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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Cambodia has improved immensely during the past decade and everything is available, from the classic budget crash pad to the plush palace. Most hotels quote in US dollars, but some places in the provinces quote in riel, while those near the Thai border quote in baht. We provide prices based on the currency quoted to us at the time of research. In Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Sihanoukville and Kep there are options to suit all wallets. Elsewhere around Cambodia, the choice is limited to budget and midrange options, but these places provide great value for money. Even some of the

provincial capitals like Ban Lung, Battambang and Kompong Thom now have midrange boutique hotels.

In this guide, budget accommodation refers to guesthouses where the majority of rooms are within the US\$2 to US\$20 range, midrange generally runs from US\$20 up to US\$80 and top end is considered US\$80 and up, up, up.

Budget guesthouses used to be restricted to Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville, but as tourism takes off in the provinces, they are turning up in most of the other provincial capitals. Costs hover around US\$2 to US\$5 for a bed. In many rural parts of Cambodia, the standard rate for cheap hotels is US\$5, usually with bathroom and satellite TV. There may be a few places starting at 10,000r, but they tend to make more by the hour than they do by the night, so don't count on much sleep.

In Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and the South Coast, which see a steady flow of tourist traffic, hotels improve significantly once you start spending more than US\$10 a night. For US\$15 it is usually possible to find an air-con room with satellite TV and attached bathroom. If you spend between US\$20 and US\$50 it is possible to arrange something very comfortable with the possible lure of a swimming pool. Most smaller provincial cities also offer air-conditioned comfort in the US\$10 to US\$20 range.

There are now a host of international-standard hotels in Siem Reap, several in Phnom Penh and a couple on the coast in Sihanoukville and Kep. Some are operated by familiar international brands such as Orient Express and Raffles. Most quote hefty walk-in rates and whack 10% tax and 10% service on as well. Book through a travel agent for a lower rate including taxes and service.

Some guesthouses in Cambodia do not have hot water, but most places have at least a few more expensive rooms where it is available. Smaller places in remote areas may have bathrooms where a large jar or cement trough is filled with water for bathing purposes. Don't climb into it – just sluice the water with the plastic scoop or metal bowl.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

While many of the swish new hotels have lifts, older hotels often don't and the cheapest rooms are at the top of several flights of stairs. It's a win-win-win situation: cheaper rooms, a bit of exercise and better views.

There is often confusion over the terms 'single', 'double', 'double occupancy' and 'twin'. A single has one bed, even if two people sleep in it. If there are two beds in the room, that is a twin, even if only one person occupies it. Two people staying in the same room is double occupancy. In some hotels 'double' means twin beds, in others it means double occupancy.

Homestays

Homestays are popping up in the provinces and offer a good way to meet the local people and learn about the Cambodian lifestyle. There are several organised homestays around the country in provinces like Kompong Cham and Kompong Thom, as well as lots of informal homestays in out-of-the-way places such as Preah Vihear. In the minority areas of Mondulakiri and Ratanakiri, it is often possible to stay with tribal villagers. The Mekong Discovery Trail (p300) includes several homestays between Kratie and the Lao border.

ACTIVITIES

Tourism in Cambodia is catching up fast and there are now more activities than ever to get that adrenaline buzz. Phnom Penh and Siem Reap remain the places with most of the action, but Sihanoukville and Kep are making a name for themselves for fun in the sun with water sports.

Birdwatching

Birdwatching is a big draw, as Cambodia is home to some of the region's rarest large waterbirds including adjutants, storks and pelicans. For more on the birds of Cambodia see p67, and for the low-down on bird sanctuaries and birding opportunities around Siem Reap, see p151.

Boat Trips

With so much water around the country, it is hardly surprising that boat trips are popular with tourists. Some of these are functional, such as travelling up the Tonlé Sap River from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap (p120), or along the Sangker River from Siem Reap to Battambang (p255). Others are the traditional tourist trips, such as those available in Phnom Penh (p98), Siem Reap (p151) and Sihanoukville (p222), or check out dolphin-spotting in Kratie (p300).

Cycling

As Cambodia's roads continue to improve, cycling tourists are an increasingly common sight. It's a real adventure and brings visitors that much closer to the uberfriendly locals. Local kids will race you at any opportunity and families will beckon cyclists in for some

PRACTICALITIES

- The usual voltage is 220V, 50 cycles, but power surges and power cuts are common, particularly in the provinces. Electrical sockets are usually two-prong, flat or round pin.
- Most guesthouses and hotels have cheap laundry services, but check they have a dryer if it's the wet season. There are laundry shops in every town.
- The *Phnom Penh Post* is now daily and offers the best balance of Cambodian and international news, including business and sport. The *Cambodia Daily* is a long-running English-language newspaper. *AsiaLife* is a free monthly listings magazine (a sort of *Time Out: Phnom Penh*).
- BBC World Service broadcasts on 100.00FM in Phnom Penh. Cambodian radio and TV stations are mainly government-controlled and specialise in karaoke videos and soap operas.
- Cambodians use the metric system for everything except precious metals and gems, where they prefer Chinese units of measurement.