



Siem Reap

TELEPHONE CODE ៨០៦៣ / POP (TOWN) 125,000 / AREA 10,299 SQ KM

Includes »

Sights	90
Sleeping.....	96
Eating	102
Shopping.....	108
Information	110
Getting There & Away	111
Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary	113
Ang Trapeng Thomor Reserve.....	115
Floating Village of Chong Kneas.....	116
Kompong Pluk.....	116
Kompong Khleang	116
Me Chrey	117

Why Go?

The life-support system for the temples of Angkor, Siem Reap (*see-em ree-ep*; សៀមរាប) was always destined for great things. It has reinvented itself as the epicentre of cool Cambodia, with everything from backpacker party pads to hip hotels, world-class wining and dining, and sumptuous spas.

This is good news for the long-suffering Khmers riding the wave, but it can make the town a little bling in places. Authentic it is not, although just a short distance away lies Siem Reap Province and the real Cambodia of rural beauty. Explore floating villages and rare-bird sanctuaries or just cycle (or quad bike or pony trek) through the paddies as an antidote to the bustle of town.

Angkor is a place to be savoured, not rushed, and this is the base to plan your adventures. Still think three days at the temples is enough? Think again, with Siem Reap on the doorstep.

Best Places to Eat

- » Cuisine Wat Damnak (p105)
- » Green Star (p105)
- » Abacus (p105)
- » Blue Pumpkin (p104)
- » Pub St Food Stalls (p102)

Best Places to Stay

- » Villa Medamrei (p97)
- » La Résidence d'Angkor (p99)
- » Shadow of Angkor Guesthouse (p97)
- » Frangipani Villa Hotel (p100)
- » European Guesthouse (p100)

When to Go

Peak season is November to March, a good time to avoid if you want to dodge the crowds. April and May can be shockingly hot, which makes exploring hard work and the countryside barren. The wet-season months are generally OK, as you can set your watch by the late-afternoon showers. However, the town centre has been under water for long periods in October during the past few years.

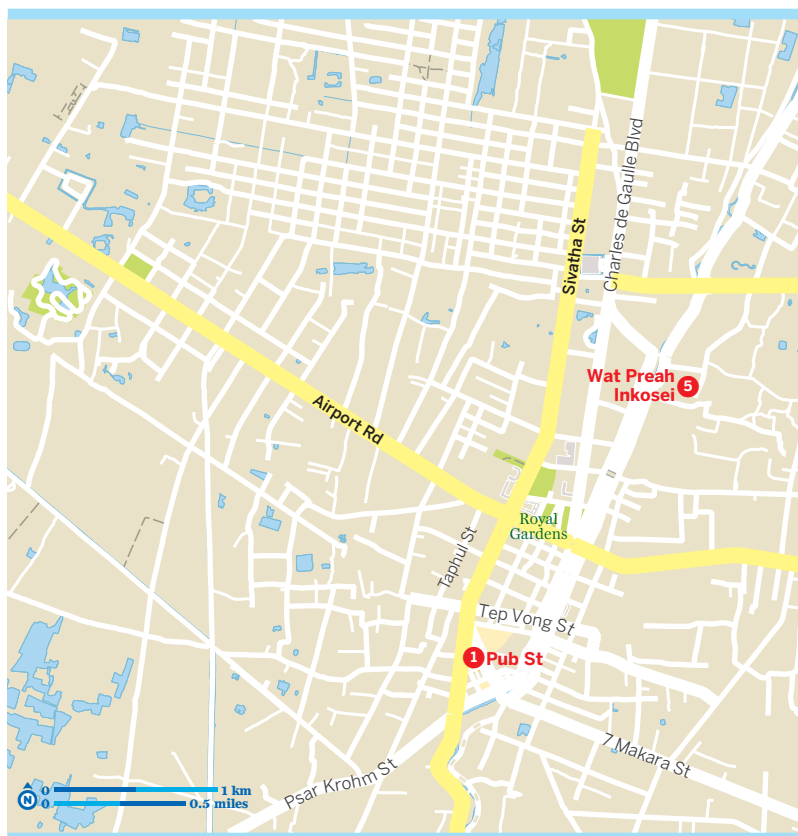
Fixtures in the calendar include February's Giant Puppet Parade and the Bon Om Tuk (Water Festival) in October/November.

History

Siem Reap was little more than a village when French explorers discovered Angkor in the 19th century. With the return of Angkor to Cambodian – or should that be French – control in 1907, Siem Reap began to grow, absorbing the first wave of tourists. The Grand Hotel d'Angkor opened its doors in 1929 and the temples of Angkor remained one of Asia's leading draws until the late 1960s, luring luminaries such as Char-

lie Chaplin and Jackie Kennedy. With the advent of war and the Khmer Rouge, Siem Reap entered a long slumber from which it only began to awaken in the mid-1990s.

Tourism is the lifeblood of Siem Reap and, without careful management, it could become Siem Reapolinos, the not-so-Costadel-Culture of southeast Asia. However, there are promising signs that developers are learning from the mistakes that have blighted other regional hot spots, with



Siem Reap Highlights

- 1** Diving into **Pub St** (p106), the drinking capital of Siem Reap, and discover nearby restaurants and bars
- 2** Exploring the flooded forest of **Kompong Pluk** (p116), an incredible village of bamboo skyscrapers
- 3** Encountering some of the world's rarest large water birds at **Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary** (p113)
- 4** Learning the secrets of Khmer cuisine with a **cooking course** (p95), the perfect way to impress friends back home
- 5** Discovering the quiet temples of Angkor hidden away in the modern pagodas of **Wat Athvea** (p94) and **Wat Preah Inkosei** (p94)