRUIT

Fruit is widely available in Cambodia and after a careful clean very healthy. Look out for the durian. This is a fruit which people either love or hate, but whichever, there is no denying the powerful smell. Most hotels in Cambodia forbid visitors to bring in durian because of the smell. However, thankfully, the taste is very different from the smell.

WATER

Drink only bottled water or boiled water.



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The special taste of indigenous Cambodian or Khmer food comes from the extensive use of 'prahok'. This is a fermented fish paste and is used both as an ingredient and as a condiment. This is loved by most Cambodians. Indeed, for many of Cambodia's poorer peasants, a dish of rice with prahok is their main meal. For visitors prahok can initially be somewhat overpowering and rather salty. It is something of an acquired taste.

Popular Cambodian dishes include rice noodles, often served in a coconut sauce, and 'amok trey' which is fish in a thick coconut curry sauce, wrapped in banana leaves and steamed. Most meals will be accompanied by a soup, served with the main dishes rather than at the start of the meal. One favorite is 'samlor machou yuon' a sour soup made using tamarind.

Cambodians are fond of grilling or barbecuing food and grilled fish is seen everywhere. Also on offer are grilled chicken and beef, etc. These will be served either with noodles or with rice.

There are many kinds of Khmer snacks which are simple but being all time favorites for Cambodia people. Num Krouch, Num Kong, and Num Pong Ansorng are among of them. Num is the Khmer word for 'cake'. These 3 kinds of cakes are made from the same flour, which consist of 3/4 sticky rice flour and 1/4 paddy rice flour. The process of making is nearly the same, however, the taste of each cakes is varies. These 3 kinds of cakes are always selling together.

Num Kroch

"Kroch" means 'Orange', so Num Kroch is Orange Cake. In fact, the cake doesn't consist of orange as ingredient at all. The name it has got is because of the shape of the cake looks like an orange. Num Kroch is made of sticky rice flour and paddy rice flour mixed together. It has the filling made of green bean and coconut meat. The filling tastes sweet of bean, coconut meat, and sugar. The filling would be covered by flour, then people make it into round-flat orange shape, top with black sesame or marinated with white sesame. The cake will be deep-fried in cooking oil until it turn into yellow-brown.

Num Korng

Korng' in Khmer means 'bracelet', the jewelery that ladies wear in their hands. This is again Num Korng is named so from its shape. Num Korng is made of sticky rice and paddy rice flour too. It has no filling. After it is shaped as a bracelet like, it was deep-fried in cooking oil too. Then it is top with thick cooked palm sugar with white sesame. Num Korng is very delicious for those who like sugar.

Num Pong Ansorng

Ansorng is a kind of reptile animal in Cambodia. 'Pong' means 'egg'. The cake looks like its egg. So people give the cake name Num Pong Ansorng. Num Pong Ansorng is made of the same flour as Num Kroch and Num Korng. The cake is round, inside filled with green bean and coconut meat just like Num Kroch. But the flavor is salty-sweet. After deep-fried (Num Pong Ansorng doesn't need to be fried much, only turn to be slight yellow), the cake will be marinated with white cooked sugar. So Num Pong Ansorng is yummy with salty filling and sweet outer.



CULTURE & THE ARTS

KHMER ARCHITECTURE

The art of modern Cambodia is almost completely overshadowed by the greatness of its past. The influence of the Khmers at the height of the empire spread as far as the Malay peninsula in the South, to the Burmese border in the West and the Vietnamese frontier in the North and East. But ancient Khmer culture was itself inherited. Indian influence was particularly strong in the Mekong basin area and the Khmers accepted Indian ideas about astrology, religion and royalty - including the cult of the god-king (deva-raja). Other elements of Cambodian culture which are recognizably Indian in origin include classical literature and dance, as well as religious architecture. Hindu deities inspired the iconography in much of Cambodian (and Southeast Asian) art and Sanskrit gave the Khmers access to a whole new world of ideas, which were tailored and transformed to the Cambodian way of thinking.

Cambodian influence is very strong in Thai culture as Siam's capture of a large part of the Khmer Empire in the 15th century resulted in many of Cambodia's best scholars, artists and craftsmen being transported to Siam (Thailand).

