

# Cambodia

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Temples of Angkor** – encountering the mother of all temples, the world's largest religious building, the one and only Angkor Wat (p90)
- **Phnom Penh** – the tarnished 'pearl of Asia' is regaining its shine, with striking museums, a stunning riverside setting and surprisingly sharp nightlife (p65)
- **Sihanoukville** – brilliant beaches, uninhabited tropical islands, a superb selection of seafood and a happening night scene (p104)
- **Ratanakiri province** – swimming in a volcanic crater, discovering sacred burial sites in the forest and exploring the uncharted forests of Virachay National Park in Cambodia's 'Wild East' (p116)
- **Kampot and around** – slowing the pace in this relaxed riverside town with a stunning setting in the shadow of Bokor (p109)
- **Off the beaten track** – doing the Indiana Jones thing and turning temple hunter in remote Preah Vihear province, home to lost ruins and ancient Angkor highways (p102)

## FAST FACTS

- **Budget** US\$15 to US\$20 a day
- **Capital** Phnom Penh
- **Costs** guesthouse in Siem Reap US\$3 to US\$10, four-hour bus ride US\$3, draught beer US\$0.50 to US\$1
- **Country code** ☎ 855
- **Languages** Khmer, English, French, Mandarin
- **Money** US\$1 = 4029r (riel)
- **Phrases** *sua s'dei* (hello), *lia suhn hao-y* (goodbye), *aw kohn* (thank you), *somh toh* (I'm sorry)
- **Population** 15 million
- **Time** GMT + seven hours
- **Visas** US\$20 for one month; issued at most land borders and all airports



## TRAVEL HINT

Do as the locals do and buy a *krama* (checked scarf). It's great for sun protection, dust protection, as a towel, as a bandage...anything is possible with the *krama* chameleon.

## OVERLAND ROUTES

There are overland routes to Cambodia from Thailand and Vietnam, or break the mould and enter Cambodia in the northeast from Laos.

There's a magical aura about Cambodia that casts a spell on many who visit this charming yet confounding kingdom. Here you can ascend to the kingdom of the gods at Angkor Wat, a spectacular fusion of symbolism, symmetry and spirituality, or you can descend into the hell of Tuol Sleng, and come face to face with the Khmer Rouge and their killing machine. Welcome to the conundrum that is Cambodia, an intoxicating place with a glorious past, a tragic present and an unwritten future.

The years of fear and loathing are over. Peace has come to this beautiful yet blighted land after three decades of war, and the Cambodian people are opening their arms to the world. Tourism has taken off, but a journey here is still as much an adventure as a holiday.

Cambodia was once the heart of the mighty Khmer empire, which ruled much of what is now Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The sacred skeleton of this empire can be seen at the fabled temples of Angkor, monuments unrivalled in scale and grandeur in Southeast Asia. But just as Angkor is more than its wat, so too is Cambodia much more than its temples. Stay on a tropical island paradise with barely a beach hut in sight. Float down the Mekong to see rare freshwater dolphins near Kratie. And explore the wild east of the country, home to minority peoples, working elephants and pristine mountain landscapes.

And what of the Cambodian people? They have struggled through years of bloodshed, poverty and political instability. Thanks to an unbreakable spirit and infectious optimism, they have prevailed with their smiles intact, and no visitor comes away from Cambodia without a measure of admiration and affection for the inhabitants of this enigmatic kingdom.

## CURRENT EVENTS

The veneer of democracy is wearing thin in Cambodia. Elections come around every five years, but the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) continues to control the military, the police, the civil service and the judiciary, so there is no separation between party and state. The leadership is good at talking the talk when the donors are in town, but it walks (or swaggers) a different walk once the donors leave.

In Cambodia, corruption has been elevated to an art form. Democracy has been supplanted by kleptocracy, governance by theft, and millions of dollars have been siphoned away in recent years. An anticorruption law has been on the table for more than a decade, but international donors seem to suffer a bout of collective amnesia every time it comes around to signing the cheques.

Evictions and land grabs continue apace, with the rich getting richer and the poor getting screwed. Several communities have been kicked out of Phnom Penh and dumped unceremoniously in arid (or flooded) fields, miles from the city. Refugees within their own country, these people's fate remains uncertain.

The Khmer Rouge trial stumbles along. After several false starts, the cast of characters is in place, but there are still many powerful interests who would rather see the whole issue forgotten. Another key figure, Khmer Rouge military commander Ta Mok, passed away in

2006 before justice could be served. Cambodians deserve closure, but it is a travesty that it is coming 30 years too late.

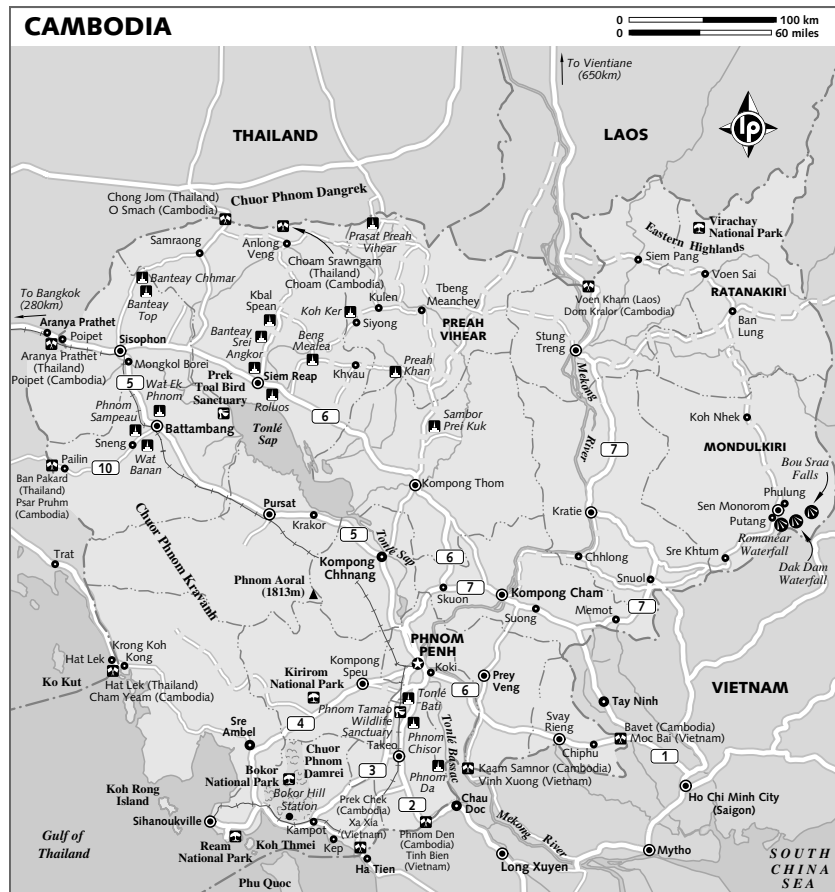
But despite this depressing diagnosis, life is improving for many Cambodians. The economy is booming thanks to tourism and industry, and regional investors such as the Koreans can't put enough money into the country. However, the progress is often despite the government and not because of it. It is down to the ingenuity and adaptability of the long-suffering Khmer people that they continue to succeed against the odds.

## HISTORY

The good, the bad and the ugly is the easiest way to sum up the history of Cambodia. Things were good in the early years, culminating in the vast Khmer empire, unrivalled in the region for three centuries. From the 13th century, the bad set in as ascendant neighbours steadily chipped away at Cambodian territory. In the 20th century it turned downright ugly, as a brutal civil war culminated in the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge (1975–79), from which Cambodia is still recovering.

## The Early Years

From the 1st to 6th century AD, much of present-day Cambodia was part of the kingdom of Funan, whose prosperity was due in large part to its position on the great trade route between China and India. India had



the greatest cultural impact, and its language, religion and culture were absorbed by Cambodians. A series of small kingdoms eventually unified to create the Khmer empire, the mightiest in the history of Southeast Asia.

### The Rise & Fall of Angkor

The Khmer empire, renowned for its unparalleled expression in architecture and sculpture, began under Jayavarman II in 802. During his rule, a new state religion established the Khmer ruler as a *devaraja* (god-king). Vast irrigation systems facilitated intensive cultivation around the empire's capital of Angkor, allowing Khmers to maintain a densely populated, highly centralised state that controlled vast swaths of territory across the region. But

overstretched outposts, overambitious construction projects and increasingly belligerent neighbours weakened the Khmer empire. When the Thais sacked Angkor in 1432, it was the final straw; the city was abandoned and the capital moved near Phnom Penh. Subsequently, Thai and Vietnamese kingdoms steadily occupied areas of Cambodia, and by the mid-19th century the kingdom was in danger of being squeezed off the map.

### Enter the French

For once the French 'protectorate' really did protect Cambodia's dwindling borders, controlling the country from 1864 until independence in 1953. However, the French were more interested in Vietnam's economic po-

erty and left Cambodia to fester. As WWII drew to a close, there were still no universities and only one secondary school!

### Independence Days

A new world emerged from the war, and colonialism was a dying force despite the worst intentions of the French. Cambodia's young king Norodom Sihanouk soon began his crusade for independence, which the French reluctantly granted in 1953. For 15 years, King Sihanouk (later prince, prime minister, chief of state, king again and now his majesty the king father) dominated Cambodian politics. The late 1950s and early 1960s were Cambodia's golden years, as the economy prospered while neighbouring countries grappled with domestic insurgencies. However, Sihanouk's erratic and repressive policies alienated both the left and right; the army overthrew him in 1970 and he fled to Beijing. Under pressure from the Chinese, he threw in his lot with Cambodia's weak communist rebels, the Khmer Rouge (French for 'Red Khmer'), boosting their support dramatically.

### The Coming of War

During the late 1960s, Cambodia was sucked into the Vietnam conflict. The US secretly began carpet bombing suspected communist base camps in Cambodia and, shortly after the 1970 coup, American and South Vietnamese troops invaded the country to root out Vietnamese communist forces. They failed, and only pushed Cambodia's communists and their Vietnamese allies deep into Cambodia's interior. Savage fighting soon engulfed the entire country, ending only when Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975, two weeks before the fall of Saigon.

### Khmer Rouge Takeover

After taking Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge, under Pol Pot's leadership, implemented one of the most bloody revolutions the world has ever seen. It was 'Year Zero', money was abolished, cities abandoned and Cambodia transformed into a Maoist, peasant-dominated, agrarian cooperative.

During the next four years, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians, including the vast majority of the country's educated people, were relocated to the countryside, tortured to death or executed. Thousands of people who spoke foreign languages or wore specta-

### DID YOU KNOW?

The UN allowed the Khmer Rouge to occupy the Cambodian seat at the UN General Assembly until 1991, meaning the murderers represented their victims for 12 years.

cles were branded as 'parasites' and systematically killed. Hundreds of thousands more died of mistreatment, malnutrition and disease. About two million Cambodians died between 1975 and 1979 as a direct result of the policies of the Khmer Rouge.

In late 1978, Vietnam invaded and overthrew the Khmer Rouge, who fled westward to the jungles bordering Thailand. In the subsequent chaos, millions of Cambodians set off on foot to find out if family members had survived the apocalypse. The harvest was neglected and the resulting famine in 1979 and 1980 killed hundreds of thousands more. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge maintained a guerrilla war throughout the 1980s, armed and financed by China and Thailand (and with indirect US support), against the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh.

### A Sort of Peace

In 1991 the warring sides met in Paris and signed a peace accord, which facilitated UN-administered elections in 1993. A new constitution was drawn up and adopted, and Norodom Sihanouk once again became king. The government was a volatile coalition of Prince Norodom Ranariddh's National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (Funcinpec) and Hun Sen's CPP. Although they were co-prime ministers, the real power was wielded by Hun Sen, the erroneously named second prime minister, whom the Vietnamese had originally installed. As the bickering intensified, he overthrew First Prime Minister Ranariddh during a July 1997 coup.

### The End of the Khmer Rouge

While hardly a triumph for democracy, the first parliament did witness the Khmer Rouge's eventual demise in 1998 after it was decimated by a series of mass defections.

Two decades after the tragic Khmer Rouge revolution, a historic agreement between the UN and the Cambodian government created

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Pol Pot, born Saloth Sar in 1925, learnt about radical Marxism in Paris before becoming a school teacher back in Cambodia. Very few people knew of him until he emerged as the public face of the Khmer Rouge revolution towards the end of 1976. Pol Pot died on 15 April 1998, after facing a Khmer Rouge show trial for his crimes. His death perhaps forever robbed the Cambodian people of the chance for truth and justice, which raises the question: did he jump or was he pushed?

the first court to bring surviving Khmer Rouge members to trial, but bureaucratic bickering at home and abroad has stalled its opening. Many Cambodians lament that it's already too late to try Pol Pot, who escaped justice when he died in 1998.

**Cambodia Today**

Despite the existence of the Cambodian royal family, Prime Minister Hun Sen continues to wear the metaphorical crown. He may have lost an eye in the 1975 battle of Phnom Penh but, with a poorly educated electorate and the opposition on the run or under his thumb, he has never lost sight of how to control the country.

The one thorn in the side of the CPP government is the Sam Rainsy Party, which is winning the hearts and minds of the younger generation and urban dwellers. Time is on their side as more and more of the young generation migrate to the cities. Funcinpec has imploded of late, unceremoniously booting out leader Prince Norodom Ranariddh (who went on to found an eponymous party), and teeters on the edge of electoral oblivion.

For more on the latest in Cambodia, see p57.

**THE CULTURE**  
**The National Psyche**

On the surface Cambodia appears to be a nation full of shiny, happy people, but a deeper look reveals a country of contradictions. Light and dark, old and new, rich and poor, love and hate, life and death – all are visible on a journey through the kingdom, but most telling is the glorious past set against Cambodia's tragic present.

Angkor is everywhere: it's on the flag, the national beer, hotel and guesthouse signage, cigarettes – it's anything and everything. A symbol of nationhood and fierce pride, it's giving the finger to the world, stating no matter how bad things have become lately, Cambodians built Angkor and it doesn't get better than that. This explains why it's a touchstone for most Cambodians, and why the fact that Thailand occupied it for more than a century still troubles relations today. Jayavarman VII, Angkor's greatest king, is still a national hero for vanquishing the occupying Chams and taking the empire to its greatest glories. As a result, he's nearly as omnipresent as his temples.

The contrast with the hellish abyss into which Cambodia was sucked by the Khmer Rouge has left an entire people profoundly shocked. Pol Pot is still a dirty word due to the death and suffering he inflicted. Whenever you hear his name, there'll be stories of endless personal tragedy, of dead brothers, mothers and babies, from which most Cambodians have never been able to recover. Such suffering takes generations to heal. Meanwhile the country is crippled by a short-term outlook that encourages people to live for today rather than thinking about tomorrow, because a short while ago there was no tomorrow.

If Jayavarman and Angkor are loved and Pol Pot hated, the mercurial Great Heroic King Sihanouk is somewhere in the middle, the last of the god-kings, who has ultimately shown himself to be human. Many Cambodians love him as the nation's father, but to others he's the man who failed them with his association with the Khmer Rouge. In many ways, his contradictions are those of contemporary Cambodia. Understand him and what he's had to survive, and you'll understand much of Cambodia.

**Lifestyle**

The defining influences for many older Cambodians are the three Fs: family, faith and

**MUST READ**

*First They Killed My Father* (2001) was written by Luong Ung and covers the steady destruction of an urban Cambodian family through execution and disease during the Khmer Rouge period.

food. Family is more than the nuclear family Westerners know; it's an extended family that includes third cousins and obscure aunts. As long as there's a bloodline there's a bond. Families stick together, solve problems collectively, listen to elders' wisdom and pool resources. Whether the house is big or small, one thing's for sure – there'll be a big family inside.

Faith is another rock in the lives of many older Cambodians, and Buddhism has helped the Cambodian people rebuild their shattered lives. Most Cambodian houses contain a small shrine to pray for luck, and wats (Buddhist temple-monasteries) fill with the faithful come the twice-monthly Buddhist Day.

Food is more important to Cambodians than to most, as they have tasted what it's like to be without. Rice is a staple with every meal and many Cambodians cannot go on without their daily fix.

But to the young generation of teenagers brought up on a steady diet of MTV and steamy soaps, it's a different story. They'll defer to their parents as long as they have to, but what they really want is what teenagers everywhere want. Cambodia is a country undergoing rapid change, but for now the traditionalists are just about holding their own, although the onslaught of karaoke is proving hard to resist.

**Population**

The 1998 Cambodian census counted 11.8 million people, but it's believed the population now stands at nearer 15 million. With the country's 2.4% birth rate, it should be even higher, but grinding poverty and a poor health-care system have bred disease and led to a depressing infant mortality rate of 59 per 1000 live births, three times that of neighbouring Thailand. An incredible 40% of the population is under the age of 15.

Officially 96% of Cambodians are described as ethnic Khmer (ethnic Cambodians), suggesting Cambodia is the most ethnically homogeneous country in Southeast Asia. Unofficially it's another story, as there are many more Chinese and Vietnamese in Cambodia than the government ever admits, and a great deal of intermarriage. The Chinese have long played a dominant role in Cambodian commerce. While official estimates put their numbers at around 50,000, it's probably 10 times that – and more. As for the Vietnamese,

many migrated under the French and later during Vietnam's 1980s occupation, and are engaged in fishing and skilled trades across the country.

Cambodia's Cham and Malay Muslims probably account for up to half a million people in the provinces around Phnom Penh. They suffered vicious persecution between 1975 and 1979, and many were exterminated.

Cambodia's diverse *chunchiet* (ethnolinguistic minorities) have traditionally isolated themselves in the country's remote mountainous regions. This suited the Cambodians, who were, the truth be told, somewhat scared of them. Today, *chunchiet* total about 70,000, with the most important groups being the Kreung in Ratanakiri and the Pnong in Mondulkiri.

**RELIGION**

Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion in Cambodia and guides the lives of many Khmers. The Khmer Rouge launched an assault on all beliefs but their own, murdering most of Cambodia's monks, and destroying wats or turning them into pigsties. However, in the past decade there's been a dramatic resurgence in religious worship and Buddhism once again leads the way.

Hinduism flourished alongside Buddhism from the 1st century AD until the 14th century, and some elements of it are still incorporated into important ceremonies involving birth, marriage and death.

There is also a significant minority of Cham and Malay people who practise Islam.

**ARTS**

The fact that centuries-old sculptures, stylised dances and architecture still spellbind the modern visitor speaks volumes.

The Khmers' astounding architecture and sculpture reached its zenith during the Angkorian era, exemplified by Angkor Wat, the many temples of Angkor Thom and the sublime carvings of Banteay Srei. Many of the finest Khmer sculptures are on display at the sublime National Museum (p72) in Phnom Penh.

Perhaps more than any other traditional art, the royal ballet of Cambodia is a tangible link with the glories of Angkor. The *apsara* dance is unique to Cambodia, while the court dance has roots in India and Java, with



**MUST SEE**

*The Killing Fields* (1984) is a poignant Roland Joffé film about American journalist Sydney Schanberg and his Cambodian assistant during and after the civil war.

many dances enacting scenes from the Hindu epic the Ramayana, known as the Reamker in Cambodia. To see how much traditional dance has blossomed after the apocalyptic Pol Pot years, catch a traditional dance show in Phnom Penh or Siem Reap.

Like much of Southeast Asia, when it comes to contemporary culture, music rules the roost. This has spawned home-grown talent such as the prolific pop star Preap Sovath, who at the age of 35 has already recorded more than 10,000 songs! You won't need to search for his music, it'll find you – trust us.

While you'll have no clue what he's saying, Nay Krim's comedy antics will likely leave you laughing. He often graces the TV's aboard long-distance buses.

The film industry in Cambodia was given a new lease of life in 2000 with the release of *Pos Keng Kong* (The Giant Snake). A remake of a 1950s Cambodian classic, it tells of a powerful young girl born from a rural relationship between a woman and a snake king. Since its release local directors have cranked up production, with dozens of films a year.

**ENVIRONMENT**  
**The Land**

Cambodia covers an area of 181,035 sq km, almost half the size of Italy or Vietnam. The country is dominated by water, and it doesn't get much bigger than the Mekong River, cutting through the country from north to south, and the Tonlé Sap (Great Lake), Southeast Asia's largest lake. There are three main mountainous regions: the Chhor Phnom Damrei (Elephant Mountains) and Chhor Phnom Kravanh (Cardamom Mountains) in the southwest, the Chhor Phnom Dangrek (Dangrek Mountains) along the northern border with Thailand, and the Eastern Highlands in the northeast.

The average Cambodian landscape is a patchwork of cultivated rice paddies guarded by numerous sugar palms, the national tree. Elsewhere are grasslands, lush rainforests,

and, at higher elevations, unlikely clumps of pines.

**Wildlife**

Some environmentalists believe what's left of Cambodia's dense jungle may hide a host of secrets, including biodiversity as rich as anywhere in Asia. The country's large mammals include tigers, leopards, bears, elephants, wild cows and deer, although exact numbers are unclear due to remote habitats and the impact of hunting. There are several dangerous species of snake, including the king cobra, banded krait and the Malayan pit viper.

The many bird species in the country include cormorants, cranes, kingfishers and pelicans, but these often end up in the cooking pot thanks to eagle-eyed kids with catapults. Keen birders should make the boat trip between Siem Reap and Battambang (see p89) to glimpse the Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary, which is home to rare water birds such as lesser and greater adjutants, milky storks and spot-billed pelicans.

The Mekong River is second only to the Amazon in fish biodiversity and hosts some mighty 3m-long catfish. The rare freshwater Irrawaddy dolphin also inhabits the Mekong north of Kratie.

**National Parks**

More than 20% of Cambodia consists of protected areas and national parks, although these are little more than lines on a map – in practice there's very little protection. Four national parks can handle visitors, although facilities at each are pretty limited: huge and unexplored Virachey, in the far

**DID YOU KNOW?**

During the rainy season (June to October), the Mekong River rises dramatically, forcing the Tonlé Sap river to flow northwest into Tonlé Sap (Great Lake). During this period, the vast lake swells from around 3000 sq km to almost 13,000 sq km, and from the air Cambodia looks like one almighty puddle. As the Mekong falls during dry season, the Tonlé Sap river reverses its flow, and the lake's floodwaters drain back into the Mekong. This unique process makes the Tonlé Sap one of the world's richest sources of freshwater fish.

northeast, spanning Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces; Kirirom, popular with Khmers, just off the road to Sihanoukville; Ream, a maritime park near Sihanoukville; and beautiful Bokor, a former French hill station near Kampot.

**Environmental Issues**

Head into the remote northwest or northeast corners of Cambodia and you will soon realise that deforestation is the biggest threat to the country's environment. Smouldering stumps seem to outnumber trees in some areas of Cambodia and the rainforest that covered almost 75% of the country in the 1960s now covers less than 30%. Environmental watchdog **Global Witness** (www.globalwitness.org) published a damning report in 2007, *Cambodia's Family Trees*, which implicated senior officials and members of the elite in plundering the country's forests.

An emerging environmental threat is the damming of the Mekong River, as the fragile Tonlé Sap biosphere could be destabilised by any significant change in river activity. The financial boom of the numerous megaprojects isn't lost on organisations such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which has offered to pay for much of the development. Let's hope long-term interests won't be scrapped for short-term profits.

**TRANSPORT****GETTING THERE & AWAY**  
**Air**

Cambodia has regular air links with its Southeast Asian neighbours. Some airlines offer open-jaw tickets into Phnom Penh and out of Siem Reap, which can save some time and money. The following telephone numbers with ☎023 area codes are for Phnom Penh offices, while those with ☎063 codes are for Siem Reap offices.

**Air Asia** (code AK; ☎ 023-356011; www.airasia.com) Daily budget flights connecting Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok.

**Angkor Airways** (code G6; ☎ 023-222056, 063-964166; www.angkorairways.com) Regular connections from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to Taipei.

**Bangkok Airways** (code PG; ☎ 023-722545, 063-380191; www.bangkokair.com) Daily connections from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to Bangkok.

**China Eastern Airlines** (code MU; ☎ 063-965229; www.ce-air.com) Regular flights from Siem Reap to Kunming.

**China Southern Airlines** (code CZ; ☎ 023-430877; www.cs-air.com) Regular flights from Phnom Penh to Guangzhou.

**Dragon Air** (code KA; ☎ 023-424300; www.dragonair.com) Daily flights between Phnom Penh and Hong Kong.

**Jetstar Asia** (code 3K; ☎ 023-220909, 063-964388; www.jetstarasia.com) Daily budget flights from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to Singapore.

**Lao Airlines** (code QV; ☎ 023-216563, 063-963283; www.laoairlines.com) Regular flights from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to both Pakse and Vientiane.

**Malaysia Airlines** (code MH; ☎ 023-426688, 063-964135; www.malaysiaairlines.com; hub Kuala Lumpur) Daily connections from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to Kuala Lumpur.

