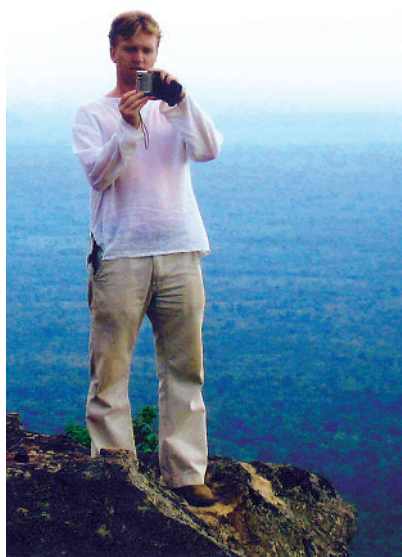


On the Road



NICK RAY *Coordinating Author*

This photo was taken at Prasat Preah Vihear (p279), the king of the mountain temples, and has to be one of my favourite views in Cambodia – the extensive plains of lowland Cambodia melting into the infinite horizon. Border tensions between Thailand and Cambodia means almost no tourists are visiting at this time. A motorcycle adventure from the Cambodian side remains a real adventure, although a risky one with the two armies facing off over barbed wire. Preah Vihear was where the Khmer Rouge made their last stand, so you still need to be careful of land mines, but equally dangerous are the ferocious winds that whip across the ridge. Careful how close you stand to the edge.

DANIEL ROBINSON This enormous jackfruit, for sale on an upturned roadside basket, made my mouth water as I anticipated its sweet, spongy, fragrant flesh. The local kids – this was on the car-less Mekong island of Koh Paen (p293) – were as captivated by me as I was by the monster fruit.



GREG BLOOM The notorious 57km 'road' from Koh Nhek to Lumphat is a convoluted maze of rutted single tracks bisecting the backcountry of Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri. Here I'm standing at the point where the trail empties into the Srepok River in Lumphat (p311), having just survived the four-hour trip on the back of a *moto*. From there, it was on to Ban Lung for a well-deserved frosty beverage.

Destination Cambodia

FAST FACTS

Population:	14.5 million
Life expectancy:	62 years
Infant mortality:	55 per 1000 births
GDP:	US\$11.25 billion (2008)
Adult literacy rate:	76.3%
Number of tourists per year:	2 million and rising
Number of monks in Cambodia:	60,000
Annual freshwater fish catch:	290,000 to 430,000 tonnes per year
Bombs dropped on Cambodia:	539,000 tonnes
Number of psychiatrists in Cambodia:	26

'Ascend to the realm of the gods at the mother of all temples, Angkor Wat, a spectacular fusion of symbolism, symmetry and spirituality'

There's a magic about Cambodia that casts a spell on many who visit this charming yet confounding kingdom. Ascend to the realm of the gods at the mother of all temples, Angkor Wat, a spectacular fusion of symbolism, symmetry and spirituality. Descend into the hell of Tuol Sleng and come face to face with the Khmer Rouge and its killing machine. Welcome to the conundrum that is Cambodia: a country with a history both inspiring and depressing, an intoxicating place where the future is waiting to be shaped.

The years of fear and loathing are finally over and Angkor is once more the symbol of the nation, drawing pilgrims from across the globe. Peace has come to this beautiful yet blighted land after three decades of war, and the Cambodian people have opened their arms to the world. Tourism has well and truly taken off, yet a journey here remains an adventure as much as a holiday.

Contemporary Cambodia is the successor state to the mighty Khmer empire, which, during the Angkorian period, ruled much of what is now Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The remains of this empire can be seen at the fabled temples of Angkor, monuments unrivalled in scale and grandeur in Southeast Asia. The traveller's first glimpse of Angkor Wat, the ultimate expression of Khmer genius, is simply staggering and is matched by only a few select spots on earth, such as Machu Picchu or Petra.

Just as Angkor is more than its wat, so too is Cambodia more than its temples. The chaotic yet charismatic capital of Phnom Penh is a hub of political intrigue, economic vitality and intellectual debate. All too often overlooked by hit-and-run tourists ticking off Angkor on a regional tour, the revitalised city is finally earning plaudits in its own right thanks to a gorgeous riverside location, a cultural renaissance, and a dining and drinking scene to rival the best in the region.

Siem Reap and Phnom Penh may be the heavyweights, but to some extent they are a bubble, a world away from the Cambodia of the countryside. This is the place to experience the rhythm of rural life and timeless landscapes of dazzling rice paddies and swaying sugar palms. Spend some time in the *srok* (provinces), as Cambodians call them, enjoying a *dar leng* (walkabout) to discover the true flavour of the country.

