



# Siem Reap & the Temples of Angkor

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## Cambodia Fast Facts

- » **Area** 181,035 sq km
- » **Border Crossings with Vietnam** eight
- » **Capital** Phnom Penh
- » **Country Code** 855
- » **Head of State** King Sihamoni
- » **Population** 15 million
- » **Money** US\$1 = 4000r (riel)
- » **National Holiday** *Chaul Chnam* or Khmer New Year, mid-April
- » **Phrases** *sua s' dei* (hello), *lia suhn hao-y* (goodbye), *aw kohn* (thank you)

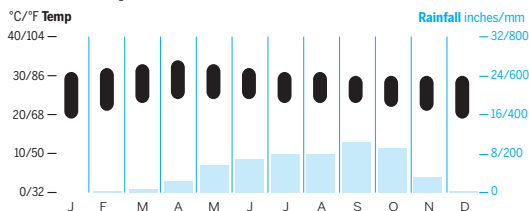
## Why Go?

Where to begin with Angkor? There is no greater concentration of architectural riches anywhere on earth. Choose from the world's largest religious building, Angkor Wat, one of the world's weirdest, Bayon or the riotous jungle of Ta Prohm. All are global icons and have helped put Cambodia on the map as the temple capital of Asia. Today, the monuments are a point of pilgrimage for all Khmers, and no traveller to the region will want to miss their extravagant beauty. Many visitors to Vietnam continue their trip into Cambodia to visit these fabled temples.

Despite the headlining act that is Angkor and the contemporary chic of Siem Reap, Cambodia's greatest treasure is its people. The Khmers have been to hell and back, but they have prevailed with a smile and no visitor comes away from this enigmatic kingdom without a measure of admiration and affection for its inhabitants.

## When to Go

### Siem Reap



**Dec–Jan** Humidity is low, there's little rain and cool breezes. Peak season for visitors.

**Feb–Jun** Temperatures rise and in May or June the monsoon brings rain and humidity.

**Jun–Oct** The wet season: Angkor is surrounded by lush foliage and the moats are full of water.

## SIEM REAP

063 / POP 119,500

Life-support system for the temples of Angkor, Siem Reap (*see-em ree-ep*) is the epicentre of the new Cambodia, a pulsating place that's one of the most popular destinations on the planet right now. At heart though, Siem Reap – whose name rather undiplomatically means 'Siamese Defeated' – is still a little charmer, with old French shop-houses, shady tree-lined boulevards and a slow-flow river.

### Sights

#### Angkor National Museum

MUSEUM

(www.angkor-national-museum.com; 968 Charles de Gaulle Blvd; adult US\$12, child under 1.2m US\$6, audio guide US\$3; ☉8.30am-6pm) A worthwhile introduction to the glories of the Khmer empire, this state-of-the-art museum helps define Angkor's historic, religious and cultural significance. Displays include 1400 exquisite stone carvings and artefacts.

#### Les Chantiers Écoles

CULTURAL CENTRE

(Puok Village; ☉7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon Sat) Tucked down a side road, this silk farm teaches traditional Khmer artisanship, including lacquer making and wood- and stone-carving, to impoverished youngsters; tours of the workshops are possible when school is in session. On the premises is an exquisite shop, Artisans d'Angkor. To see the entire silk-making process, from mulberry trees to silk worms and spinning to weaving, visit Les Chantiers Écoles' **silk farm** (☉7.30am-5.30pm), 16km west of town. Shuttle buses leave the school at 9.30am and 1.30pm daily for a three-hour tour.

#### Cambodian Cultural Village

CULTURAL CENTRE

(Map p419; www.cambodianculturalvillage.com; NH6; foreigner/Khmer US\$11/4, child under 12 US\$2; ☉8am-7pm Mon-Thu, to 8.30pm Fri-Sun) This place aims to represent all of Cambodia in a whirlwind tour of recreated houses and villages. It may be kitsch, but it's very popular with Cambodians, and the dance and music performances will delight the kiddies.



### Angkor Highlights

- 1 See the sun rise over one of the world's most iconic buildings, the one and only **Angkor Wat** (p418)
- 2 Contemplate the serenity and splendour of the **Bayon** (p419), its 216

enigmatic faces staring out into the jungle

- 3 Witness nature running riot at the mysterious ruin of **Ta Prohm** (p423), the *Tomb Raider* temple

- 4 Stare in wonder at the delicate carvings adorning **Banteay Srei** (p424), the finest seen at Angkor

- 5 Trek deep into the jungle to discover the River of a Thousand Lingas at **Kbal Spean** (p424)