

Understand Cambodia

CAMBODIA TODAY.....304

Get up to date on the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), environmental challenges and the evolving economy.

HISTORY.....306

Follow the roller-coaster ride that is Cambodian history, from the heady era of the Angkorian Empire to the dark days of genocidal madness.

POL POT & THE KHMER ROUGE TRIALS.....323

Learn more about the leadership of the Khmer Rouge and keep abreast of the latest developments in the ongoing trial.

PEOPLE & CULTURE.....326

Get the low-down on Cambodia's way of life, the ethnic patchwork of its peoples, their religious beliefs and the traditional arts.

FOOD & DRINK.....336

Know your noodles and plan a culinary odyssey through Cambodia with this guide to Khmer cuisine.

ENVIRONMENT.....341

Mountains high, rivers deep; discover more about Cambodia's varied landscape, protected areas and the wild critters roaming the jungle.

Cambodia Today

The political landscape shifted dramatically in the 2013 election, with major opposition gains adding up to some interesting times for Cambodia. The economy continues to grow at a dramatic pace, albeit from what was 'Year Zero' just a few decades ago, but many observers are beginning to question at what cost to the delicate environment.

Best on Film

The Killing Fields (1984) This definitive film on the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia tells the story of American journalist Sydney Schanberg and Cambodian photographer Dith Pran during and after the war.

Apocalypse Now (1979) In Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece, a renegade colonel, played by Marlon Brando, goes AWOL in Cambodia. Martin Sheen plays a young soldier sent to bring him back, and the ensuing encounter makes for a powerful indictment of war.

The Last Reel (2014) This award-winning homegrown Cambodian film explores the impact of Cambodia's dark past on the next generation.

Best in Print

Hun Sen's Cambodia (Sebastian Strangio) A no-holds-barred look at contemporary Cambodia and the rule of Prime Minister Hun Sen.

The Gate (François Bizot) Bizot was kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge, and later held by them in the French embassy.

Voices from S-21 (David Chandler) A study of the Khmer Rouge's interrogation and torture centre.

Cambodia's Curse (Joel Brinkley) A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist pulls no punches in his criticism of the government and donors alike.

Politics

The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has dominated the politics of Cambodia since 1979 when it was installed in power by the Vietnamese. Party and state are intertwined and the CPP leadership has been making plans for the future with dynastic alliances between its offspring.

However, this control was shaken in the last election when the united opposition was able to make significant gains. Long-standing opposition leader Sam Rainsy joined with Human Rights Party leader Kem Sokha to launch the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). While official results from the National Election Commission (NEC) confirmed a CPP victory, official opposition counts suggested the CNRP may have actually won the popular vote by a slight majority. As a result the CNRP boycotted the National Assembly and refused to take its seats.

Following months of demonstrations and political wranglings, the opposition ended its boycott. Since that time, both sides have agreed to support a 'culture of dialogue', which means promoting conversation over criticism. However, heated topics remain, including the shared border with Vietnam and land reform. When it comes to land issues, it is ironic that the former communist, Hun Sen, is backing the elite tycoons, and the ex-banker, Sam Rainsy, is backing the masses with a land-redistribution scheme. Such is Cambodia, an enigmatic land of confusion and contradictions.

Huge geopolitical forces are at play in the region with China's push into the South China Sea. Cambodia finds itself caught in the middle of a simmering conflict between its two closest allies, China and Vietnam, and cannot please both; it has already alienated some of its