The South Coast is fringed by tropical islands, with just a handful of beach huts in sight. The next Ko Samui or Gili Trawangan awaits discovery and, for now, visitors can play Robinson Crusoe, but probably not for much longer. Inland from the coast lie the Cardamom Mountains, part of a vast tropical wilderness that provides a home to elusive wildlife and is the gateway to emerging ecotourism adventures. The mighty Mekong River cuts through the country and is home to some of the region's last remaining freshwater dolphins; cyclists and dirt bikers can follow the river's length as it meanders through traditional communities. The northeast is a world unto itself, its wild and mountainous landscapes a home for Cambodia's ethnic minorities and an abundance of natural attractions, including thundering waterfalls and pristine crater lakes.

Despite this beautiful backdrop, life is no picnic for the average Cambodian. Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in Asia and it's a tough existence for much of the population, as they battle it out against the whims of nature and, sometimes, their politicians. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP; www.undp.org), Cambodia remains in worse shape than Congo and the Solomon Islands, just scraping in ahead of Myanmar,

while Transparency International (www.transparency.org), the anticorruption watchdog, rates the country a lowly 158 out of the 180 countries ranked. Income remains desperately low for many Khmers, with annual salaries in the hundreds rather than thousands of dollars, and public servants, such as teachers, unable to eke out a living on their meagre wages.

Cambodia's pristine environment may be a big draw, but much of it is currently under threat. Ancient forests are being razed to make way for plantations, rivers are being sized up for major hydroelectric power plants and the south coast is being explored by leading oil companies. All this helped add up to an ever-stronger economy, at least until the global financial crisis swept through town, but it's unlikely to encourage the ecotourism that is just starting to develop.

Cambodia is like the teen starlet who has just been discovered by an adoring public: everyone wants something from her but not everyone wants what is in her best interests. The government, long shunned by international big business, is keen to benefit from all these new-found opportunities. Contracts are being signed off like autographs and there are concerns for the long-term development of the country. The Chinese have come to the table to play for big stakes and pledged US\$1.1 billion in assistance in late 2009, considerably more than all the other donors put together, and with no burdensome strings attached. Good governance? Beijing preaches a different faith to that of Brussels.

Tourism has brought many benefits to Cambodia: it provides opportunity and employment for a new generation of Khmers, has helped spark a rebirth of the traditional arts, and has given the country a renewed sense of pride and optimism as it recovers from the dark decades of war and genocide. However, not all tourism has been good for the country and there is the dark side of sex tourism, human exploitation and a gambling culture. Cambodia is in a great position to learn from the mistakes of other countries in the region and follow a sustainable road to tourism development. However, it may be that the government is more focused on the short-term gain that megabucks investments can provide. Can Cambodia be all things to all visitors? So far, so good, but a new era is about to begin and the beaches are the next battleground.

There are two faces to Cambodia: one shiny and happy, the other dark and complex. For every illegal eviction of city dwellers or land grab by a general, there will be a new NGO school offering better education, or a new clean-water initiative to improve the lives of the average villager. Such is the yin and yang of Cambodia, a country that inspires and confounds. The more layers you unravel, the more it makes you want to cry, but these are spontaneous tears, sometimes of sorrow, sometimes of joy.

Despite having the eighth wonder of the world in its backyard, Cambodia's greatest treasure is its people. The Khmers have been to hell and back, struggling through years of bloodshed, poverty and political instability. Thanks to an unbreakable spirit and infectious optimism, they have prevailed with their smiles intact. No visitor comes away from Cambodia without a measure of admiration and affection for the inhabitants of this enigmatic kingdom.

Cambodia: beaches as beautiful as Thailand but without the tourist tide; wilds as remote as Laos but even less explored; cuisine as subtle as Vietnam but yet to be discovered; and temples that leave Myanmar (Burma) and Indonesia in the shade. This is the heart of Southeast Asia, with everything the region has to offer packed into one bite-sized country. If you were only planning to spend a week in Cambodia, it's time to think again.

'Despite having the eighth wonder of the world in its backyard, Cambodia's greatest treasure is its people'

Getting Started

A journey to Cambodia offers a window on the soul of Southeast Asia. The magnificent temples of Angkor are unrivalled, and beyond the rich legacy of the ancient Khmer empire lie the buzzing capital of Phnom Penh, countless kilometres of unspoilt tropical beaches, the mighty Mekong River, a vibrant culture and some of the friendliest people in the region. It's not the most 'sophisticated' destination in the world (though for many this makes it all the more charming), so be sure to pack some patience and humour. Cambodia is full of surprises, so gear up for the adventure.

See Climate Charts (p323) for more information.

WHEN TO GO

Cambodia can be visited at any time of the year. The ideal months are December and January, when humidity levels are relatively low, there is little rainfall and a cooling breeze whips across the land, but this is also peak season when the majority of visitors descend on the country.