**PMT Air** (code U4; ☎ 023-221379; www.pmtair.com) Regular flights from Siem Reap to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

**Shanghai Airlines** (code FM; ☎ 023-723999; www.shanghai-air.com) Regular flights linking Phnom Penh with Shanghai.

**Siem Reap Airways** (code FT; ☎ 023-720022, 063-380191; www.siemreapairways.com) Regular connections from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap to Hong Kong. High season flights connect Luang Prabang and Siem Reap.

**SilkAir** (code MI; ☎ 023-426807; www.silkair.com) Daily flights linking Phnom Penh and Siem Reap with Singapore.

**Thai Airways International** (THAI, code TG; ☎ 023-214359; www.thaiair.com) Daily flights connecting Phnom Penh and Bangkok.

**Vietnam Airlines** (code VN; ☎ 023-363396, 063-964488; www.vietnamair.com.vn) Daily flights linking Phnom Penh and Siem Reap with both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

**Land**

Cambodia shares one border crossing with Laos (via Stung Treng; see p115) and five crossings with Thailand, although only Poipet (see p97) and Krong Koh Kong (see p113) are regularly used. The three other crossings are at O Smach (see p89), Choam (see p101) and Psar Pruhm (see p101).

There are three border crossings with Vietnam: via Bavet (see p79), via Kaam Samnor

**DEPARTURE TAX**

There's a hefty departure tax of US\$25 on all international flights out of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap airports.

**DEPARTURE TAX**

The departure tax for domestic flights is US\$6 from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, and US\$5 from Ban Lung.

(see p79) and via Phnom Den (see p81). However, just as we were going to press the word was out that the border at Prek Chek–Xa Xia, linking Kampot and Kep in Cambodia with Ha Tien in Vietnam, was open. Double-check this in Kampot or Kep but, if it's true, this is great news for overland travellers.

See p121 for information on issues when crossing borders, and p126 for details on Cambodian visas.

**GETTING AROUND****Air**

Domestic airlines have been in a state of turmoil in recent years. The most reliable carriers right now are **Angkor Airways** (code G6; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-222056; www.angkorairways.com) and **Siem Reap Airways** (code FT; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-720022; www.siemreapairways.com), connecting Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, and **PMT Air** (code U4; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-221379; www.pmtair.com) connecting Ban Lung in Ratanakiri province with the capital, and Siem Reap with Sihanoukville.

**Boat**

The most popular boat for foreigners runs on the Tonlé Sap, connecting Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Be warned: the 5½-hour trip can be insanely overcrowded and breakdowns aren't unknown. Less crowded and more stunning are the speedboats between Siem Reap and Battambang. Both trips can be slowed by low water in the dry season, and are overpriced given buses run the routes for a fraction of the price.

The beautiful boat trips on the Mekong, which travelled from Kompong Cham to Kratie and on to Stung Treng, are no longer an option, as sealed roads and cheap buses have put them out of business. Riding the Gulf of Thailand's swells between Sihanoukville and Krong Koh Kong is another viable route.

**Bus**

A proliferation of sealed roads and improved dirt tracks means buses reach further than ever before. The cities of Stung Treng and Sen

Monorom are now easily reachable in a day from Phnom Penh, a feat unimaginable just a few years ago. Competition between bus companies is rife along the major routes, causing prices for comfortable air-con buses to plummet on routes to Siem Reap, Poipet, Battambang and Sihanoukville. Phnom Penh Sorya Transport has the most extensive network, which also serves smaller centres like Tonlé Bati, Takeo, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Cham and Kratie. Hour Lean's buses are the newest and delve deeper into the northeast, covering the provinces of Kratie, Stung Treng, Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri.

**Car & Motorcycle**

Self-drive car hire is a bit of a masochistic option, given the state of roads, vehicles and other drivers (in no particular order). However, guesthouses and travel agencies can arrange a car and driver for anything between US\$20 and US\$50 a day, depending on the destination. For the sticky roads in the wet season, a 4WD plus driver is more like US\$50 to US\$100.

While major roads are a bit wild for motorcycles, many of Cambodia's less travelled tracks are perfect for two-wheeled exploration. However, forays on motorcycles into the remote and diabolical roads of the northwest and northeast should only be attempted by experienced riders. If you're lacking experience, it's best to hire a motorcycle and driver for those long days through seas of sand – it'll set you back about US\$15 to US\$20 per 24-hour period. In all cases, proceed cautiously as medical facilities are limited in Cambodia.

Phnom Penh has the best motorbikes, with daily rates ranging from US\$3 for 100cc motorbikes to US\$7 or more for 250cc dirt bikes. Kampot also has a good range of bikes with competitive prices. In other provincial towns, it's usually possible to find a 100c motorbike for around US\$5 a day. Rental of self-drive motorcycles is currently prohibited in Siem Reap and Sihanoukville, although rules keep changing in Sihanoukville.

**Local Transport**

There are no local bus networks in Cambodia, save for a couple of routes to towns near Phnom Penh. Most people use motos (motorcycle taxis), *remorque-motos* (motorcycled-pulled trailers) or *cyclos* (pedicabs).

**CYCLO**

As in Vietnam and Laos, *cyclos* are a cheap way to get around urban areas. Being pedalled about is a slower, more relaxing way to see the sights, but for everyday journeys *cyclos* are fast being pushed out of business by motos.

*Cyclo* fares vary wildly depending on your negotiating skills, but aim to pay about the same as *moto* prices.

**MOTO**

*Motos* are a quick way of making short hops around towns and cities. Prices range from 1000r to 4000r, depending on the distance and the town. Most journeys are about 1000r to 2000r – expect to pay double late at night.

It's best to set the price before mounting the *moto*, as some drivers assume foreigners will pay more. Most also presume you know the route and this can create complications if they don't speak English – drivers will often just keep going until you tell them to turn, so be vigilant unless you want to end up in Bangkok or Ho Chi Minh City. The unofficial uniform of the *moto* driver is the baseball cap.

**REMORQUE-KANG & REMORQUE-MOTO**

The *remorque-kang* is a trailer pulled by a bicycle, a sort of reverse *cyclo*. In places such as Battambang and Kompong Cham, the *remorque-kang* are used in place of the *cyclo*. A trailer hitched to a motorcycle is called a *remorque-moto*, also often called a *túk-túk à la Thailand*. This is the Cambodian equivalent of a local bus in the countryside. *Remorque-motos* with covered carriages are pretty popular with tourists in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

**Share Taxi, Pick-up & Minibus**

While vast road improvements across Cambodia have boosted bus transport, the country's minibuses, pick-up trucks and share taxis are still a crucial part of the equation for those wishing to lose the crowd.

**WARNING**

Since burning flesh doesn't smell very nice and takes a long time to heal, get in the habit of climbing off the *moto* to your left, stepping clear of the scorching exhaust pipe. The exhaust burn is one of the most common traveller ailments in Cambodia.

Pick-ups continue to take on the worst roads in Cambodia. Squeeze in the air-con cab or, if you feel like a tan and a mouthful of dust, sit on the back. They leave when seriously full. Much quicker are share taxis, which run on the same routes during the dry season. It is quite possible to buy spare seats to make the journey more comfortable. Arrange pick-ups and share taxis independently, as it's cheaper than going through a guesthouse. Haggle patiently to ensure fair prices. There are almost no metered taxis in Cambodia, save for a couple in the capital.

Minibuses usually travel sealed roads and are the cheapest and most cramped of transport options. While they offer little in savings, they tend to leave more regularly than other options.

**Train**

As Cambodia's roads improve, so its railways continue their descent into oblivion. There are currently no passenger services operating in Cambodia, but it is just about still possible to pay your way on to a cargo train. However, this is only for serious train spotters, as these are some of the slowest trains in the world.

A lack of maintenance since before the civil war means tracks are more crooked than a Cambodian politician. Trains can't travel at more than 20km/h, so the 274km Battambang trip takes 15 hours. Optimists might say this offers more time to take in the countryside – a lot more time.

It's possible to sit on the roof of Cambodian trains, a novelty that many travellers enjoy.

**PHNOM PENH**

☎ 023 / pop 1.5 million

Oh Phnom Penh. It's exotic, it's chaotic, it's beguiling, it's distressing, it's compulsive, it's repulsive. Every day brings a different experience, some a shock to the senses, others that bring a smile, some that confound all logic, others that wrench the emotions. Many cities are captivating, but Phnom Penh is unique in its capacity to both charm and chill to the bone. Relax on the riverfront beneath swaying palms and take in saffron-clad monks wandering the streets, or dig up the crimes of the past in Tuol Sleng





Museum for a disturbing look into the dark side of the human condition.

Phnom Penh has been to hell and back. The glamorous 'pearl of Asia' in Sihanouk's '60s, it was evacuated then viscerated under the Khmer Rouge, only to rise from the ashes of civil war. Today, Cambodia's capital is going places – and no, we're not talking about the taxing traffic. Tastefully renovated French colonial buildings, skyscrapers and satellite cities are the new Phnom Penh, but it is worlds away from the struggle to survive that most residents face.

Many travellers hit the road after the obligatory sightseeing circuit is completed, but the hidden charms of Phnom Penh are best discovered at leisure.

## ORIENTATION

Phnom Penh sits on the western shores of the Tonlé Sap and Tonlé Bassac rivers, near their convergence with the mighty Mekong River. From the riverbank, the city radiates outward in a gridlike pattern, with Chrouy Changvar (Japanese Friendship) and Monivong (Vietnam) Bridges defining the northern and southern limits, respectively. While the centre of town is roughly around Psar Thmei (Central Market), it is the riverfront that's the heart of the action for most visitors.

The major thoroughfares in Phnom Penh run north–south. They're Monivong Blvd (the main commercial drag), Norodom Blvd (mostly administrative), Samdech Sothearos Blvd (in front of the Royal Palace) and Siso-

with Quay (riverfront wining and dining). The main east–west arteries are Russian Blvd in the north; Sihanouk Blvd, which runs past the Independence Monument; and Mao Tse Toung Blvd, in the far south of town, the closest thing Phnom Penh has to a ring road.

Apart from main boulevards, there are hundreds of numbered *phlaurv* (streets), which are abbreviated as Ph. In most cases, odd-numbered streets run north–south, with their numbers rising from the river westwards. Even-numbered streets run east–west and their numbers rise from north to south.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**D's Books** (Map p70; www.ds-books.com; 77 Ph 240; ☎ 9am–9pm) Well stocked, with stacks of regional favourites and international titles. There's a second branch at 12 Ph 178, near the Foreign Correspondents' Club.

**Monument Books** (Map p70; ☎ 217617; 111 Norodom Blvd; ☎ 10am–9pm) Best range of new books in town, with almost everything ever published on Cambodia, but prices are high compared with Bangkok. Has a branch at the airport.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 119)

**English-speaking police** (☎ 366841, 012 999999) Passers-by may be more helpful.

**Fire** (☎ 118)

**Police** (☎ 117)

### Internet Access

Internet cafés are everywhere, almost outnumbering moto drivers. Happy hunting grounds include the riverfront area, 'NGO land' just south of Sihanouk Blvd around Ph 57, and the Boeng Kak area. Healthy competition has dropped prices to 2000r per hour. Most places can also hook you up with cheap internet phone calls.

### Media

There are some pretty useful free publications available in Phnom Penh. Check out the *Phnom Penh Pocket Guide* (www.camodiapocketguide.com) for the lowdown on bars and restaurants. The *Phnom Penh Visitors' Guide* (www.canbypublications.com) is brimming with useful information on the capital and beyond, while *AsiaLIFE Phnom Penh* (www.asialifecambodia.com) is a reliable read.

## Medical Services

**Calmette Hospital** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 426948; 3 Monivong Blvd; ☎ 24hr) The daddy among the local hospitals.

**European Dental Clinic** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 211363, 012 854408; 160A Norodom Blvd; ☎ 8am–noon & 2–7pm Mon–Sat) The place to get your teeth checked out.

**SOS International Medical Centre** (Map p70;

☎ 216911; www.internationalsos.com; 161 Ph 51;

☎ 8am–5.30pm Mon–Fri & 8am–noon Sat, emergencies 24hr) One of the town's most expensive medical establishments.

**Tropical & Travellers Medical Clinic** (Map p70; ☎ 336802; www.travellersmedicalclinic.com; 88 Ph 108; ☎ 8am–8pm) English-run clinic with reasonable prices.

## Money

While several banks offer free credit-card advances, the most convenient and often cheapest places to cash travellers cheques are at exchange kiosks along Sisowath Quay. Some guesthouses and travel agents can also change travellers cheques outside banking hours. Several major banks now have credit-card-compatible ATMs; there are also some ATMs at the airport.

**ANZ Royal Bank** (Map p70; ☎ 726900; 265 Sisowath Quay) Also has ATMs galore, including at supermarkets and petrol stations.

**Canadia Bank** (Map p70; ☎ 215286; 265 Ph 110) Free cash advances on MasterCard and Visa, plus a 24-hour Visa- and MasterCard-compatible ATM.

**Foreign Trade Bank** (Map p70; ☎ 723466; 3 Ph 114) At 1%, this has the lowest commission in town on US-dollar travellers cheques.

**SBC Bank** (Map p70; ☎ 990688; 315 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 8am–8pm) Convenient hours and location, plus it represents Western Union.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map p70; Ph 13; ☎ 7am–7pm) In a grand old building, this has increasingly reliable postal services along with expensive express mail.

## Telephone

The cheapest local and domestic calls in Phnom Penh are found at private kerbside stalls. Local calls start from 300r a minute. There are now cheap international calls available through mobile providers, so expect the kiosks to start offering overseas calls soon.

There are public phone boxes operated by Camintel and the Ministry of Post & Telecommunications (MPTC) around town.

## STREET NUMBERS

The complete lack of effective house numbering in Phnom Penh makes addresses hard to track down. It's not uncommon to find a row of houses numbered, say, 13A, 34, 7, 26 – makes sense, doesn't it? Worse, several different houses might use the same number in the same street.

Try to get a cross-reference for an address, such as 'close to the intersection of Phlaurv (Ph) 107 and Ph 182'.

Nearby will be a local shop that sells phone-cards for pricey international calls – expect to shell out US\$2 per minute.

Many internet cafés offer ridiculously low-cost international calls via the internet, starting from 300r per minute.

## Tourist Information

Due to lack of funding, forget about useful government-issued tourist information in Phnom Penh. Guesthouses and travellers who seem to know where they're going are your prime sources of knowledge – oh, and this guidebook isn't too bad either!

## Travel Agencies

Reliable travel agencies include the following places:

**Hanuman Tourism** (Map p70; ☎ 218396; www.hanumantourism.com; 12 Ph 310)

**Neak Krrohorm Travel & Tours** (Map p70; ☎ 219496; 128 Ph 108)

**PTM Travel & Tours** (Map p70; ☎ 364768; 200 Monivong Blvd)

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Phnom Penh is by no means as dangerous as many guesthouses make it out to be – after all, if you head into town, you won't be eating or drinking at their restaurant! However, it's still important to keep your wits about you. At night it's unwise to travel alone or carry a bag as it could attract the wrong kind of attention. Should you be unlucky enough to be a victim of robbery, stay calm and keep your hands up, as going for your pockets is as good as going for a weapon in the assailant's mind.

When riding a motorcycle don't ignore the No Left Turn signs, as traffic police are

## GETTING INTO TOWN

Most buses, pick-ups and taxis arrive near Psar Thmei (Map p70), commonly known as Central Market, in the centre of town; from here it's just a short moto (motorcycle taxi) or cyclo (pedicab) ride to guesthouses located anywhere in this small city. Boats from Siem Reap and Chau Doc (Vietnam) arrive at the tourist boat dock (Map p70), near the eastern end of Ph 106, where hundreds of motos wait in ambush. Phnom Penh International Airport (off Map pp66–7) is 7km west of central Phnom Penh via Russian Blvd. Official taxis and motos cost US\$7 and US\$2, respectively, but a short walk towards town from the airport you'll find a regular moto for around US\$1.





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only too willing to help you part with your cash. They may demand US\$20, but if you're patient and smile, a dollar should see you on your way.

Begging is a problem in Phnom Penh. Check out p125 for advice on how to help the less fortunate.

## SIGHTS

The sights in Phnom Penh highlight the contradictions of Cambodia. The stunning legacy of god-kings exhibited at the National Museum is in stark contrast to the horrific legacy of killers displayed at Tuol Sleng, and the grandeur of the Royal Palace is a world away from the ghoulishness of Choeng Ek. All around the city you will witness both splendour and sorrow.

After exploring the dark depths of the city's markets (such as Psar Thmei and Psar Tuol Tom Pong), head to the thriving riverfront and enjoy a sunset stroll.

## Royal Palace & Silver Pagoda

With its classic Khmer roofs and ornate gilding, the **Royal Palace** (Map p70; Samdech Sothearos Blvd; admission US\$3, camera/video US\$2/5; ☎ 7.30-11am & 2.30-5pm) dominates the diminutive local skyline. Hidden away behind protective walls and beneath the shadows of striking ceremonial buildings, it's an oasis of calm, with lush gardens and leafy havens. As it's the official residence of King Sihamoni, parts of the massive compound are closed to the public.

Within the compound is the extravagant **Silver Pagoda**, the floor of which is covered with five tons of gleaming silver. You can sneak a peek at some of the 5000 tiles near the entrance – most are covered to protect them. Rivalling the floor, an extraordinary Baccarat-crystal Buddha sits atop an impressive gilded pedestal. Adding to the lavish mix is a life-sized solid-gold Buddha, which weighs 90kg and is adorned



with 2086 diamonds, the largest weighing in at 25 carats.

Photography is not permitted inside the pagoda itself, so the camera prices are a little ambitious; buy some postcards instead.

Visitors are not permitted into the grounds with bare shoulders or skimpy shorts.

## National Museum

A millennium's worth of masterful Khmer artwork, including the world's finest collection of Angkor-era sculpture, spills out from open-air galleries into the inviting inner courtyard of the **National Museum** (Map p70; Ph 13; admission US\$3, camera/video US\$1/3; ☎ 8am–5pm).

One of the most celebrated works is the statue of Jayavarman VII (r 1181–1219), his head bowed slightly in a meditative pose. The oldest artefacts are examples of pottery and bronze from the Funan and Chenla empires (4th–9th centuries AD).

English- and French-speaking guides are available for a bit of context, and there's also a useful exhibition booklet, *The New Guide to the National Museum*, available at the front desk.

## Tuol Sleng Museum

While walking down the corridors of the **Tuol Sleng Museum** (Map pp66–7; Ph 113; admission US\$2; ☎ 8am–5.30pm), with their checked tile floors and cream walls, it's not hard to imagine the site's simple origins as the Tuol Svay Prey High School. However, delving into former classrooms shatters any illusion of normalcy. A single rusty bed and a disturbingly gruesome black-and-white photo are all that adorn some rooms, but they stand as testament to the unthinkable horrors that happened here.

In 1975 Pol Pot's security forces turned the school into Security Prison 21 (S-21), the largest centre of detention and torture in the country. Almost everyone held here was later executed at the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 2005 the government privatised the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek, and was paid an undisclosed sum by a Japanese company who'll manage the site and charge admission fees. This has enraged relatives of victims, who feel the government is trading their murdered loved ones for profit.

(below). Detainees who died during torture were buried in mass graves inside the prison grounds. During the first part of 1977, S-21 claimed a terrifying average of 100 victims per day.

Tuol Sleng demonstrates the darkest side of the human spirit that lurks within us all. It is not for the squeamish, but a visit here is instrumental in understanding Cambodia's past and present.

Try to catch the documentary film running daily at 10am and 3pm. Visit the **Documentation Center of Cambodia** ([www.dccam.com](http://www.dccam.com)) for more on the crimes of the Khmer Rouge.

## Killing Fields of Choeng Ek

Rising above the 129 mass graves in the **Killing Fields** (off Map pp66–7; admission US\$2; ☎ 7am–5.30pm) is a blinding white stupa (religious monument, often containing Buddha relics) that serves as a memorial to the approximately 17,000 men, women and children who were executed here by the Khmer Rouge between mid-1975 and December 1978. Encased inside the stupa are almost 9000 human skulls found during excavations here in 1980. Many of these skulls still bear witness to the fact that they were bludgeoned to death for the sake of saving precious bullets.

Hearing the sounds of joyful children playing at a nearby school while spotting human bone and clothing poking from the churned ground reinforces the contradictions of Cambodia today.

The Killing Fields of Choeng Ek are 14km southwest of central Phnom Penh, clearly signposted from Monireth Blvd. Return moto rides are about US\$4, or it's a pleasant bicycle ride once beyond the city limits.

## Wat Phnom

Occupying the city's highest point – don't get too excited, it's just a 27m-high, tree-covered bump – **Wat Phnom** (Map p70; admission

US\$1; ☎ 6am–6pm) is a quiet, shady and incense-infused respite. According to legend, the first pagoda on this site was erected in 1373 to house four Buddha statues deposited here by the waters of the Mekong. These were discovered by a woman named Penh, hence the name Phnom Penh, literally 'Hill of Penh'. As well as the temple, you'll find droves of Khmers praying for luck and a few amputees looking for some sympathy and riel.

## Independence Monument

Soaring over the city's largest roundabout is the grand **Independence Monument** (Map p70; cnr Norodom & Sihanouk Blvds), built in 1958. It's now also a memorial to Cambodia's war dead.

## Wat Ounalom

The headquarters of the Cambodian Buddhist patriarchate, **Wat Ounalom** (Map p70; Samdech Sotheasok Blvd; ☎ 6am–6pm) is the country's pre-eminent centre of Buddhist education and the focal point of the Buddhist faith in Phnom Penh.

There's not much to see, but a stroll through the complex, much of which was heavily damaged during Pol Pot's regime, will let you soak up the peaceful ambience.

## ACTIVITIES

### Massages

'You want massage?' While it's tempting and innocent sounding, most of the massages involve truly wandering hands – yes, most are of the naughty variety. For a real, rewarding rub, visit the highly skilled blind masseurs of **Seeing Hands Massage** (Map p70; Ph 13; per hr US\$4; ☎ 7am–9pm), opposite the main post office. Besides being a fabulous way to relax after a long journey, having a massage also helps blind Cambodians stay self-sufficient. It's busy, so drop in to make an appointment for later.

### Swimming

Dying for a dip? Don't take the plunge into Boeng Kak, no matter what you've been smoking. Several upmarket hotels offer the chance to escape the heat of the day by a pool. The pool at **Hotel Cambodiana** (Map pp66–7; 313 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 7am–9pm) is the most atmospheric, with sun chairs and views of the Mekong river – but prepare to part with US\$6 during the week or US\$8 on the weekend.

## TOURS

Most of the leading guesthouses organise city tours, including the sights listed earlier, for around US\$5 per person. Note that prices mentioned don't include entrance fees. While these tours may seem cheap and handy, sights such as the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek and Tuol Sleng Museum should not be rushed and are best visited independently.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The Chinese New Year (p121) and most national holidays (see p123) are celebrated with vigour in Phnom Penh. Festivals focused primarily in the capital city:

**Royal Ploughing Ceremony** This ritual agricultural festival takes place in early May in front of the National Museum. The noses of the royal oxen are said to predict the success of the upcoming harvest.

**Bon Om Tuk** (Water Festival) Hundreds of thousands of Cambodians flock to the riverfront in late October or November to watch some 350 boats compete in races on the Tonlé Sap river. The population of Phnom Penh doubles during this time.

## SLEEPING

There's no real Khao San Rd area in Phnom Penh, although the Boeng Kak lakefront and the Psar O Russei area have emerged as the most popular backpacker haunts. Boeng Kak's wooden guesthouses are perched over water on stilts, a sort of Ko Pha-Ngan without the Gulf of Thailand, while the less atmospheric backstreets south of Psar O Russei house hotel-like guesthouses with a few more creature comforts.

## Boeng Kak Area

Despite some solid structures going up in recent years, this rickety area is still slated for redevelopment some time in the future. 'Tis a shame, as the guesthouses here have a unique ambience, with wooden chill-out areas stretching over the water. They also offer very basic rooms at extremely cheap prices – though bugs are thrown in for free. Valuables should be kept in lockers, as most rooms aren't very secure.

### WARNING

During large celebrations in Phnom Penh, women should watch out for the overeager attention of young groups of males.

### READING UP

For a greater insight into the methodical machine of death that was Tuol Sleng, pick up *Voices from S-21* by David Chandler, a chilling yet incisive description of life in the prison pieced together from accounts from the torturers and the tortured.

**Number 9 Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 012 766225; Ph 93; s US\$2-4, tw US\$5-8; 🍷) The original lakefront guesthouse is still a popular place thanks to its blooming plants and billowing hammocks. There are more than 50 rooms, but be selective as some are shabby. Lively drinking scene by night.

**Grand View Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 430766; Ph 93; r US\$3-8; 🍷) This is a tall skinny hotel à la Ho Chi Minh City with rooms that are a cut above the competition. Sleep in comfort at night and snag a spot in someone else's hammock by day.

