



Northwestern Cambodia

POP 3.75 MILLION / AREA 71,157 SQ KM

Includes ➔

Kompong Chhnang ...	211
Pursat	215
Battambang	218
Pailin	230
Poipet	232
Sisophon	235
Prasat Preah Vihear	241

Best Places to Eat & Drink

- ➔ Cafe Eden (p224)
- ➔ Lonely Tree Cafe (p224)
- ➔ Jaan Bai (p224)
- ➔ Limy Restaurant (p243)
- ➔ Phnom Tbaeng Restaurant (p241)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ La Villa (p223)
- ➔ Here Be Dragons (p223)
- ➔ Sambor Village Hotel (p248)
- ➔ Banteay Chhmar Homestay (p237)
- ➔ Preah Vihear Boutique Hotel (p243)

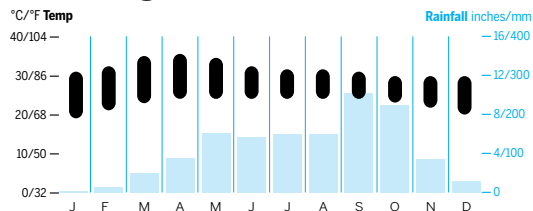
Why Go?

Intrepid travellers take note: northwestern Cambodia is an explorer's delight. The region is first and foremost about remote temples, many of them pillars of the Angkorian empire. The most famous is Prasat Preah Vihear, now more accessible than ever thanks to rapidly improving roads. Put Sambor Prei Kuk, in Kompong Thom province, and Banteay Chhmar, in Banteay Meanchey, on your radar as well. Preah Khan, Koh Ker, Prasat Banan...the list goes on.

The other big draw in the region is effortlessly cool Battambang, with its classic colonial architecture, burgeoning arts scene and a host of worthy day trips out of town.

At the centre of the region lies the unique Tonlé Sap lake, one of the most fish-rich lakes in the world and home to several rare bird species. Explore floating villages out of Pursat or Kompong Chhnang, or take the classic boat trip from Battambang to Siem Reap.

When to Go Battambang



Dec–Jan Best for remote temple-hopping; dry and relatively cool climates prevail.

Nov Best time for back-country exploration; roads are neither too muddy nor too dusty.

Aug–Sep Height of rainy season; ideal for boat rides on Tonlé Sap.

KOMPONG CHHNANG PROVINCE

Kompong Chhnang Province (ខេត្តកំពង់ឆ្នាំង) is a relatively wealthy province thanks to its proximity to the capital and its fishing and agricultural industries, supported by abundant water resources.

Kompong Chhnang កំពង់ឆ្នាំង

☎ 026 / POP 45,000

Kompong Chhnang (Clay Pot Port) is a tale of two cities: the sleepy centre dating back to the colonial area, arrayed around a huge park, and the bustling dockside on the Tonlé Sap River. Nearby sights include two floating villages, a hamlet famous for its distinctive pottery and drop-dead gorgeous countryside, typically Cambodian in its union of verdant rice fields and towering sugar palms.

👁 Sights & Activities

Floating Villages

BOAT TOUR

A short sail from Kompong Chhnang's river port, 2km northeast of the centre on the Tonlé Sap River, leads to a couple of colourful floating villages: **Phoum Kandal**, an ethnic Vietnamese village directly southeast of the boat dock; and the Khmer village of **Chong Kos** a bit further north. Much less

commercial than Kompong Luong, they have all the amenities of a mainland village – houses, machine-tool shops, vegetable vendors, a mosque, a petrol station – except that almost everything floats.

To get into the heart of these villages you will have to hire a motorless wooden paddle boat at the river port. These cost US\$10 per hour and are good for three people. Bigger motorized tourist boats are available for river tours for US\$15 per hour, but these only circle the perimeter of the villages.

Ondong Rossey & Phnom Santuk

CULTURAL TOUR

(អណ្តូងប្រស្សី និងភ្នំសន្ទូក) The quiet village of Ondong Rossey, where the area's famous red pottery is made under every house, is a delightful 7km ride west of town through serene rice fields dotted with sugar palms, many with bamboo ladders running up the trunk. The unpainted pots, decorated with etched or appliqué designs, are either turned with a foot-spun wheel (for small pieces) or banged into shape with a heavy wooden spatula (for large ones).

The golden-hued mud piled up in the yards is quarried at nearby **Phnom Krang Dai Meas** and pounded into fine clay before being shaped and fired; only at the last stage does it acquire a pinkish hue. Pieces can be

THE KHMER ROUGE AIRPORT

The Khmer Rouge were not known as great builders, but in 1977 and 1978, slave labourers built an airfield using cement of such high quality that even today the 2440m runway and access roads look like they were paved just last week.

No one knows for sure, but it seems that Kompong Chhnang airport (IATA code KZC), never operational under the Khmer Rouge, was intended to serve as a base for launching air attacks against Vietnam. Chinese engineers oversaw the work of tens of thousands of Cambodians suspected of disloyalty to the Khmer Rouge. Anyone unable to work was killed, often with a blow to the head delivered with a bamboo rod. In early 1979, as Vietnamese forces approached, almost the entire workforce was executed. Estimates of the number of victims, buried nearby in mass graves, range from 10,000 to 50,000.

In the late 1990s, a plan to turn the airport into a cargo hub for air-courier companies came to nought. These days, local teenagers come out here to tool around on their motorbikes, do doughnuts and drag race, while cows graze between the taxiway and the runway. On sunny days the sun creates convincing mirages.

On an anonymous slope a few kilometres away, the Khmer Rouge dug a **cave** – said to be 3km deep – apparently for the purpose of storing weapons flown in from China. Now home to swirling bats, it can be explored with a torch (flashlight) but, lacking ventilation, gets very hot and humid.

On a hillside near a cluster of bullet-pocked cement barracks, stripped of anything of value, is a massive cement water tank. Inside it's a remarkable echo chamber.

The airport is about 12km west of town. Take NH5 towards Battambang for 7km and then turn left onto a concrete road.