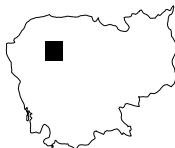


Siem Reap

សៀមរាប



Back in the 1960s, Siem Reap (*see-em ree-ep*) was the place to be in Southeast Asia and saw a steady stream of the rich and famous. After three decades of slumber, it's well and truly back and one of the most popular destinations on the planet right now. The life-support system for the temples of Angkor, Cambodia's eighth wonder of the world, Siem Reap was always destined for great things, but few people saw them coming this thick and this fast. It has reinvented itself as the epicentre of the new Cambodia, with more guesthouses and hotels than temples, world-class wining and dining and sumptuous spas.

At its heart, Siem Reap is still a little charmer, with old French shop-houses, shady tree-lined boulevards and a slow-flowing river. But it is expanding at breakneck speed with new houses and apartments, hotels and resorts sprouting like mushrooms in the surrounding countryside. The tourist tide has arrived and locals are riding the wave. Not only is this great news for the long-suffering Khmers, but it has transformed the town into a pulsating place for visitors. Forget the naysayers who mutter into their beers about Siem Reap in the 'old days', now is the time to be here, although you may curse your luck when stuck behind a jam of tour buses on the way back from the temples.

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.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Encounter some of the world's rarest large water birds at the sanctuary of **Prek Toal** (p138)
- Explore the flooded forest of **Kompong Phhluk** (p139), an incredible village of bamboo skyscrapers
- Discover the quiet temples of Angkor, hidden away in the modern pagodas of **Wat Athvea** and **Wat Preah Inkosei** (p123)
- Dive into **Bar Street** (p134), the drink capital of Siem Reap, and discover nearby restaurants and bars
- Learn the secrets of Khmer cuisine with a **cooking course** (p125), the perfect way to impress friends back home



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 063

■ POPULATION: 800,000

■ AREA: 10,299 SQ KM

HISTORY

The name Siem Reap means 'Siamese Defeated', hardly the most tactful name for a major city near Thailand. Imagine Birmingham with the name 'Germany Defeated'. The empire of Angkor once included much of modern-day Thailand, but there's a touch of irony about the name, given that Thailand ultimately defeated Cambodia and controlled Siem Reap and Angkor from 1794 to 1907.

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 visitors including Charlie 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 awake in the mid-1990s.

Tourism is the lifeblood of Siem Reap and without careful management it could become Siem Reapolinos, the not so Costa-del-Culture of Southeast Asia. However, there are promising signs that developers are learning from the mistakes that have blighted other regional hot spots, with restrictions on the height of hotels and bus sizes. Either way, Angkor is centre stage on the world travel map right now and there is no going back for its supply line, Siem Reap.

ORIENTATION

Siem Reap is still a small town at heart and easy enough to navigate in an hour or two. The centre is around Psar Chaa (Old Market), the administrative district is along the western bank of the river, and accommodation is spread throughout town. National Hwy 6 (NH6) cuts across the northern part of town, passing Psar Leu (Main Market) in the east of town and the Royal Residence and the Grand Hotel d'Angkor in the centre, and then heads to the airport and beyond to the Thai border. Stung Siem Reap (Siem Reap River) flows north-south through the centre of town, and has enough bridges that you won't have to worry too much about being on the wrong side. Like Phnom Penh, however, street numbering is haphazard to

say the least, so take care when hunting down specific addresses.

Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom are only 6km and 8km north of town respectively, while the Rolouos Group of temples is 13km east along NH6 – see the map on pp142–3 for the location of these and other places beyond the city centre.

Buses and share taxis usually drop passengers off at the taxi park about 3km east of the town centre, from where it is a short *moto* (small motorcycle with driver) ride to nearby guesthouses or hotels. Fast boats from Phnom Penh and Battambang arrive at Phnom Krom, about 11km south of town, and most places to stay include a free transfer by *moto* or minibus. Siem Reap airport is 7km west of town and there are plenty of taxis and *motos* available for transfers to the town centre. For more details, see p138.

INFORMATION

Pick up a copy of the *Siem Reap Angkor Visitors Guide* (www.canbypublications.com), which is packed with listings and comes out quarterly. For further insights into the restaurant and bar scene in Siem Reap, pick up the *Siem Reap Drinking & Dining* guide, produced by the Pocket Guide (www.cambodiapocketguide.com).

Bookshops

Cheap books on Angkor and Cambodia are hawked by kids around the temples, and by amputees trying to make a clean start in Siem Reap. Be aware that many are illegal photocopies and the print quality is poor.

Carnets d'Asie (Map p120; 333 Sivatha St) Boutique bookstore specialising in French editions, plus English coffee-table books.

D's Books (Map p120; Bar St; ☎ 9am-10pm) The largest chain of second-hand bookshops in Cambodia, this is conveniently located for night browsing.

Monument Books (Map p120; FCC Angkor) Well-stocked new bookstore with a branch at FCC Angkor and at Siem Reap International Airport in both international and domestic terminals.

Siem Reap Book Center (Map p120; Pithnou St) Large selection of new titles on Angkor and beyond.

Emergency

Tourist Office (Map pp142-3; ☎ 012 969991) There's an office at the main ticket checkpoint for the Angkor area. This is the place to come and complain if you encounter any serious problems while in Siem Reap.



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Internet Access

Internet shops have spread through town like wildfire and your nearest online fix will never be far away. Prices are US\$0.50 to US\$1 per hour and most places also offer cheap

internet-based telephone calls. The greatest concentration is along Sivatha St and around the Psar Chaa area. Many guesthouses and hotels also offer affordable access or free services for guests. Many of the leading restaurants

SIEM REAP

SIEM REAP

and bars, as well as many midrange hotels, offer free wi-fi.

Medical Services & Pharmacies

Siem Reap now has an international-standard hospital for emergencies. However, any serious complications will still require relocation to Bangkok.

Angkor Children's Hospital (Map p120; ☎963409; ☎24hr) An international-standard paediatric hospital, the place to take your children if they fall sick. Will assist in any emergency for up to 24 hours. Donations accepted.

Royal Angkor International Hospital (Map pp142-3; ☎761888; www.royalangkorphospital.com; Airport Rd) A new international facility, affiliated with the Bangkok Hospital.

U-Care Pharmacy (Map p120; ☎965396; Pithnou St; ☎8am-9pm) Smart pharmacy and shop like Boots in Thailand (and the UK). English spoken.

Money

For cash exchanges, markets are faster and less bureaucratic than the banks.

ANZ Royal Bank (Map p120; ☎023 726900; Achar Mean St) Provides free credit-card advances and can change travellers cheques in most major currencies. International ATMs all over town.

Canada Bank (Map p120; ☎964808; Sivatha St) Offers free credit-card cash advances and changes travellers cheques in most major currencies at a 2% commission. International ATM.

Union Commercial Bank (Map p120; ☎964703; Psar Chaa) Charges 2% commission for travellers cheques and offers free Visa advances.

Post

The **main post office** (Map p120; ☎7am-5.30pm) is along the river, 500m south of the Grand Hotel d'Angkor. Services are more reliable these days, but it doesn't hurt to see your stamps franked; many people have reported mail going astray in the past. For urgent shipping requirements, there are several courier services in town:

DHL (Map p120; ☎964949; Central Market)

EMS (Map p120; ☎760000; main post office)

Telephone & Fax

Making international calls is straightforward. The cheapest way is to use the major internet cafés, with calls starting at about US\$0.10 per minute, but there can be some delay. The cheapest 'unblemished' calls can be arranged with the purchase of an M Fone tourist sim, working out at US\$0.25 per minute. Or use

one of the many private booths advertising these telephone services. There are a few public phone booths around town, including some around Psar Chaa. Phone cards are sold at shops and hotels. For domestic calls, it is cheaper to call from a private booth. Hotels impose hefty surcharges on calls, so check the rates before you dial.

If you need to send or receive faxes and are not based in a hotel that offers this service, try one of the many reasonably priced internet cafés in the Psar Chaa area.

Tourist Information

The Tourism Office in Siem Reap is in a white building opposite the Grand Hotel d'Angkor. There's a sign saying 'Tourist Information', but this is a little optimistic unless you come as a paid-up client on one of its private tours. Guesthouses and hotels are often a more reliable source of information, as are fellow travellers who have been in town for a few days.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Siem Reap is a pretty safe city, even at night. However, if you rent a bike, don't keep your bag in the basket, as it will be easy pickings for a drive-by snatch. Likewise, lone females should try to walk home with travelling companions when leaving late-night spots, particularly if heading to poorly lit areas.

There are a lot of commission scams in Siem Reap that involve certain guesthouses and small hotels paying *moto* and taxi drivers to deliver guests. Ways to avoid the scam include booking ahead via the internet and arranging a pick-up, or sticking with a partner guesthouse if you are coming from Phnom Penh. Alternatively, just go with the flow and negotiate with the hotel or guesthouse on arrival.

For more on the commission scams facing those travelling to Siem Reap by land from Bangkok, see the boxed text on p330.

There are a lot of beggars around town and some visitors quickly develop beggar fatigue. However, try to remember that with no social security network and no government support, life is pretty tough for the poorest of the poor in Cambodia. There is no need to give to everybody, but there is also no need to treat them as pariahs. In the case of children, it is often better not to encourage begging, but if you are compelled to help then offer food, as money usually ends up being passed on to someone else.

Out at the remote temple sites beyond Angkor, stick to clearly marked trails. There are still land mines at locations such as Phnom Kulen and Kbal Spean. For more information about Cambodia's land mines, see p312.

SIGHTS

Visitors come to Siem Reap to see the temples of Angkor. The sights in and around the town pale in comparison, but they are a good diversion for those who find themselves tempted out after a few days. That said, some of the best are...yet more temples!

Pagodas

Modern pagodas around Siem Reap offer an interesting contrast to the ancient sandstone structures of Angkor. **Wat Bo** (Map p120; ☎6am-6pm) is one of the town's oldest temples and has a collection of well-preserved wall paintings from the late 19th century depicting the *Reamker*, Cambodia's interpretation of the *Ramayana*. Another wat to consider is **Wat Preah Inkosei** (Map pp142-3; ☎6am-6pm), built on the site of an early Angkorian brick temple north of town, which still stands today at the rear of the compound.