**Floating Island** (Map p70; ☎ 012 551227; floating island\_pp@yahoo.com; 11 Ph 93; r US\$3-9; 🍷) Head upstairs for a breeze or save some dollars downstairs in the darker rooms. This is a good drinking spot thanks to a double-decker area with sunset views.

**Simon's II Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 012 608892; Ph 93; r US\$10-15; 🍷) This wedding-cake-like villa is home to the smartest rooms in the area, including satellite TV and hot-water showers.

### Psar O Russei Area

**Tat Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 012 921211; 52 Ph 125; r US\$2-10; 🍷) The friendly family here ensures Tat Guesthouse is a home away from home. Cheapies involve shared showers, but a hot shower and cable TV for US\$6 is hard to beat. The rooftop restaurant is above the dust.

**Narin II Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 986131; 20 Ph 111; r US\$4-15; 🍷) Almost a hotel, this big pad has some affordable budget rooms, as well as cheap quads for US\$15.

**our pick Sunday Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 211623; 97 Ph 141; r US\$5-15; 🍷) Rooms – but not prices – have been upgraded here, making this a fine deal. The friendly English-speaking (sometimes English-accented) staff can help with travel arrangements.

**Spring Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 222155; 34 Ph 111; r US\$6-12; 🍷) An unfortunate typo on the business card says 'bland new building', but it's interior comfort that matters and this place has bright, spotless rooms complete with cable TV.

Other possibilities:

**Capitol Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 724104; capitol@online.com.kh; 14 Ph 182; r US\$4-10; 🍷) The oldest guesthouse in town has several annexes with good value rooms, and a bustling café on the corner of Ph 182.

**King Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 220512; 74 Ph 141; r US\$3-25; 🍷) The range of rooms is as wide as the

King's (Elvis, not Sihanouk!) girth, and there is a huge restaurant and travel centre downstairs.

### Other Areas

**Okay Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 012 920556; Ph 258; r US\$2-15; 🍷) Okay is more than OK thanks to a popular restaurant, appealing garden, great rooms and the best backpacker vibe beyond Boeng Kak.

**our pick Royal Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 218026; 91 Ph 154; r US\$6-12; 🍷) An old favourite with a new look, Royal Guesthouse has recently been renovated by its owners. Good value comfort and sparkling bathrooms in a central location.

**Last Home** (Map p70; ☎ 012 831702; 21 Ph 172; r US\$6-20; 🍷) Recently relocated to a spiffing new building behind Wat Ounalom, the Last Home has a loyal following among regular visitors. Extras include cable TV and newish bathrooms.

**Hotel Indochine** (Map p70; ☎ 724239; indochine.htl@camnet.com.kh; 251 Sisowath Quay; r US\$10-20; 🍷) Location, location, location – this is the original riverfront hotel. Fork out for the fancier rooms looking over the river, as the cheapies are showing their age. For bigger comfort but a smaller view, try Indochine 2 (☎ 211525; 28 Ph 130; room US\$15 to US\$20), located a couple of blocks away.

**Bright Lotus Guesthouse** (Map p70; ☎ 990446; 22 Ph 178; r US\$12-18; 🍷) Occupying a super corner with a top view of the National Museum, Royal Palace and, if you have a neck like Mr Fantastic, the riverfront, this guesthouse is one place where it is worth climbing the stairs.

One area that is worth seeking out for those wanting a modicum more comfort is the so-called golden mile, a strip of hotels on Ph 278 that all feature 'Golden' in their name. There is little to choose between them, as all offer air-con, cable TV, fridge, hot water and free laundry for US\$13/15 a single/double.

### EATING

Some travellers get in the habit of hunkering down on the guesthouse balcony, encouraged by proprietors talking up the dangers of Phnom Penh – don't do it. Phnom Penh is home to fantastic flavours. Make for the markets and dip into cheap Cambodian chow or delve into the city's impressive range of cosmopolitan eateries.

Unless stated otherwise, restaurants are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

### Khmer

After dark, the Khmer eateries scattered across town illuminate their beaconlike Angkor Beer signs, drawing in locals for fine fare and generous jugs of draught beer. Don't be shy – the food is great and the atmosphere lively. A typical meal will cost just 4000r to 6000r, and a jug of beer is only 8000r. *Soup chnang dei* (cook-your-own soup) is a big thing with Cambodians and a great idea for group dining.

**Sa Em Restaurant** (Map p70; 379 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$1-3) Cheap and cheerful is the best way to sum up this place, where you can enjoy the riverfront setting without the riverfront prices. It serves simple Khmer specials beneath its leafy canopy.

**our pick Khmer Borane Restaurant** (Map p70; 389 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$1.50-3) For the traditional taste of Cambodia, come to Khmer Borane, located on the riverfront near the Royal Palace. Delightful Khmer dishes such as fish in palm sugar, pomelo salad or *lok lak* (stir-fried beef) proves that Khmer cuisine can keep up with that of its better-known neighbours.

**Frizz Restaurant** (Map p70; ☎ 220953; 335 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$2-5) Ignore the German-sounding name, as this place serves up wonderfully aromatic Khmer cuisine. It also operates cooking classes for those wanting to learn its secrets.

The best markets for dining are **Psar Thmei** (Map p70; ☎ breakfast & lunch), **Psar Tuol Tom Pong** (Map pp66-7; cnr Ph 440 & Ph 163; ☎ breakfast & lunch) and **Psar O Russei** (Map p70; ☎ breakfast & lunch), which is handy given these are also great shopping venues. Most dishes cost a reasonable 2000r to 4000r. There are also several areas around the city with open-air food stalls during the early evening – try **Psar Ta Pang** (Map p70; cnr Ph 51 & Ph 136; ☎ dinner) for excellent *bobor* (rice porridge) and tasty desserts.

For a sanitised version of the street stall experience, head to the upper levels of Sorya Shopping Mall, where there is an excellent food court with about 30 stalls selling a range of Khmer and Asian food. Continue into the dome to a mini food court with spectacular views over Psar Thmei.

Swanky Khmer restaurants line NH6 on the east side of the Chruoy Changvar Bridge and offer a unique and authentic dining experience for less money than likely at first glance. Try **Hang Neak** (off Map pp66-7; ☎ 369661; NH6; mains US\$3-10; ☎ dinner) or **Heng Lay** (off Map pp66-7; ☎ 430888; NH6; mains US\$3-10; ☎ dinner),

which both host local Charlie Chaplin-esque comedians and karaoke stars.

### Other Asian

**Wah Kee Restaurant** (Map p70; 296 Monivong Blvd; mains US\$1-10; ☎ dinner) If the midnight munchies come a calling, this all-night diner is the place to be. Cheap noodle dishes start at just US\$1, sizzling spicy beef hot plates are delicious, and there is plenty of fresh seafood in tanks.

**Chiang Mai Riverside** (Map p70; 227 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$2-5) Easily overlooked along the ever glitzy riverfront strip, this place has delicious and inexpensive Thai food, including fish cakes, spicy *laap* (a Lao dish of chopped meat or fish with a ton of herbs and spices) and creative curries.

**Mount Everest** (Map p70; ☎ 213821; 98 Sihanouk Blvd; curries US\$2-4) This is one of the oldest curry houses in town, with a menu that includes popular Indian and Nepalese dishes.

**Monsoon** (Map p70; 17 Ph 104; curries US\$3-5) OK, so it is also a sophisticated wine bar and happens to be in the middle of a 'lively' bar strip, but do not be deceived – this is home to some of the best Pakistani curries this side of Lahore.

Or try these:

**Boat Noodle Restaurant** (Map p70; Ph 294; mains 3000-12,000r) Consistently popular thanks to bargain Thai food and a sprinkling of Khmer dishes for good measure.

**Chi Cha** (Map p70; ☎ 336065; 27 Ph 110; set meals from US\$2) Cheap Bangladeshi curry house turning out a savoury subcontinent selection, including bargain *thalis* (traditional 'all-you-can-eat' meals).

**Pho Fortune** (Map p70; ☎ 012 871753; 11 Ph 178; mains from US\$1-4) Serves good *pho*, the rice-noodle soup that drives Vietnam forward.

### International

**our pick Boddhi Tree** (Map pp66-7; 50 Ph 113; dishes US\$1-4) This lush garden is the perfect antidote to the horrors of neighbouring Tuol Sleng Museum. Asian dishes, sandwiches, salads, tapas and desserts are available here, all freshly prepared and packed full of flavour.

**Kandal House** (Map p70; 239 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$2-4) The menu at this tiny restaurant on the riverfront includes some delicious home-made pastas, salads and soups, plus a smattering of Asian favourites. Chilled Anchor draught is available in pints.

**Cantina** (Map p70; 347 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$2-4; ☎ dinner) Right next door to Happy Herb's, this is the place for *tostadas* (fried tortillas), fajitas and other Mexican favourites. It's

also a lively bar, thanks to local legend and owner Hurley Scroggins.

**Java Café & Gallery** (Map p70; ☎ 987420; 56 Sihanouk Blvd; mains US\$2.50-5) Interesting art exhibitions, wi-fi internet access, a large airy terrace – and that’s even before we get to the menu. Wholesome and filling sandwiches and wraps are a speciality, plus global coffees.

**Happy Herb’s Pizza** (Map p70; ☎ 362349; 345 Sisowath Quay; pizzas US\$3-6) No, it doesn’t mean extra toppings for free, it means pizza à la ganja. Ask for extra happy and they won’t be able to wipe the smile off your face for a week. Nonhappy pizzas are also good.

**Jars of Clay** (Map pp66-7; 39 Ph 155; ☎ Tue-Sat) As the thermometer hits 40°C, and you feel like you will melt in Psar Tuol Tom Pong, make for this little café. Frappuccinos, milk shakes and speciality coffees will cool things off, plus there are light bites.

Some other eateries to scratch that international itch:

**Mama’s Restaurant** (Map p70; Ph 111; mains 2000-6000r) This is one of the cheapest international eateries in town, with a menu that ranges from shepherd’s pie to French food and even African specials.

**nature & sea** (Map p70; Ph 51; mains 9000-20,000r) Breezy rooftop spot with wholesome savoury crepes, salads, and fantastic fish and chips – and not forgetting divine fruit shakes.

**Nike’s Pizza House** (Map p70; 160 Ph 63; pizzas US\$3-6) Reliable pizzas. Try the ‘pineapple porn moan’ pizza – silly spelling or pure pleasure?

### Self-Catering

Inexpensive restaurants actually offer more savings than self-catering, but for midday snacks or treats from home, supermarkets are perfect. Baguettes are widely available for around 500r and the open-air markets have heaps of fresh fruit and vegetables.

**Lucky Supermarket** (Map p70; 160 Sihanouk Blvd; ☎ 8am-9pm) Home to a serious range of

goodies from near and far. There’s another in **Sorya Shopping Mall** (Map p70; ☎ 8am-9pm).

**Bayon Market** (Map p70; 133 Monivong Blvd; ☎ 7am-8pm) A smaller shop with a surprisingly big range of stock, from local favourites to Gatorade to McVitie’s biscuits.

**Kivi Bakery** (Map p70; ☎ 215784; 199 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 7am-11pm) Located on the riverfront strip, this is one of the best Cambodian-owned bakeries in town, with cakes from several continents.

Another trick is to call at the bakeries of five-star hotels such as **Hotel Cambodiana** (Map pp66-7; 313 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 7am-7pm) after 6pm, when all cakes are half price.

### DRINKING

Should it survive the developer’s wrecking ball, the lakeside is a great place for a sunset drink. Lazing in a hammock and watching the sun burn red is a must. However, there is a whole lot more to Phnom Penh nightlife, including some tempting happy hours – drinks are often half price.

For the ins and outs on the drinking and entertainment scene, check the Friday edition of the *Cambodia Daily*, or the latest issues of *AsiaLIFE Phnom Penh* or the *Bayon Pearnik*.

### Bars

**Elephant Bar** (Map p70; Ph 92; ☎ 2pm-midnight) The signature bar of the Raffles-owned Hotel Le Royal, this is a sophisticated spot that offers two-for-one happy hours between 4pm and 8pm. Play pool, and tuck into the free chips and salsa. Enjoy two original Singapore slings for just US\$7 or so.

**Foreign Correspondents’ Club** (FCC; Map p70; ☎ 724014; 363 Sisowath Quay; mains US\$5-15; ☎ 7am-midnight) Most people pass through this Phnom Penh institution at some time during their time in Phnom Penh. Occupying a grand old building with striking views over the Tonlé Sap river and the National Museum, this is a good place to hit for happy hour between 5pm and 7pm, when drinks are half price. There is also food from the four corners of the globe.

**Green Vespa** (Map p70; www.greenvespa.com; 95 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 6am-late) The friendly face of Phnom Penh, this bar draws a crowd thanks to a huge drinks selection, top pub grub, cracking music and alluring promotions. Voted bar of the year in 2006 by readers of the *Phnom Penh Pocket Guide*.

**Zeppelin Café** (Map p70; 49 Ph 86; ☎ 4pm-late) Who says vinyl is dead? It lives on here in Phnom Penh, thanks to the owner of this old-skool rock bar, who mans the turntables every night. Fun.

**Talkin to a Stranger** (Map p70; ☎ 012 798530; 218 Ph 294; ☎ 5pm-late Tue-Sun) One of the best-loved bars in Phnom Penh thanks to the convivial hosts, killer cocktails and an original menu. Regular events include quiz nights and live music.

**Elsewhere Bar** (Map p70; ☎ 211348; 175 Ph 51; ☎ 10am-late Wed-Mon) Why go Elsewhere? Ambient vibes, lush garden setting, great drinks menu and a beckoning swimming pool, that’s why! Order an amnesia cocktail and forget your worries. Happy hour from 5pm to 8pm.

**Gasolina** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 012 373009; 56-58 Ph 57; ☎ 6pm-late Tue-Sun) Filled with the sensual sounds of South America, this Latin bar is housed in a spacious villa with a huge garden. Salsa lessons every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights.

**Gym Bar** (Map p70; 42 Ph 178; ☎ 11am-late) This is the number-one sports bar in town – you won’t see a better selection of big screens in this part of the world. Cold beer, pub grub and a rowdy crowd for the big games.

**Salt Lounge** (Map p70; 217 Ph 136; ☎ 6pm-late) Sleek, modern and minimalist, this cool cocktail bar is a great place to while away the night. A gay-friendly that welcomes everyone.

**Riverhouse Lounge** (Map p70; cnr Ph 110 & Sisowath Quay; ☎ 4pm-late) The closest thing to a club on the riverfront, this lounge bar has DJs or live music most nights. It’s chic and cool, but look out for promotions to keep it cheap.

**Heart of Darkness** (Map p70; 26 Ph 51; ☎ 8pm-late) The Heart of Business these days, this is more a nightclub than a bar but remains a place to see and be seen. Be very wary of large gangs of rich young Khmers here... some are children of the elite and rely on their bodyguards to do their dirty work.

Other admired establishments with liquid menus:

**California 2 Guesthouse** (Map p70; 317 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 7am-10pm) Biker bar with the cheapest beer on the riverfront.

**Pontoon Lounge** (Map p70; Tonlé Sap river, Ph 108; ☎ 11.30am-late) Floating on the river, this cool bar is where the beautiful people come. Happy hour from 5pm to 8pm.

### DINING FOR A CAUSE

These fantastic eateries have been established as funding initiatives for worthy causes and as training centres for young staff.

**Café 151** (Map p70; www.theglobalchild.com; 151 Sisowath Quay; drinks US\$1-2) A hole in the wall offering coffee and shakes, with 100% of profits going to help street children.

**Café Yejj** (Map pp66-7; 170 Ph 450; www.yejj.com; mains US\$2-4) An air-conditioned bolt hole, this bistro-style café specialises in tasty pastas and healthy salads. Or forget the healthy and have a frappuccino and a chocolate brownie. It promotes fair trade and responsible employment.

**Friends** (Map p70; ☎ 426748; www.friends-international.org; 215 Ph 13; dishes US\$1-5; ☎ lunch & dinner) With a prime location near the National Museum, this restaurant has a lively little menu of light bites and innovative specials. The shakes are exquisite, as are the raspberry and mango daiquiris. Friends gives former street children a helping hand into the hospitality industry.

**Lazy Gecko Café** (Map p70; ☎ 012 1912935; 23B Ph 93; mains US\$1.50-4.50) Boasting ‘homemade hummus just like when Mum was dating that chap from Cyprus’, this little eatery serves international dishes and supports a local orphanage. Thursday is quiz night, while Saturdays involves an orphanage visit that includes dinner and a performance by the children.

**Le Café du Centre** (Map p70; ☎ 992432; French Cultural Centre Ph 184; mains US\$1.50-4.50) This Friends-run restaurant comes in the form of a leafy hideaway in a lush garden courtyard. It serves sandwiches and crepes, plus a good selection of ice creams.

**Le Rit’s** (Map p70; ☎ 213160; 14 Ph 310; breakfast from US\$3, set lunch or dinner US\$5) The three-course lunch and dinners in the well-groomed garden here are a relaxing experience. The main menu is Thai style, and the food comes with a French flourish. Proceeds assist disadvantaged women re-enter the workplace.

**Lotus Blanc** (Map p70; ☎ 995660; Stung Mean Chey; US\$3-6; ☎ 12-2pm Mon-Fri) Fifteen minutes from the city centre, this restaurant acts as a vocational-training centre for youths found scouring the city dump for a meagre living. Run by French NGO Pour un Sourire d’Enfant (For the Smile of a Child), it serves classy Western and Khmer cuisine.

**Romdeng** (Map p70; ☎ 092 219565; 21 Ph 278; mains US\$4-6.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) Also under the Friends umbrella, elegant Romdeng specialises in traditional food from the provinces and offers a staggering choice of traditional Khmer fare.



**Rising Sun** (Map p70; 20 Ph 178; ☎ 7am-late) English pub meets backpacker bar.

**teukei bar** (Map p70; Ph 111; ☎ 7pm-late Mon-Sat) Linger beneath Chinese lanterns and chill to ambient sounds and classic reggae cuts. Close to the Psar O Russei guesthouses.

There is quite a 'girlie bar' scene in Phnom Penh, with dozens of places dotted about town. They are pretty welcoming to guys and girls, although 'I love you long time' should be taken with a pinch of salt. Ph 104 and Ph 51 are popular haunts if you want to join the circus.

## Live Music

**Equinox Bar** (Map p70; ☎ 012 586139; 3A Ph 278; ☎ 10am-late) Acoustic jam sessions are held every Thursday and Saturday night in this cool little bar. Happy hour from 5pm to 8pm.

**Riverside Bar & Bistro** (Map p70; ☎ 213898; 273 Sisowath Quay; ☎ 7am-1am) A mainstay of the riverfront scene, this place often has bands jamming away in the back room. Pricey drinks are offset by free wi-fi.

## ENTERTAINMENT

If you want to catch a glimpse of Cambodia's graceful classical dance, watch students train at the **Apsara Arts Association** (off Map pp66-7; 71 Ph 598; ☎ 7.30-10.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Sat). Remember, this is a school of learning, not a tourist attraction, so keep noise levels and flash photography to a minimum. Dance performances are held at Apsara every Saturday at 7pm (admission US\$5); classical dance and folk dance alternate.

## SHOPPING

The one item you'll be glad you purchased here is the mighty *krama*, a versatile checked cotton scarf worn by Cambodians on their heads, around their necks or around their midribs, just perfect for blocking both sun and dust. Wearing them is an affirmation of identity for many Cambodians.

Other popular items include antiques, silver, jewellery, gems, woodcarvings, papier-mâché masks, stone copies of ancient Khmer art, brass figurines, oil paintings, silk, sarongs and branded clothing from local factories.

Several stores sell lovely wares to support local organisations striving to improve the lives of Cambodia's disabled community or

disfranchised women. Shop for the cause at the following places:

**CHA** (Map p70; 40 Ph 113; ☎ 8am-6pm) This well-stocked boutique and workshop sells fine handmade clothing, scarves, toys, bags and photo albums.

**NCDP Handicrafts** (Map p70; 3 Norodom Blvd; ☎ 8am-6pm) Exquisite silk scarves, throws, bags and cushions. Other items include *krama*, shirts, purses, notebooks and greeting cards.

**Rajana** (Map pp66-7; 170 Ph 450; ☎ 10am-6pm) Beautiful selection of cards, some quirky metalware, quality jewellery, bamboo crafts and a range of Cambodian condiments.

**Tabitha** (Map pp66-7; cnr Ph 360 & Ph 51; ☎ 7am-6pm) This place sells premium silk, and has a fantastic collection of bags, tableware, bedroom decorations and children's toys.

**Wat Than Handicrafts** (Map pp66-7; Norodom Blvd; ☎ 7.30am-noon, 1.30-5pm) Set inside Wat Than, this place has a similar selection to NCDP Handicrafts.

Bargains, and bargaining sessions, await in Phnom Penh's lively markets – put on your haggling hat and enter the fray. Most markets are open between 6.30am and 5.30pm. **Psar Tuol Tom Pong** (Map pp66-7; cnr Ph 440 & Ph 163), nicknamed the Russian Market (not to be confused with Psar O Russei), is packed to the rafters with genuine, and not so genuine, Columbia, Gap and other branded clothing. There's also beautiful Cambodian silk, handicrafts and pirated DVDs, CDs and software.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

See p63 for international flights to Phnom Penh.

The Phnom Penh–Siem Reap route is well serviced by **Angkor Airways** (code G6; ☎ 222056; www.angkorairways.com) and **Siem Reap Airways** (code FI; ☎ 720022; www.siemreapairways.com), with up to six flights a day (one way/return from US\$65/110). Seats are usually available without much advance notice.

**PMT Air** (code U4; ☎ 221379; www.pmtair.com) serves Ratanakiri several times a week from Phnom Penh (one way/return US\$100/180). However, this service is often suspended, despite high prices supposedly guaranteeing departure.

### Boat

Several companies take turns offering popular daily fast boats up the Tonlé Sap to Siem Reap (US\$18 to US\$25, five to six hours), leaving the boat dock on Sisowath Quay at

## GETTING TO VIETNAM

### To Vinh Xuong

The bus-boat combination via Kaam Samnor (Cambodia) and Vinh Xuong (Vietnam) is the most scenic way to travel between Cambodia and Vietnam, although be aware it links Phnom Penh to Chau Doc in the Mekong Delta, not Ho Chi Minh City. The border crossing is open from 7am to 5pm.

**Capitol Tour** (Map p70; ☎ 217627; 14 Ph 182) charges just US\$6 for the trip, which includes a bus from Phnom Penh to Neak Luong on the Mekong River and a boat from there to Chau Doc (six to seven hours).

For the adventurous or independent, it can be done for a similar price by first catching a bus from Psar Thmei (Central Market) in Phnom Penh to Neak Luong (4500r), then taking a speedboat from there to the border at Kaam Samnor (10,000r), then a moto between the borders (4000r), and finally a minibus from Vinh Xuong to Chau Doc (US\$1).

See p900 for information on doing the trip in the opposite direction.

### To Moc Bai

The run from Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh City via the border Bavet (Cambodia) and Moc Bai (Vietnam) is pretty smooth these days, taking between five and six hours. Many of the cheap guesthouses in Phnom Penh used to run bargain buses on this route, but the resulting cut-throat competition saw them kill each other off. There are now several bus companies running direct international services every day (US\$9 to US\$12, six hours), including **Phnom Penh Sorya Transport** (PPST; Map p70; ☎ 210359), whose buses leave from Psar Thmei, **Mai Linh** (☎ 211888; 391 Sihanouk Blvd) and **Mekong Express** (☎ 427518; 87 Sisowath Quay). The border is open from 7am to 5pm.

See p893 for details on travelling from Vietnam to Cambodia.

7am. Tickets can be arranged through guesthouses or near the dock itself. The boats can be packed like sardines, so it's best to sit on the roof and marinate in plenty of sunscreen. Given the fact that buses to Siem Reap start at US\$4, the boat is a very expensive option. See p64 for other rewarding, and less expensive, Cambodian boat journeys.

### Bus

Super-duper sealed sections of road now connect Phnom Penh with Siem Reap, Battambang and Sihanoukville, making for bountiful bus services. Most currently leave from company offices, which are spread throughout town. The government is slowly but surely developing out-of-town bus stations, so the points of departure may change in time.

Competition ensures that prices are low, although there are a few premium services for those who want a little more comfort, a little less karaoke.

**Phnom Penh Sorya Transport** (PPST; Map p70; ☎ 210359; Psar Thmei) is the longest-running company, and serves Battambang (16,000r, five hours), Kampot (12,000r, three hours), Kompong Cham (10,000r, two hours), Kom-

pong Chhnang (6000r, two hours), Kratie (21,000r, six hours), Neak Luong (4500r, two hours), Poipet (26,000r, eight hours), Siem Reap (16,000r, six hours), Sihanoukville (15,000r, four hours) and Takeo (5500r, two hours).