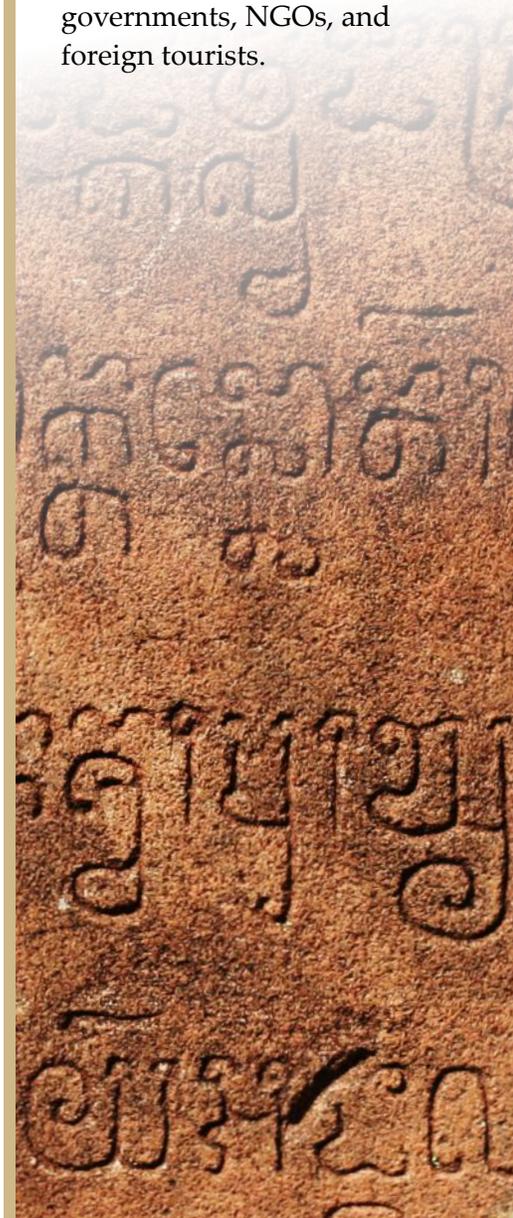
The richness of their culture remains a great source of pride for the Khmer people and in the past it has helped forge a sense of national identity. There has been an artistic revival since 1979 and the government has devoted resources to the restoration of monuments and pagodas. (Many local wats have been repaired by local subscription; it is estimated that one fifth of rural disposable income is given to the upkeep of wats.)

The resurgence of Buddhism has been paralleled in recent years by a revival of traditional Khmer culture, which was actively undermined during the Pol Pot years. Today Phnom Penh's 2 Fine Arts Schools are flourishing again; one teaches music and dance, the other specializes in architecture and archaeology. There is a surprisingly good collection of artifacts in the National Museum of Arts even though huge quantities of treasure and antiques have been stolen and much of the remainder destroyed by the Khmer Rouge.

The height of Khmer art and architecture dates from the Angkor period. All the surviving monuments are built of stone or brick, and all are religious buildings. The culture and art of the early kingdoms of Funan and Chenla were central to the evolution of Angkarian art and architecture. Art historian Philip Rawson writes that these 2 kingdoms were the foundation of Khmer art, "just as archaic Greek sculpture was the foundation of later classical Greek art". Funan's center was to the SW of the Mekong delta but extended into present day Cambodia. The only remains that definitely came from the early kingdom of Funan are

ART

The history of art in Cambodia stretches back centuries to ancient crafts. Traditional Cambodian arts and crafts include textiles, non-textile weaving, silversmithing, stone carving, lacquer ware, ceramics, wat murals, and kite-making. Beginning in the mid-20th century, a tradition of modern art began in Cambodia, though in the later 20th century both traditional and modern arts declined for several reasons, including the killing of artists by the Khmer Rouge. The country has experienced a recent artistic revival due to increased support from governments, NGOs, and foreign tourists.



limited to 4 Sanskrit inscriptions and a few sculptures. The earliest surviving statues from Funan are at Angkor Borei and date from the 6th century; but by then Funan was a vassal of Chenla. The kingdom of Chenla - based at Sambor and later at Sambor Prei Kuk - expanded at the expense of Funan. It refined and developed Funan's earlier artistic styles.