South of the city centre, **Wat Athvea** (Map pp142-3; ☎6am-6pm) is an attractive pagoda on the site of an ancient temple. The old temple is still in very good condition and sees far fewer visitors than the main temples in the Angkor area, making it a peaceful spot in the late afternoon.

On the left fork of the road to Angkor Wat, **Wat Thmei** (Map pp142-3; ☎6am-6pm) has a small memorial stupa containing the skulls and bones of victims of the Khmer Rouge. It also has plenty of young monks wanting to practise their English.

Wat Dam Nak (Map p120; ☎6am-6pm) was formerly a royal palace during the reign of King Sisowath, hence the name *dam nak* (palace). Today it is home to the **Centre for Khmer Studies** (www.khmerstudies.org), an independent institution promoting a greater understanding of Khmer culture with a drop-in research library on site.

Artisans d'Angkor

Siem Reap is the epicentre of the drive to revitalise Cambodian traditional culture, which was dealt such a harsh blow by the Khmer Rouge and the years of instability that followed its rule.

Les Chantiers Écoles (Map p120) is a school specialising in teaching wood- and stone-carving techniques to impoverished youngsters. On the premises the school has a beautiful shop called **Artisans d'Angkor** (Map p120; ☎380354; www.artisansdangkor.com), which sells everything from elegant stone and wood reproductions of Angkorian-era statues to household furniture. Tours are available daily from 7.30am to 5.30pm to learn more about traditional techniques. Tucked down a side road, the school is well signposted from Sivatha St.

ANGKOR NATIONAL MUSEUM

Looming large on the road to Angkor is the **Angkor National Museum** (Map pp142-3; ☎966601; www.angkornationalmuseum.com; 968 Charles de Gaulle Blvd; admission US\$12, under 1.20m US\$6; ☎6am-6pm), a state-of-the-art showpiece on the Khmer civilisation and the majesty of Angkor. Displays are themed by era, religion and royalty as visitors move through the impressive galleries. After a short presentation, visitors enter the zenlike 'Gallery of a Thousand Buddhas', which has a fine collection of images. Other collections include the pre-Angkorian period of Funan and Chenla, the great Khmer kings, Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and the inscriptions.

Presentations include touch-screen video, epic commentary and the chance to experience a panoramic sunrise at Angkor Wat, but for all the technology there seems to be a scarcity of sculpture compared with the National Museum (p84) in Phnom Penh or even Angkor Conservation (p148). It is almost a triumph of style over substance, as if the curators are overcompensating for the shallowness of the collection with the depth of information. That said, it remains a very useful experience for first-time visitors to put the story of Angkor and the Khmer empire in context before exploring the temples. The downside is the price, which at US\$12 is simply too high, given that US\$20 buys admission to all the temples at Angkor. Visitors also have to pay a US\$2 camera fee, but can't snap everywhere and an audio tour is available for US\$3. Attached to the museum is a 'Cultural Mall', lined with shops, galleries and cafés.

There is also a second shop opposite Angkor Wat in the Angkor Café (p150) and outlets at Phnom Penh and Siem Reap international airports. Profits from sales go back into funding the school and bringing more teenagers into the training programme.

Les Chantiers Écoles Silk Farm

Les Chantiers Écoles (see Artisans d'Angkor above) also maintains a silk farm, which produces some of the best work in the country, including clothing, interior design products and accessories. All stages of the production process can be seen here, from the cultivation of mulberry trees through the nurturing of silk worms to the dyeing and weaving of silk. Free tours are available daily between 7am and 5pm and there is a free shuttle bus departing Les Chantiers Écoles at 9.30am and 1.30pm. The farm is about 16km west of Siem Reap, just off the road to Sisophon in the village of Puok.

National Centre for Khmer Ceramics Revival

This **ceramics centre** (Map pp142-3; ☎761519; www.khmerceramics.com; near Airport Rd; ☎8am-6pm) is dedicated to reviving the Khmer tradition of pottery, which was an intricate art during the time of Angkor. The centre has recreated an ancient Khmer kiln that is eight metres long and is helping to breathe new life into this old art. It is possible to visit the centre and try your hand at the potter's wheel. There are plenty of elegant items on sale at the site and the centre is working with **Heritage Watch** (www.heritagewatch.org) to offer a sustainable livelihood to remote villagers. The centre is located down a left-hand side road, just before the roundabout near the airport.

Shadow Puppets

The creation of leather *sbei tuoi* (shadow puppets) is a traditional Khmer art form, and the figures make a memorable souvenir. Characters include gods and demons from the *Reamker*, as well as exquisite elephants with intricate armour. These are a very Cambodian keepsake. The House of Peace Association makes these puppets, and small puppets start from US\$15 while larger pieces can be as much as US\$150. One workshop is located at Wat Preah Inkosei (Map pp142-3) and a second (Map pp142-3) about 4km down NH6 on the way to the airport. La Noria

Guesthouse (p135) hosts shadow puppet shows on Wednesday evening.

Miniature Replicas of Angkor's Temples

One of the more quirky places in town is the **garden** (Map p120; admission US\$1.50) of a local master sculptor, which houses miniature replicas of Angkor Wat, the Bayon, Banteay Srei and other temples. It is a bluffer's way to get that aerial shot of Angkor without chartering a helicopter, although the astute might question the presence of oversized insects in the shot.

Tonlé Sap Exhibition

North of town, Krousar Thmey – a non-governmental organisation (NGO) supporting orphans – has an interesting **exhibition** (Map pp142-3; admission free) about Tonlé Sap Lake. The exhibition contains photos, models and fishing equipment from around the lake, as well as an informative video. After viewing the exhibition you can indulge in a massage to help the blind (opposite).

Cambodian Cultural Village

It may be kitsch, it may be kooky, but it is very popular with Cambodians and some Asian visitors, and provides a diversion for families travelling with children. This is the **Cambodian Cultural Village** (Map pp142-3; ☎963836; www.cambodianculturalvillage.com; Airport Rd; admission US\$9; ☎8am-7pm), which tries to represent all of Cambodia in a whirlwind tour of recreated houses and villages. The visit begins with a wax museum and includes homes of the Cham, Chinese, Kreung and Khmer people, as well as miniature replicas of landmark buildings in Cambodia. There are dance shows and performances throughout the day, but it still doesn't add up to a turn-on for most foreign visitors, unless they have the kiddies in tow. It is located about midway between Siem Reap and the airport.

Cambodia Land Mine Museum

Established by DIY de-miner Aki Ra, the **Land Mine Museum** (Map pp142-3; ☎12 598951; www.cambodialandminemuseum.org; admission US\$1; ☎7am-6pm) is very popular with travellers thanks to its informative displays on the curse of land mines in Cambodia. The museum includes an extensive collection of mines, mortars, guns and weaponry used during the civil war in Cambodia. The site includes a mock minefield so that visitors can attempt to locate the

deactivated mines. Not only a weapon of war, land mines are a weapon against peace and proceeds from the museum are ploughed into mine awareness campaigns and support an on-site orphanage, rehabilitation centre and training facility. The museum is about 25km from Siem Reap in Banteay Srei and is easily combined with a visit to Banteay Srei temple, about 6km beyond.

For those wanting to learn more about the after-effects of an amputation, it is possible to visit the **Physical Rehabilitation Centre** (Map p120) in Siem Reap, run by **Handicap International** (www.handicapinternational.be). There are informative displays including a variety of homemade prosthetics that it has replaced with international-standard artificial limbs, plus it is possible to meet some of the locals receiving assistance here.

ACTIVITIES

Cooking Courses

Cooking classes have really taken off in Siem Reap with a number of restaurants and hotels now offering an introduction to the secrets of Cambodian cooking, including many of the top-end places. Some classes with a good reputation:

Angkor Palm (Map p120; ☎761436; www.angkorpalm.com; Pithnou St; ☎8am-5pm). This popular restaurant has just opened a new country villa near Banteay Srei temple offering informal cooking classes at just US\$5 per dish.

Cooks in Tuk Tuks (Map pp142-3; ☎963400; www.theverigarden.info; US\$18-25). Starts at 10am daily with a visit to Psar Leu market, then returns to the peaceful River Garden for a professional class.

Le Tigre de Papier (Map p120; ☎760930; letigredepapier@hotmail.com; Bar St; US\$11). Starts at 10am daily and includes a visit to the market. Proceeds go to supporting Sala Bai Hotel and Restaurant School (p127), making it great value and a good cause.

Golf

Siem Reap has two international-standard golf courses. **Phokheetra Country Club** (Map pp142-3; ☎964600; www.softel.com) hosts the first tournament to be held in Cambodia on the Asian tour every December and includes an ancient Angkor bridge amid its manicured fairways and greens. The **Angkor Golf Resort** (Map pp142-3; ☎761139; www.angkor-golf.com) was designed by legendary British golfer Nick Faldo and is world class. Greens fees for both are around US\$100, plus more for a caddy, clubs and carts.

Horse Riding

Yee-haa, ride 'em cowboy! The **Happy Ranch** (Map pp142-3; ☎012 920002; www.thehappyranch.com; US\$15-80) offers the chance to explore Siem Reap on horseback, taking in surrounding villages and secluded temples. This is a calm way to experience the countryside, far from the traffic and crowds elsewhere. Riding lessons are also available for children or beginners, and for seriously horsier types there are a couple of stable rooms available to stay in.

Massage & Spa

You may well need a massage if you have been exploring the rollercoaster roads of Preah Vihear province. Deserving of support is **Seeing Hands Massage 4** (Map p120; ☎012 836487; 324 Sivatha St; per hr fan/air-con \$5/7), which trains blind people in the art of massage. Watch out for copycats, as some of these are just exploiting the blind for profit. **Krousar Thmey** (Map pp142-3; massage US\$6) also has massage by the blind at its interesting Tonlé Sap Exhibition.

Foot massage is a big hit in Siem Reap – not surprising given all those steep stairways at the temples. If your feet are feeling frumpy, head to the strip running northwest of Psar Chaa where there are half a dozen or more places offering a massage for about US\$6 an hour, including **Islands Massage** (Map p120; ☎964402) and the brilliantly named **Dr Feet** (Map p120; ☎965034).

There are also some indulgent spas to pamper that inner princess:

Bodia Spa (Map p120; ☎761593; Pithnou St; ☎10am-midnight) Sophisticated spa near Psar Chaa offering a full range of scrubs, rubs and natural remedies, including its own line of herbal products.