The following are a few more of the many companies:

**Capitol Tour** (Map p70; ☎ 217627; 14 Ph 182) Serves Battambang, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Poipet, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

**GST** (Map p70; ☎ 012 895550; Psar Thmei) Buses to Battambang, Bangkok, Poipet, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

**Hour Lean** (Map p70; ☎ 012 939905; 97 Sisowath Quay) Buses to Battambang, Kampot, Kompong Cham, Kratie, Poipet, Sen Monorom, Siem Reap, Sihanoukville, Stung Treng and Takeo.

**Mekong Express** (Map p70; ☎ 427518; 87 Sisowath Quay) Serves Ho Chi Minh City, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

**Neak Krorthorm** (Map p70; ☎ 219496; 127 Ph 108) Serves Battambang, Poipet, Siem Reap and Sisophon.

For more details on any of these services, see the individual city entries throughout the chapter.

## Car & Motorcycle

Guesthouses and travel agencies can arrange a car and driver from US\$20 a day, depending on the destination. Motorcycles are a liberating way to see places of interest near Phnom Penh. See right for rental details.

## Share Taxi, Pick-up & Minibus

With cheap, comfortable and fast buses, and blissful sealed roads heading off in every direction from town, Phnom Penh's share taxis, pick-ups and minibuses offer few advantages besides flexible departure times.

Share taxis to Kampot, Krong Koh Kong and Sihanoukville leave from Psar Dang Kor (Map pp66–7), while share taxis, pick-ups and minibuses for most other places leave from near Psar Thmei (Map pp66–7). Vehicles for Svay Rieng and Vietnam leave from Chbah Ampeau taxi park (Map pp66–7).

## Train

There are currently no passenger services operating in Cambodia. However, some train-spotter types have negotiated their way on to cargo trains. While more costly, uncomfortable and lengthy than the bus, it's the last chance to experience a rooftop ride in this region.

## GETTING AROUND

### Bicycle

**Japan Rentals** (Map p70; Ph 107; per day US\$1) is the perfect place to pick up some pedals.

### Cyclo

Cyclos are still common, but have lost a lot of business to motos. Costs are generally 1000r to 2000r for a short trip, 3000r and up for longer rides, but the guys who hang outside tourist hot spots will pick a number, any number!

### Moto

Motos are generally recognisable by the baseball caps that are worn by many drivers. In areas frequented by foreigners, moto drivers generally speak English and sometimes a little French, making them useful guides as well (US\$6 to US\$10 per day, depending on the destinations). Elsewhere in town it can be difficult because eager Khmer-speaking drivers will adamantly nod that they know the destination when they clearly have no clue. If you don't want to end up in the

'burbs, pay attention and give directions if necessary.

Most short trips are 1000r to 2000r and about double that at night. Longer trips will cost more – it's about 3000r from the National Museum to Psar Tuol Tom Pong. While Khmers don't usually negotiate a price in advance, it's a good idea for foreigners to do so to prevent opportunist overcharging.

## Motorcycle

The best of the numerous places to hire motorcycles are **Lucky! Lucky!** (Map p70; ☎ 212788; 413 Monivong Blvd; ☎ 7am–6pm) and nearby **New! New!** (Map p70; ☎ 012 855488; 417 Monivong Blvd; ☎ 7am–6pm). A 100cc Honda costs US\$4 per day or around US\$20 per week, and 250cc dirt bikes cost US\$7/40 per day/week.

Motorcycle theft is a problem and if the bike goes bye-bye you'll be liable – use a hefty padlock.

## Taxi

Phnom Penh has no metered taxis of the sort found in Thailand or Vietnam. **Bailey's Taxis** (☎ 012 890000) and **Taxi Vantha** (☎ 012-855000) offer taxis 24 hours a day, but have a limited number of cars. The airport run costs US\$5 and elsewhere taxis charge about US\$1 per kilometre.

## AROUND PHNOM PENH

### TONLÉ BATI

**Tonlé Bati** (admission incl drink US\$3; ☎ 7am–6pm) is home to two Angkorian-era temples and a popular lakeside picnic area. Set among flowers and wavering palms, **Ta Prohm** and its bas-reliefs depicting stories of birth, infidelity and murder is much more evocative than the diminutive **Yeay Peau**. Ta Prohm was built by King Jayavarman VII (r 1181–1219) on the site of a 6th-century Khmer shrine.

It's 2km off National Highway (NH) 2, 33km south of Phnom Penh. Grab an hourly **PPPT** (Map p70; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-210359; Psar Thmei) bus to Takeo and it'll drop you at the turn-off (3000r, one hour).

### PHNOM TAMAO WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The **Phnom Tamao Wildlife Sanctuary** (admission US\$2; ☎ 7am–6pm) for rescued animals is home to gibbons, sun bears, elephants, tigers and

deer, and has a massive bird enclosure. The animals were all taken from poachers or abusive masters, and are housed here to keep them safe and to take part in a sustainable breeding programme. All the money raised goes back into protecting Cambodia's frequently preyed-upon wildlife.

To get here, you will require your own wheels or a moto. A moto should cost around US\$8. The sanctuary is located about 45km south of Phnom Penh; take NH2 for about 39km then turn right at the sign. From here, head straight down the sandy track lined with local beggars.

### PHNOM CHISOR

Some spectacular views of the surrounding countryside are on offer from the summit of Phnom Chisor, although the landscape screams Gobi Desert during the dry season. An 11th-century laterite-and-brick **temple** (admission US\$2; ☎ 7am–6pm), with carved sandstone lintels, guards the hilltop's eastern face. From atop the temple's southern stairs, the sacred pool of **Tonlé Om** is visible in the distance.

It's a 2000r pick-up ride from Tonlé Bati to the Phnom Chisor turn-off on NH2, 57km south of Phnom Penh. From there, a return trip to Phnom Chisor's base by moto is about 8000r. Flag down a bus back to Phnom Penh (4000r, 1½ hours, hourly).

### TAKEO & PHNOM DA

☎ 032 / pop 44,000

Poking its head from hilltop foliage and looking over endless rice paddies is the small laterite temple of **Phnom Da** (admission US\$2; ☎ 6am–6pm), in an area that once was part of the pre-Angkorian Chenla civilisation's remarkable capital. In the dry season access is by boat along an ancient canal dating from the pre-Angkorian people. During the wet season the surrounding land sinks beneath the waters and Phnom Da is only accessible by speedboat (US\$20 to charter) from Takeo, an unremarkable provincial capital 75km south of Phnom Penh. En route, speedboats access Angkor Borei, where there's a small **Chenla Museum** (admission US\$1; ☎ 7am–6pm).

**Boeung Takeo Guesthouse** (☎ 931306; Ph 3; r US\$5–10; ☎) boasts a lakefront location, large rooms and clean conditions – just the spot for a night's kip. Rooms with a view are no harder on the pocket.

## GETTING TO VIETNAM

The Phnom Den–Tinh Bien crossing, linking Takeo province with An Giang province, sits 60km southeast of Takeo town, but has little traffic as it is quite remote. Share taxis make the run to the border from Takeo and cost about 4000r per person. You must have a valid Cambodian or Vietnamese visa before making this crossing.

See p901 for information on doing the trip in the opposite direction.

Standing on stilts and overlooking the canal to Angkor Borei, **Restaurant Stung Takeo** (Ph 9; meals 3000–6000r; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a popular Khmer diner. It's the place to fill up before journeying to Phnom Da.

Local buses link Takeo to Phnom Penh (5500r, two hours, hourly) between 6am and 4pm. To reach Kampot take a *remorque-moto* to Angkor Tasaom on NH3 before nabbing a share taxi heading south.

### KIRIROM NATIONAL PARK

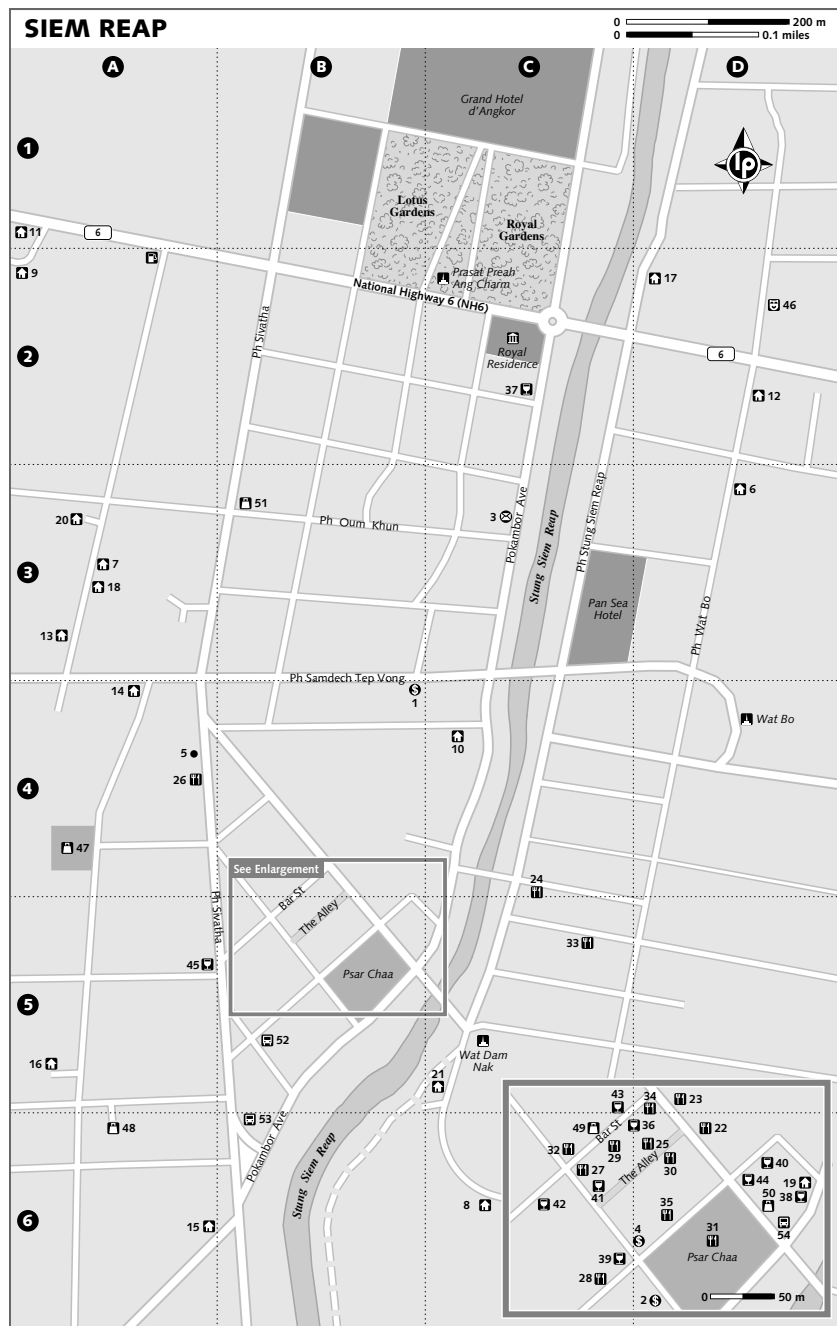
Set amid elevated pine forests, **Kirirom National Park** (admission \$5; ☎ 7am–6pm) offers some small waterfalls and decent walking trails. Hook up with a **ranger** (about US\$5) for a two-hour hike up to **Phnom Dat Chivit** (End of the World Mountain), where an abrupt cliff face offers an unbroken view of the western mountain ranges. Near the national park is the **Chambok community-based ecotourism site** (☎ 023-214409; www.geocities.com/chambokbet; admission US\$3); proceeds from its educational walks are pumped back into the community. There is a pretty waterfall, a visitor centre and a restaurant here.

Kirirom is 112km southwest of Phnom Penh. It's not easy to access by public transport – Sihanoukville buses can let you off at the Kirirom turn-off, but you'll have to find a moto for the remaining 25km west. The easiest option is to hire a motorcycle or charter a taxi with others. A large sign marks the turn-off, about 85km south of Phnom Penh.

## SIEM REAP

☎ 063 / pop 158,000

Siem Reap is the life-support system for the temples of Angkor, the eighth wonder of the



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world. In a state of slumber until a few years ago, it has woken up with a jolt and is now one of the regional hot spots for wining and dining, shopping and schmoozing.

Angkor is a place to be savoured, not rushed, and Siem Reap is the perfect place from which to plan your adventures. At its heart, it remains a charming town with rural qualities. Old French shophouses, shady tree-lined boulevards and a gentle winding river are remnants of the past, while five-star hotels, air-conditioned buses and international restaurants are pointers to the future. The gold rush continues unabated, and without careful management it could become Siem Reapolinos, the not so Costa del Culture of Southeast Asia. One way or the other, the world has finally woken up to Angkor and this little town is set for big changes.

**ORIENTATION**

Straddling Stung Siem Reap's narrow waters, Siem Reap spreads outwards from Psar Chaa, which is the epicentre of ingestion, with tasty eats and liquid treats. It's still a small town and easy to navigate, with budget accommodation spread throughout. NH6 runs east-west and cuts the town in two. Street numbering is wholly haphazard, so take care when hunting down specific addresses.

**INFORMATION**

**Bookshops**

Some of the cheapest books on Angkor are hawked by local kids and amputees around temples - buying one is a decent way of assisting the disadvantaged.

**Emergency**

- Ambulance ☎ (119)
- Fire ☎ (118)
- Police ☎ (117)
- Tourist Police (Map pp92-3; ☎ 012 402424; 🕒 24hr) Located at the main Angkor ticket office.

**Internet Access**

Internet access is everywhere, with the highest concentrations of internet cafés found on Ph Sivatha and around Psar Chaa. Charges range from 2000r to 4000r per hour. Some restaurants offer free wi-fi, including the Blue Pumpkin (p86).

**Medical Services**

- Naga Medical Centre (Map pp92-3; ☎ 964500; 593 NH6; 🕒 24hr) One of the better private clinics in Siem Reap.
- Royal Angkor International Hospital (Map pp92-3; ☎ 761888; www.royalangkorphospital.com; NH6 West; 🕒 24hr) A new international facility, affiliated with the Bangkok Hospital Medical Centre.



## GETTING INTO TOWN

Travellers coming independently by road will usually be dropped near Psar Leu (Map pp92–3) in the east of town and from here it's just a short ride by moto (motorcycle taxi; 2000r to 4000r) into town. If you're arriving with bus services sold by guesthouses, the bus will head straight to a partner guesthouse.

Most travellers arriving by boat aren't surprised by hordes of motos waiting at Phnom Krom dock (off Map pp92–3), 11km from town, but they are taken aback by the sight of their name on a board being furiously waved by a driver – guesthouses in Phnom Penh pass on or sell names to guesthouses in Siem Reap! If you follow the sign and stay at that guesthouse, then the lift is free; if you choose to stay elsewhere expect to pay the driver about US\$1.

Most guesthouses have a free airport pick-up service; otherwise the 7km ride to town costs US\$1 by moto or US\$5 for a taxi.

## Media

To keep on top of the constant changes in Siem Reap, pick up a free copy of *Siem Reap Angkor Visitors Guide*, published quarterly. For more on the bar and restaurant scene, pick up the *Siem Reap Pocket Guide*, also free.

## Money

**ANZ Royal Bank** (Map p82; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-726900; Ph Samdech Tep Vong) Free credit-card advances and can change travellers cheques in most major currencies. International ATMs all over town.

**Canadia Bank** (Map p82; ☎ 964808; Psar Chaa) Provides free credit-card cash advances and changes travellers cheques in most major currencies at a 2% commission. International ATM.

**Union Commercial Bank** (Map p82; ☎ 964703; Psar Chaa) Charges 2% commission for travellers cheques and offers free Visa advances.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map p82; Pokambor Ave; ☎ 7am–5pm) Improving services, but it's still advisable to ensure the postcards are franked.

## Telephone

The cheapest international calls are via the internet, although the connection is not always that clear. Unblemished but more expensive international calls can be made at numerous private booths advertising telephone services, which also offer inexpensive local calls starting from 300r per minute.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The name Siem Reap actually means 'Siamese Defeated' – hardly the most tactful name for a major city near Thailand!

## Tourist Information

Unbelievably, there's still no helpful tourist office for independent travellers in Siem Reap. Guesthouses and fellow travellers are the best sources of general information.

## 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.

There are many commission scams run by guesthouses, the worst involving those arriving by bus from Bangkok; see p89 for more information.

Begging is prevalent in Siem Reap – have a read of p125 for advice on how to help the less fortunate.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Temples, schmemples. There is more to Siem Reap than the Temples of Angkor – but not a lot.

Forming part of the Cambodian Land Mind Relief Fund (CLMMRF), the **Cambodia Landmine Museum** (off Map pp92–3; ☎ 012 598951; admission free, donations accepted; ☎ 7am–6pm) showcases a large collection of mines and artillery with a fascinating documentary on their destructive capabilities. Check out the garden where visitors are challenged to find hidden (deactivated!) mines. It recently moved and is located more than 20km from town on the road to Banteay Srei.

Yee-haa! The **Happy Ranch** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 012 920002; www.thehappyranch.com; horse rides US\$15–80; ☎ 6am–6pm) offers you the chance to explore Siem Reap on horseback, taking in surrounding villages and secluded temple spots.

**Artisans d'Angkor** (☎ 963330; Angkor Silk Farm ☎ 8am–5pm; Chantiers Ecoles Map p82; ☎ 7.30am–6.30pm), a centre of arts and crafts, has two workshops that are open to visitors. The Chantiers Ecoles branch is the centre of traditional carving and masonry, while the Angkor Silk Farm showcases the entire silk-making process, from mulberry trees and silk worms to spinning and weaving.

## Massages & Spas

With all that traipsing around temples, exhausted limbs and muscles are an inevitability. Thankfully Siem Reap has tapped into the lucrative market of rejuvenation and is bursting with spas and treatment centres. All the upmarket hotels have swish spas, but there are affordable massages elsewhere.

The massages at **Seeing Hands Massage** (Map p82; ☎ 012 836487; 324 Ph Sivatha; massage US\$4; ☎ 7am–9pm) are performed by the blind, with part of the profits going to help the sight-impaired of Siem Reap.

**Krousar Thmey** (Map pp92–3; Krousar Thmey Tonlé Sap Exhibition Centre; massage US\$6) is a well-known NGO that offers massages by professionally trained blind masseurs in the school behind the exhibition centre.

You can also visit one of the many massage places near Psar Chaa for a cheap but effective rubdown.

## Swimming

It's hot work clambering about the temples and there is no better way to wind down than with a dip in a swimming pool. You can pay by the day at most hotels for use of the swimming pool and/or gym, or head to **Aqua** (Map pp92–3; www.aquacambodia.com; Ph 7 Makara; swimming US\$2) where there is a large pool and a lively little late-night bar.

## COURSES

Learn the secrets of Cambodian cooking with **Le Tigre de Papier Cooking School** (Map p82; ☎ 760930; letigredepapier@hotmail.com; Bar St; courses US\$12). It starts at 10am daily and includes a visit to the market. Proceeds go to supporting Sala Bai Hotel & Restaurant School (right, p87).

## SLEEPING

There are now more guesthouses and hotels in Siem Reap than temples around Angkor – and that's a lot. While accommodation is

spread throughout town, four areas hold the bulk of quality choices: Psar Chaa, Ph Sivatha, NH6 west, and the east bank of the river.

## Psar Chaa Area

**Popular Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 963578; chom@camnet.com.kh; r US\$5–14; ☎ ☎) Popular by name, popular by nature, this expanding guesthouse has a huge selection of well-tended rooms and a rooftop restaurant with great food.

**Ivy Guesthouse 2** (Map p82; ☎ 012 380516; r US\$6–8) A homely guesthouse with a cool chill-out area with hammocks and TV, the Ivy shows a little more decorative flair than most in this price range.

**our pick Shadow of Angkor Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 964774; 353 Pokambor Ave; shadowofangkor@hotmail.com; r US\$6–20; ☎ ☎) Probably the best-located guesthouse in town, Shadow of Angkor occupies a grand old French-era building overlooking the river. Invest in the arty air-con rooms if the budget allows.

**Red Lodge** (Map p82; ☎ 012 707048; www.redlodgear.com; r incl breakfast US\$8–12; ☎ ☎) Hidden in a maze of backstreets, Red Lodge has bright and spacious rooms. Prices include free fruit, toast, tea and coffee, plus free bike rentals, so it's a steal.

## Phlaouv Sivatha Area

**Naga Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 963439; r US\$3–10; ☎ ☎) We first bunked here back in 1995 and it still remains true to its roots, a real crash pad. Rooms with shared bathroom are just US\$3 and there's a pool table if you're after some cue action.

**our pick Garden Village** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 012 217373; www.gardenvillage-angkor.com; dm US\$1, r US\$3–12; ☎ ☎) With probably the cheapest beds in town, here you can choose from eight-bed dorms or US\$3 cubicles with shared bathrooms. The bargains don't stop there, with US\$0.50 beer at the rooftop bar. Nice.

**Baca Villa** (Map p82; ☎ 965328; www.baca-villa.com; r US\$7–10; ☎ ☎) This small but smart guesthouse offers a warm welcome to all. Fan rooms include hot water, plus there is a lively little bar-restaurant out front.

**Sala Bai Hotel & Restaurant School** (Map p82; ☎ 963329; www.salabai.com; r US\$10–25; ☎ ☎) Enjoy the intimate surrounds of this training-school hotel, where the sweet staff are ever helpful. Decorative touches include silk wall hangings, woven throw pillows and wicker wardrobes.

A couple of other friendly, family-run options:

**Mommy's Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 012 941755; r US\$4-15; 🏠) This modern villa includes large rooms with air-con, as well as cheaper pads with cold showers.

**Smiley Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 012 852955; r US\$6-15; 🏠) One of the first guesthouses to undergo a hotel-tastic make-over, this place has more than 70 rooms.

## NH6 West

**Jasmine Lodge** (Map p82; ☎ 760697; www.jasminelodge.com; NH6 west; r US\$2-15; 🏠 📶) A friendly and fun little guesthouse, the Jasmine has cheapies with shared bathroom and a range of smarter options. The elevated bar-restaurant includes a pool table.

**Earthwalkers** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 760107; www.earthwalkers.no; dm US\$4, s/d from US\$9/12, all incl breakfast; 🏠 📶 🚶) This is the closest thing Siem Reap has to a full-blown backpacker hostel. Rooms are superclean and even dorm beds include a hearty breakfast.

**ourpick Damnak Chan** (Moon Inn; Map pp92-3; ☎ 760334; damnakchan@yahoo.com; r US\$13-23; 🏠 📶 🚶) This tranquil spot is a haven from the bustle of NH6 and includes a smart new pool. Rooms are smart, service is speedy and breakfast is an extra US\$2.

More? You want more? Try these:

**Hello Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 012 920556; r US\$4-15; 🏠) Linked to Okay Guesthouse (p74) in Phnom Penh, this place has cracking-value rooms. The restaurant has handy Khmer phrases to learn written all over its walls.

**Prince Mekong Villa** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 012 437972; www.princemekong.com; s/tw incl breakfast from US\$4/6) Satisfied guests buzz about the range of services provided here: good travel info, and free laundry, breakfast and bicycles.

## East Bank of the River

**Mahogany Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 760909; proeun@online.com.kh; Ph Wat Bo; r US\$5-15; 🏠 📶) There's still some mahogany in long-running Mahogany Guesthouse. The old house has cheap rooms, while a newer block has rooms with whistles and bells. Good upcountry travel information available.

**Angkor Thom Hotel** (SR Map p82; ☎ 964862; r US\$13-15; 🏠 📶) This is a cut above the guesthouse competition; rooms have satellite TV, fridge and hot water, plus Angkor photos line the corridors.

**Green Village Palace** (SR Map p82; ☎ 760623; www.greenvillagepalace.com; Ph Wat Dam Nak; r US\$15-25; 🏠 📶) If you feel like bending the budget

for a little treat, this hotel has smart rooms with silk trim, plus a small swimming pool and a gym.

Other options among dozens:

**Rosy Guesthouse** (Map p82; ☎ 965059; r US\$7-15;

🏠) Reasonably priced rooms, and it's not far to the bustling bar downstairs.

**Wat's Up Guesthouse** (SR Map p82; ☎ 012 675881; r US\$8-15; 🏠 📶) A smart place with a memorable name.

## EATING

Yeah, yeah, all the guesthouses have extensive menus of Khmer classics and comfort food, but hit the town to experience the dynamic dining scene that is Siem Reap. The gastronomic extravaganza of Khmer and international flavours won't break the bank and you can keep on rolling for a night on the town. Unless stated otherwise, restaurants are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

**Soup Dragon** (Map p82; ☎ 964933; Bar St; meals US\$1-7) Hit the ground floor for classic Asian breakfasts such as *pho* for less than US\$1 – just the recipe for traipsing around the temples. Upstairs is a smarter restaurant with a huge menu of Asian and international dishes.

