

South Coast



Fringed with tropical beaches, pristine mangrove forests and unspoilt islands, Cambodia's South Coast also boasts national parks of global ecological importance and two eerie, partly deserted colonial-era resorts. With a cracking selection of attractions both luxurious and adventurous, the area is now on a convenient, direct overland route from Bangkok.

Kampot, Cambodia's principal seaport until the founding of Sihanoukville in 1959, still retains some of its French-era charm. A great place to chill out, it's also a good base for visiting the misty highlands of Bokor National Park. Kep, once the country's most exclusive beach town, was destroyed during the Khmer Rouge period and the civil war, but is making a slow, stylish comeback. The booming city of Sihanoukville, Cambodia's main beach resort, is a short drive from Ream National Park and a one- to three-hour cruise from the country's best scuba diving.

The western portion of the South Coast, wild and remote, is dominated by the impenetrable jungle of the Cardamom Mountains (Chhur Phnom Kravanh), one of mainland Southeast Asia's largest and best-preserved forest areas. Ecotourism is opening up the Koh Kong Conservation Corridor, home to tigers and elephants, which stretches along NH48 from Krong Koh Kong, near the Thai frontier, to the Gulf of Kompong Som, northwest of Sihanoukville.

Near the Vietnamese border are some fabulous cave-temples and the Takeo–Angkor Borei region, 5th-century birthplace of ancient Cambodian civilisation.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the uninhabited islands, isolated beaches, pristine rainforests, mangrove-lined rivers and remote waterfalls of the **Koh Kong Conservation Corridor** (p200), now opening up to ecotourism
- Soak up the sun in **Sihanoukville** (p209), home to blissful beaches, tropical islands, scuba diving and a lively nightshift
- Journey to fog-enveloped **Bokor National Park** (p229), with its abandoned casino and (sometimes) breathtaking coastal views
- Kick back in quiet **Kampot** (p223), a charming river town with some of Cambodia's best-preserved French architecture
- Explore remote islands and dine on fresh seafood around **Kep** (p232), the midcentury mecca of Cambodia's jet set



■ ELEVATION: 0-1800M

■ POPULATION: 1.8 MILLION

■ AREA: 27,817 SQ KM

SOUTH COAST