Bodytune (Map p120; ☎764141; Pokambor Ave; massages US\$12-37; ☎10am-10pm) Lavish outpost of a popular Thai spa, this is a fine place to relax and unwind on the riverfront.

Frangipani (Map p120; ☎964391; ☎10am-10pm) Located down a narrow alley between Psar Chaa and Bar St, this delightful little place offers massage and a whole range of spa treatments.

Many top-end hotels have in-house spas that are open to all. Those with the best reputation include **Angkor Spa** (Map pp142-3) at Sofitel Phokheetra Royal Angkor (p130), **Sanctuary Spa** (Map p120) at Shinta Mani (p129), voted second best in Asia by readers of the *Spa Asia* magazine, and **Visaya Spa** (Map p120) at FCC Angkor (p129).

Quad Biking

Quad biking has finally come to Siem Reap thank to **Quad Adventure Cambodia** (Map p120; ☎092 787216; www.quad-adventure-cambodia.com; US\$19-76). For those who haven't tried it, all-terrain biking is serious fun and all rides include a short introductory lesson. Rides around Siem Reap involve sunset over the rice fields, pretty temples and back roads through traditional villages where children wave and shout. Quad Adventure Cambodia is well signposted in the Wat Dam Nak area.

Swimming

It's hot work clambering about the temples and there is no better way to wind down than with a dip in swimming pool. Pay by the day at most hotels for use of the swimming pool and/or gym, ranging from just US\$5 at some of the midrange hotels to US\$20 at the five-star palaces. More and more of the cheaper hotels and resorts are putting in pools and this can be a worthwhile splash for weary travellers.

Or head to **Aqua** (Map pp142-3; www.aquacam.com; 7 Makara St; swimming US\$2), where there is a large pool and a lively little bar-restaurant. Locals like to swim in the waters of the Western Baray (p173) at the weekend.

Tours

Most visitors are in Siem Reap to tour the temples of Angkor. See p152 for more on temple tours and p333 for a list of recommended Cambodian tour operators.

SIEM REAP FOR CHILDREN

Siem Reap is a great city for children these days thanks to a range of activities beyond the temples. Many of the temples themselves will appeal to older children, particularly the Indiana Jones atmosphere of Ta Prohm and Beng Mealea, the sheer size and scale of Angkor Wat or the weird faces at the Bayon.

Other activities that might be popular include boat trips on the Tonlé Sap to visit the incredible floating village of Chong Kneas (p139) or the flooded forest of Kompong Phhluk (p139); swimming at a hotel or resort (above); exploring the countryside on horseback (p125) or quad bike (above); goofing around at the Cambodian Cultural Village (p124); or just enjoying the cafés and restaurants of Siem Reap at a leisurely pace, such as Butterflies Garden Restaurant (p131), with its incredible collection of fluttering butterflies.

SLEEPING

Siem Reap has the best range of accommodation in Cambodia. A vast number of family-run guesthouses charging US\$3 to US\$15 a room cater for budget travellers, while those looking for midrange accommodation can choose upmarket guesthouses from US\$15, or small hotels from US\$20 per room. Those wanting air-con at a budget price may find better value at cheap hotels and upmarket guesthouses than in the budget guesthouses offering only a few air-con rooms.

There are plenty of midrange to top-end hotels around town, and as the construction boom continues unabated, these will soon be supplemented by further arrivals. In the low season (April to September), it may be possible to negotiate discounts at many of these places. Top-end hotels usually publish high- and low-season rates.

Check out the website of **Siem Reap Angkor Hotel & Guesthouse Association** (www.angkorhotels.org) for a complete listing of guesthouses and hotels.

Budget

Touts for budget guesthouses wait at the taxi park, Phnom Krom (where the fast boat from Phnom Penh docks) and at the airport. Even if you have not yet decided where to stay in Siem Reap, do not be surprised to see a noticeboard displaying your name, as most guesthouses in Phnom Penh either have partners up here or sell your name on to another guesthouse! This system usually involves a free ride into town. There is no obligation to stay at their guesthouse if you don't like the look of it, but the 'free lift' might suddenly cost US\$1 or more.

Apart from the guesthouses listed here, many places around town offer rooms from US\$3. Many offer small discounts for those planning longer stays.

PSAR CHAA AREA

Popular Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎963578; chom@camnet.com.kh; r US\$3-14; ☎ ☑) Popular by name, popular by nature, this ever-expanding guesthouse has more than 70 well-tended rooms. There's a rooftop restaurant with great food.

Mandalay Inn (Map p120; ☎963960; www.mandalayinn.com; 148 Sivatha St; r US\$7-20; ☎ ☑) Promising Burmese hospitality meets Khmer smiles at this smart lodging with spotless rooms plus free wi-fi and a rooftop gym.

Shadow of Angkor Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎964774; www.shadowofangkor.com; 353 Pokambor Ave; r US\$8-25; ☎ ☑) Boasting a choice setting in a grand old French-era building overlooking the river, this friendly place offers budget fan rooms, affordable air-con and free internet. Downstairs is a bustling riverfront restaurant with happy hours from 5pm to 9pm.

Other options near the market:

Ivy Guesthouse 2 (Map p120; ☎012 602930; r US\$6-8) An inviting guesthouse with a chill-out area and bar, the Ivy is a fun place to stay.

Red Lodge (Map p120; ☎012 707048; www.redlodge.angkor.com; r US\$6-12; ☎ ☑) Hidden in a maze of backstreets. Rooms are bright and spacious. Prices include free bicycles, but not to keep!

SIVATHA STREET AREA

Garden Village (Map pp142-3; ☎012 217373; www.gardenvillage-angkor.com; dm US\$1, r US\$3-12; ☎ ☑) This sprawling place offers some of the cheapest beds in town; choose from eight-bed dorms or US\$3 cubicles with shared bathroom. The bargains don't stop there, with US\$0.50 beer available at the rooftop bar. Nice.

Smiley Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎012 852955; r US\$6-15; ☎) One of the first guesthouses to undergo a hotelistic makeover, this place has more than 70 rooms set around a flourishing garden courtyard.

Sala Bai Hotel & Restaurant School (Map p120; ☎963329; www.salabai.com; r US\$10-25; ☎) Immerse yourself in the intimate surrounds of this training school hotel, where the super staff are ever-helpful. Rooms include silk wall hangings, woven throw pillows and wicker wardrobes.

A few more friendly, family-run options:

Naga Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎963439; naga_gh@hotmail.com; r US\$4-10; ☎) One of the original budget crashpads, extras include a pool table and free wi-fi.

Mommy's Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎012 941755; r US\$4-15; ☎) This homely villa has large rooms with air-con, as well as cheap digs with cold showers.

AIRPORT ROAD

Jasmine Lodge (Map p120; ☎760697; www.jasminelodge.com; NH6; r US\$2-15; ☎ ☑) Offering a home away from home, this long-running guesthouse boasts cheapies with shared bathroom and a range of smarter options. The elevated bar-restaurant includes a pool table.

Earthwalkers (Map pp142-3; ☎012 967901; www.earthwalkers.no; off NH6; dm US\$5, s/d from US\$9/12; ☎ ☑ ☑) The original backpacker

hostel in town, Earthwalkers just got better thanks to the signature 'footprint' swimming pool. Dorms include breakfast and private rooms come with fan or air-con to suit all budgets. Popular bar-restaurant, plus great travel information.

Phoum Khmer Guesthouse (Map pp142-3; ☎965197; khmerreservation@gmail.com; off NH6; r from US\$15; ☎ ☑ ☑) Barely scraping into the budget category, this attractively designed guesthouse has expressive rooms complete with silks and smart fittings.

More, you want more? Try these:

Prince Mekong Villa (Map pp142-3; ☎012 437972; www.princemekong.com; s/tw from US\$4/6) Satisfied guests buzz about the range of services provided here: free laundry, breakfast, bicycle and good travel info.

Hello Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎012 920556; r US\$4-15; ☎) Linked to Okay Guesthouse in Phnom Penh, the rooms here are tempting value. The restaurant includes handy Khmer phrases plastered all over the wall.

WAT BO AREA

Mahogany Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎760909; proeun@online.com.kh; Wat Bo St; r US\$5-15; ☎ ☑) There's still a hint of mahogany in long-running Mahogany Guesthouse. Hit the old house for cheap rooms or continue to the newer block for rooms with whistles and bells. Good travel info available.

Rithy Rin Villa (Map p120; ☎800488; rithyrin_villa@yahoo.com; r US\$8-15; ☎) A large modern villa in a quiet part of town, the Rithy Rin is a friendly spot with a good range of rooms, all with TV, fridge and hot water.

Angkor Thom Hotel (Map p120; ☎964862; Wat Bo St; r US\$10-15; ☎) Consistently good value, this place is a cut above the guesthouse competition. Satellite TV, fridge and hot water are standard and the prices drop as the stairs rise.

And the budget beat goes on...

Rosy Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎965059; Stung Siem Reap St; r US\$7-15; ☎) Sensibly priced rooms here, plus it's not far to the bustling bar downstairs.

Wat's Up Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎012 675881; r US\$8-15; ☎ ☑) A smart new place with a memorable name in a quieter part of town.

Midrange

Great deals are available thanks to an explosion in Siem Reap's midrange options. Most rates include a free transfer from the airport or boat dock. Don't be afraid to venture 'further afield' (p129), as some of the most atmospheric places are away from the centre.

PSAR CHAA AREA

Molly Malone's Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎963533; www.mollymalonescambodia.com; Bar St; r US\$20-40; ☎ ☎) If you want to be in the thick of things, this smart B&B above a popular Irish pub (p134) has a small selection of guestrooms, creatively finished with four-poster beds. Try for a higher-priced room with balcony.

Golden Banana (Map p120; ☎012 885366; www.golden-banana.com; r US\$23-58; ☎ ☎ ☎) Memorable name for a memorable place. All the rooms are set in pagoda-style bungalows. The old wing is a cheaper, but newer suites are set on two floors with swing chairs and a pool view. Gay-friendly.

Ta Prohm Hotel (Map p120; ☎380117; www.ta-prohm-hotel.com; r US\$30-70; ☎ ☎) One of the oldest hotels in town, Ta Prohm keeps earning a commendation for very reasonable rates. The rooms are huge and the location great, helping it keep up with cooler new places.