Relics of the pre-Angkorian periods have been found all over South Cambodia and between the Mekong and the Tonle Sap. The principal monuments are brick towers with square ground plans, false doors and mounting storeys of decreasing size. They were characterized by strong sculptural work, based on Indian ideas but carved in a unique style. Many of the statues from this era are in the National Museum of Arts at Phnom Penh. Most of the art from the pre-Angkorian kingdoms is Hindu but it seems that Mahayana Buddhism was briefly introduced into the country as a number of images of Bodhisattvas have been found. In the late 8th century, the Chenla kingdom collapsed and Jayavarman II, who had lived most of his life in the Saliendra court in Java, returned to declare himself devaraja in 802. During the Angkor period, Javanese and neighboring Champa architectural influences were incorporated into Khmer designs. The architecture and its decoration were governed by a series of mystical and religious beliefs. Temples were designed to represent the cosmic Mount Meru, surrounded by oceans.

DANCE, DRAMA AND MUSIC

There is a strong tradition of dance in Cambodia which has its origins in the sacred dances of the apsaras, the mythological seductresses of ancient Cambodia. Classical dance reached its height during the Angkor period; it was based on interpretations of the Indian epics, particularly the Ramayana. Dance also became a religious tradition, designed to bring the king and his people divine blessing. Dancers, nearly all of whom were well born, were central to the royal court and were protected as a separate part of the king's harem; only the god-king could touch them. The dancers became legendary even outside Cambodia: when Thailand invaded, the Khmer classical ballet dancers were part of their war booty and were taken to the Thai court. The decline of Angkor brought

the decline of classical dance, although it continued to survive as an art form through the patronage of the royal Thai court. When the French colonialists revived Khmer ballet in the 20th century they initially imported dancers from Thailand.

The dances are very symbolic. Court dances are subject to a precise order, a strict form and a prescribed language of movements and gestures. Most of the dancers are women and the male and female roles are distinguished by costume. All the dancers are barefoot as the unimpeded movement of the feet is very important. The national dance is called the lanthorn which is characterized by slow graceful movements of the hands and arms.

Folk plays and shadow plays are a popular form of entertainment in the countryside. The latter are based on stories from the Ramayana embroidered with local legends. The characters are cut out of leather and often painted. Wandering shadow puppeteers perform at local festivals.

Cambodian music has evolved from Indian and Indonesian influences and, more recently, Thai. The traditional orchestra consists of 3 xylophones, khom thom (a horseshoe-shaped arrangement with 16 flat gongs), violins, wind instruments including flutes, flageolets and a Khmer version of bagpipes, as well as drums of different shapes and sizes.



RELIGION

Hinduism and Buddhism have been the two most dominant religions to flourish in Cambodia since ancient times. The people of the region gladly welcomed these two religions thousands of years ago and have since then adhered to them.

Hinduism in particular has been the dominant religion in the region. It has played a massive role in shaping the social structure of the country right from the time when it was accepted by the Angkor monarchs. The monarchs gladly accepted the concept of Deva-Raja which revered them as a manifestation of the god shiva in human form.

There are many temples still surviving from the Angkor period that were built as a tribute to the Hindu gods. The architecture of the Hindu temples display all sorts of vivid artistry that is characteristic of Hinduism. The temples were made using the best of building materials which is why they have managed to stand the test of time. Inside the temples they were decorated with fancy ornaments and sculptures that displayed the craftsmanship of the Cambodian people.

ALLURING ASIA

The second most popular religion to flourish in Cambodia through the ages has been Buddhism. The particular sect that gained dominance in the region is known as Mahayana. Although the dharma came into the region round about the same time as Hinduism it was always second to Hinduism in terms of the number of followers it had. Over the years however Buddhism rose in popularity and became the state religion back in the 13th century. An overwhelming majority of the local population amounting to almost 95% of the people profess the Buddhist faith in Cambodia today.

The 1970s saw a massive oppression of Buddhists at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime. The Buddhist monks were brought down from their highly revered position and forced to contribute to social growth by engaging in manual labor. As a result many Buddhists were executed and tortured along with which many of their temples were also demolished.

Alongside the pantheist religions exists the presence of the monotheistic Islamic community in Cambodia. Although this community is not as large when compared to those of other faiths it still has a strong presence in the Cambodian community. The Muslims of Cambodia also suffered intense persecution at the hands of the Khmer rouge regime which was highly intolerant of any form of organized religion because of being atheistic in nature.

There is also a significant Christian community present in Cambodia. The Roman Catholic version of Christianity is the most dominant in the region due to a history of catholic missionary activity in the region. The Christian population of Cambodia was quite overwhelmingly large at one point in time but has diminished since then.

Apart from these well established religions there are the hill tribes of Cambodia that have their own beliefs. These are small communities that live in scattered places with each group having particular beliefs of their own.

