

Temples of Angkor

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Best Temples for Suprise or Supset

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Best Temples for Film Buffs

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Why Go?

Welcome to heaven on earth. Angkor is the earthly representation of Mt Meru, the Mt Olympus of the Hindu faith and the abode of ancient gods. The temples are the perfect fusion of creative ambition and spiritual devotion. The Cambodian 'god-kings' of old each strove to better their ancestors in size, scale and symmetry, culminating in the world's largest religious building, Angkor Wat.

The temples of Angkor are a source of inspiration and national pride to all Khmers as they struggle to rebuild their lives after years of terror and trauma. Today, the temples are a point of pilgrimage for all Cambodians, and no traveller to the region will want to miss their extravagant beauty. Angkor is one of the world's foremost ancient sites, with the epic proportions of the Great Wall of China, the detail and intricacy of the Taj Mahal and the symbolism and symmetry of the pyramids, all rolled into one.

When to Go

Avoid the sweltering temperatures of March to May. November to February is the best time of year to travel, but this is no secret, so it coincides with peak season. And peak season really is mountainous in this day and age, where more than two million visitors a year descend on Angkor. The summer months of July and August can be a surprisingly rewarding time, as the landscape is emerald green, the moats overflowing with water and the moss and lichen in bright contrast to the grey sandstone.

Plan a dawn-to-dusk itinerary with a long, leisurely lunch to avoid the heat of the midday sun. Alternatively, plan to explore the temples through lunch, when it can be considerably quieter than the peak morning and afternoon visit times. However, it will be hot as hell and the light is not that conducive to photography.

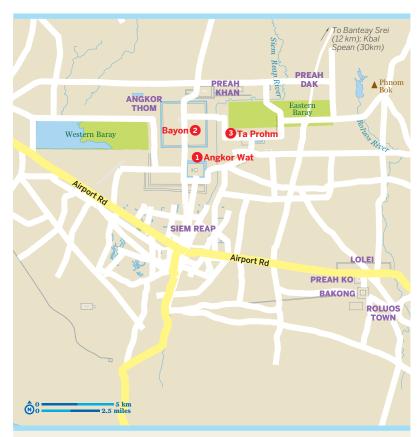
The Angkor Wat International Half Marathon takes place annually in December, including the option of bicycle rides for those not into running.

History

The Angkorian period spans more than 600 years from AD 802 to 1432. This incredible age saw the construction of the temples of Angkor and the consolidation of the Khmer empire's position as one of the great powers in southeast Asia. This era encompasses periods of decline and revival, and wars with

rival powers in Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar. This brief history deals only with the periods that produced the temples that can be seen at Angkor.

The hundreds of temples surviving today are but the sacred skeleton of the vast political, religious and social centre of Cambodia's ancient Khmer empire, a city that,



Angkor Highlights

- 1 Seeing the sun rise over the holiest of holies, **Angkor Wat** (p125), the world's largest religious building
- 2 Contemplating the serenity and splendour of **Bayon** (p136), its 216 enigmatic faces staring out into the jungle
- 3 Witnessing nature reclaiming the stones at the

- mysterious ruin of **Ta Prohm** (p142), the *Tomb Raider* temple
- 4 Staring in wonder at the delicate carvings adorning **Banteay Srei** (p149), the finest seen at Angkor
- 5 Trekking deep into the jungle to discover the River of a Thousand Lingas at **Kbal Spean** (p152)
- 6 Exploring the tangled vines, crumbling corridors and jumbled sandstone blocks of **Beng Mealea** (p153)
- 7 Getting off the beaten path with a visit to the 10thcentury capital of **Koh Ker** (p154), with its striking step pyramid of Prasat Thom