Steung Siem Reap Hotel (Map p120; ☎965167; www.steungsiemreaphotel.com; s/d from US\$70/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) In keeping with the French colonial air around Psar Chaa, this hotel has high ceilings, louver shutters and wrought-iron balconies. Three-star rooms feature a smart wooden trim. The location is hard to beat.

Or check out some cheaper deals:

E18HT Rooms (Map p120; ☎012 800860; www.e18htrooms.com; r US\$15-20; ☎ ☎) Smart little boutique guesthouse with bright silks, DVD player and free internet. Actually 16 rooms now.

Ivy Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎012 800860; ivyasia@hotmail.com; r US\$15-20; ☎ ☎) Well-established and right in the middle of the action; rooms have TV, hot water and decorative detail.

SIVATHA ST AREA

Golden Temple Villa (Map p120; ☎012 943459; www.goldentemplevilla.com; r US\$8-30; ☎ ☎) Readers love this place thanks to its funky décor and fun outlook. Rooms are painted in vivid colours and include cable TV. The modern villa is surrounded by a lush garden, and a bar-restaurant is downstairs. Free internet.

Ancient Angkor Guesthouse (Map pp142-3; ☎012 772862; www.ancient-angkor.com; r US\$10-30; ☎ ☎ ☎) A newer pad offering tidy rooms. The small pool is inviting on a hot day, as is the free internet.

Villa Siem Reap (Map p120; ☎761036; www.thevilla-siemreap.com; 153 Taphul St; r US\$20-50; ☎ ☎) Homely service in intimate surrounds make this a popular place. Rooms are nicely finished and

include a safe and minibar. Good tours are available to some of the far-flung sights.

Mekong Angkor Palace (Map p120; ☎963636; www.mekongangkorpalace.com; Sivatha St; r US\$30-40; ☎ ☎) Set in spacious grounds away from the main drag, this hotel offers large, bright rooms with all the amenities, but little flourish. The pool makes up for such minor shortcomings, however.

Auberge Mont Royal (Map p120; ☎964044; www.auberge-mont-royal.com; r US\$30-55; ☎ ☎) Set in a classic colonial-style villa, the auberge has smart rooms at a smart price, with the swimming pool and spa taking it to another level.

Other places in and around the popular Sivatha strip:

Dead Fish Inn (Map p120; ☎963060; www.deadfish-tower.com; r US\$5-25; ☎ ☎) Once visited, not forgotten thanks to a wicked sense of humour that sees all rooms named after luxury hotel chains like Hilton and Sofitel.

Green Garden Home Villa (Map p120; ☎963342; www.greengardenhome.com; r US\$15-50; ☎ ☎) It keeps on growing and now boasts an inviting swimming pool and smarter rooms in a wat-style wing.

Red Piano Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎963240; www.redpianocambodia.com; r US\$16-30; ☎ ☎) Popular guesthouse with signature carved wooden beds and colourful wall hangings, plus TV and hot water.

NH6 WEST AREA

Paul Dubrule Hotel & Tourism School (École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme Paul Dubrule; Map pp142-3; ☎963673; www.ecolepauldubrule.org; r US\$15-30; ☎ ☎) Paul Dubrule co-founded the Accor hotel group, so it's no surprise his tourism school hotel offers slick service and smart rooms. Proceeds are ploughed into maintaining the training centre. The rooms are a great deal.

WAT BO AREA

Many of the hotels here are on or near the east riverbank, a pleasant, shaded area of town.

Green Village Palace (off Map p120; ☎760623; www.greenvillagepalace.com; Wat Dam Nak St; r US\$15-30; ☎ ☎) It is something of a palace for this sort of money, as the smart rooms include sweeping silks, plus there's a small swimming pool and a gym.

Siem Reap Hostel (Map p120; ☎964660; www.thesiemreaphostel.com; 10 Makara St; dm US\$10, r US\$30-45; ☎ ☎) Angkor's latest backpacker hostel is pretty slick, catering to the budget backpacker and the aspiring flashpacker, but the dorms are pricey given US\$10 will buy an air-con room elsewhere. Smart rooms, free bicycles and a lively bar-restaurant.

Soria Moria Hotel (Map p120; ☎964768; www.thesoriamoria.com; Wat Bo St; r US\$40-75; ☎ ☎) A hotel with a heart, promoting local causes to help the community, this boutique place has attractive rooms with smart bathroom fittings. Fusion restaurant downstairs, sky Jacuzzi upstairs.

La Noria Guesthouse (Map p120; ☎964242; www.angkor-hotel-lanoria.com; s/d US\$41/44; ☎ ☎ ☎) Lovely La Noria is set in a lush tropical garden with a pretty swimming pool. Rooms have a traditional trim and include a veranda but no TV or fridge.

Viroth's Hotel (Map p120; ☎761720; www.viroth-hotel.com; r US\$70; ☎ ☎ ☎) Minimalist and modern, this small boutique property has seven rooms finished in contemporary chic. Facilities include a pool, a Jacuzzi and off-peak wi-fi.

Other recommendations:

Golden Orange Hotel (Map p120; ☎965389; www.goldenorangehotel.com; r US\$25-35; ☎ ☎) Spacious rooms, some with big bathtubs, plus free wi-fi/internet for all guests.

City River Hotel (Map p120; ☎763000; www.cityriverhotel.com; r from US\$50; ☎ ☎ ☎) Smart, modern rooms in a great riverside location, now with a swimming pool.

FURTHER AFIELD

Lotus Lodge (Map pp142-3; ☎966140; www.lotuslodge-cambodia.com; r US\$15-35; ☎ ☎ ☎) A new resort, the Lotus offers a great deal for those wanting a peaceful retreat after a day at the temples. Rooms are clean and comfortable, plus there is a spacious swimming pool with a welcoming restaurant-bar.

The River Garden (Map pp142-3; ☎963400; www.rivergarden.info; r US\$44-66; ☎ ☎ ☎) Invitingly set amid an enchanting garden, this wooden resort has a small selection of atmospheric rooms, some with large balconies and deep baths. Relax by the pool, indulge in an ice-cream buffet or join their cooks in *tuk taks* culinary class (p125).

Pavillon Indochine (Map pp142-3; ☎012 849681; www.pavillon-indochine.com; r US\$50-55, ste US\$65-75; ☎ ☎ ☎) The expanded Pavillon offers charming colonial chic rooms set around a small swimming pool. The trim includes billowing mosquito nets and a safe. The doors have just opened on the new Pavillon d'Orient (St 60), a higher-end boutique resort with MP4 movies on wide-screen TVs, plus a spa.

Hanumanalaya (Map pp142-3; ☎760582; www.hanumanalaya.com; r US\$60-90; ☎ ☎ ☎) A beaut-

iful boutique retreat, Hanumanalaya is set around a lush garden and pretty swimming pool. Rooms are decorated in antiques and handicrafts, but include modern comforts like cable TV, a minibar and safe. Also home to the indulgent Sita Spa and the authentic Reahoo Restaurant.

More for the mix:

Mysteres d'Angkor (Map pp142-3; ☎963639; www.mysteres-angkor.com; r US\$49-74; ☎ ☎ ☎) Set behind Wat Po Langka, the rooms are set amid a verdant garden with pool.

Antanue Angkor Villa (Map pp142-3; ☎965230; www.antanue.com; r US\$50-90; ☎ ☎ ☎) Smart rooms, garden bungalows and a swimming pool here, plus a recommended Japanese restaurant.

Top End

Most of the hotels in this range levy an additional 10% government tax, 2% tourist tax, and sometimes an extra 10% for service, but breakfast is included. It is essential to book ahead at most places from November through to March, particularly for the glamorous spots. Competition in this sector can be fierce, meaning some tempting low season discounts. Booking online or through a travel agent can save considerable money on the walk-in rate.

La Maison d'Angkor (Map pp142-3; ☎965045; www.lamaisondangkor.com; Airport Rd; r US\$80-115; ☎ ☎ ☎) These pretty white bungalows are set around a tempting swimming pool in a leafy garden. Features include contemporary bathrooms, thoughtful detail and a safety-deposit box.

Angkor Village (Map p120; ☎965561; www.angkor-village.com; r US\$89-139; ☎ ☎ ☎) This beautiful bungalow resort is set in stunningly sculpted water gardens and has made a name for itself as a haven of peace and tranquillity. The rooms include four-poster beds and Sino-Khmer furnishings but no TV, and breakfast is extra.

Shinta Mani (Map p120; ☎761998; www.shintamani.com; Oum Khun St; s/d/tr from US\$90/100/110; ☎ ☎ ☎) Established as a training institute to give disadvantaged youth a helping hand into the tourism industry, this hotel's 18 rooms feature designer bathrooms and sleigh beds, as well as a small pool. Shinta Mani has won several international awards for responsible tourism practices and has lots of community programmes. The restaurant here is also highly regarded.

FCC Angkor (Map p120; ☎760280; www.fcccambodia.com; Pokambor Ave; s/d from US\$130/150; ☎ ☎ ☎)

This funky hotel is a member of Design Hotels and wouldn't look out of place in any chic European capital. However, there are Khmer touches, and rooms feature large bathtubs, Cambodian silks and wi-fi throughout. The black-tiled swimming pool and Visaya Spa complete the picture.

Victoria Angkor Hotel (Map p120; ☎760428; www.victoriahotels-asia.com; s/d from US\$140/150; 🏠 📺 🚿) The Victoria is a popular choice for those craving the French touch in Indochine. The classy lobby is the perfect introduction to one of the most impressive courtyard pools in town. The rooms are well-finished and many include a striking pool view.

Angkor Village Resort (Map pp142-3; ☎963561; Phum Traeng St; r US\$169; 🏠 📺 🚿) Smarter still is the Angkor Village, out towards Angkor, with a snaking pool that wends its way through the grounds like a river. The rooms are more spacious and include elegant bathrooms and mod cons such as TVs.

La Résidence d'Angkor (Map p120; ☎963390; www.pansea-angkor.com; Stung Siem Reap St; r from US\$190; 🏠 📺 🚿) These open-plan, all-wooden rooms are among the most inviting in town, complete with huge Jacuzzi-sized tubs. Wander through the subtle reception to a stunning swimming pool, which is perfect for laps. Memorable indeed.