From early February, temperatures keep rising until the killer month, April, when the mercury often exceeds 40°C (104°F). Some time in May or June, the southwestern monsoon brings rain and high humidity, cooking up a sweat for all but the hardiest of visitors. The wet season, which lasts until October, isn't such a bad time to visit, as the rain tends to come in short, sharp downpours. Angkor is surrounded by lush foliage and the moats are full of water at this time of year. If you are planning to visit remote areas, however, the wet season makes for tough travel.

Some visitors like to coordinate their trip with one of the annual festivals, such as Bon Om Tuk or Khmer New Year (see p19).

COSTS & MONEY

The cost of travelling in Cambodia covers the whole spectrum, from very cheap to outrageously expensive, depending on taste and comfort. Penny-pinchers can survive on as little as US\$15 per day, while budget travellers with an eye on enjoyment can live it up on US\$30 a day. Midrange travellers can turn on the style with US\$75 to US\$150 a day, staying in smart places, dining well and travelling in comfort. At the top end, you'll need US\$200 a day or more to live a life of luxury.

Accommodation starts from as little as US\$2 to US\$5 in popular destinations. Spending US\$10 to US\$20 will add amenities such as air-conditioning, satellite TV, fridge and hot water. Stepping up to US\$50, you enter the world of three-star standards and charming boutique resorts. Forking out US\$100

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Actually, bring as little as possible. Cambodia has virtually everything you find at home and it's usually available at lower prices. All the soaps and smellies are plentiful, and clothing, shoes and backpacks are available at a fraction of the price in the West. Tampons are available in all major towns and cities, but not in more remote areas.

A Swiss Army knife or equivalent comes in handy, but you don't need 27 separate functions. A torch (flashlight), compass, a flash drive and extra camera memory are also useful.

Other handy items include earplugs to block the ever-present noise, a universal plug adaptor, a rain cover for your backpack and insect repellent to keep the bugs at bay. Finally, the secret of successful packing: plastic bags. Not only do they keep things separate and clean, but also dry. That means a lot at the end of a long, wet day.

or more brings a five-star fling. Don't be afraid to negotiate for a discount if it is low season or traffic is down.

While Cambodian cuisine may not be as well known as that of neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam, it can certainly compete with the best of them. Snack on the street or chow down in the market, with meals starting at just 2000r or so, or indulge in a banquet for a few bucks. Local Khmer restaurants are a step up in comfort, and a meal will cost around US\$2. Next are the sophisticated Khmer, Asian and international restaurants. Meals start from about US\$4 at the cheaper places, rising to US\$10 and up at the smarter ones, and US\$50 or more is possible if you go wild with the wine list.

Domestic flights link Phnom Penh to Siem Reap. Fast boats link several popular destinations in Cambodia and the journey can be more scenic than by road. There is now a healthy selection of bus companies connecting towns and cities throughout Cambodia and prices are rock bottom. On the rougher roads, share taxis and pick-ups take the strain. Train travel is no longer possible, as passenger services have been suspended, but that could be seen as a blessing in disguise given that trains crawl along at an average speed of 20km/h. For ultimate flexibility, rent a car or 4WD and travel with a guide. See the Transport chapter (p337) for more information.

Visitors to Angkor (which is surely everybody coming to Cambodia) will have to factor in the cost of entrance fees, which are US\$20 for one day, US\$40 for three days and US\$60 for one week. An additional expense is transport to get to, from and around the ruins; from US\$2 for a bicycle, about US\$8 for a *moto* (small motorcycle with driver), US\$10 to US\$15 for a *remork-moto* (motorcycle with carriage, aka *tuk tuk*) and US\$25 to US\$50 for a car.

Small budget, big budget, it doesn't really matter; Cambodia is the place to be. Soak it up in the style that suits.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and experience the magic of independent travel. International travel is growing at a dizzying rate and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Cambodia has been to hell and back and there are many ways that you can put a little back into the country. Staying a bit longer, travelling further, and spreading the wealth around (by getting off the beaten path) is obvious advice, but even for those on a short stay, it is possible to engage with locals in markets and spend money in restaurants and outlets that assist disadvantaged Cambodians. See the boxed text, p60, in the Food and Drink chapter, as well as the Eating and Shopping sections in the Phnom Penh and Siem Reap chapters, and other town entries, for more ideas.

The following websites have more information on sustainable tourism and tips on responsible travel:

Cambodia Community-Based Ecotourism Network (www.ccben.org) The official website promoting community-based ecotourism in Cambodia. Browse here for more on projects and initiatives across the country.

ChildSafe (www.childsafe-cambodia.org) Learn about the ChildSafe campaign, which aims to stop child-sex tourism and protect vulnerable children from all forms of exploitation.

ConCERT (www.concertcambodia.org) Siem Reap-based organisation 'connecting communities, environment and responsible tourism'.

Heritage Watch (www.heritagewatch.org) The home of the heritage-friendly tourism campaign to raise interest in remote heritage sites and their protection.