**ourpick Blue Pumpkin** (Map p82; ☎ 963574; mains US\$1.50-5) Downstairs it looks like any old café, albeit one with a wondrous selection of cakes, breads and homemade ice cream. Upstairs is a white world of minimalist expression with beds to lounge on and free wi-fi. Light bites, great sandwiches and shakes.

**ourpick Khmer Kitchen Restaurant** (Map p82; ☎ 964154; The Alley; mains US\$2-3; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Can't get no culinary satisfaction? Mick Jagger was here for the delectable Khmer and Thai dishes, including a sublime pumpkin and coconut soup. This restaurant has been so successful it's now doubled in size (there's another entrance from Psar Chaa); the best seats are at the candlelit tables spilling out into the atmospheric alley.

**Dead Fish Tower** (Map p82; Ph Sivatha; dishes US\$2-5) Floor dining, comfy cushions and tree-trunk tables is the way to go here. The Thai teasers on the menu are extensive, and it promises 'be sure we don't serve dog, cat, rat or worm' – so bad luck if these are your delicacies of choice.

**Kama Sutra** (Map p82; ☎ 012 1824474; Bar St; mains US\$2.50-7) Enjoy it in 80 different positions... ahem, that's Indian food and seating arrangements we're talking about here. This slick and stylish Indian restaurant offers authentic curries and isn't as expensive as it looks.

**Red Piano** (Map p82; ☎ 963240; Bar St; mains US\$3-5) A restored colonial gem, Red Piano has a big balcony for watching the action unfold on Bar St below. The menu has a great selection of Asian and international food, and former patron Angelina Jolie even has a cocktail named in her honour.

**Angkor Palm** (Map p82; ☎ 761436; mains US\$3-6) Voted Siem Reap's restaurant of the year in 2006 in the *Siem Reap Pocket Guide* awards, Angkor Palm has legendary *amoc* (baked fish in banana leaf) that even Khmers go crazy for. Cooking classes are available from 10am.

**In Touch** (Map p82; ☎ 963240; Bar St; mains US\$3-6) Just across the road from the Red Piano and every bit as alluring, In Touch has some spectacular lighting. The flavours are mainly Thai and there is often live music.

**Cambodian BBQ** (Map p82; ☎ 965407; The Alley; mains US\$7-9; 🍷 dinner) The Alley is now wall-to-wall restaurants, but this place offers a twist on the traditional *phnom pleung* (hill of fire) grills, serving up crocodile, snake, ostrich and kangaroo, plus free noodles and vegetables.

Other spots include the following:

**Angkor Market** (Map p82; Ph Sivatha) The best supermarket in town has an excellent supply of international goodies for those heading upcountry.

**Taj Mahal** (Map p82; curries US\$2-5) Well-established Indian restaurant. Liberal portions will slake the most serious of curry cravings.

## 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.

**Joe-To-Go** (Map p82; ☎ 092 532640; www.theglobalchild.org; drinks US\$0.50-2; 🍷 5am-3pm) Gourmet coffee is the main draw here – it's a good wake-up option before sunrise at the temples. Proceeds support education for street children.

**Singing Tree Café** (Map p82; ☎ 965210; www.singingtrecfe.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, and commits a percentage of profits to wildlife conservation and helping street children.

**Butterflies Garden Restaurant** (Map p82; ☎ 761211; www.butterfliesofangkor.com; mains US\$3-6; 🍷 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 and some indulgent desserts. The restaurant supports good causes, including Cambodian Living Arts, dedicated to reviving Cambodian performing arts.

**Sala Bai Hotel & Restaurant School** (Map p82; ☎ 963329; www.salabai.com; set lunch US\$5; 🍷 12-2pm Mon-Fri Nov-June) This school trains young Khmers in hospitality services and serves a menu of Western and Cambodian cuisine.

**Les Jardins des Delices** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 963673; Paul Dubrule Hotel & Tourism School, NH6; set lunch US\$7; 🍷 lunch only) Enjoy Sofitel standards at a snip with a three-course meal of Asian and Western food prepared by students training in the culinary arts.

When it comes to the cheapest Cambodian eats, Psar Chaa (Map p82) has plenty of dishes on display and many more cooked to order. It's a lively and atmospheric place for a local meal at local-ish prices. By night, there are lots of street strips turning out bargain meals: try the strip at the end of Bar St, opposite Molly Malone's. Alternatively, ask a moto driver for recommendations of the best hole-in-the-walls, as these guys know the rub.

## DRINKING

Siem Reap rocks. It used to be as dead as the ancient kings of Angkor, but dozens of bars have opened up in recent years. The Psar Chaa area is a good hunting ground, with one street even earning the moniker Bar St – dive in, crawl out!

**Angkor What?** (Map p82; Bar St; 🍷 6pm-late) This is the original Siem Reap bar, and it's still going strong. The 5pm to 8pm happy hour – with bargain buckets of Mekong whiskey, Coke and Red Bull, and cheap pitchers of Anchor – lubes things up for later when everyone's bouncing along to indie anthems.

**Temple Club** (Map p82; Bar St; 🍷 10am-late) The only worshipping going on at this temple is 'all hail the ale'. There is a free traditional dance show upstairs from 7.30pm, then things start rocking downstairs from 9pm. Good food and loud tunes seem to draw a crowd.

**Warehouse** (Map p82; ☎ 10.30am-3am) Top tunes, drinks aplenty and a lively crowd ensures this is one of the better bars in town. All-nighters have been known to occur if the crowd is on form.

**Laundry Bar** (Map p82; Psar Chaa; ☎ 6pm-late) Put on your cleanest undies for a trip to the Laundry, a lavishly decorated nightclub with a dance floor. It gets busy on weekends or when guest DJs crank up the sound system.

**Funky Munky** (Map p82; ☎ 012 1824553; www.funkymunkycambodia.com; ☎ noon-late) This great little bar turns out more than 20 different burgers, including the slightly scary 'cardiac arrest'. Crash the quiz night, held every Thursday, where proceeds go to a variety of worthy causes.

**Molly Malone's** (Map p82; Bar St; ☎ 7.30am-late) An authentic Irish pub, this is the place to come if you are missing the Emerald Isle. There's Powers Whisky, Guinness and steaming stews, and the soundtrack, inevitably, includes the Pogues and U2.

**Linga Bar** (Map p82; The Alley; ☎ 5pm-late) This chic gay bar is attracting all comers thanks to a cracking cocktail list and some big beats, which draw a dancing crowd later into the night.

**FCC Angkor** (Map p82; Pokambor Ave; ☎ 7am-midnight) The place to pretend you are in old Indochina, FCC is set in a beautiful building with a reflective pool and lazy lounge chairs. Half-price happy hour runs from 5pm to 7pm.

Other places to imbibe:

**Ivy Bar** (Map p82; ☎ 6am-late) A great little bar with excellent food and a friendly crowd.

**X Bar** (Map p82; Ph Sivatha; ☎ 4pm-late) Currently the late-night spot in town, drawing revellers for the witching hour when other places are closing up.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Several restaurants and hotels offer cultural performances during the evening and for many this is the only chance to witness classical Cambodian dance. Unfortunately the shows are either expensive or hardly authentic.

**Bayon II Restaurant** (Map p82; just north of NH6) A cheaper choice, it offers a decent dance performance and a buffet dinner for US\$11.

## SHOPPING

Siem Reap is a shop-till-you-drop kind of place, be it **Psar Chaa** (Map p82; ☎ 6am-9pm), lesser-known markets, souvenir shops or the endless temple shenanigans. Buying at the temples is a great way to help the local economy, as

many vendors are descended from the original Angkor inhabitants. The **Angkor Night Market** (Map p82; ☎ 4pm-midnight) is a good one-stop shop for everything and is just off the main Sivatha strip.

Another way to let your shopping dollars do well is to visit shops that support Cambodia's disabled and disenfranchised:

**Artisans d'Angkor** (Map p82; ☎ 380354) High-quality reproduction carvings and exquisite silks are available. Impoverished youngsters are trained in the arts of their ancestors.

**Rajana** (Map p82; ☎ 964744; Bar St) 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 p82; ☎ 380335) This shop opposite Psar Chaa specialises in quality silk products such as wallets, handbags and the like. Profits train and sustain the disabled community.

**Shenga** (☎ 012 260015; www.shenga.net; Angkor Night Market) Housed in the lively little night market, this is a fair-trade boutique with sexy lingerie.

**Tabitha Cambodia** (Map p82; ☎ 760650; Ph Sivatha) Home to a beautiful range of silk scarves, cushion covers and throws, this shop puts its proceeds towards projects such as house building and well drilling.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

For the lowdown on international destinations from Siem Reap, see p63.

There are up to six flights a day by **Angkor Airways** (code G6; ☎ 964166; www.angkorairways.com) and **Siem Reap Airways** (code FT; ☎ 380191; www.siemreapairways.com) between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Flights start at US\$65/100 one way/return, and tickets are usually available without much advance notice.

**PMT Air** (code U4; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-221379; www.pmtair.com) connects Siem Reap with Sihanoukville (one way/return US\$80/120) several times a week, a popular option to link temples and beach.

### CONSPIRACY THEORY

Why is the road between Siem Reap and the Thailand border at Poipet still in notoriously bad shape when it should be a major priority for trade and tourism? Well, it's rumoured that an unnamed airline is paying an unstated commission to an unnamed political party to indefinitely stall this road's upgrade!

### BANGKOK TO SIEM REAP: THE SCAM BUS

While direct Bangkok-Siem Reap bus tickets are cheap and sound convenient, they're anything but. Since the bus operators make their real money from Siem Reap guesthouses paying them commission for bringing guests, their goal is to make the journey as long and uncomfortable as humanly possible. Why? Well, if they dropped you off at an average guesthouse at 4pm, you will probably search out better accommodation. However if you arrive battered, exhausted and in the dark, you're more likely to succumb to pressure and just collapse at their chosen guesthouse.

Some companies are actually secretly using the painful Psar Pruhm-Ban Pakard border (p101) instead of the much faster (though still painfully bumpy) Poipet-Aranya Prathet crossing (p97)! Others also try to 'help' you with your visa, resulting in you being overcharged.

Make travel the adventure it was always supposed to be – catch a bus to the border and go it alone from there.

## Boat

Daily express boats service Phnom Penh (US\$18 to US\$25, five to six hours), but are overpriced given it's just as fast by road and only US\$4. Guesthouses usually include transport to the dock at Phnom Krom, 11km south of town, with the boat tickets; otherwise expect to pay motos about US\$1. Aim for the roof and don't forget to apply the war paint (ie sunscreen).

Express boats to Battambang (US\$15, three to eight hours) pass near Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary on arguably Cambodia's most scenic stretch of water. Low water in the dry season means only smaller speedboats make the run, but they often fall prey to sticky mud, making for seemingly endless journeys. Try to ensure the boat driver keeps to a sensible speed, as big waves have proved a major problem for local communities over the years. Hovercrafts are rumoured to be in the pipeline.

### GETTING TO THAILAND

Foreigners can cross from O Smach in northern Cambodia to Chong Jom in Thailand, although few pass through this way. First arrange a taxi from Siem Reap to Samroang (four hours, US\$30 for the taxi) and continue from there to O Smach by moto (US\$5), taking up to two hours. Once on the Thai side, it gets much easier with several minibuses and *sāwngthāew* (small pick-up trucks with two benches in the back) each day from Chong Jom to Surin.

See p753 for information on doing the trip in the reverse direction.

## Bus

The road to Phnom Penh is now glorious tarmac, making for smooth journeys, whereas the road west to Sisophon and Poipet is still one hell of a bumpy ride. Bridges are being built, which suggests there might actually be a decent road during the lifetime of this book. Competition ensures low and consistent pricing among the various bus companies. Buses arrive and depart from the taxi park (Map pp92-3), east of town near NH6.

**Neak Krorhorm** (Map p82; ☎ 964924) offers the most destinations, with buses to Phnom Penh (US\$3.50, five to six hours), Battambang (US\$4, four to five hours), Poipet (US\$4, four to five hours) and Bangkok (US\$10, 10 to 14 hours). Its office is opposite Psar Chaa.

Other companies with Siem Reap offices:

**Capitol Tour** (Map p82; ☎ 963883) Buses to Phnom Penh, Poipet and Bangkok; its office is off Ph Sivatha.

**GST** (Map p82; ☎ 012 888981; Ph Sivatha) Buses to Phnom Penh.

**PPST** (☎ 016 222588) Services to Phnom Penh, Kompong Cham and Poipet; its office is in the Psar Chaa area.

### Share Taxi, Pick-up & Moto

For details on travelling to Anlong Veng, see p102. The best way to travel to Preah Vihear province is by moto; see p102 for more info.

## GETTING AROUND

For all the juicy details on how best to explore the temples of Angkor, see p91.

Navigating Siem Reap on foot is pretty straightforward, as it's a relatively small place. If you need to cross town quickly, a moto will cost 1000r to 2000r, and double that at night. *Remorque-motos* start at US\$1.

Motorbike hire is prohibited in Siem Reap.



## TEMPLES OF ANGKOR

Prepare for divine inspiration! The temples of Angkor, capital of Cambodia's ancient Khmer empire, are the perfect fusion of creative ambition and spiritual devotion. Between the 9th and 13th centuries the Cambodian *devaraja* strove to better the temples of their ancestors in size, scale and symmetry, culminating in the world's largest religious building, Angkor Wat. The hundreds of temples surviving today are but the sacred skeleton of the vast political, religious and social centre of an empire that stretched from Myanmar (Burma) to Vietnam, a city that boasted a population of one million at a time when London was a little town of 50,000 inhabitants. The houses, public buildings and palaces were constructed of wood – now long decayed – because the right to dwell in structures of stone was reserved for the gods.

Angkor is the heart and soul of the Kingdom of Cambodia, a source of inspiration and national pride to all Khmers as they struggle to rebuild their lives after the years of terror and trauma. Today, the temples are a point of pilgrimage for all Cambodians and no traveller will want to miss their extravagant beauty when passing through the region.

The 'lost city' of Angkor became the centre of intense European popular and scholarly interest after the publication in the 1860s of *Le Tour du Monde*, an account by the French naturalist Henri Mouhot of his voyages. A group of talented and dedicated archaeologists and philologists, mostly French, soon undertook a comprehensive programme of research. Under the aegis of École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), they made an arduous effort – begun in 1908 and interrupted in the early 1970s by war – to clear away the jungle vegetation that was breaking apart the monuments, and to rebuild the damaged structures, restoring them to something approaching their original grandeur.

The three most magnificent temples at Angkor are the enigmatic Bayon, in the fortified ancient city of Angkor Thom, with its eerie faces staring down; romantic Ta Prohm, parts of which are slowly being digested by nature; and the immense Angkor Wat, the mother of all temples, which sends a tingle down your spine on the first encounter. Take your time and spend five

days, even a week, as all these monuments are well worth several visits each and there are dozens of less celebrated but no less rewarding temples to dig around in the area – not literally, mind you, that's best left to the archaeologists!

### ANGKOR WAT

Soaring skywards and surrounded by a moat that would make its European castle counterparts blush, Angkor Wat is one of the most inspired and spectacular monuments ever conceived by the human mind.

Some researchers believe a walk from its outer causeway to its inner confines is a symbolic trip back to the first age of the universe's creation. Others point out it also replicates the spatial universe in miniature; the Hindu's mythical Mt Meru represented by the massive central tower, with its surrounding smaller peaks (lesser towers) surrounded in turn by continents (lower courtyards) and oceans (moat). The seven-headed *naga* (mythical serpent-beings) along the causeway become a symbolic rainbow bridge for man to reach the abode of the gods.

Enough of the metaphors, you say. What do you really need to know? Well, it's the largest religious building in the world and it'll blow your socks off! Not wearing socks? Strap up those sandals, as they're in for a wild ride...

It was built by Suryavarman II (r 1112–52) to honour Vishnu, his patron deity, and to be his funerary temple. The central temple consists of three elaborate levels, each of which encloses a square surrounded by intricately interlinked galleries. Rising 31m above the 3rd level and 55m above the ground is the central tower, which gives the whole ensemble its sublime unity.

Surrounding the central temple complex is an 800m-long series of extraordinarily exquisite bas-reliefs. The most celebrated scene, the **Churning of the Ocean of Milk**, is located along the southern section of the east gallery. This brilliantly executed carving depicts 88 *asura* (demons) on the left and 92 *deva* (gods) with crested helmets on the right, churning up the sea to extract the elixir of immortality.

Spend a few hours in awe of this unique place. Many tourists come for sunrise before heading back to town for breakfast. Explore the vast corridors from 7am when Angkor Wat is cool and quiet.

## EXPLORING THE TEMPLES

### INFORMATION

The official **Angkor ticket office** (Map pp92-3; 1-day/3-day/1-week passes US\$20/40/60; ☎ 5am-5.30pm) is a large checkpoint on the road to Angkor. All passes require a photo and the authorities now insist on taking the shots. Expect queues. Lose the pass and you'll be fined US\$30 if spotted in a temple. The temple complex is open from 5am to 6.30pm, unless there is a special show on at one of the temples.

Try to be patient with the hordes of children selling food, drinks and souvenirs, as they're pretty young and are only doing what their families have asked them to do to survive – you'll find their ice-cold bottled water is heavenly in the heat, although the merits of their bamboo flutes and wooden crossbows aren't immediately so clear.

### ITINERARIES

#### One Day

Hit Ta Prohm for sunrise and a look at this dramatic wrestling match with nature. Continue to Angkor Wat while it is still quite early and the crowds are light. After lunch enter the ancient city walls of Angkor Thom and check out its incredible terraces and temples, including the enigmatic faces of the Bayon. Biggest mistake – trying to see too much.

#### Three Days

Start with some of the smaller temples and build up to the big hitters. Visit the early Roluos group on the first day for some chronological consistency and try the stars of the grand circuit, including Preah Khan, Preah Neak Pean, Ta Som and sunset at Pre Rup. Day two might include Ta Prohm and the temples on the small circuit, plus the distant but stunning Banteay Srei. Then the climax: Angkor Wat at dawn and the immense city of Angkor Thom in the afternoon.

#### One Week

Angkor is your oyster – relax, enjoy and explore at will. Make sure you visit Beng Mealea, Kbal Spean and Koh Ker (p103).

### EATING

Food stalls are found at most of the more popular temples such as Banteay Srei, Preah Khan and Ta Prohm. Angkor Wat even has full-blown cafés and restaurants. It's a great way to fit more into your day and it's also nice to relax in the popular temples without the masses of package tourists – they usually eat lunch in town. Rest assured, you'll never go hungry around Angkor.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

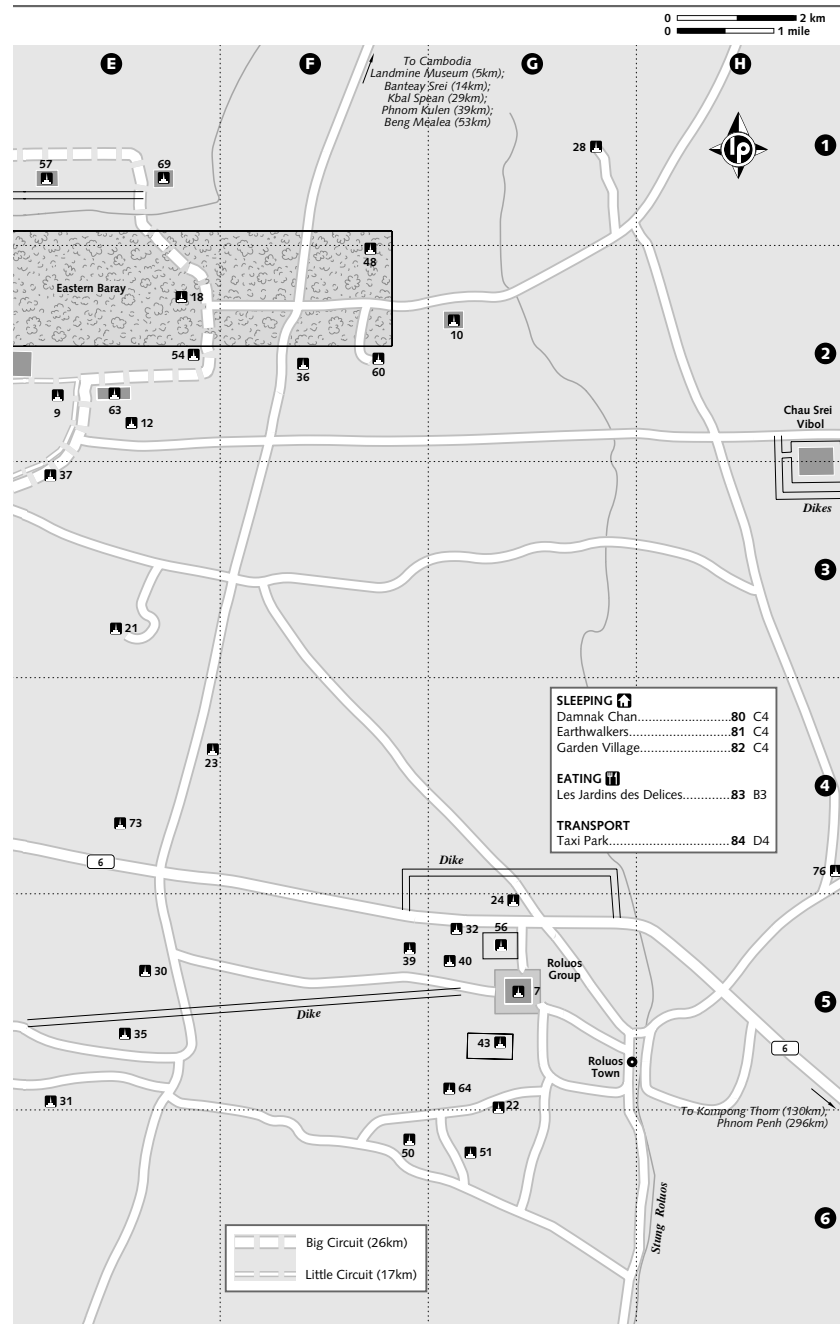
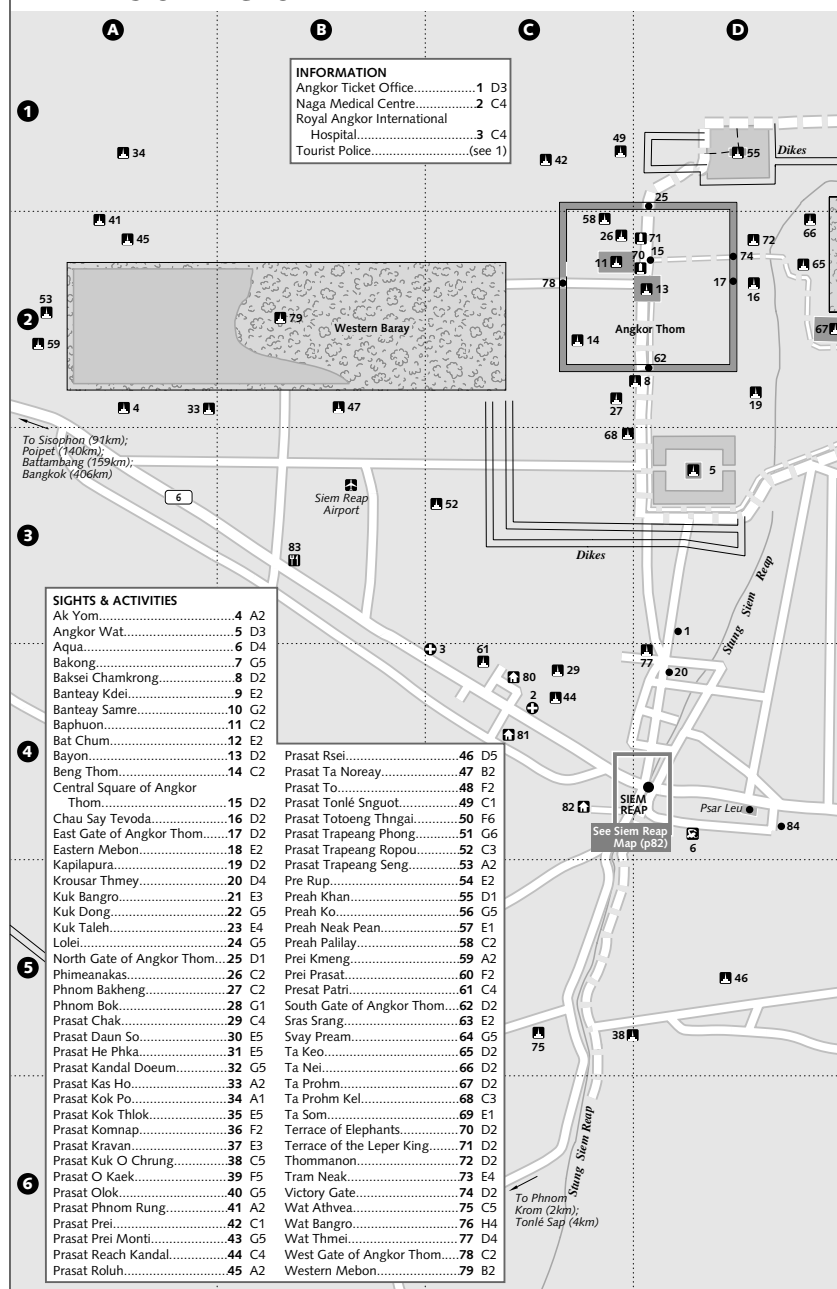
The most popular way to explore has traditionally been to hook up with a moto driver for about US\$6 to US\$8 per day, or a little more if you're including remote temples. Some know a lot about the temples and can act as de facto guides. An enjoyable alternative for incurable romantics is to opt for the *remorque-moto* (motorcycle-pulled trailer) – just perfect for two. Prices range from US\$10 to US\$15 per day depending on the destinations.