Hotel de la Paix (Map p120; ☎966000; www.hotel.delapaixangkor.com; Sivatha St; r from US\$300; 🏠 📺 🚿) This is the sort of hotel you either love or hate, thanks to its contemporary design, trendy interiors and minimalist style. We happen to love it, including the open-plan bathrooms, the iPods in each room and the cutting-edge cuisine. Traditionalists be warned.

Sofitel Phokheetra Royal Angkor (Map pp142-3; ☎964600; www.sofitel.com; Vithai Charles de Gaulle; r from US\$355; 🏠 📺 🚿) For a touch of Thai islands on the road to Angkor, this resort hotel is a smart option. It has one of the largest lagoon pools in town, plus a renowned spa, and rooms are signature Sofitel.

Grand Hotel d'Angkor (Map p120; ☎963888; www.raffles-grandhoteldangkor.com; r from US\$360; 🏠 📺 🚿) The hotel with history on its side, this place has been welcoming guests since 1929, including Charlie Chaplin, Charles de Gaulle, Jackie Kennedy and Bill Clinton. Ensnared in such opulent surroundings, you can imagine what it was like to be a tourist in colonial days. Rooms include classic colonial-era touches and a diz-

zying array of bathroom gifts. Currently being refitted, it will offer more exclusivity and suites than ever as it rolls out the new rooms.

Amansara (Map p120; ☎760333; www.amansara.com; r from US\$675; 🏠 📺 🚿) Aman junkies just can't get enough of the Aman chain and will fly to the ends of the earth to experience unshamed luxury. Set in the old guest villa of Norodom Sihanouk, the superb suites here are among the largest in town and some include a private plunge pool. Rates include tours around the main Angkor temples, but not meals and far-flung sights. Former guests already include a Who's Who of the rich and famous, such as Mick Jagger and Brad Pitt.

Other ideas for indulging:
Lotus Angkor Hotel (Map pp142-3; ☎965555; www.lotusangkor.com; Airport Rd; r from US\$80; 🏠 📺 🚿) Popular with tour groups thanks to smart rooms and a full-sized pool.

Day Inn Angkor Resort (Map p120; ☎760500; www.dayinnangkor.com; Oum Khun St; s/d US\$80/90; 🏠 📺 🚿) Bamboo- and rattan-clad rooms here are attractively set around an inviting pool.

Tara Angkor Hotel (Map pp142-3; ☎966661; www.taraangkorhotel.com; r from US\$110; 🏠 📺 🚿) A new boutique hotel on the road to Angkor; the décor is cool and minimalist.

Angkor Palace Spa Resort (Map pp142-3; ☎760511; www.angkorpalaceresort.com; off Airport Rd; r US\$180; 🏠 📺 🚿) This Balinese-style resort is a huge place with lovely open-plan rooms and a huge swimming pool. Good value.

Heritage Suites Hotel (Map pp142-3; ☎969100; www.relaischateaux.com/heritage; r from US\$235, ste US\$520; 🏠 📺 🚿) Designed in the colonial style, the suites here are spectacular and open plan.

EATING

The dining scene in Siem Reap is something to savour, offering a superb selection of street dining, Asian eateries and sumptuous restaurants. The range encompasses something from every continent, with new temptations constantly on offer. Sample the subtleties of Khmer cuisine in Siem Reap, or simply indulge in home comforts or gastronomic delights prior to – or after – hitting the remote provinces.

Tourist numbers mean many top restaurants are heaving during high season. But with so many places to choose from, keep walking and you'll find somewhere more tranquil. The restaurants reviewed here represent just a fraction of the food on offer.

DINING (OR DRINKING) FOR A CAUSE

These are some fabulous restaurants that support worthy causes or assist in the training of Cambodia's future hospitality gurus with a subsidised ticket into the tourism industry. If you dine at the training places, it gives the trainees a good opportunity to hone their skills with real customers.

Butterflies Garden Restaurant (Map p120; ☎761211; www.butterfliesofangkor.com; mains US\$3-7; ☎9am-10pm) Set in a blooming garden that provides a backdrop for more than 1000 butterflies, this is dining with a difference. The menu includes Khmer flavours with an international touch, some classics from home and indulgent desserts. Supports good causes, including Cambodian Living Arts, and sells handicrafts to help communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

Sala Bai Hotel and Restaurant School (Map p120; ☎963329; www.salabai.com; set lunch US\$5; ☎noon-2pm Mon-Fri Nov-Jun) This school trains young Khmers in the art of hospitality and serves an affordable menu of Western and Cambodian cuisine.

Les Jardins des Delices (Map pp142-3; ☎963673; Paul Dubrule Hotel & Tourism School; NH6; set lunch US\$8; ☎noon-2pm Mon-Fri) Enjoy Sofitel standards at a snip with a three-course meal of Asian and Western food prepared by students training in the culinary arts.

Joe-To-Go (Map p120; ☎092 532640; www.theglobalchild.org; ☎5am-3pm) Gourmet coffee is the main draw here, a good wake-up call before sunrise at the temples. Proceeds support education for street children and help to house them in a safer environment.

Singing Tree Café (Map p120; ☎965210; www.singingtreecafe.com; mains US\$1.50-3; ☎closed Mon) This garden café serves scrumptious muffins, coffee with a kick and health food. It doubles as a community centre, yoga studio and gallery, committing a percentage of profits to wildlife conservation and helping street children.

Some of the budget guesthouses have good menus offering a selection of local dishes and Western meals; while it's easy to order in-house food, it hardly counts as the full Siem Reap experience. Several of the midrange hotels and all the top-end places have restaurants, some excellent. For details on dinner and a performance of classical dance, as featured at several hotels and restaurants around town, see Entertainment (p135).

For more on the lunch options available in and around Angkor, see the boxed text on p150.

Khmer

When it comes to cheaper Khmer eats, **Psar Chaa** (Map p120; ☎7am-9pm) has plenty of food stalls on the northwest side, all with signs and menus in English. These are atmospheric places for a local meal at local-ish prices. Some dishes are on display, others are freshly flash fried to order, but most dishes are just US\$1 to US\$2. Another good strip of local diners sits opposite Wat Damnak, and you can judge the quality and value by the number of *motos* and *remorque-motos* parked outside.

By night, lots of street strips turn out bargain meals: try the strip at the end of Bar St, opposite Molly Malone's. Alternatively, ask a

moto driver to recommend the best hole-in-the-wall, as these guys know the rub.

Socheata II Restaurant (Map p120; ☎761416; Pithnou St; mains US\$1.50-5; ☎7am-10pm) A blink-and-you'll-miss-it Khmer restaurant that offers a big range of Cambodian classics including very tasty salads such as banana leaf, pomelo and watercress.

Khmer Kitchen Restaurant (Map p120; ☎964154; The Alley; mains US\$2-4; ☎11am-10pm) Can't get no (culinary) satisfaction? Then follow in the footsteps of Sir Mick and try this popular place, which offers an affordable selection of Khmer and Thai favourites.

Angkor Palm (Map p120; ☎761436; Pithnou St; mains US\$3-6; ☎10am-10pm) This award-winning Cambodian restaurant offers the authentic taste of Cambodia. Even Khmers go crazy for the legendary *amoc* (baked fish in banana leaf) here. Cooking classes are also available at its new Banteay Srei location (p125).

Sugar Palm (Map p120; ☎964838; Taphul Rd; mains US\$4-7; ☎11am-late) Set in a beautiful wooden house in the west of town, the Sugar Palm is the place to sample traditional flavours infused with herbs and spices. Popular cocktail bar to warm-up or wind-down.

Café Indochine (Map p120; Sivatha St; mains US\$4-7; ☎10am-3pm & 5-11pm) One of the few remaining

traditional Khmer houses in town, this attractive restaurant offers a blend of Asian and European flavours. Enjoy the ambience by dining later to dodge the crowds.

Madame Butterfly (Map pp142-3; ☎016 909607; Airport Rd; mains US\$4-8; ☎6-11pm) This traditional wooden house has been sumptuously decorated with fine silks and billowing drapes. The menu is Khmer and a fusion of Asian cuisines. There are plenty of private rooms and hidden corners for a romantic night.

Amarapura (Map pp142-3; ☎761844; off Airport Rd; mains US\$4-8; ☎lunch & dinner) This garden restaurant offers an original combination of Khmer and Burmese cuisine, but has just been put up for sale as we go to press, so there may be changes afoot.

Amok (Map p120; ☎012 800309; The Alley; mains US\$4-9; ☎5-11pm) The name pays homage to Cambodia's national dish, *amok* (or *amok*), and this is indeed a fine place to try baked fish curry in banana leaf. It is in the heart of the Alley.

L'Escale des Arts & des Sens (Map p120; ☎761442; www.escale-arts-sens.com; Oum Khun St; mains US\$5-20; ☎6.30am-10pm) Established by Sofitel super-chef Didier Corlou, this striking villa offers new Asian cuisine. Try the wonderful tapas platters that include a selection of teasing tasters and are washed down with rice wine. Mains include beef cooked seven ways, inspired by a royal recipe for tiger meat, thankfully not on the menu.

Cambodian BBQ (Map p120; ☎965407; The Alley; mains US\$7-9; ☎dinner) This is another tasty option along the Alley, which is wall-to-wall with good Cambodian restaurants, many family owned. Take a stroll and see what takes your fancy. Cambodian BBQ uses crocodile, snake, ostrich and kangaroo to add a twist to the traditional *phnom pleung* (hill of fire) grills.

Some good Khmer restaurants cater to tour groups:

Bayon Restaurant (Map p120; ☎012 855219; Wat Bo St; mains US\$2-5; ☎lunch & dinner) Set around an inner courtyard, this place has slick service and a deserved reputation for tasty food.

Samapheap Restaurant (Map p120; Stung Siem Reap St; mains US\$2-5; ☎lunch & dinner) A typical garden restaurant, the range of food here is excellent with hundreds of dishes.

Viroth's Restaurant (Map p120; ☎016 951800; Wat Bo St; mains US\$3-7; ☎lunch & dinner) A sophisticated garden restaurant near Wat Bo, this is where Khmer cuisine meets Balinese design.

Other Asian

Soup Dragon (Map p120; ☎964933; Bar St; Vietnamese mains US\$1-4, Western mains US\$4-7; ☎6am-11pm) This three-level restaurant has a split personality: the ground floor serves up classic Asian breakfasts like *pho* (Vietnamese rice-noodle soup) for under US\$1 – just the recipe for tackling the temples – while upstairs serves a diverse menu of Asian and international dishes, including Italian and Moroccan.