HOW MUCH?

Hotel room with air-con
US\$10-20

Restaurant meal US\$4-15

Internet access per hour
US\$0.40-2.00

Cambodia Daily
news-paper 1200r

Krama (checked scarf)
US\$1-2

Mekong Discovery Trail (www.mekongdiscoverytrail.org) The official website for the Mekong Discovery Trail, promoting community-based tourism initiatives on the upper Mekong.

Responsible Travel (www.responsible-travel.org) A no-nonsense website with commonsense advice on how to travel with a conscience.

Sam Veasna Center for Wildlife Conservation (www.samveasna.org) The best source of information on sustainable visits to Cambodia's world-class bird sanctuaries.

Stay Another Day (www.stay-another-day.org) A great website dedicated to tempting tourists into staying another day in Cambodia, packed with ideas on day trips, project visits and alternative things to see and do.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

The classic Cambodian read is Norman Lewis' *A Dragon Apparent: Travels in Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam* (1951), an account of his 1950 foray into an Indochina that would soon disappear. In the course of his travels, Lewis circumnavigated Tonlé Sap Lake, with a pause at Angkor. The book has been reissued as part of *The Norman Lewis Omnibus* (1995).

Written by authors who know and love their countries, *To Asia with Love: A Connoisseur's Guide to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam* (2004), an anthology edited by Kim Fay, is a delightful introduction to Cambodia and the Mekong region for those looking for some inspiration and adventure. A new *To Cambodia with Love* is still on the cards and should finally be out some time during the lifetime of this book.

Travels in Siam, Cambodia, Laos and Annam (1864) by Henri Mouhot has been reprinted in English by White Lotus and gives the inside story of the man credited with 'rediscovering' Angkor.

Jon Swain's *River of Time* (1995) takes the reader back to an old Indochina, partly lost to the madness of war, and includes firsthand accounts of the French embassy stand-off in the first days of the Khmer Rouge takeover.

Tim Page's *Derailed in Uncle Ho's Victory Garden* (1995) covers this legendary photographer's quest for the truth behind the disappearance of photojournalist Sean Flynn (son of Errol) in Cambodia in 1970, and his mission to secure a monument to fallen correspondents on all sides of the Indochina conflict.

An excellent account of life on the Mother River is *The River's Tale: A Year on the Mekong* (2001) by Edward Gargan. A war-protector-turned-foreign-correspondent, Gargan sees for himself how Cambodia and its neighbours have brought themselves back from the brink.

The Indochina Chronicles (2005) by Phil Karber is a lively travelogue taking in adventures and misadventures in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Amit Gilboa's *Off the Rails in Phnom Penh – Guns, Girls and Ganja* (1998) deals with such murky subjects as prostitution and drugs. It feels like he got too close to his subject at times and it's not really a side of Cambodia of which most Khmers are proud.

The ultimate spoof guidebook, *Phaic Tăn: Sunstroke on a Shoestring* (2004) is a pastiche of Southeast Asian countries that pokes fun at all of us. No one is spared: not the locals, not the travellers – not even hallowed guidebook authors.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Andy Brouwer's Cambodia Tales (www.andybrouwer.co.uk) Gateway to all things Cambodian, this site includes comprehensive links to other sites and regular travel articles from veteran Cambodia adventurers. Includes a popular blog.

Angkor Wat Portal (www.angkor.com) When it comes to links, this site has them, spreading its cyber-tentacles into all sorts of interesting areas.

TOP 10

Thailand

CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh

Vietnam

ANCIENT TEMPLES

Cambodia is the temple capital of Asia. The kingdom is littered with the lavish legacy of the god-kings. Choose from majestic mountain-top temples, forbidding and forgotten jungle fortresses, incredible carved riverbeds and pre-Angkorian brick cities.

- 1 Angkor Wat (p167), the mother of all temples
- 2 Banteay Chhmar (p265), the forgotten complex of the far northwest
- 3 Banteay Srei (p189), the jewel in the crown of Angkorian art
- 4 Bayon (p172), with its 216 enigmatic faces
- 5 Beng Mealea (p191), Angkor-sized but swallowed by jungle
- 6 Kbal Spean (p190), the River of a Thousand Lingas
- 7 Koh Ker (p274), an usurper capital of huge proportions
- 8 Prasat Preah Vihear (p279), the most spectacular of the mountain temples
- 9 Sambor Prei Kuk (p284), the first temple city in the region
- 10 Ta Prohm (p181), left as explorers first saw it – nature run riot

THE CAMBODIAN TRAGEDY IN WORDS

In stark contrast to the glories of the Angkor empire is the dark void into which the country plunged in the 1970s. A brutal civil war raged for five years, delivering the Khmer Rouge to power. This regime turned the clocks to Year Zero in what was to become one of the world's most radical and bloody revolutions. Read your way into these tumultuous events to understand how it all happened.