Bicycles have been picking up in popularity and can be rented from guesthouses and shops around town for about US\$2 per day. Check out the White Bicycles project supported by some guesthouses, where the money goes to help community development. Cycling is a rewarding way to explore nearby temples, provided you plug water at every opportunity; there is a 'big circuit' and a 'little circuit' marked on Map pp92-3. Or ditch the bike and go back to basics by heading out on foot. There are obviously limitations to what you can see due to the distances involved, but exploring Angkor Thom's walls on foot or walking to and from Angkor Wat are both feasible.

Those with an aversion to exercise and the elements can opt for a car and driver. Most guesthouses can organise one for just US\$20 to US\$25 per day.

Finally there are unconventional options. Elephant rides are possible from Angkor Thom's south gate to Bayon (US\$10) during the day and make for some memorable photos. Elephants also climb Phnom Bakheng in the evening (US\$15), but this can't be much fun for the poor creatures. Or aim high and take the massive hot air balloon (US\$11 per person). It's on a fixed line, so only offers a view from a distance, but it's the best aerial shot available unless you have the budget for a helicopter ride (US\$75 for eight minutes).

TEMPLES OF ANGKOR



CAMBODIA

CAMBODIA

## ANGKOR THOM

The entrances to the fortified city of Angkor Thom are marked by five monumental gates – the **East Gate**, **South Gate**, **West Gate**, **North Gate** and **Victory Gate** – each topped by four serene faces of Avalokiteshvara (the Buddha of compassion). The city's walls stretch more than 12km, and are 6m high and 8m wide every step of the way.

Angkor Thom was built by Angkor's greatest king, Jayavarman VII (r 1181–1219), who came to power after the disastrous sacking of the previous Khmer capital by the Chams.

Behind its walls are some amazing and important monuments, including Bayon, Baphuon, the Terrace of Elephants and the Terrace of the Leper King.

### Bayon

Ever get the feeling someone's staring at you? There are 216 gargantuan faces of Avalokiteshvara watching over visitors in this memorable temple. Built around 1200 by Jayavarman VII in the exact centre of the city, some historians believe the unsettling faces with the icy smile bear more than a passing resemblance to the great king himself. What better way to keep an eye on your subjects? Almost as extraordinary are Bayon's 1200m of bas-reliefs, incorporating a staggering 11,000 figures. The most elaborate carvings on the outer wall of the 1st level depict vivid scenes of life in 12th-century Cambodia, including cockfighting and kick boxing.

It's best visited at sunrise or sunset as shadows and shafts of light make the faces stranger still. Little more than a pile of rocks from a distance, once within the walls, Bayon is one of Angkor's most stunning temples.

### Baphuon

Some have called this the 'world's largest jigsaw puzzle'. The temple was painstakingly taken apart piece by piece by a team of archaeologists before the civil war, but their meticulous records were destroyed during the madness of the Khmer Rouge. Now, after subsequent years of excruciating research, it's one of the most ambitious restoration projects at Angkor. Adding to the complexity of the jigsaw are 16th-century alterations, including a 70m-long reclining Buddha on the western wall.

Baphuon sits 200m northwest of Bayon and, like Angkor Wat, it's a pyramidal representation of Mt Meru. Construction

probably began under Suryavarman I and was later completed by Udayadityavarman II (r 1049–65). It marked the centre of the city that existed before the construction of Angkor Thom.

### Terrace of Elephants

Stairways boasting three-headed elephants and retaining walls laden with gargantuan bas-reliefs of elephants flank this monumental terrace's central stairway, which is held aloft by the outstretched arms of *garuda* (mythical half-man, half-bird creatures) and lion-headed figures.

The 300m-long terrace was originally topped with wooden pavilions decorated with golden-framed windows. It was used as a giant reviewing stand for public ceremonies and parades, and served as the king's grand audience hall. It's easy to imagine the overwhelming pomp and grandeur of the Khmer empire at its height in surroundings such as this.

### Terrace of the Leper King

The Terrace of the Leper King, just north of the Terrace of Elephants, is a carved 6m-high platform, on top of which stands a mysterious statue. Researchers now believe it's Yama, the god of death, and that this site served as a royal crematorium. Until recently, some scholars believed it was Yasovarman (r 889–910), a Khmer ruler who, legend says, died of leprosy.

The front retaining walls are decorated with seven tiers of meticulously executed carvings, including numerous seated *apsara* (dancing girl or celestial nymph). More spectacular still are the evil-looking figures found in the hidden trench behind the front retaining wall. They look as if they'd been carved yesterday, as they were covered over when the original terrace was enlarged centuries ago.

## AROUND ANGKOR THOM

### Phnom Bakheng

Built during the reign of Yasovarman, this is the first of several temples in Angkor designed to represent mythical Mt Meru. While Phnom Bakheng is still the definitive location from which to photograph the distant Angkor Wat in the glow of a late afternoon sun, it's a bit of a circus these days. It is more peaceful in the early morning, and is a possible option for sunrise. Quieter spots for sunset are the temples of **Phnom Krom**, overlooking Tonlé Sap, and **Pre Rup**.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Much of Thai culture has its links to the Cambodian artisans, dancers, scholars and fighters whom the Thais made off with after they sacked Angkor in 1432. Have a peek at the bas-reliefs at Bayon and you'll see something that looks much like the 'Thai' kick boxing of today. The history of Angkor remains a seriously sensitive topic between the two cultures, fuelling a centuries-old rivalry.

### Ta Keo

Built by Jayavarman V (r 968–1001), this massive pyramid rises more than 50m but, as it was never completed, it's missing the elaborate carvings seen at other temples. Inscriptions suggest it was struck by lightning during construction and abandoned. Others have suggested the death of the king or the extremely hard sandstone may explain its unfinished state. Those suffering from vertigo should stick to the eastern stairway.

### Ta Prohm

One of the most popular of Angkor's many wonders, Ta Prohm looks like it fell straight out of a film set from *Indiana Jones*; in fact, Ta Prohm was used as a set for shooting both *Tomb Raider* and *Two Brothers*. This 12th-century Mahayana Buddhist temple is one of the Angkorian era's largest edifices and has been left much as it looked when the first French explorers set eyes on it more than a century ago. While other major monuments of Angkor have been preserved with a massive programme to clear away the all-devouring jungle, this temple has been abandoned to riotous nature – and it is quite a riot in some places.

Inside, the temple is a maze of narrow corridors and crumbling stonework, areas of which are roped off as the chances of collapse are serious. There are plenty of incredible photo opportunities inside, as the tentacle-like roots of mature trees slowly strangle the stonework. According to inscriptions it took an incredible 80,000 people to maintain the building!

There is a poetic cycle to this venerable ruin, with humans first conquering nature to create, and nature once again conquering humans to destroy.

### Preah Khan

Preah Khan (Sacred Sword) once housed more than 1000 teachers and may have been a Buddhist university. It's one of Angkor's largest complexes, a maze of vaulted corridors, fine carvings and lichen-clad stonework. Its floor plan resembles that of Ta Prohm, but it is in a superior state of preservation. The temple is shaped in a cruciform. It's southern corridor is a wonderfully atmospheric jumble of vines and stones, while near the eastern entrance there is a curious two-storey structure that would look more at home in Greece than Cambodia. Preah Khan is a genuine fusion temple, the eastern entrance dedicated to Mahayana Buddhism, with equal sized doors, and the other cardinal directions dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, with successively smaller doors, emphasising the unequal nature of Hinduism.

### Preah Neak Pean

Like the ultimate ornamental pond at some Balinese resort, Preah Neak Pean comprises a central tower set in a square pool and four smaller pools laid out symmetrically around the centre, each with an interesting subterranean carved fountain. The temple was originally set in a massive *baray* (reservoir) called Jayatataka that fed Preah Khan.

### Ta Som

This tiny temple is easy to overlook with so many other temptations to choose from, but the eastern gate here has been absolutely overwhelmed by an ancient tree that has sent its intrusive roots on a destructive mission into every nook and cranny. Unlike Ta Prohm, you won't have to wait in line for a photograph.

## ROLUOS GROUP

Southeast of Angkor Wat, Roluos (then called Hariharalaya) served as the capital of Indravarman I (r 877–89). While the temples here can't compete with the major monuments, they are among the earliest large, stone temples built by the Khmer and mark the beginning of classical art; it's worth visiting them early on for a chronological insight into the evolution of Khmer architectural ingenuity.

**Bakong**, the grandest of Angkor's earlier temples, was also created by Indravarman. Dedicated to Shiva, the complex consists of a five-tiered sandstone central pyramid, flanked by eight towers of brick and sandstone.



**Preah Ko** is a direct link to the earlier brick structures of the pre-Angkorian Chenla period, with six brick *prasat* (towers) decorated with carved sandstone and plaster reliefs. It was erected by Indravarman I in the late 9th century.

## OTHER TEMPLES

The following temples are beyond the central area of Angkor, but both Banteay Srei and Kbal Spean can be combined together with Angkor if you toss a few dollars more your moto driver's way (US\$10 to US\$15 for the day). For a fistful of dollars (US\$15 for the day), it's possible to add Beng Mealea to the list. A standard Angkor pass is only good for entry into Banteay Srei and Kbal Spean.

### Banteay Srei

Banteay Srei is considered by many to be the jewel in Angkor's artistic crown. At first sight, some visitors are disappointed by its size, but once within its walls it's impossible not to be impressed by the elaborate carvings that adorn the doorways and walls. The carvings are roped off these days.

The site is located about 32km north of Siem Reap, and late afternoon or early morning (before the tour buses arrive) is a fine time to visit, as the sun's rays bring out the best in the pink sandstone.

### Kbal Spean

The River of a Thousand Lingas, Kbal Spean is home to the most intricate riverbed carv-

### DID YOU KNOW?

Banteay Srei means 'Citadel of the Women'; it is said that it must have been built by women because the elaborate carvings are too fine for the hand of a man.

ings in the Angkor area and was only 'rediscovered' in 1969. Sadly, its remote location has led to some looting in recent years. Beneath the carvings there is a small waterfall, which is best visited from June to December as the river dries up during the dry season. The site is about 15km north of Banteay Srei and a 30-minute scenic jungle trek from the parking area.

### Beng Mealea

The *Titanic* of temples, **Beng Mealea** (admission US\$5) is a huge, truly abandoned temple, sunk in the jungle, that makes Ta Prohm look like they just forgot to mow the lawn. Built by Suryavarman II, the man who gave the world Angkor Wat, Beng Mealea has a layout that is remarkably similar to that of its more famous sibling, although this is hard to imagine given the mess it is today. Much of the jungle has been cleared in recent years, but the site still has a magical atmosphere. It's about 70km northeast of Siem Reap on surfaced roads and it can take as little as one hour to get here.

As well the US\$5 admission charge there are additional charges for cars and motorbikes – agree on who is paying these in advance.

### Phnom Kulen

One of the most sacred places in Cambodia, this famous **mountain** (admission US\$20) was the birthplace of the Khmer empire; Jayavarman II proclaimed independence from Java here in 802. At the mountain's summit (487m) is an ancient reclining Buddha, carved into a massive boulder, and an active monastery, though visitors usually prefer the large waterfall and the impressive carvings found on the riverbed nearby.

It costs a whopping US\$20 on top of the US\$15 you'll have to fork out for the moto here – quite frankly, it's not worth it compared with Angkor. Head instead to Kbal Spean which is included in the Angkor pass. Still interested? It's about 60km from Siem Reap and getting here takes about three hours.

## NORTHWESTERN CAMBODIA

Nowhere else in Cambodia, perhaps even in Southeast Asia, is there a region with such an intoxicating mix of history and adventure. Battle Preah Vihear province's jungle paths to sit alone atop immense temple complexes, cruise the kingdom's most scenic water route to Battambang, an elegant French colonial town, or wade into the region's recent and painful past as the home of the Khmer Rouge.

### POIPEET

☎ 054 / pop 45,000

Viva Poipet! Long the cesspool of Cambodia, Poipet is reinventing itself as the Las Vegas of Cambodia, home to more than half-a-dozen major casino resorts. It's the first place in the kingdom many visitors encounter, thanks to the nearby Thailand border crossing at Aranya Prathet. Scams abound in this Wild West town, so don't stick around.

**Canadia Bank** (☎ 967107; NH5) is not far from the border post and will change travellers cheques.

If you are unlucky enough to get stuck here, **Ngy Heng Hotel** (☎ 967101; NH5; r US\$5-10; 🏠) is a reliable option that isn't fully occupied by casino employees. The clean rooms include hot water and satellite TV.

There are many transport scams, so negotiate hard. The local authorities insist foreigners use tourist transport, which effectively means inflated prices. A free shuttle takes you to the 'Tourist Lounge', which is the bus terminal for Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Battambang. Share taxis are fixed at a cheeky US\$50 to Siem Reap, but greedy touts sometimes demand US\$60 or more; official buses to Siem Reap are about US\$10. The best strategy is to ignore all offers of help and consider going as far as Sisophon first before arranging the onward journey to Siem Reap or Battambang. To dodge the dodgy types, check out Cambodia Overland on **Tales of Asia** ([www.talesofasia.com](http://www.talesofasia.com)) for all the nitty-gritty.

The roads east from Poipet will shock those arriving from Thailand. Times stated are for the dry season – it can take much, much longer in the wet season. A pick-up is a slower, slightly cheaper and much dirtier option.

### SISOPHON

☎ 054 / pop 111,700

Most people who've been here never even know it – for them, Sisophon (known as Svay, or 'Mango' to locals) is just a dusty stop between Poipet and Siem Reap. However, for those in the know, it's the perfect base for a day trip to the huge temple complex of Banteay Chhmar. It's also the jumping-off point for those heading to Phnom Penh by road via the French colonial town of Battambang.

Cheap guesthouses line the road to Siem Reap. The best of the bunch is **Sara Torn Guesthouse** (NH6 east; s/tw with shared bathroom 100/150B), which has an inviting veranda. Rooms are spacious, but very, very basic.

**Neak Meas Hotel** (☎ 012 555349; r US\$12-20; 🏠) is the largest hotel in town – and it's still expanding. Consider bringing earplugs as the karaoke bar and nightclub kick in every night. A great all-rounder, but the restaurant is not so hot.

For cheap eats, head to the friendly food stalls lining the taxi park. One of the better eateries in town is **Phkay Proek Restaurant** (NH5; mains US\$1.50-4; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner), next door to the Phnom Svay Hotel. Thai dishes feature heavily, plus plenty of Cambodia's most wanted.

After some negotiating, a share taxi seat should cost 60B to Battambang (one hour) and about 150B to Siem Reap (two to three hours). For more comfort, pay double and have the front seat to yourself. Locals pay about 60B for transport to Poipet (one hour).

### BANTEAY CHHMAR

Vast and remote, the vestiges of **Banteay Chhmar** (admission US\$5; 🕒 6am-6pm) linger in the jungle and are a playground for the adventurous. Wander around rubble strewn with carvings and climb into the shadows of dark corridors.

### GETTING TO THAILAND

When leaving Cambodia walk across the border at Poipet and take a tük-tük (80B) or motorcycle taxi (60B) to Aranya Prathet, from where there are two daily trains (70B, six hours) and regular air-con buses (1st/2nd class 220/180B, four hours, hourly) to Bangkok. The border is open from 7am to 8pm.

See p709 for information on doing the trip in reverse.

### READING UP

The definitive guidebook to Angkor was long *A Guide to the Angkor Monuments* by Maurice Glaize, first published in the 1940s. It's hard to find, but you can download it free at [www.theangkorguide.com](http://www.theangkorguide.com). Among the modern titles, *Angkor: An Introduction to the Temples* by Dawn Rooney is the most popular. Complete with illustrations and photographs, it's a useful companion around Angkor. Another popular title is *Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire* by Bruno Dagens, with the emphasis more on the discovery and restoration of Angkor; it's lavishly illustrated and dripping with interesting asides.

What's left of the massive structure houses some brilliant bas-reliefs, including the famous 32-armed Avalokiteshvaras adorning the rear outer gallery. Sadly, only two remain, as six were smuggled into Thailand after a brazen act of looting in 1998. The front outer gallery houses a sublime series of bas-reliefs depicting sea battles between the Khmer and Cham empires.

Set among rice fields, **Banteay Top** (Fortress of the Army) is almost 14km southeast of Banteay Chhmar. Although it's only a little 'un, there's something special about its atmosphere. One damaged tower appears partially rebuilt and looks decidedly precarious, a bony finger pointing skyward.

NH69 from Sisophon to Banteay Chhmar (two to three hours) ranges from tolerable to bad depending on the season. Arrange a return moto trip in Sisophon (US\$10 or so) or take a pick-up to Thmar Puok (outside/inside 4000/6000r) and arrange a moto from there (US\$5).

## BATTAMBANG

☎ 053 / pop 158,100

Battambang is an elegant riverside town, home to the best-preserved French-period architecture in the country. The stunning boat trip from Siem Reap lures travellers here, but it's the remarkably chilled atmosphere that keeps them lingering; you'd never guess it's the kingdom's second-largest city. Battambang is also the ideal base for exploring nearby temples and villages that offer a real slice of rural Cambodia.

## Orientation

Battambang is fairly compact and easily negotiable on foot. Most of the restaurants, shops and hotels are on the west bank of the Stung Sangker, within a few blocks of Psar Nat (Meeting Market), which marks the town centre.

## Information

Numerous Interphone shops south of Psar Nat on the riverfront offer cheapish international phone calls. There are lots of internet places along the riverfront and around the market.

**Battambang Referral Hospital** Limited services and little English is spoken; it's opposite the boat dock.

**Canadia Bank** (☎ 952267) Offers free Visa and MasterCard cash advances and can change most major currencies

or travellers cheques. Also has an international ATM. It's opposite Psar Nat.

**Main post office** (Ph 1) Not worth the risk – wait until Phnom Penh or Siem Reap.

**Tourist office** Eagerly dishes out info on local sights, though there's little in the way of hand-outs. It's near the governor's residence.

**Union Commercial Bank** (Ph 1) Offers free Visa cash advances.

## Sights

Although it's the pace, not the sights, that seems to keep people here, there are a few things to brighten up the day. Lazing on the riverbank, in true French fashion, are a series of charming **French shophouses**. Slightly south, the **Battambang Museum** (Ph 1; admission US\$1; ☎ 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) houses an attractive but limited collection of fine-carved lintels.

**Phare Ponleu Selpak** (☎ 952424; www.phareps.org) stages lively circus shows and dances at its arts centre for disadvantaged children. Give it a call or look out for its posters for schedules. It's located outside town.

Battambang's surrounding countryside is laced with contrasting histories: ancient and recent, brilliant and bloody. An excursion can't be recommended enough.

## Courses

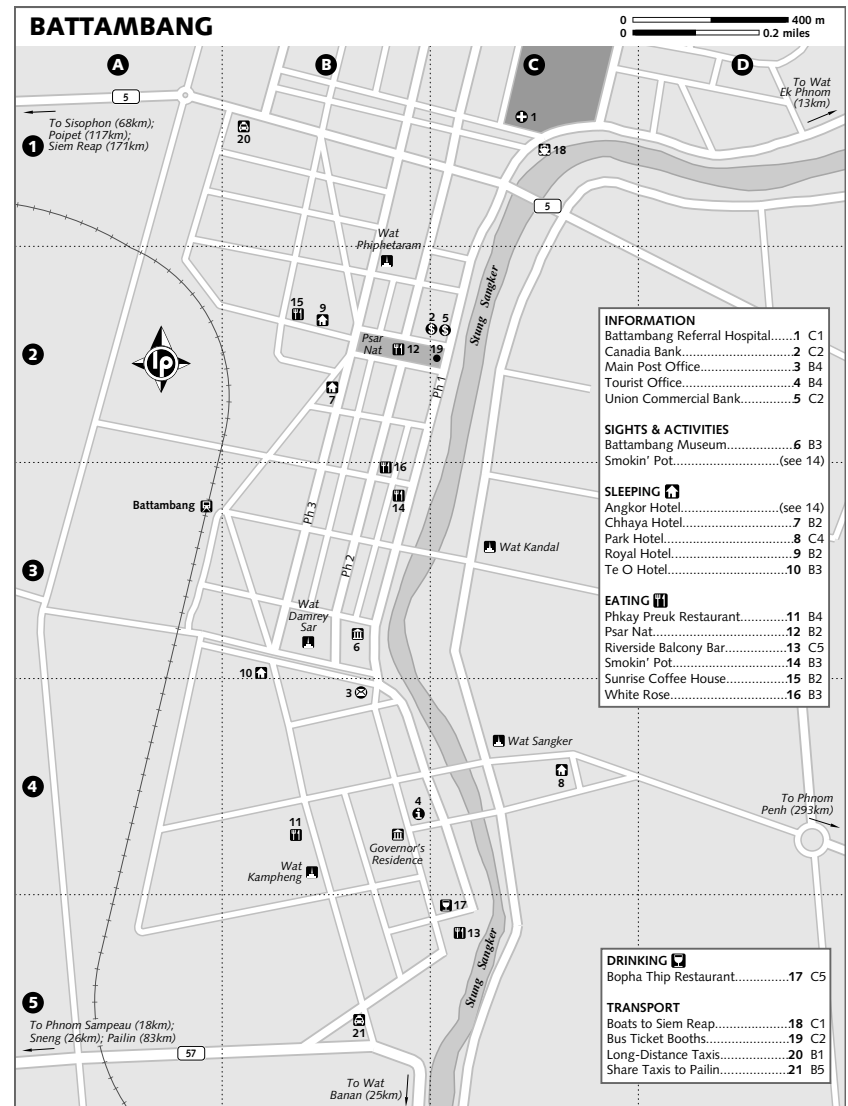
Take a lesson at **Smokin' Pot** (☎ 012 821400). First you'll be taught the finer points of purchasing at the open market before delving into the art of Khmer and Thai...*cooking!* What were you thinking? Lesson, lunch and a morning of fun for just US\$7.

## Sleeping

**Chhaya Hotel** (☎ 952170; chhaya.best@yahoo.com; 118 Ph 3; r US\$4-12; 🏠) The popular Chhaya has a huge number of clean and comfortable rooms. Free shuttles to the boat dock and switched-on local guides ensure it remains a traveller favourite.

**Park Hotel** (☎ 953773; r with shared bathroom US\$3, r with private bathroom US\$5-12; 🏠) The location is not the best in town, but the rooms are seriously good value. Rooms with bathroom include satellite TV and other little touches.

**Royal Hotel** (☎ 016 912034; royalsiahotelbb@yahoo.com; r US\$4-20; 🏠) Rooms come in every shape and size here; opt for just using the fan in one of the air-con rooms for a real deal. Check out the rooftop restaurant for views over Battambang.



**Te O Hotel** (☎ 952288; Ph 3; s/d US\$11/13) One of the oldest hotels in town, this is still a favourite with the NGO crowd. The rooms are clean and well furnished, and include satellite TV and fridge.

**Angkor Hotel** (☎ 952310, Ph 1; r US\$11-13; 🏠) It boasts a great location on the riverfront, but is an ugly duckling compared to the fine old buildings nearby. All rooms are the same, with

TV and fridge, but hot water is extra. Ask for a river view.

## Eating & Drinking

Battambang has a good blend of restaurants with the option of Khmer classics or some international enticements. For truly cheap Khmer treats like *bobor* and *nam ben choc*

**READING UP**

Look out for old Cambodia hand Ray Zepp's *Around Battambang* (US\$5), packed with juicy information on local wats (Buddhist temple-monasteries) and the Angkorian temples near Battambang. The cause is worthwhile as proceeds go to the monks' HIV project, helping combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.

(rice noodles with fish or curry) visit **Psar Nat** (☎ 6.30am-5.30pm), although watch out for the 'unusable bits' soup.