Dead Fish Tower (Map p120; Sivatha St; mains US\$2-4; ☎7am-late) Looking more like an adventure playground than a restaurant at first glance, this place has floor dining and tree-trunk tables. The restaurant promises '...we don't serve dog, cat, rat or worm', so bad luck if you like any of those. However, it does keep crocodiles on site, which might put off some.

Hong Kong Restaurant (Map p120; ☎012 966226; Pithnou St; mains US\$2-4; ☎9am-10pm) A new Chinese restaurant specialising in authentic *dim sum* at a reasonable price. Try the spicy *mopor tofu* (minced pork with tofu).

Curry Walla (Map p120; ☎965451; Sivatha St; mains US\$2-4; ☎10.30am-11pm) For good value Indian food, this place is hard to beat. The *thalis* (set meals) are a bargain and the owner knows his share of spicy secrets from the subcontinent.

Chivit Thai (Map p120; ☎012 830761; 130 Wat Bo St; mains US\$2-6; ☎7am-10pm) The most atmospheric Thai place in town, this is set in a beautiful wooden villa surrounded by a lush garden. Choose between floor dining on Thai cushions or table dining. The food includes a delicious *laab* (spicy Thai salad with fish or meat).

Kama Sutra (Map p120; ☎017 824474; Bar St; mains US\$2.50-7; ☎noon-late) Enjoy it in 80 different positions; ahem, that's Indian food and seating arrangements we're talking about here. This stylish Indian restaurant offers a delicious array of curries at surprisingly affordable prices. Delectable daals, creamy curries and regional flavours make it a must.

In Touch (Map p120; ☎963240; Bar St; mains US\$3-6; ☎11am-late) Located on a prime corner at the end of Bar St, In Touch has spectacular lighting to set the mood. The flavours are mainly Thai, but dine early unless you want to be serenaded by the resident band.

Kobe (Map pp142-3; ☎012 985038; Airport Rd; mains US\$5-15; ☎lunch & dinner) This cube could be confused with a mausoleum at first glance, but it's actually an uber-trendy new Japanese restaurant.

Ginga (Map pp142-3; ☎963366; mains US\$6-15; ☎lunch & dinner) This popular Japanese restaurant draws the Tokyo crowd for traditional Japanese cuisine. The menu includes some affordable sashimi and sushi sets, plus combo boxes at lunchtime.

International

A lot of the guesthouses around town offer affordable international dishes for those on a budget.

Blue Pumpkin (Map p120; ☎963574; Pithnou St; mains US\$1.50-5; ☎6am-10pm) Downstairs it looks like any old café, albeit with a delightful selection of cakes, breads and homemade ice cream. Upstairs is another world of white minimalism with beds to lounge on and free wi-fi. Light bites, great sandwiches, filling specials, ice-cream creations and divine shakes, what more can you ask for?

Red Piano Restaurant (Map p120; ☎963240; Bar St; mains US\$3-5) Strikingly set in a restored colonial gem, there is a big balcony for watching the action unfold on the streets below. The menu has a great selection of Asian and international food, all at reasonable prices. Former celebrity guest Angelina Jolie even has a cocktail named in her honour.

Le Grand Café (Map p120; ☎012 414375; mains US\$2-6; ☎8am-midnight) Housed in a lovingly restored French house near Psar Chaa, this elegant restaurant offers an enticing blend of French and Khmer flavours. Highlights include succulent duck, tender steaks and an indulgent ice-cream menu.

Funky Munky (Map p120; ☎017 824553; www.funky-munkycambodia.com; mains US\$3-7; ☎noon-late, closed Mon) This great little bar-restaurant turns out brilliant build-your-own burgers, including the slightly scary 'Cardiac Arrest'. The eclectic menu will satisfy any global nomad and it is well worth dropping by on Thursday for the quiz; all proceeds are donated to local causes. Truly funky décor, with artsy film posters, and a cocktail menu created for cheeky monkeys.

Carnets d'Asie (Map p120; ☎760278; 333 Sivatha St; mains US\$4-12; ☎lunch & dinner) This courtyard restaurant offers refined dining, mixing the exotic from Asia with the familiar from Europe. Particularly good fish and seafood selection.

Les Orientalistes (Map p120; ☎760278; 613 Wat Bo St; mains US\$4-12; ☎lunch & dinner) A bright and exotic restaurant with voluptuous archways and Turkish rugs, this place conjures up the

souks of the Maghreb. It serves an international mix of Khmer, French and Moroccan cuisine, including tasty tapas.

FCC Angkor (Map p120; ☎760280; mains US\$5-15; ☎7am-midnight) This bold building draws people in from the riverside thanks to a reflective pool, torch-lit dining and a garden bar. Inside, the colonial chic continues with lounge chairs and an open kitchen turning out a range of Asian and international food. Daily set menus are available from US\$15.

Other internationally inclined places: **Viva** (Map p120; ☎012 209154; Pithnou St; mains US\$2-5; ☎11.30am-late) Spice up your life with Mexican food and margaritas. Great location.

Kampuccino Pizza (Map p120; ☎012 970896; Pokambor Ave; mains US\$2-6; ☎7am-midnight) A popular restaurant near Psar Chaa; the international menu offers something from every corner of the globe.

Tell Restaurant (Map p120; ☎963289; Sivatha St; mains US\$2-10; ☎10am-10pm; ☎) Soak up the air-con on a hot day; this place has cheap Asian eats and some creative Central European dishes.

French

Abacus (Map p120; ☎012 644286; mains US\$5-10; ☎11am-late) The French menu here is one of the most original in town, combining traditional treats like entrecote and duck breast with new world additions like ostrich and smoked salmon. Lovely setting in an old wooden house with a verdant garden.

Le Malraux (Map p120; ☎966041; mains US\$5-12; ☎7am-midnight) A good spot for gastronomes, this classically Art Deco café-restaurant offers fine French food. Try the combination salmon *tartare* and *carpaccio* to start, followed by a quality cut from the selection of steaks.

Damnak Alliance Café (Map p120; ☎964242; mains US\$5-15; ☎10am-10pm) This classy French restaurant also pays homage to its Cambodian context, with starters that include a rare lotus salad. Try scallops on a bed of spinach and graduate to duck breast in a passion sauce, but remember to save space for dessert.

Italian

Happy Herb's Pizza (Map p120; ☎092 838134; Pithnou St; pizzas US\$3-7; ☎7am-11pm) The Siem Reap outpost of a Phnom Penh institution, the 'happy' in question is a somewhat illegal herb that leaves diners on a high. Nonhappy pizzas also available.

Pizza Italiana (Map p120; ☎012 440382; Bar St; pizzas US\$4-8; ☎11am-11pm) Turning out tasty Italian

food, this is a good place to watch the action warming up. Pizzas are thin-crust and come in some original combinations, plus there are pastas and daily specials.

L'Oasi Italiana (Map pp142-3; ☎092 418917; meals US\$4-10; ☎ 11am-2pm & 6-10pm, closed Mon lunch) This really is something of an oasis, hidden away in a forest near Wat Preah Inkosei. Expats swear by the gnocchi and homemade pasta, so venture forth.

Cafés

Some very good cafés are covered under the 'Dining (or Drinking) for a Cause' boxed text (p131).

Le Café (Map p120; ☎092 271392; Wat Bo area; snacks US\$2-4; ☎ 7.30am-9pm) Run in partnership with the Paul Dubrule Hotel School (p131), this café brings five-star sandwiches, salads and shakes to the French Cultural Centre.

Café de la Paix (Map p120; Hotel de la Paix; Sivatha St; meals US\$3-5; ☎ 6am-10pm) Sounds unlikely, but the opulent de la Paix is home to an affordable café serving up a superb selection of sandwiches, salads and Lavazza coffees. The ice cream is among the best in town, including a divine passionfruit. Free wi-fi.

Self-Catering

The markets are well stocked with fruit and fresh bread. For more substantial treats like cheese and chocolate, try the local supermarkets. Eating in the market usually works out cheaper than self-catering, but some folks like to make up a picnic for longer days on the road.

Try these outlets:

Angkor Market (Map p120; Sivatha St) A steady supply of international eats and treats.

Starmart (Map p120; Caltex Starmart, NH6 west) Has a good selection of imports, including ice creams.

DRINKING

Siem Reap rocks. The transformation from sleepy overgrown village to an international destination for the jetset has been dramatic and Siem Reap is now firmly on the nightlife map of Southeast Asia. The Psar Chaa area is a good hunting ground, with one street even earning the moniker Bar St – dive in, crawl out! Bar St is closed to traffic every evening. However, the floodgates open around midnight.

A great spot running parallel to Bar St is the Alley, where the volume control is just

a little lower. There are plenty more places around town, so make sure you plan at least one big night out.

Most of the bars here have happy hours, but so do some of the fancier hotels, which is a good way to sample the high life even if you are not staying at those places, although the atmosphere can be a little austere.

As well as the storming selection of bars below, some of the aforementioned restaurants double-up as lively bars by night, including atmospheric Abacus (p133), Aqua (p126) with its tempting swimming pool, classic FCC Angkor (p133), the very Funky Munky (p133), the popular Red Piano (p133) and the rooftop Soup Dragon (p132), which donates 7% of the take to the Angkor Children's Hospital, so you are helping someone's liver if not your own.

The Warehouse (Map p120; Psar Chaa area; ☎ 10.30am-3am) One of the most popular bars in town, it occupies a strategic corner that simply sucks you in. Rockin' tunes, table football and devilish drinks keep them coming. There's great bar food and international bites, plus free wi-fi at all hours.

Laundry Bar (Map p120; Psar Chaa area; ☎ 6pm-late) One of the most alluring bars in town thanks to low lighting and discerning décor – put your cleanest undies on for a trip here. It gets busy on weekends or when guest DJs crank up the volume, but is worth a visit anytime. Happy hour until 9pm.

Angkor What? (Map p120; Bar St; ☎ 6pm-late) Siem Reap's original bar is still serving up serious hangovers every night. The happy hour (to 8pm) – with bargain buckets of Mekong whiskey and cheap Anchor pitchers – lightens the mood for later when everyone's bouncing along to indie anthems, sometimes on the tables.