- 1 *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* by William Shawcross (1979)
- 2 *Brother Enemy* by Nayan Chanda (1985)
- 3 *History of Cambodia* by David Chandler (1994)
- 4 *Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness* by Milton Osbourne (1994)
- 5 *The Pol Pot Regime* by Ben Kiernan (1996)
- 6 *Voices from S-21* by David Chandler (1999)
- 7 *First They Killed My Father* by Luong Ung (2001)
- 8 *The Gate* by Francois Bizot (2003)
- 9 *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare* by Phillip Short (2004)
- 10 *The Lost Executioner* by Nic Dunlop (2005)

ADVENTURES

If you are looking for adventures in Asia, then you have come to the right place. The roads may be rough, but the stories will be smooth and stay with you forever.

- 1 Make the overland pilgrimage to Prasat Preah Vihear (p279)
- 2 Beachcomb on the beautiful island of Koh Kong (p203)
- 3 Disappear for a week into the wildlife-rich forests of Virachey National Park (p311)
- 4 Paddle a dugout through the flooded forest of Kompong Pluk (p152)
- 5 Go underground at Kampot Province's cave pagodas (p228 and p231)
- 6 Ride the bamboo train in Battambang, Cambodia's local express (p252)
- 7 Camp out in the jungle at the temple of Preah Khan (p272)
- 8 See some of Asia's rarest large waterbirds at Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary (p151)
- 9 Mountain bike through traditional villages on the Mekong Discovery Trail (p300)
- 10 Penetrate the vast rainforests of the remote Cardamoms like an explorer of old (p200)

Biking Southeast Asia with Mr Pumpy (www.mrpumpy.net) The definitive but dated website for cyclists passing through Cambodia is written with candour and humour by Mr Pumpy's best friend Felix Hude.

Expat Advisory (www.expat-advisory.com) News and events site aimed at expats in Asia, with up-to-date information on happenings in Phnom Penh.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Offers information on travelling to and within Cambodia, the Thorn Tree travel forum and up-to-date travel news.

Ministry of Tourism (www.mot.gov.kh) The official Cambodian tourism website is dated, but there are some useful links for hotels, restaurants and travel agents.

Tales of Asia (www.talesofasia.com) This popular website has detailed information on overland travel in Cambodia, including the Bangkok–Siem Reap overland run.

Things Asian (www.thingsasian.com) Bubbling with information on the culture of the Mekong region, this site has everything including architecture, literature and fashion.

Events Calendar

Why not plan your trip to coincide with one of Cambodia's major festivals? Holidays and festivals take place according to the lunar calendar, so dates vary from year to year. Check the internet for the exact dates.

JANUARY–APRIL

CHAUL CHNAM CHEN (CHINESE NEW YEAR)

late Jan–mid-Feb

The Chinese inhabitants of Cambodia celebrate their New Year somewhere between late January and mid-February – for the Vietnamese, this is Tet. As many of Phnom Penh's businesses are run by Chinese, commerce grinds to a halt around this time and there are dragon dances all over town. Many Vietnamese living in Cambodia return to their homeland for a week or more.

CHAUL CHNAM KHMER (KHMER NEW YEAR)

mid-Apr

This is a three-day celebration of the Khmer New Year, and is like Christmas, New Year and birthdays all rolled into one. Cambodians make offerings at wats, clean out their homes, and exchange gifts. It is a lively time to visit the country as the Khmers go wild with water and talcum powder, leaving a lot of bemused tourists looking like plaster-cast figures. Large crowds congregate at Wat Phnom in the capital, but females should watch out for the over-eager attention of young gangs of males. Throngs of Khmers flock to Angkor, and it's absolute madness at most temples, so avoid the celebration if you want a quiet, reflective Angkor experience. That said, it is nowhere near as excessive as in Thailand or Laos, so it might seem quiet by comparison.

MAY–AUGUST

CHAT PREAH NENGKAL (ROYAL PLOUGHING CEREMONY)

early May

Led by the royal family, the Royal Ploughing Ceremony is a ritual agricultural festival held

to mark the traditional beginning of the rice-growing season. It takes place in front of the National Museum (p93), near the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, and the royal oxen are said to have a nose for whether it will be a good harvest or a bad one.

VISAKHA PUJA (BUDDHA DAY)

May/Jun

Celebrating Buddha's birth, enlightenment and *parinibbana* (passing away), activities are centred on wats. The festival falls on the eighth day of the fourth moon and is best observed at Angkor Wat, where you can see candle-lit processions of monks.

SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER

P'CHUM BEN

(FESTIVAL OF THE DEAD)

Sep/Oct

This festival is a kind of All Souls' Day, when respects are paid to the dead through offerings made at wats. Offerings include paper money, flowers, candles and incense, as well as food and drink, all passed through the medium of the monks. P'chum Ben lasts for several days and devout Buddhists are expected to visit seven wats during the festival.