**Smokin' Pot** (☎ 012 821400; mains US\$1.50-3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A lively spot for Khmer and Thai food, this place has top tunes and friendly staff. *The place for a cooking class* (p98).

**Phkay Preuk Restaurant** (Ph 3; mains 2000-12,000r; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Part of a family chain in northwest Cambodia, this garden restaurant has spicy Thai curries, authentic Asian flavours and Walls ice cream.

**White Rose** (Ph 2; mains 2500-6000r; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) We've been enjoying fine fruit shakes here for more than a decade now. Thick and tasty, they cost just 2000r. The menu includes some tasty Asian dishes, including tangy fresh peppercorn dishes. There is also ice cream to round things off.

**Sunrise Coffee House** (☎ 953426; mains US\$1-3; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) The place to head if you are all riced out, Sunrise has a superb range of sweet and savoury snacks. The menu has plenty of creative coffee kicks and the tastiest homemade cakes this side of Siem Reap.

**Riverside Balcony Bar** (Ph 1; mains US\$2.50-4; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Set in a grand wooden house overlooking the Stung Sangker, Riverside Balcony Bar serves Western favourites such as burgers and pasta. It's also the best bar in town.

There is a veritable army of beer girls guarding the door at Bopha Thip Restaurant, as well as live music most nights. Swill an expensive beer and try out your *rom vong* (Cambodia circle dancing) moves with the locals.

**Getting There & Away****BOAT**

For the inside story on the speedboats to Siem Reap (US\$15, three to eight hours), see p89. The dock is in the north of town, not far from the hospital.

**BUS**

The 293km-long road to Phnom Penh is now the Cambodian equivalent of a motorway, which has reduced travel times to a mere five hours. **Capitol Tour** (☎ 953040), **GST** (☎ 012 727774), **Hour Lean** (☎ 012 307252) and **Neak Krorhorm** (☎ 012 627299) all have various services to the capital, which depart between 6.30am and 2pm (US\$4 to US\$5). From Battambang, buses leave from the transport station near Psar Boeng Chhoeuk; the bus companies all have ticket booths at the east end of Psar Nat. Capitol Tour and GST also offer bus services to Poipet (US\$3, two hours) and Bangkok (US\$10, 10 hours), while Neak Krohorm services Siem Reap (US\$4, four hours).

**SHARE TAXI**

There are share taxis to both Sisophon (60B, one hour) and Pailin (200B, two to four hours). Long-distance taxis leave from NH5, in the town's north, while taxis to Pailin leave from NH57, in the town's south.

**TRAIN**

There are no longer passenger services on the 274km of track between Battambang and Phnom Penh.

**Getting Around**

Most of Battambang is compact enough to comfortably explore on foot. Moto rides are usually 1000r, more at night or if venturing across the river.

**AROUND BATTAMANG**

Most destinations following can be combined into an interesting day trip on the back of a moto (US\$8 to US\$10). Individually, a return moto trip to each sight is about US\$4. Particularly helpful English-speaking moto drivers can be found in front of the **Chhaya Hotel** (Map p99; 118 Ph 3) in Battambang.

A US\$2 ticket covers admission to Wat Ek Phnom, Phnom Sampeau and Wat Banan. It can be bought at any of the three sights, all of which are open during daylight hours.

**WARNING**

Pailin is one of the most heavily mined areas in Cambodia so be doubly careful to avoid straying from the path.

**GETTING TO THAILAND**

Leaving Cambodia, take a share taxi (100B, one hour) or moto (100B) from Pailin to the border at Psar Pruham. From Ban Pakard on the Thai side of the border, there are regular minibuses to Chanthaburi (100B, 1½ hours). From there you'll have no problem hopping on a bus to Bangkok. The border crossing is open from 7am to 5pm.

See p765 for information on doing the trip in the reverse direction.

**Wat Ek Phnom**

The Angkorian-era temple of Ek Phnom is not in the league of Angkor Wat, but it is a beautiful ride out here. The shady road hugs the river, passing old wooden houses and snippets of real life before arriving at the temple, 13km north of Battambang. Try to visit in the early morning or late afternoon light.

**Phnom Sampeau**

Phnom Sampeau is a striking hill, 18km from town. With its limestone cavities and memories of genocide, it is a sad juxtaposition of beauty and brutality. The eerie caves were used as slaughter chambers by the Khmer Rouge and still contain the skeletal remains of its victims. Climb further and you'll see two massive guns used by the Vietnamese during the war. Finally, at the summit there's a stunning view over the countryside and a small wat with a golden **stupa**. A massive 38m-high and 112.5m-long Buddha montage is being hewn into the outcrop's base. Local children make excellent guides for a couple of thousand riel.

**Wat Banan**

Locals claim Wat Banan was the inspiration for Angkor Wat, but its teeny-tiny five towers suggest they're hopelessly optimistic. Still, it's in impressive shape for its age, and its hillside location makes it the most striking and peaceful temple in the area. There are 359 stairs to climb but good views lie in wait. The temple is 25km south of Battambang.

On the way back to town ask the driver to test drive Battambang's infamous **bamboo train**. Basically it's a little platform on wheels, powered by a portable motor, but it sure flies – great fun until you meet something coming the other way!

**PAILIN**

☎ 053 / pop 17,800

Pailin has an attractive location amid the foothills of Chhuor Phnom Kravanh (Cardamom Mountains), but the town itself lacks major attractions unless you know a bit about gemstones. Pailin has long been a haven for retired Khmer Rouge leaders, so it will be interesting to see the local reaction here if or when the trial moves forwards. Not that many foreigners make it here, although some have unwittingly passed through on the bus from Bangkok to Siem Reap (see p89).

There are some really rough-and-ready guesthouses here, but **Guesthouse Ponleu Pich Pailin** (r100B) is just about bearable with its basic rooms. It's opposite Psar Pailin.

**Hang Meas Pailin Hotel** (☎ 012 787546; NH57; r US\$11-50; ☎) is the leading hotel in town, with smart rooms that include satellite TV, fridge and hot shower. There's a decent restaurant here with regular live music.

Share taxis to Battambang (200B, two to four hours) regularly ply the bumpy but bearable road.

**ANLONG VENG**

☎ 065

The dusty and isolated town of Anlong Veng was long the stronghold of the Khmer Rouge, and many ex-revolutionaries still live here. Anlong Veng finally succumbed to government forces in 1998 and the government has since encouraged both development and an influx of moderate migrants from other parts of the kingdom.

Attractions include military commander **Ta Mok's House** (admission US\$2; ☎ 7am-5pm), **Pol Pot's**

**GETTING TO THAILAND**

The Choam-Choam Srawngam border crossing with Thailand is just a few kilometres north of Anlong Veng. Catch a moto (US\$2) and hop off en route to see the decapitated statue of Khmer Rouge soldiers carved into a boulder. On the other side, transport is not so frequent. Catch a taxi to Si Saket, the closest town. For details about getting from the major Cambodian cities to Choam see p102.

See p755 for information on doing the trip in the reverse direction.



cremation site and other remarkably dull places catapulted to 'mildly interesting' by their connection with mass murderers. More interesting are the majestic views from the **Chuor Phnom Dangrek** looming over town. Anlong Veng is also the western gateway to Prasat Preah Vihear.

For accommodation, **Bot Uddom Guest House** (☎ 012 779495; r US\$5-15; 🏠) overlooks a pretty lake. Rooms are very clean and there are some comfortable common areas.

Anlong Veng is 142km north of Siem Reap. Share taxis (20,000r, three to five hours) and pick-ups (15,000/8000r inside/outside) regularly ride the roller-coaster dust express (NH67) to Siem Reap. It costs about US\$2 for a seat to the border at Choam.

## PREAH VIHEAR PROVINCE

Home to hard-core journeys and rich rewards, this is the province for adventure addicts and those who long for personal encounters with forgotten Khmer temples in the forests of Cambodia. Preah Vihear is one of the poorest provinces in the country and the infrastructure is the kingdom's worst, but while sandy ox cart trails and tortuous roads ensure long, painful, dirty journeys, they also guarantee solitude at the temples.

As roads slowly get better, the number of visitors will increase, so say a prayer for your backside now and hit the road. The most gratifying trip is one that links Siem Reap and Kompong Thom (the best jumping-off points) via Koh Ker, Preah Khan and Prasat Preah Vihear temple complexes. Throw in some ancient Angkor bridges such as Spean Ta Ong, and you have a mission worthy of Indiana Jones.

Thanks to seas of sand that swallow Suzukis, it's a challenge for highly experienced motorbike riders, so it's definitely not for gung-ho beginners. Find a good moto driver (about US\$15 per day plus petrol) or get a

group together and rent a sturdy 4WD with a driver. Carry a hammock and mosquito net, and don't even think about it during the wet season.

## Tbeng Meanchey

☎ 064 / pop 24,400

The only thing going for this small and non-descript town is its proximity to the glorious temple of Prasat Preah Vihear, 115km to the north. Locals refer to the town as Preah Vihear, a fact that confounds many a foreigner.

There are cheap cells at **27 May Guesthouse** (r 5000-15,000r), but what do you expect for US\$1.25? It can get noisy here, as it's near the market and taxi park.

The best all-rounder in town is the **Prum Tep Guesthouse** (☎ 012 964645; r US\$5-10; 🏠), which has spacious, comfortable rooms with satellite TV. Bathrooms include Western-style toilets and it's the only place with air-con, if it's working.

The **Mlop Dong Restaurant** (4000-8000r; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is a lively local restaurant that does a roaring local trade from breakfast through to close. By night, it's the closest thing to a bar in town. It's opposite the taxi park.

Share taxis (20,000r) travel the 155km along sometimes good, often bad, NH64 to Kompong Thom daily.

## Prasat Preah Vihear

Occupying the most breathtaking location of all Angkorian temples, **Prasat Preah Vihear** (admission US\$5) is perched atop a mountain escarpment on the border with Thailand, with enormous views across the plains of northern Cambodia, 550m below. It was built during the reign of Suryavarman I (c 1002-49) and embellished by successive monarchs, resulting in an impressive series of sanctuaries rising to the cliff's summit. The upper level is the best preserved and hosts some exquisitely carved lintels.

You'll see some incredibly clean tourists from Thailand, thanks to a major motorway that Thailand built to the temple's front door – try not to drool or cry when you see it. Just remember, your filth is your passport and you can smile knowing that you've undertaken a modern-day pilgrimage that's easily the equal of any undertaken at the height of the Khmer empire. The temple only became accessible in recent years after the Khmer Rouge, who

gained control in the early 1990s, finally surrendered in 1998.

Sleep at the rudimentary **Raksaleap Guest House** (092 224838; r US\$5), located below the escarpment in Kor Muy Village, or better still, hitch a hammock on the cliff by the temple.

A long day trip here from Anlong Veng by moto (US\$15) is feasible; the 103km trip takes about three hours each way on decent dirt roads. Sporadic pick-ups leave Anlong Veng for nearby Sa Em (10,000r, two hours), from where motos can get you to the escarpment's base (US\$3, 40 minutes). The road to Tbeng Meanchey is a nightmare after the rainy season, but usually gets graded some time during the dry season. The 115km journey can take anything from two to five hours. Pick-ups and share taxis leave from the taxi station at around 9am daily (outside/inside US\$2.50/5, entire front cabin US\$10) or hire a moto (US\$15 per day plus petrol).

The road up the escarpment is stupidly steep, with 35-degree slopes in areas, meaning you'll either have to hike up in the heat for 1½ hours or hire a moto (US\$5 return).

## Preah Khan

Covering almost 5 sq km, Preah Khan is the largest temple enclosure constructed during the Angkorian period – quite a feat when you consider the competition. Thanks to its back-of-beyond location, it's astonishingly quiet and peaceful. **Prasat Preah Stung** is perhaps the most memorable of the many temples here, with four enigmatic Bayon-style faces. The dramatic *garudas* and delicate elephant carvings clinging to the crumbling remains of **Prasat Damrei**, a few kilometres east, are also worth a peek. Although looters and time have taken their toll at Preah Khan, there's enough rising from the sea of rubble to imagine the complex's former splendour.

The best bet is to stay with one of the friendly families in 'downtown' **Ta Seng**, the village 4km away. Expect to pay about 10,000r per person with a basic meal. It's also possible to sling a hammock in the temple, but there is no food or drink available (although there are lots of mosses for company).

Preah Khan is a gruelling five-hour trip from Kompong Thom or Tbeng Meanchey. An amazing, exhaustive and rewarding alternative is to approach along the ancient Angkor highway from Beng Mealea, which is 70km northeast of Siem Reap (the trip takes

about six hours). You'll cross several splendid Angkor bridges, like the remarkable 77m-long **Spean Ta Ong**, just west of Khvau. Even if you have your own bike, it's still best to hire a knowledgeable moto driver (US\$15 per day plus petrol) to help navigate the countless jungle trails on these three routes.

## Koh Ker

Home to almost 30 ancient structures, including **Prasat Thom**, an immense seven-tier pyramid, **Koh Ker** (admission US\$10; 🕒 6am-6pm) was briefly the capital of the Khmer empire under king Jayavarman IV (r 928-42). Walking past the shattered lion guarding **Prasat Krahom** (Red Temple), you'll soon see the Mayan-like pyramid climbing skyward. The views and breeze at its summit are well worth the steep 40m climb. Much of the jungle that once cloaked Prasat Krahom has recently been cleared, killing some of the romance but opening up the scale of the complex.

For richer or poorer – richer in the case of the Cambodian businessmen, poorer in the case of the average backpacker – Koh Ker represents the future of Preah Vihear's remote temple complexes, with a new toll road, admission charges and an increasing number of visitors. That said, most tourists still don't make it this far and the future crowds have yet to materialise. Get here now.

To overnight here, sling a hammock near the temples, stay with friendly villagers in Koh Ker (prices are negotiable, but 10,000r is probably fair, plus extra if food is available), or make for the **Kohké Guesthouse** (s US\$3) in the village of Siyong, 9km southeast.

Koh Ker is now only two to three hours from Siem Reap via Beng Mealea. The 292km return trip should be about US\$15 to US\$20 by moto, or about US\$65 by car. It's just two hours from Tbeng Meanchey, and a moto is about US\$10 to US\$15 for the day.

## KOMPONG THOM

☎ 062 / pop 74,600

Kompong Thom is a perfect springboard for adventure seekers wishing to see the pre-Angkorian temples of Sambor Prei Kuk or the remarkable remote temples of Preah Vihear province. Surrounding this otherwise dull and dusty town are endless rice paddies, dirt tracks and glimpses into Cambodia's traditional rural life, something those sticking to the capital and Angkor miss.

### WARNING

Preah Vihear province is one of Cambodia's most heavily mined provinces and most were laid in the past decade. Do not, under any circumstances, stray from well-trodden paths anywhere in the province, including remote temple sites. Those with their own transport should only travel on roads or trails that locals use regularly.



Forget both the unreliable main post office, near the port, and the branch near the market when it comes to postal services.

For cheap international phone calls, use an internet café, or for local calls use one of the private mobile phone booths on the street. Internet access is now possible all over town for about 4000r per hour.

**Canadia Bank** (☎ 933490; Ph Ekareach) Deals with most currencies, changes travellers cheques, has a credit-card-compatible ATM and offers free credit-card cash advances.

**Casablanca** A healthy selection of books for those seeking a literary escape; it's near the Golden Lions Roundabout.

**Hospital** (☎ 933426) Near the Golden Lions Roundabout, but it's basic. Head to Phnom Penh if it's serious.

**Tourist office** (Ph Sopheap Mongkul; ☎ 9am-6pm)

One of the best in the country. Lots of hand-outs, excellent English, and the staff actually show up to work.

**Union Commercial Bank** (☎ 933833; Ph Ekareach) Offers free credit-card cash advances.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Theft is common, so don't leave valuables on the beach unattended or motorbikes without a hefty padlock. Night robberies have occurred near the port and on the poorly lit areas of Ph Ekareach, so stick together or hook up with a reliable moto driver when heading out on the town alone. Lone women should exercise caution when walking on the beaches after dark, as there's been a high-profile case of rape.

## Sights & Activities

### BEACHES

With its north end housing the backpacker haven of **Serendipity Beach**, the most popular stretch of sand is undoubtedly **Ochheuteal Beach**. It's a pretty spot, but it's not always peaceful. Crowds dwindle if you stroll southwards, and if you cross the small headland at its southern end you'll be rewarded with **Otres Beach**, a seemingly infinite stretch of white sand. Businesses are staking out the sand, but it's still quiet most days.

**Victory Beach** is close to the main backpacker ghetto, but it's fairly scruffy and looks onto the port. **Independence Beach** is a nice stretch of sand and quieter than most, while beautiful **Sokha Beach** has been virtually privatised and only a small sliver is open to the public.

See p109 for islands near Sihanoukville.

### DIVING

The waters around Sihanoukville have less dramatic action than Indonesia or Thailand.

However, venture further to the island of Koh Tang on an overnight trip and you'll get slightly more bang for your buck. There are several reputable dive operators in Sihanoukville:

**Chez Claude** (☎ 012 824870) The longest-running operator in town; owner Claude knows the local waters as well as anyone.

**EcoSea Dive** (☎ 012 654104; www.ecosea.com) Offers diving or snorkelling trips and PADI courses.

**Scuba Nation** (☎ 012 604680; www.divecambodia.com) The first PADI-approved dive centre in Cambodia. French, German and Dutch are spoken.

### SAILING

With so much water around, sailing was bound to feature. **Otres Nautica** (☎ 092 230065; otres.nautica@yahoo.com) is a sailing club that operates out of Otres Beach. It has Hobie Wave catamarans, kayaks and sailing boats.

### REAM NATIONAL PARK

For adventurous and educational guided boat trips through mangrove swamps to deserted beaches, head to **Ream National Park** (☎ 012 889620). Many guesthouses arrange various trips through the park (about US\$15) and the chances of spotting dolphins or monkeys are pretty good. The park is only 13km from Sihanoukville.

### MASSAGE

Try a massage at **Seeing Hands Massage 3** (Ph Ekareach; per hr US\$3; ☎ 7am-9pm), another outpost of the excellent massage-by-the-blind initiative pioneered in Phnom Penh.

Alternatively, head to **Sala Santepheap** (☎ 012 952011; massage by donation), which is run by the Starfish Project, a local goodwill project helping the Sihanoukville community.

### Sleeping

There are three popular areas for budget accommodation in Sihanoukville: the long-running area centred on Weather Station Hill above Victory Beach, the town centre and the lively Serendipity Beach. Land rights for Serendipity are a sensitive issue, so things may change in this part of town. Given we're all here for the beach, the town centre is not the most exotic place to stay.

### WEATHER STATION HILL

**Mealy Chenda Guesthouse** (☎ 933472; r US\$3-17; ☎) Once upon a time there was just one guesthouse here, and Mealy Chenda was it. More

a hotel these days, it still has a friendly family vibe thanks to the caring owners. Cheap rooms are under the restaurant-bar, while the top-dollar rooms include a sunset view. Wholesome food.

**Bungalow Village** (☎ 933875; bungalows US\$4-10) Exactly what it sounds like, this is a hamlet of bungalows spread across the hillside. It's nearer the beach than most, and the garden gives this place more charm than many cheapies.

**Sakal Bungalows** (☎ 012 806155; r US\$5-13; ☎) The atmospheric bungalows blend into the lush garden at this likeable little place, plus there is a shiny new wing with air-con. A very chilled-out spot with a busy bar.

**Blue Frog Guesthouse** (☎ 012 838004; www.bluefroghotel.com; r US\$8-12; ☎) This wooden house is more sophisticated than it looks, with all the rooms crammed with goodies such as TV, fridge and, wait for it, DVD player.

Other good options among many:

**Green Gecko Guest House** (☎ 012 560944; r US\$2-12; ☎) A friendly hotel with caring customer service; the rooms are clean and well maintained.

**Da Da Guesthouse** (☎ 012 879527; r US\$5-10; ☎) One of the longer-running places on the hill; the friendly family offers a good selection of rooms.

### SERENDIPITY BEACH

**Mohachai Guesthouse** (☎ 933586; r US\$5-15) Located just a short stroll up the hill from the beach, there are nearly 40 rooms here. Tiled floors and attached bathrooms are about as flash as it gets, but good travel tips are available.

**Serendipity Beach Bungalows** (☎ 016 513599; r US\$5-30) Snuggling into the hillside with fantastic views, the bungalows here are like honeymoon hideaways. Each bungalow has a sea-view terrace.

**Serenity** (☎ 011 696009; edenserendipity@yahoo.com; r US\$6-30) A hideaway at the end of Serendipity, Serenity has adopted its name wholeheartedly and is a sanctuary of calm and tranquillity. The upmarket bungalows are seriously sweet and the views are superb. The cheapies include private bathrooms and a slice of the beachfront action.

**Monkey Republic Bungalows** (☎ 012 490290; monkeyrepubliccambodia@yahoo.co.uk; r US\$7) The epitome of what all seaside accommodation should be: cool, friendly, laid-back, and with plenty of banana trees. Bungalows are simple, but the lofty chill-out zone with swinging hammocks is a smooth touch.

**Reef Resort** (☎ 012 315338; reefresort-cambodia@nmi.com; r US\$30; ☎) A short stroll from the beach, this new resort has smart rooms complete with TV, fridge and well-appointed bathrooms. There is also an inviting pool and a popular bar-restaurant.

Other worthy spots:

**Diamond Guest House** (☎ 016 948929; r US\$7-10; ☎) Tucked behind Serendipity Beach, this family-run guesthouse is quiet, safe and very relaxed.

**Cloud 9** (☎ 012 479365; bungalows US\$12-17) An attractive little resort with bungalows draped down the hillside to the sea. Includes a bar near the water.

### TOWN CENTRE

**Holy Cow** (☎ 012 478510; Ekareach St; r US\$3-8) Holy cow indeed – this is a cool place for the downtown area. Set back from the main strip, the wooden house has cosy rooms, and doubles as a popular restaurant-bar.

**Small Hotel** (☎ 012 716385; r US\$7-15) Popular with expats escaping for the weekend, this small hotel has a big personality thanks to the Swedish owners. Spotless rooms, Swedish food and slick service.

### Eating

There are plenty of places to eat all over Sihanoukville, many with a lively mix of Khmer and Western dishes. Most of the aforementioned guesthouses and hotels have restaurants, including Mealy Chenda (opposite), which draws a mixed crowd of backpackers and locals. Unless stated otherwise, all restaurants listed here are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

### WEATHER STATION HILL

**Khmer Gourmet** (☎ 012 1799450; snacks 2000-4000r) No, it's not an upmarket Khmer restaurant; instead, it's the home of fresh pies, cakes and sweet treats. The *pièce de résistance* is the coffee machine, complete with authentic sound effects.

**Romduol's Restaurant** (mains 3000-8000r) Don't be fooled by the simple setting, as the menu is a whole lot more sophisticated and meals are a real deal.

**Melting Pot** (☎ 012 913714; mains 4000-16,000r) The eclectic menu here includes fresh *pain au chocolat* for breakfast, and French, Indian and even South American food for lunch and dinner. Indian specials include *dhal amritsari* (lentils with fruit) and *murg makhani* (succulent chicken in rich butter gravy).



**Mama Cambodia** (☎ 012 221468; mains US\$2-3) 'Mama' is a Khmer lady with a serious flair for cooking. Unlike the bizarre beauty queens laminated into her menus, her traditional Khmer meals are authentic and tasty.

**Snake House** (☎ 012 673805; mains US\$2-5) If you have a phobia about snakes, avoid this place. Serpents slither around glass-topped tables while you eat, plus there's a python to your left, a cobra to your right. Memorable indeed.

**La Paillote** (☎ 012 633247; mains US\$5-14; ☺ lunch & dinner) This fine-dining restaurant is a little out of place in the backpacker haven of Sihanoukville, but is set in a delightful garden courtyard. Treat yourself to a selection of international dishes, most with a French accent.

## SERENDIPITY BEACH

**Mick & Craig's Sanctuary** (☎ 012 727740; mains US\$2-7) Come hungry, as this long-running restaurant specialises in hearty portions of home-cooked food. The menu includes vegetarian options, as well as a serious selection of proper pub grub and popular Khmer dishes. It's open late as it's also a bar.

**Chez Claude** (☎ 012 824870; mains US\$3-12) One of the best restaurants on the south coast, Chez Claude is perched on a hill above Independence and Sokha Beaches. The menu includes Franco-Khmer fish dishes, as well as clams, scallops or whatever else the fisherfolk bring in. Drop by for a sunset beer to experience the immense views.

The sublime stretch of sand that links Serendipity to Ochheuteal is now home to dozens of beach shacks turning out freshly barbecued seafood. It's hard to recommend one above the other, as they all have comfy satellite chairs, low tables with candles, enthusiastic sellers, and meals priced from US\$2 to US\$4. Wander up and down and take your pick.