Temple Club (Map p120; Bar St; ☎ 10am-late) The only worshipping going on at this temple is 'all hail the ale'. With a popular restaurant, this place starts moving early and doesn't stop. The loud tunes and some liberally minded locals draw a dance crowd. Insane happy hours from 10am to 10pm.

Le Tigre de Papier (Map p120; Bar St; ☎ 24hr) Established spot on Bar St offering big-screen sports and movies and a great menu of Italian, international and Asian food, plus the chance to slake the midnight munchies as it is open 24 hours.

Molly Malone's (Map p120; Bar St; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) Siem Reap's first Irish pub brings the sparkle

of the Emerald Isle to homesick Irish and a whole host of other honorary Dubliners. Serves up Powers whiskey, Guinness and steaming stews. It also hosts occasional live bands.

Linga Bar (Map p120; The Alley; ☎ 5pm-late) This chic gay bar is attracting all-comers thanks to a relaxed atmosphere, a cracking cocktail list and some big beats, which draw a dancing crowd later into the night.

Chilli Si-Dang (Map p120; ☎012 723488; Stung Siem Reap St; ☎ 7am-late) Boasting a tranquil riverside location and balcony views, this is a relaxed wine bar from which to quaff some vintages or sample some cocktails. Happy hour 5pm to 8pm and free wi-fi.

XBar (Map p120; Sivatha St; ☎ 4am-sunrise) Currently the late-night spot in town, X Bar draws revelers for the witching hour when other places are closing up. Early-evening movies on the big screen, pool tables and rumours of a skateboard pipe...mind the cocktails.

Other places to imbibe:

Banana Leaf (Map p120; Bar St) Spread along the sidewalk, this place is good for people watching, and watching football, thanks to a giant screen.

Blue Chilli Too (Map p120; the New Alley) A small gay bar, tucked away in the new alley area north of Bar St.

Island Bar (Map p120; Angkor Night Market; ☎ 4am-late) Lurking at the back of the night market, this is a great spot to relax after a shopping spree. Happy hour until 8pm.

Ivy Bar (Map p120; Psar Chaa area) A long-running and deservedly popular bar with excellent food and a friendly crowd.

World Lounge (Map p120; Bar St) Formerly known as Buddha Lounge, this is a good spot to while away an evening.

ENTERTAINMENT

Several restaurants and hotels offer cultural performances during the evening, and for many visitors such shows offer the only opportunity to see Cambodian classical dance. While they may be aimed at tourists and nowhere near as sophisticated as a performance of the Royal Ballet in Phnom Penh, to the untrained eye it is nonetheless graceful and alluring. Prices usually include a buffet meal. Look out for special performances to support cultural organisations and orphanages, as these can be a good way to assist the local community.

The best deal is at **Temple Club** (Map p120; Bar St), which offers a free traditional dance show upstairs from 7.30pm, providing

punters order some food and drink from the very reasonably priced menu. In a similar vein, Dead Fish Tower (p132) offers a nightly performance from 7pm. Butterflies Garden Restaurant (p131) also hosts regular cultural performances.

The most atmospheric show is at **Apsara Theatre** (Map p120; admission US\$25) at Angkor Village (p129), as the setting is a striking wooden pavilion finished in the style of a wat, but the set menu is uninspiring. There are two shows per night. The Grand Hotel d'Angkor (p130) has an attractive performance stage behind its swimming pool, but admission is a hefty US\$32. Better than both of these is the performance at the **Dining Room** (Map p120; free performance Tue, Thu & Sat), the restaurant (mains US\$10 to US\$25) at La Residence d'Angkor (p130), as you can dine à la carte in the garden.

Tonlé Sap Restaurant (Map p120; ☎963388; NH6 west; show US\$12; ☎ 7.30pm) and **Koulen II Restaurant** (Map p120; ☎012 630090; Sivatha St; show US\$12; ☎ 7pm) both offer major shows that pull in the big tour groups who chow down on a wide spread of buffet dishes.

For something a bit different, try the Wednesday evening shadow-puppet show with classical dance at **La Noria Restaurant** (Map p120; ☎964242; mains US\$3-6), which includes a set-dinner. Part of the fee is donated to a charity supporting local children.

Beatocello (Map pp142-3; www.beatocello.com; ☎ 7.15pm Thu & Sat), better known as Dr Beat Richner, performs original and Bach cello compositions at Jayavarman VII Children's Hospital. Entry is free, but donations are welcome, as they assist the hospital in its mission to give free medical treatment to the children of Cambodia.

SHOPPING

Much of what you see on sale in the markets of Siem Reap can also be purchased from children and vendors throughout the temple area. Some people get fed up with the endless sales pitches as they navigate the ancient wonders, while others enjoy the banter and a chance to interact with Cambodian people.

It's often children out selling, and some visitors will argue that they should be at school instead. However, most do attend school at least half of the time, if their families can afford it.

Items touted at the temples include postcards, T-shirts, temple bas-relief rubbings,

SHOPPING FOR A CAUSE

There are several shops that support Cambodia's disabled and disenfranchised through their production process or their profits. Consider spending some money at one of these worthy places:

Artisans D'Angkor (Map p120; ☎380354; www.artisansdangkor.com; 🕒7.30am-7pm) High-quality reproduction carvings and exquisite silks are available. Impoverished youngsters are trained in the arts of their ancestors.

Krousar Thmey (Map pp142-3; Charles de Gaulle Blvd; 🕒8am-5.30pm) Small shop selling shadow puppets, traditional scarves, paintings and postcards, all to assist blind children in Cambodia.

Nyemo (Map p120; Sivatha St; 🕒8am-9pm) Beautiful silk products such as cushions, hangings and throws, plus children's toys. Proceeds used to help HIV/AIDS sufferers and vulnerable women generally. Located in Carnets d'Asie.

Rajana (Map p120; Sivatha St; 🕒9am-9pm, closed Sun) Sells quirky wooden and metalware objects, well-designed silver jewellery and handmade cards. Rajana promotes fair trade and employment opportunities for Cambodians.

Rehab Craft (Map p120; Pithnou St; 🕒10am-7pm) This shop specialises in quality silk products such as wallets, handbags and the like. Profits train and sustain the disabled community.

Senteurs d'Angkor (Map p120; ☎964801; Pithnou St; 🕒8.30am-9.30pm) Opposite Psar Chaa, this shop has an eclectic collection of silk and carvings, as well as a superb range of traditional beauty products and spices, all made locally.

Tabitha Cambodia (Map p120; ☎760650; Sivatha St; 🕒7am-6pm) Attractive range of silk scarves, cushion covers and throws to choose from. Proceeds go towards Tabitha projects like house building and well drilling.

curious musical instruments, ornamental knives and crossbows – the latter may raise a few eyebrows with customs should you try to take one home! Bargain, but not too hard, as you can't bargain at the fixed price shops in town.

When it comes to shopping in town, **Psar Chaa market** (Map p120) is well stocked with anything you may want to buy in Cambodia, and lots you don't. Silverware, silk, wood carvings, stone carvings, Buddhas, paintings, rubbings, notes and coins, T-shirts, table mats... the list goes on. There are bargains to be had if you haggle patiently and humorously. Avoid buying old stone carvings that vendors claim are from Angkor. Whether or not they are real, buying these artefacts serves only to encourage their plunder and they will usually be confiscated by customs. Buy modern replicas and bury them in the garden for a few months – they will soon look the same.

Angkor Night Market (Map p120; near Sivatha St; 🕒4pm-midnight) is the latest addition to the Siem Reap shopping scene. It is packed with stalls selling a variety of handicrafts, souvenirs and silks and is well worth a browse to take advantage of cooler temperatures.

There are now lots of memorable shops in Siem Reap. Some of the standout places:

Boom Boom Room (Map p120; Pithnou St; 🕒10am-10pm) No, not that sort of boom boom! Dedicated to selling iPods, downloads, accessories and T-shirts.

Jasmine (Map p120; ☎760610; Pokambor Ave; 🕒9am-10pm) Located in FCC Angkor, this boutique produces stylish silk clothing.

McDermott Gallery (Map p120; ☎012 615695; www.mcdermottgallery.com; The Alley; 🕒10am-10pm) Calendars, cards and striking sepia images of the temples, plus regular exhibitions.

Samatoa (Map p120; ☎012 285930; Pithnou St; 🕒8am-11pm) Designer clothes finished in silk with the option of a tailored fit in 48 hours. Promotes fair trade.

There are also several venues showcasing contemporary local art. Check out the Arts Lounge in Hotel de la Paix (p130) and the Damnak Alliance Café (p133).

Quality photos can be printed cheaply in Siem Reap, and digital shots downloaded onto DVD. One of the most reliable photographic shops is **Siem Reap Thmei Photo** (Map p120; Wat Bo St), a large Fuji lab.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There are direct international flights to Bangkok in Thailand; Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse in Laos; Ho Chi Minh

City (Saigon) and Hanoi in Vietnam; Hong Kong; Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia; Kunming in China; Seoul in South Korea; Singapore; and Taipei in Taiwan. For more information on international flights to and from Siem Reap, see the Transport chapter (p324).

Domestic links are currently limited to Phnom Penh and only Siem Reap Airways (US\$75/120 one way/return) currently offers this route. Demand for the limited number of flights is high during peak season, so book as far in advance as possible. There were flights to Sihanoukville for a short time and these may well resume some time soon.

Airline offices around town:

Angkor Airways (Map p120; ☎964166; www.angkorairways.com; Achar Mean St)

Bangkok Airways (Map pp142-3; ☎380191; www.bangkokair.com; Airport Rd)

China Eastern Airlines (Map p120; ☎965229; www.ce-air.com; Tep Vong St)

Jetstar Asia (Map pp142-3; ☎964388; www.jetstarasia.com; Siem Reap Airport)

Lao Airlines (Map p120; ☎963283; www.laos-airlines.com) Behind Center Market.

Malaysia Airlines (Map pp142-3; ☎964135; www.malaysia-airlines.com; Siem Reap Airport)

Siem Reap Airways (Map p142-3; ☎380191; www.siemreapairways.com; Airport Rd)

Vietnam Airlines (Map pp142-3; ☎964488; www.vietnamairlines.com; Airport Rd)

Boat

There are daily express boat services between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh (US\$20 to US\$25, five to six hours) or Battambang (US\$15, three to eight hours depending on the season). The boat to Phnom Penh is a bit of a rip-off these days, given it is just as fast by road and about one-quarter the price. The Battambang trip is seriously scenic, but breakdowns are very common. See the Phnom Penh (p109) and Battambang (p245) listings for more details.