BON OM TUK

(WATER FESTIVAL)

Oct/Nov

Celebrating the epic victory of Jayavarman VII over the Chams, who occupied Angkor in 1177, this festival also marks the remarkable natural phenomenon of the reversal of the current of the Tonlé Sap River. It is one of the most important festivals in the Khmer calendar and is a wonderful, if chaotic, time to be in Phnom Penh or Siem Reap. Boat races are held on the Tonlé Sap and Siem Reap Rivers, with each boat colourfully decorated and holding 40 rowers. As many as two million people flood the capital for the fun and frolics – which also include live concerts, food stands, fair rides and fireworks – so be sure to book ahead for accommodation.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

CAMBODIA SNAPSHOT

Two Weeks

Whether you start in Siem Reap and travel south, or head north to Angkor, this is the ultimate journey, via temples, beaches and the capital.

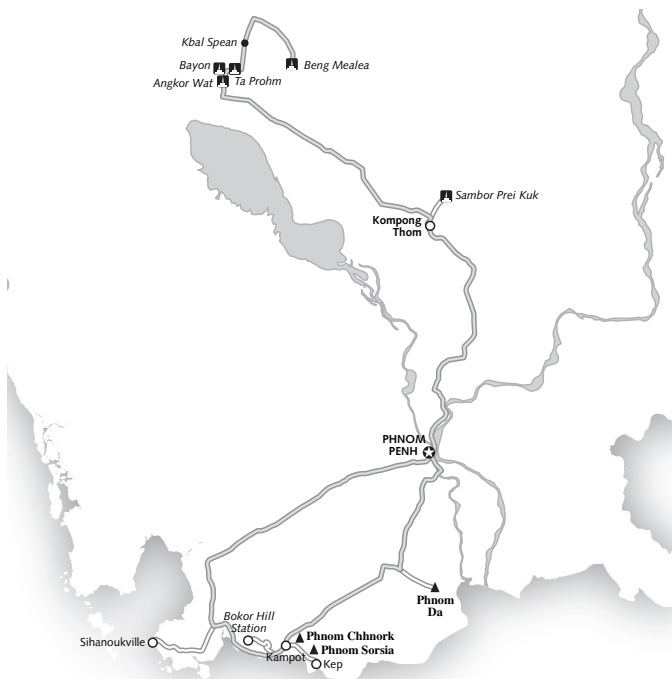
Hit **Phnom Penh** (p81) for sights such as the impressive **National Museum** (p93), with its excellent Angkorian sculpture collection, and the stunning **Silver Pagoda** (p92). There is superb shopping at the **Psar Tuol Tom Pong** (p119), and a **night shift** (p114) that never sleeps.

Take a fast boat to **Phnom Da** (p238), then go south to the colonial-era town of **Kampot** (p223). From here, visit **Bokor Hill Station** (p229), the seaside town of **Kep** (p232) and the cave pagodas at **Phnom Chhnork** (p228) and **Phnom Sorsia** (p229).

Go west to **Sihanoukville** (p209), Cambodia's beach capital, to sample the seafood, dive the nearby waters or just soak up the sun. Backtrack via Phnom Penh to **Kompong Thom** (p281) and get a taste of what's to come by visiting the pre-Angkorian brick temples of **Sambor Prei Kuk** (p284).

Finish the trip at Angkor, a mind-blowing experience with which few sights compare. See **Angkor Wat** (p167), perfection in stone; **Bayon** (p172), weirdness in stone; and **Ta Prohm** (p181), nature triumphing over stone – before venturing further afield to **Kbal Spean** (p190) or jungle-clad **Beng Mealea** (p191).

This trip can take two weeks at a steady pace or three weeks at a slow pace. Public transport serves most of this route. Rent a motorbike for side trips to Kep and Sambor Prei Kuk, and try out a *remork-moto* (*tuk tuk*) at Angkor. More money, less time? Rent a car and set the pace.



THE BIG ONE

One Month

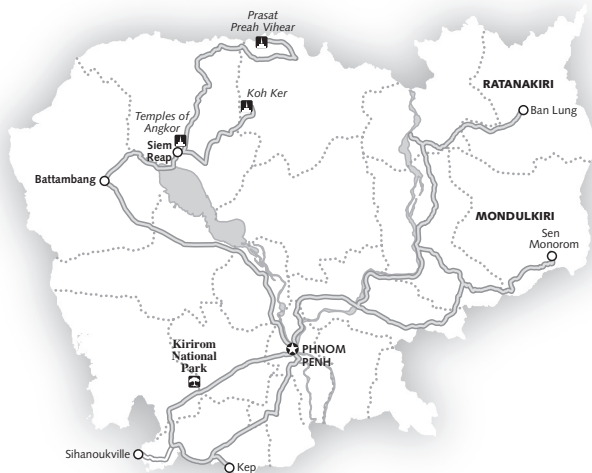
Cambodia is a small country and even though the roads are sometimes bad and travel can be slow, most of the big hitters can be visited in a month.