Boats from Siem Reap leave from the floating village of Chong Kneas near Phnom Krom, 11km south of Siem Reap. The boats dock in different places at different times of the year; when the lake recedes in the dry season, both the port and floating village move with it. A Korean company is currently building an all-weather road and, somewhat incongruously, a marina.

Most of the guesthouses in town sell boat tickets. Buying the ticket from a guesthouse

usually includes a *moto* or minibus ride to the port. Otherwise, a *moto* out here costs about US\$1 to US\$2, a *remorque-moto* about US\$4. A taxi is more like US\$10.

Bus, Car & Taxi

The road linking Siem Reap to Phnom Penh is now surfaced all the way, and air-con buses thunder up and down daily. The road west to Sisophon, Thailand and Battambang is in a messy state in places, but is finally being overhauled. It is served by some buses and plenty of share taxis.

There are several companies operating buses between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, and services depart between 6.30am and 12.30pm. The average cost of a bus ticket is US\$5, depending on the company. Tickets can be bought at guesthouses or ticket booths in town. Leading companies include **Capitol Transport** (Map p120; ☎963883), **GST** (Map p120; ☎012 888981; Sivatha St), **Neak Krohorm** (Map p120; ☎964924) near Psar Chaa, and **Sorya Transport** (Off Map p120; ☎760103). **Mekong Express** (Map p120; ☎963662; Central Market; US\$9) and **Paramount Angkor Express** (☎963662; Tep Vong St; US\$8) both offer a slightly more upmarket service with an in-drive hostess and a snack. All buses now arrive and depart from the bus station and taxi park, about one kilometre east of Psar Leu on NH6 towards Phnom Penh. Watch out for over-eager *moto* and *remorque* drivers on arrival at Siem Reap bus station; it's like stepping off the bus and into a rugby scrum.

Share taxis are a faster way to travel between Siem Reap and the capital. They usually cover the distance in just four hours and charge about US\$7 per person or US\$45 for the whole car.

The 152km run to Thailand can take as little as three hours, but in the wet season you should double that and add some more on an off day. Buses through to Bangkok cost about US\$10 to US\$12 and can take from 10 to 14 hours. It is faster to go your own way. Share taxis run to Poipet (US\$6 per seat, US\$40 for the car, three to four hours) for those travelling independently, or to Sisophon (US\$4), for connections to Battambang. For more on the overland trip between Bangkok and Siem Reap, including the 'scam bus', see p330.

Share taxis and pick-ups depart from the taxi park about 3km out of town on NH6 towards Phnom Penh.

GETTING AROUND

For more on transport around Angkor, see p152. Following are insights on the most common forms of transport used for getting around Siem Reap.

To/From the Airport

Siem Reap International Airport is 7km from the town centre. Many hotels and guesthouses in Siem Reap have a free airport pick-up service if you have booked in advance. Official taxis are available next to the terminal for US\$5. A trip to the city centre on the back of a *moto* is US\$1.50. *Remorque-motos* are available outside the terminal; negotiate for about US\$4, depending on the hotel or guesthouse location.

Bicycle

Some of the guesthouses around town hire out bicycles, as do a few shops around Psar Chaa, usually for US\$1 to US\$2 a day. Try to support the **White Bicycles** (www.thewhitebicycles.org) project to help the local community (see p153).

Car & Motorcycle

Most hotels and guesthouses can organise car hire for the day, with a going rate of US\$20 to US\$30. Upmarket hotels may charge more. Foreigners are forbidden to rent motorcycles in and around Siem Reap. If you want to get around on your own motorcycle, you need to hire one in Phnom Penh and ride it to Siem Reap.

Moto

A *moto* with a driver will cost about US\$6 to US\$8 per day. The average cost for a short trip within town is 1000r to 2000r, more to places strung out along the roads to Angkor or the airport. It is probably best to negotiate in advance these days, as a lot of drivers have got into the habit of overcharging with the tourism boom.

Remorque-moto

These small little motorcycles with carriages (commonly called *tuk tuks* around town) are a nice way for couples to get about Siem Reap, although drivers like to inflate the prices. Try for US\$1 on trips around town, although drivers may charge US\$2 for a trip to the edges of town at night. Prices rise if you pile in more people!

AROUND SIEM REAP

PREK TOAL BIRD SANCTUARY

ជំរកបក្សីព្រៃកម្ពុជា

Prek Toal is one of three biospheres on Tonlé Sap Lake, and the establishment of the bird sanctuary makes Prek Toal the most worthwhile and straightforward to visit. It is an ornithologist's fantasy, with a significant number of rare breeds gathered in one small area, including the huge lesser and greater adjutant storks, the milky stork and the spot-billed pelican. Even the uninitiated will be impressed, as these birds have a huge wingspan and build enormous nests.

Visitors during the dry season (December to May) will find the concentration of birds like something out of a Hitchcock film. As water starts to dry up elsewhere, the birds congregate here. Serious twitchers know that the best time to see birds is early morning or late afternoon and this means an early start or an overnight at Prek Toal's environment office, where there are basic beds for US\$7. For real enthusiasts, it may be best to head out of Siem Reap after lunch, to get to the sanctuary at around 4pm for an afternoon viewing. Stay overnight and view the birds in the morning before returning to town.

One company in Siem Reap, **Osmose** (☎012 832812; www.osmosetonlesap.net), runs organised day trips to help promote responsible tourism in Cambodia, and contributes to the conservation of the area. The day trips cost US\$80 per person with a minimum group of four. Tours offered by this nonprofit agency include transportation, entrance fees, guides, breakfast, lunch and water, making it a very reasonable deal. They can arrange overnight trips for serious enthusiasts. Proceeds go towards educating children and villagers about the importance of the birds and the unique flooded-forest environment, and the trip includes the chance to visit one of the local communities. Day trips include a hotel pick-up around 6am and a return by nightfall.

Binoculars are available at Prek Toal for those who don't carry their own. Sunscreen and head protection are essential, as it can get very hot in the dry season. The guides are equipped with booklets with the bird names in English, but they speak little English themselves, hence the advantage of travelling with Osmose.

Getting to the sanctuary under your own steam requires you to take a 20-minute *moto* (US\$1 or so) or taxi (US\$10) ride to the floating village of Chong Kneas and then a boat to the environment office (around US\$40 return, one hour each way). From here, a small boat (US\$20 including a guide) will take you into the sanctuary, which is about one hour beyond.

ANG TRAPENG THMOR RESERVE

There is another bird sanctuary, **Ang Trapeng Thmor Reserve** (admission US\$10), just across the border in the Phnom Srok region of Banteay Meanchey Province, about 100km from Siem Reap. It's one of only two places in the world where it is possible to see the extremely rare sarus crane, as depicted on bas-reliefs at Bayon. These grey-feathered birds have immensely long legs and striking red heads. The reserve is based around a reservoir created by forced labour during the Khmer Rouge regime, and facilities are very basic, but it is an incredibly beautiful place. Bring your own binoculars, however, as none are available. To reach here, follow the road to Sisophon for about 72km before turning north at Prey Mon. It's 22km to the site, passing through some famous silk-weaving villages. The **Sam Veasna Centre** (☎761597; www.samveasna.org) arranges birding trips out here, which is probably the easiest way to undertake the trip. It also arranges specialist birding trips to remote parts of northwestern Cambodia (p267 and p267).

FLOATING VILLAGE OF CHONG KNEAS

ភូមិបណ្តែតចុងក្លាស

This famous floating village is now extremely popular with visitors wanting a break from the temples, and is an easy excursion to arrange yourself. Visitors arriving by fast boat get a preview, as the floating village is near Phnom Krom, where the boat docks. It is very scenic in the warm light of early morning or late afternoon and can be combined with a view of the sunset from the hilltop temple of Phnom Krom (p174). The downside is that tour groups tend to take over, and boats end up chugging up and down the channels in convoy.

Visitors should also check out the **Gecko Centre** (www.tsbr-ed.org; ☎8.30am-5.30pm), an informative centre that is located in the floating village and helps to unlock the secrets of the Tonlé Sap. It has displays on flora and fauna

of the area, as well as information on communities living around the lake.

The village moves depending on the season and you will need to rent a boat to get around it properly. A local cooperative has fixed boat prices at US\$10 per person to visit the floating village, a touch on the cheeky side for what is a short trip. On top of this, the Koreans are charging for the new road and the local police for security, all-in-all a bit of a scam. If you are travelling by boat between Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, you get to see it for free anyhow.

To get to the floating village from Siem Reap costs US\$1.50 or so by *moto* each way (more if the driver waits), or US\$10 by taxi. The trip takes 20 minutes.

FLOODED FOREST OF KOMPONG PHHLUK

ព្រៃលិចទឹកកំពង់ក្រក

More memorable than Chong Kneas, but harder to reach, is the village of Kompong Phhluk, an other-worldly place built on soaring stilts. Nearby is a flooded forest, inundated every year when the lake rises to take the Mekong's overflow. As the lake drops, the petrified trees are revealed. Exploring this area by wooden dugout in the wet season is very atmospheric. The village itself is a friendly place, where most of the houses are built on stilts of about 6m or 7m high, almost bamboo skyscrapers. It looks like it's straight out of a film set.

There are two ways to get to Kompong Phhluk. One is to come via the floating village of Chong Kneas, where a boat (one hour) can be arranged for about US\$30 round trip, and the other is to come via the small town of Roluos by a combination of road (about US\$5 by *moto*) and boat (US\$7). All said the road/boat route will take up to two hours, but it depends on the season – sometimes it's more by road, sometimes more by boat!

KOMPONG KHLEANG

កំពង់ឃ្លាំង

One of the largest communities on the Tonlé Sap, Kompong Khleang is almost a floating town, complete with several large pagodas. Like Kompong Phhluk, most of the houses here are built on towering stilts to allow for a dramatic change in water level. Few tourists have visited here, but it is not that difficult to reach from Siem Reap. It is possible to get here by road via the town of Dam Dek or by boat from the floating village of Chong Kneas.

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