Setting out from **Phnom Penh** (p81), take in the beauty of the northeast, following the Run to the Hills itinerary (p23). Choose between **Ratanakiri Province** (p305) and **Mondulakiri Province** (p312) to ensure maximum time elsewhere. The gentle hills of Mondulakiri are better for budget travellers as traversing overland is easy, while Ratanakiri makes sense for those planning an overland journey between Cambodia and Laos. Tough choice...can't decide? Flip a coin, if you can find one in this coinless country.

Head to the South Coast, taking the route outlined in the Cambodia Snapshot itinerary (opposite). Take your time and consider a few nights in **Kep** (p232) or on one of the nearby islands, and a boat trip from **Sihanoukville** (p209) to explore the up-and-coming islands off the coast. On your way back to the capital, check out **Kirirom National Park** (p127), home to pine trees, black bears, and some spectacular views of the Cardamom Mountains.

Then it's time to turn northwest and head to charming **Battambang** (p249), one of Cambodia's best preserved colonial-era towns and a base from which to discover rural life and ride the bamboo train. Take the proverbial slow boat to **Siem Reap** (p128), passing through stunning scenery along the snaking Sangker River, and turn your attention to the **temples of Angkor** (p153).

Visit all the greatest hits in and around Angkor, but set aside some extra time to venture further to the rival capital of **Koh Ker** (p274), which is cloaked in thick jungle, or **Prasat Preah Vihear** (p279), where it is all about location, location, location – a mountain temple perched precariously atop a cliff-face on the Thai border.



Overlanders can run this route in reverse, setting out from Siem Reap and exiting Cambodia by river into Vietnam or Laos. Entering from Laos, divert east to Ratanakiri before heading south. Getting about is generally easy, as there are buses on the big roads, taxis on the small roads and buzzing boats on the many rivers.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

THE LOST TEMPLES OF THE NORTHWEST

The magnificent temples of Angkor are renowned for their splendour, but these represent no more than the capital of what was an unrivalled empire spanning Southeast Asia. In the steaming jungles of Cambodia, forgotten to the world for centuries, lie several stunning religious monuments that make the perfect excuse to extend your adventure.

The beauty of this tough trip on rough roads is that it is the alternative way to link Cambodia's vibrant capital, Phnom Penh, with Siem Reap, gateway to Angkor. Starting in **Phnom Penh** (p81), head north through **Kompong Thom** (p281) and on to the pre-Angkorian capital of **Sambor Prei Kuk** (p284), Asia's first temple city. Bid farewell to civilisation from here and make the tough journey (dry season only) northwest to the vast jungle temple of **Preah Khan** (p272), one of the largest structures from the Angkorian era.

Continue on to **Koh Ker** (p274), an usurper capital from the 10th century, with a wealth of monuments spread throughout the forest.

Most breathtaking of the temples is **Prasat Preah Vihear** (p279). The height of Angkorian architectural audacity, its foundation stones stretch to the edge of a precipitous cliff. Breathe in the views – they are simply astounding. From here, it is an easy run to **Siem Reap** (p128) via the former Khmer Rouge stronghold of **Anlong Veng** (p268), where you can visit Pol Pot's cremation site. In Siem Reap, finish with the compulsory **temples of Angkor** (p153) or continue to the beautiful **Banteay Chhmar** (p265) if you still have the energy reserves.

This is a tough trip with little in the way of public transport. It should not be attempted in the wet season and takes at least a week. Seasoned motorbike riders can do it on a dirt bike. For less pain, a 4WD is the way to go. The trip is possible using a combination of pick-up truck and *moto* (small motorcycle with driver), but you'll need massage therapy afterwards.



RUN TO THE HILLS

Northeast Cambodia is a world unto itself, a landscape of rolling hills and secret waterfalls, and home to a patchwork of ethnic minorities, a few of whom still use elephants to get around. It's not only the sights and sounds that are different up here – the temperature is also notably cooler.

Leaving the capital **Phnom Penh** (p81), pass through the bustling Mekong town of **Kompong Cham** (p292) before heading east to **Sen Monorom** (p312), the charming capital of Mondulkiri Province. Spend a few days here to bathe at **Bou Sraa Waterfall** (p316), one of Cambodia's biggest; learn about **elephant behaviour** (p316); and explore Bunong villages before heading back to the Mekong at **Kratie** (p298). This attractive little town is the base for an encounter with one of the rarest mammals on earth, the elusive Irrawaddy river dolphin, which lives in ever-dwindling numbers upstream from here.

Push north up the Mekong to **Stung Treng Province** (p302), site of several budding ecotourism excursions and home to another dolphin pool near the Lao border. To the east lies **Ban Lung** (p305), provincial capital of Ratanakiri Province and base for an adventure to remember. From here plunge into Cambodia's most beautiful natural swimming pool at **Boeng Yeak Lom** (p306); visit ethnic minority villages around Voeng Sai (p309) and **Andong Meas** (p310); forge a river adventure along the Tonlé San around **Ta Veng** (p310); or trek deep into the forests of **Virachey National Park** (p311).

Adventurers and motorbikers can link Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri Provinces directly via the village of **Koh Nhek** (p318). Sen Monorom to Koh Nhek is a breeze, but the roads all but disappear from there and a *moto* driver as a guide is almost essential.



On main roads, this trip is easy to manage using share taxis or pickups, but until the roads are finished it's a frightening prospect in the wet season. Motorbikers can link Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri Provinces on one of Cambodia's more devilish roads – not for amateurs. Finishing up in Ratanakiri, overlanders can carry on into Laos.

TAILORED TRIP

UNTAMED CARDAMOMS & UNEXPLORED COAST

Visitors can get a sense of the diverse ecosystems of the Cardamom Mountains – from the pine-forested highlands down through dense rainforest to the mangrove-fringed shoreline and pristine beaches – along the **Koh Kong Conservation Corridor** (p200) in Cambodia's far southwestern corner. Starting out from the one-time smugglers' port of **Krong Koh Kong** (p196), travel by *moto* or boat to the **Tatai River** (p202), where you can stay in ecologically sustainable accommodation. Drive inland to the **Thma Bang ranger station** (p204), in the Central Cardamoms Protected Forest, to explore the Areng River habitats of the endangered dragonfish (Asian arowana) and Siamese crocodile (p205). Krong Koh Kong is also a good base for an excursion by open skiff through the pristine mangrove forests of **Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary** (p202) and on to **Koh Kong Island** (p203), the western side of which has seven unspoilt beaches, some with hidden lagoons. The northwest coast of **Botum Sakor National Park** (p205) is just across the channel from the island, but the superb beaches further south are easier to get to from **Koh Sdach** (p205), an island that is accessible on the **Sihanoukville–Koh Sdach ferry** (p220) and is not far from some excellent snorkelling grounds.



To visit the park's mangrove-lined east coast – including **Ta Op stream** (p205) and its monkeys – hire a boat in **Andoung Tuek** (p206), where you can also cruise upriver to the village of **Chi Phat** (p206). Once notorious for its poachers, it is now the site of a pioneering community-based ecotourism project. Ecolodges situated around the Koh Kong Conservation Corridor include Rainbow Lodge (p202) and Four Rivers Floating Ecolodge (p202), both on the Tatai River.

The Authors



NICK RAY

Coordinating Author

A Londoner of sorts, Nick comes from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. He lives in Phnom Penh with his wife Kulikar and his young children, Julian and Belle. He has written for several guidebooks on Cambodia including Lonely Planet's *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring* and *Cycling Vietnam, Laos & Cambodia*. He also writes articles for newspapers and magazines, including *The Sunday Times* and *Wanderlust* in the UK. When not writing, he is often out exploring the remote parts of Cambodia as a location scout for the world of TV and film, including the movies *Tomb Raider* and *Two Brothers*. Motorbikes are a part-time passion (riding them a passion, maintaining them part-time) and he has travelled through all of Cambodia's provinces on two wheels.



DANIEL ROBINSON

Environment, South Coast, Northwestern Cambodia

Daniel Robinson researched the award-winning first edition of Lonely Planet's *Cambodia* guidebook back in 1989, when Phnom Penh–Siem Reap flights stayed over the middle of the Tonlé Sap to avoid ground fire and, for three days, he was the only guest at Siem Reap's only hotel; the story of his misadventures in a mined temple appears in *Lonely Planet Unpacked Again*. These days his favourite spots for chilling are the (for now) pristine west coast of Koh Kong Island, the foggy ruins of Bokor Hill Station and the rocky promontory at Prasat Preah Vihear, where breathtaking views stretch almost to Angkor. Daniel is based in Tel Aviv and Los Angeles.



GREG BLOOM

Eastern Cambodia

Greg has had the enviable task of following his wife around to Southeast Asian postings for the last seven years. After five years in Manila, he landed in 'small town' Phnom Penh in 2008 and immediately took a liking to the city and its residents. A mountain man at heart, he jumped at the opportunity to cover Cambodia's 'Wild East' for this title. When not writing about Southeast Asia, Greg might be found snouting around the former Soviet Union (he once called Kyiv home) or running around Asia's ultimate Frisbee fields. His blogs about this and other research trips are at www.mytripjournal.com/bloomblogs.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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