## TOWN CENTRE

**Starfish Bakery** (☎ 012 952011; meals US\$1-3; ☺ breakfast & lunch) The place to come for choice cakes, super shakes and light bites, this leafy garden café is tucked down a little side street off Ph 7 Makara. It's for a good cause, as the Starfish Project supports local disadvantaged Cambodians.

**Café Q & A** (☎ 012 342720; 95 Ph Ekareach; mains US\$2-3) This is a library, secondhand bookstore

and restaurant rolled into one. Tuck into the Western fare and a book simultaneously.

Self-caterers should check out **Samudera Market** (Ph 7 Makara; ☺ 7am-8pm), near Starfish Bakery, which has the best stock of international foods, including cheese, meats and chocolate.

## Drinking

The sands of Serendipity are a happening night spot, while Weather Station Hill and the town centre boast many venues knocking out locally brewed Angkor at just US\$0.50 a glass, the cheapest draught in Cambodia. The hill is getting a bit 'girlie' of late, as a new crowd moves in, but there are still plenty of backpacker bars.

**Eden** (Serendipity Beach; ☺ 24hr) Koh Pha-Ngan comes to Cambodia, with candlelit tables by night and revellers washed up on the beach. The Eden gang love an excuse for a party, but it's pretty loud for anyone planning on taking a room nearby.

**Utopia** (Serendipity Beach; ☺ 24hr) Home to the 24-hour party people, this great garden bar rocks on through the night and offers free accommodation for those who just can't drag themselves away.

**Bar Ru** (☎ 012 388860; Golden Lions Roundabout; ☺ 8am-late) Knock back the drinks at this unpretentious bar and take part in its charity crab races or quiz nights. Money raised goes to community organisations based in Sihanoukville. It also offers beach bungalows on Koh Ru.

**Angkor Arms** (☎ 933847; Ph Ekareach; ☺ 9am-late) The original 'Snookyville' pub, this place spills out on to the street and is a friendly spot for a beer. Pool, darts and big sporting occasions on a big screen.

**Star Bar** (☎ 012 377398; Ph Sopheakmongkol) Remember the rickety staircase before you have one too many. This is one of the latest spots in town, and the owners now operate bungalows on rising Otres Beach.

Heading south from Serendipity to Ochheuteal, there are numerous beach shacks that also rock on until the early hours. They change names quicker than most of us change underwear, so it's hard to single any out. That said, **Chiva Shack** (☎ 012 360911; Ochheuteal Beach; ☺ 24hr) has made a name for itself with full-moon parties, fire throwers, happy pizzas and some delicious cocktails right on the beach. There's also free accommodation if you crash out.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Sihanoukville Airport is open for business once more and there are regular flights to and from Siem Reap (one way US\$80) with **PMT Air** (code U4; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-221379; www.pmtair.com).

### BOAT

See p113 for fast-boat services between Sihanoukville and Krong Koh Kong.

### BUS

Many companies operate buses between Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh (14,000r, four hours), including Capitol Tour, GST, Hour Lean, Mekong Express and PPST. All have offices in town. PPST and several guesthouses run minibuses to Krong Koh Kong (US\$13, six hours).

### MOTORCYCLE

NH4 to Phnom Penh is busy, boring and dangerous, so riding isn't recommended. However, renting motorcycles is banned in Sihanoukville, so Phnom Penh or Kampot are now the only options to kick start a two-wheeled adventure.

### SHARE TAXI

Cramped taxis head to Phnom Penh (15,000r, three hours) and Kampot (12,000r, two hours) from the new taxi park in the town centre. Buses are the better option to the capital.

### TRAIN

Sadly, passenger trains no longer service Sihanoukville.

## Getting Around

Bicycles are a pleasant and environmentally friendly way to get around, and some guesthouses offer rentals for US\$1 to US\$2 per day.

With moto drivers having a well-earned reputation for overcharging, it's important to negotiate in advance. From the town centre to Victory or Serendipity Beaches expect to pay about 3000r, while a trip between these beaches is around 5000r. Costs almost double at night.

Motorbike rentals are currently forbidden in Sihanoukville. However, the situation is on and off again, so here's the rub if it's permitted: numerous guesthouses and restaurants

rent 100cc motos for US\$3 per day, and **GST** (☎ 933826; Ph Ekareach) rents out larger 250cc trail bikes for US\$7 per day, just the medicine for Bokor National Park.

## Around Sihanoukville

There are numerous islands off the coast, but the scene is low-key compared with honky-tonk Thailand. **Bamboo Island** (Koh Russei) and **Koh Ru** both have basic accommodation, with boat trips out there encompassing stops for snorkelling along the way. It's not quite Mama Linh's of Nha Trang fame, but fun all the same.

Bamboo Island is surrounded by clear waters, and the **bungalows** (r with shared bathroom US\$8-10) are sweet, with breezy terraces. There is also a large restaurant. A boat out here costs US\$8 return.

Koh Ru has beach **bungalows** (US\$10) plus its own restaurant and bar. It's more secluded than Bamboo Island and costs US\$10 for a return boat trip.

## KAMPOT

☎ 033 / pop 37,400

There is something about this little charmer that encourages visitors to linger. It might be the lovely riverside setting or the ageing French buildings, it could be the great little guesthouses and burgeoning bar scene. Whatever the magic ingredient, this is the perfect base to explore nearby caves and tackle the challenge that is Bokor National Park.

## Information

There's a basic tourist office, but little info is to be had. There are a couple of internet places near the central roundabout charging 6000r per hour.

**Canadia Bank** (☎ 932392) Offers free credit-card cash advances, and changes most currencies and travellers cheques.

**Hospital** (☎ 016 877689) Get yourself back to Phnom Penh sharpish! This hospital is very basic.

**Kepler's Books** (☎ 016 618906) The best used-book shop in town.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the years before civil war took its toll, no self-respecting French restaurant in Paris would be without Kampot pepper on the table.

## Sights & Activities

Remember, this is not a town where you come and do, but a place to come and feel. Sit on the riverbank and watch the sun set beneath the mountains or take in some of the town's fine **French architecture**.

About 10km east are the bat-filled caves of **Phnom Chhnork** (admission free), one containing a remarkably preserved 7th-century brick temple. Also outside of town are the **Tuk Chhou Falls** (admission US\$1; ☒ dawn-dusk), which are really no more than a series of not-so-rapid rapids. They're 8km west of town and are filled with bathing locals on weekends.

## Sleeping

Guesthouses have been mushrooming in the past couple of years. The following are just a few standouts.

**Long Villa Guesthouse** (☎ 012 210820; r US\$3-10) The friendly family here promises 'what you see is what you get', and it has been treating travellers well for a few years now. Rooms are good value and travel information is available. It's near Psar Leu.

**Bodhi Villa** (☎ 012 419140; bodhivilla@mac.com; Tuk Chhou Rd; r US\$3-10) Laid-back and friendly, this happy hideaway is tucked behind a flourishing garden on the banks of the river. The location provides a good base for the water sports on offer, including water-skiing and boat cruising.

**Blissful Guesthouse** (☎ 012 513024; blissful.guesthouse@yahoo.com; r US\$4-5) This is a fine place to unwind and relax. The large rooms are simple but have a few thoughtful trimmings, while a lush garden, great chill-out area and popular bar-restaurant make this a great guesthouse.

**Utopia** (r US\$8-10) Spot the enormous bird-house surrounded by an emerald forest and you have found Utopia, where you can while away the day on floating pontoons. It even offers free spots to crash (sofas, cushions, hammocks) for those who flake out after too much partying. It's off Tuk Chhou Rd.

Other reliable options:

**Kampot River View Guesthouse** (☎ 012 821570; r US\$4-6) Right on the river's edge, this is a breezy place with some rooms overlooking the water.

**Orchid Guest House** (☎ 932634; orchidguesthousekmpot@yahoo.com; r US\$4-15; ☒) A lovely lodging set in a manicured garden full of, you guessed it, orchids.

## Eating & Drinking

There is something for everyone in Kampot these days, with recipes from as far afield as Mexico and Sri Lanka. There are now more bars than guesthouses along the riverfront, but many are quiet most nights.

**Epic Arts Cafe** (☎ 012 350824; www.epicarts.org.uk; snacks 3000-10,000r; ☒ breakfast & lunch) This tiny little café offers divine cakes, tasty shakes and plenty of light bites. The staff are hearing impaired, and all proceeds go to support Epic Arts, which uses performance to promote expression among the disabled community.

**Ta Eou Restaurant** (☎ 932422; River Rd; mains 4000-12,000r; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Sit over the water contemplating the challenge of Bokor, as the blood-red sun drops over the mountain. Seafood is sublime here, including fresh crab laden with tasty green peppercorns.

**Little Garden Bar** (☎ 012 256901; www.littlegardenbar.com; ☒ 7am-late) The garden may be little but the hearts are big. As well as serving up fine international food (mains cost from 4000r to 28,000r), lively cocktails and the odd glass of vino, the team here supports and launches community-based projects.

**Rusty Keyhole** (☎ 012 679607; mains 5000-20,000r; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With tables spilling on to the street, the Keyhole is the most welcoming bar in town – unless you happen to be a missionary. Happy hours run from 5pm to 7pm and there is hearty fare at any time.

**Lucki Food Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 012 806105; mains US\$2.50-4; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The interior may be no frills, but the menu promises plenty of thrills, with authentic Sri Lankan and Indian dishes served up with a free drink or snack.

**Bokor Mountain Lodge** (☎ 932314; www.bokorlodge.com; mains US\$4-9.50; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The oldest bar-restaurant in town has been through many incarnations, and currently offers an international menu that includes hearty steaks and pies. There's a pool table for some action with the beers.

## Getting There & Away

Share taxi leave from the old Total station in the southeast of town and ply NH3 to Phnom Penh (14,000r, two hours) and Sihanoukville (12,000r, two hours).

A more comfortable, slower, but equally cheap option to the capital are the buses of **Hour Lean** (☎ 012 939917), which take four hours. For details on getting to Bokor or Kep, see the respective entries following.

## Getting Around

**Sean Ly Motor Shop** (☎ 012 944687) rents small motorbikes from US\$3 per day and big bikes from US\$4, plus cars/minibuses/pick-ups for US\$20/25/30. A moto to explore the caves and even Kep for the day starts from US\$6.

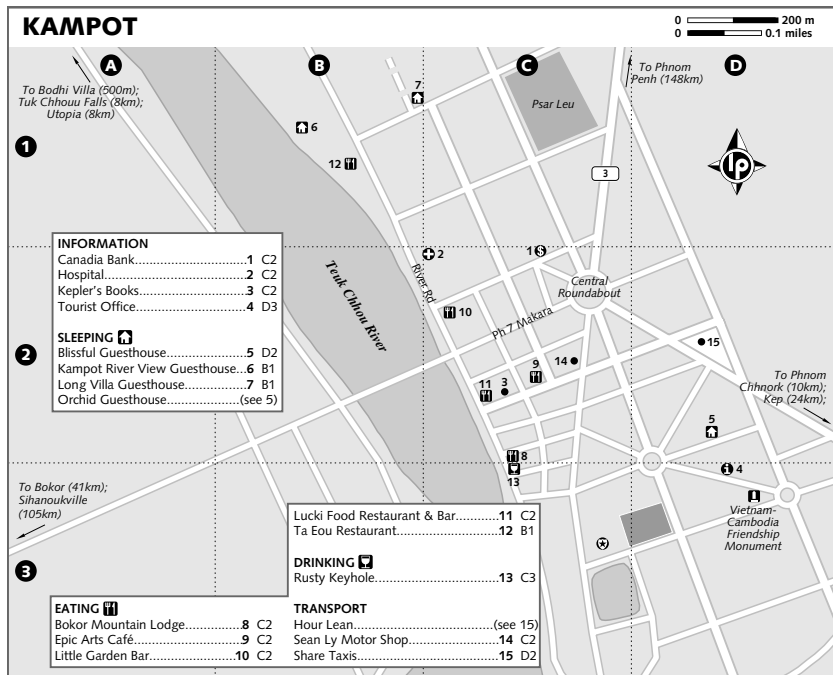
## BOKOR NATIONAL PARK

One of Cambodia's most alluring protected areas, **Bokor National Park** (admission US\$5) clings to the southern tip of the Chhor Phnom Damrei. You can stay in the park all day, but entry is only from 6am to noon. Besides a refreshingly cool climate, the park has secluded **waterfalls**, commanding ocean views, the abandoned and eerie **Bokor hill station** (elevation 1080m), and exceedingly elusive animals including tigers and elephants. Unfortunately, illegal logging in the 1990s cost the park its shot at World Heritage status.

At great financial and human expense (many indentured labourers perished in the process), the French forged a road into the area in the first quarter of the 20th century. A small community was created, and the grand colonial hotel, known as the **Bokor Palace**, was inaugurated in 1925. The hill station was twice abandoned: first in the late 1940s when the Vietnamese and Khmer Issarak (Free Khmer) forces overran it while fighting for independence against the French, and again in 1970 when it was left to the invading Khmer Rouge. It now has a genuine ghost-town feel, especially when thick mists envelop the skeletons of the original structures. However, the old hill station looks set for another rebirth, as private company Sokha Hotels is planning to build a casino-resort on the site of the old Bokor Palace.

The picturesque two-tiered drop of **Popokvil Falls**, a peaceful three-hour walk from the hill station, is best seen in the wet season as it's disappointingly drippy at other times. While in the jungle, remember to stick to well-worn paths and keep an ear out for tigers.

It is possible to spend the night at the **ranger station** (per bunk US\$5), which has basic bunk beds. Pack warm clothing, a torch



(electricity goes off at about 9pm) and some food as supplies are limited.

The access road is 7km west of Kampot and from there it's a scenically stunning, but bruisingly bumpy, 25km up to the plateau's first ruin, the **Black Palace**. It's about a two-hour drive from Kampot, making for a perfect day trip. The road is too tough for first-time bikers; hiring a 250cc dirt bike and driver for the trip will cost about US\$12. Less painful and much cheaper are the day trips arranged by guesthouses in Kampot (see p110), which cost US\$6 and include pick-up transport, lunch and an English-speaking guide.

## KEP

☎ 036 / pop 11,500

Kep is the comeback kid. Ravaged by the civil war and pillaged during the famine of 1979–80, it remained a ghost town until very recently. Founded by the French elite in 1908, the town is once again thriving and the seaside is as peaceful as ever, with lapping seas and swaying palms.

There aren't many beachside places to stay, but there are some great budget bungalows with sublime ocean views lining the forested hillside above the coast. The beach itself is a touch scrappy, as it was never a natural sandy bay. Before the war, white sand was shipped in from Sihanouville to keep up appearances!

Better beaches are found off the coast on islands such as **Koh Tonsay** (Rabbit Island), which now has a couple of basic guesthouses. A boat for the day can be arranged from the seafood sellers as you enter town for about US\$15, depending on numbers. Guesthouses can also help arrange boats if you're tired of hagglng.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Kep Seaside Guesthouse** (☎ 012 684241; r US\$5-7) One of the few budget places by the sea, Kep Seaside Guesthouse has good-value big, breezy rooms. Try Room 10, which has a big balcony and a grandstand view. Shady hammocks line the rocky shore.

**Le Bout du Monde** (☎ 012 242166; r US\$5-15) The original hilltop guesthouse, this wooden longhouse has basic rooms with smart trim, plus some bungalows. The restaurant is well regarded (mains US\$2 to US\$5).

**Vanna Bungalow** (☎ 012 755038; r US\$6-20) Just below Bout du Monde, this place is set in verdant gardens and offers attractive bungalows at affordable prices.

**Veranda Guesthouse** (☎ 012 888619; www.veranda-resort.com; bungalows US\$20-60) A maze of individual bungalows connected by wooden boardwalks, this stunning resort has an alluring mix of modern luxury and a natural setting. Sit back and soak up the views from your private veranda, complete with hammock. The restaurant specialises in Western fare (mains US\$1 to US\$4).

Away from the accommodation options, dining is easy, as there are numerous bamboo shacks along the coast offering fresh seafood, although be sure to agree to a price in advance and make sure the crab is fresh.

## Getting There & Away

Kep is just 24km from Kampot, so it's easiest to take a moto (about US\$4 return) or share taxi from there. The Cambodian–Vietnamese border at Prek Chek–Xa Xia had just opened at the time of going to press, suggesting Kep will see a lot more traffic in the next few years.

## KRONG KOH KONG

☎ 035 / pop 33,100

Krong Koh Kong is a frontier town of smugglers, gamblers and prostitutes, which acts as a functional stop on the southern overland trail between Thailand and Cambodia. Most people zoom through before getting to know that it is a laid-back town full of friendly locals.

You can while away time on the beaches outside town or head to **Ta Tai Waterfall**, a wide, shallow set of falls spilling over a 4m limestone shelf, about 20km from town. Casinos dominate the border line, and are popular with gambling Thais.

## Information

Baht, US dollars and riel are all accepted here, despite what scammers at the border might say. The nearest banks that can deal with credit cards or travellers cheques are in Sihanouville or Thailand. Internet access is readily available around town. Check out **Koh Kong, Cambodia** (<http://kohkong.sihanouville-cambodia.com>) for some more background information.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Otto's** (☎ 963163; Ph 8; r with shared/private bathroom 100/150B) Set in a traditional wooden house near the boat dock, Otto's has basic rooms with mossie nets. Travel information is on

tap here, plus there's a popular Western restaurant (mains 60B to 200B; open breakfast, lunch and dinner), which serves a hearty bratwurst.

**Phou Mint Koh Kong Hotel** (☎ 936221; Ph 1; r US\$5-15; ☺) Lately overshadowed by the towering Koh Kong City Hotel, the Phou Mint is still top value for its riverside location. It has huge sparkling rooms with fans and satellite TVs.

With a garden setting and Thai menu bursting with vegetarian options and fresh seafood, **Baan Peakmai** (cnr Ph 3 & Ph 6; mains 50-150B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is the best Thai restaurant in town. For your first or last taste of Khmer cuisine, slide into **Samras Angkor Restaurant** (mains 50-150B; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner).

## Drinking

**Sunset Lounge** (☎ 012 1724909; ☺ 24hr) Sip drinks over the water at this striking bar that creeps all the way out into the river. The views are undeniably stunning and this is the best place to come for frank and funny travel advice.

## Getting There & Away

Daily buses to Phnom Penh or Sihanouville both depart around 9am and charge a cheeky 500B; share taxis charge about 300B for a berth. Both destinations take about six hours to reach, but journey times will drop once the four bridges come on line.

Fast boats leave daily for Sihanouville (US\$15, four hours, 8am). Coming the other way, boats depart Sihanouville at noon. These boats were designed for rivers, so it can get rough during high winds, particularly in the wet summer season.

## GETTING TO THAILAND

Leaving Cambodia, take a moto (motorcycle taxi; 80B per person) or share taxi (200B for the whole car) from Krong Koh Kong over the big bridge to the border at Hat Lek. Walk across the border to where there are minibuses (100B, one hour, every 30 minutes) to Trat for connections to Bangkok or Koh Chang. The border post is open daily from 7am to 5pm.

See p765 for information on doing the trip in the opposite direction.

## Getting Around

Chartering a moto for a whole day of sightseeing, taking in the waterfalls, beaches and town, should cost about US\$10 to US\$15. Guesthouses can usually organise a bicycle for rent (US\$2 to US\$3 per day).

Chartered boats can take you to the islands, and cost between US\$30 and US\$40 depending on the size of the boat and how long you want to hang out.

# NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA

The northeast is one of the wildest regions in Cambodia. The provinces of Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri are home to some of Cambodia's most beautiful landscapes, as well as tigers, leopards and elephants. You can plod through the jungle to secret waterfalls on elephant back, and to glimpse the rare Irrawaddy dolphins in the Mekong River. Or you can live the wild life in the northeast, as the area is home to ethnic minority groups known as Khmer Loeu (Upper Khmer) or *chunchiet*. Different dialects, different lifestyles and different looks – these people are a world away from their lowland neighbours. It's not for everyone, which also means it's far from the madding crowds of Siem Reap.

There are no longer regular fast boat services on this stretch of the Mekong, as new roads and cheap buses have picked off all the punters.

## KOMPONG CHAM

☎ 042 / pop 51,200

Sitting on the shores of the Mekong, Kompong Cham was an important trading post during the French period, and the legacy lives on in bruised but beautiful buildings around the town. It's a good stopover, but otherwise there's little reason to linger.

## Information

**ABC Computer** (11 Ph Ang Duong) Internet access.

**Cambodia Asia Bank** (☎ 942149) Near the transport stop, this bank offers an international ATM.

**Canadia Bank** (☎ 941361; Preah Monivong Blvd) Near the market, Canadia Bank changes cash and travellers cheques in most currencies and offers free Visa and MasterCard advances.



## Sights & Activities

**Wat Nokor** (admission US\$2) is an 11th-century Mahayana Buddhist shrine of sandstone and laterite set slap-bang in the centre of an active and slightly kitsch Theravada wat. A peaceful atmosphere pervades the place, which rests about 1km from town, just off the road to Phnom Penh. Equally tranquil is a bike ride or walk on the nearby rural island of **Koh Paen**, which is connected to town in the dry season by an elaborate bamboo bridge.

## Sleeping

One street near the market boasts guesthouses advertising rooms at 5000r, although most rooms are cells and most 'guests' seem to pay by the hour, so it could get oh, ohh, ohhh! so noisy.

**Bopheia Guesthouse** (☎ 012 796803; Vithei Pasteur; r US\$2-3) One of the original guesthouses in town, the more 'expensive' rooms include a bathroom. Bicycles are the best way to explore town, and they're available for rent here (4000r per day).

**Phnom Brak Trochak Cheth Guest House** (☎ 941507; s/d US\$4/5) Ten points if you can say this name after a few beers. This guesthouse has been upgraded by its new owners and now has smart rooms, although they're cooled by fan only.

**Mekong Hotel** (☎ 941536; Ph Preah Bat Sihanouk; r US\$5-20; ☎) In a prime riverfront location, this is the best all-rounder in town. All rooms come with TV, while 10 bucks brings the bonus of air-con, hot water and a Mekong view. Consider an ultimate Frisbee game in the huge corridors.

## Eating & Drinking

For cheap eats, hit the stop-and-dip food stalls in the market. *Tukalok* (fruit shake) stalls near the police station also offer a selection of snacks.

**Two Dragons Restaurant** (Ph Ang Duong; mains 4000-8000r; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Incredibly popular with Khmers, this restaurant has exotic dishes and an ever changing specials menu.

**Lazy Mekong Daze** (Ph Preah Bat Sihanouk; Riverfront; mains US\$1.50-3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by a British-Khmer couple, this bolt hole is a great place to unwind with Mekong views and tasty food.

**Mekong Crossing** (Vithei Pasteur; meals US\$2-4; ☎ lunch & dinner) Wholesome Western grub, Khmer classics and a (un?)healthy drinks list

make this a popular place. The owner knows Cham like the back of his hand.

In the early evening locals gather on the waterfront outside the Mekong Hotel, where a number of stalls sell cheap beers.

## Getting There & Away

For Phnom Penh, there are buses (10,000r, three hours), and share taxis (10,000r, two hours). PPST, Hour Lean and GST all have regular services, leaving from the respective bus company's office.

Hour Lean buses to Kratie (three to four hours, 17,000r) depart from near the roundabout in Kompong Cham.

Travellers motorbiking to Kratie should consider following the western bank of the Mekong to the Stung Trang district, crossing the river and continuing northward through Chhlong for a really pretty ride.

## KRATIE

☎ 072 / pop 89,400

The best place in Cambodia to glimpse the region's remaining freshwater Irrawaddy dolphins, Kratie (*Kra-cheh*) wraps around the east bank of the river and sits under the most dramatic of skies. Thanks to the marine life, its striking riverside setting and well-preserved French and Khmer architecture, the town is becoming a hot stop on the overland route to Laos or Ratanakiri Province.

## Information

Telephone calls can be made at kiosks around the market and internet is available at the You Hong Guest House. Western Union money transfers are available at **Aceda Bank** (☎ 971707).

## Sights & Activities

Just 15km north of town at Kampi, the endangered **Irrawaddy dolphins** often breach the Mekong's silent surface for a breath of fresh air. It costs US\$2 to visit the site, plus about US\$3 per person for a boat, depending on the number of passengers. Return trips by moto should cost about US\$3 or so. Alternatively, it's an enjoyable 60-minute bicycle ride to Kampi. Take in a dramatic sunset over the Mekong from **Phnom Sombok** on the way back to town.

Opposite town in the middle of the Mekong is an idyllic slice of rural Cambodia on the island of **Koh Trong**.

## Sleeping & Eating

The best budget sleeping and eating options are found in the vicinity of the market.

**Star Guesthouse** (☎ 971663; Ph Preah Sihanouk; r US\$2-5) A budget favourite where the rooms are cheap, travel information is on tap and the friendly staff speak good English. The restaurant turns out good grub (meals cost from US\$1 to US\$3).

**You Hong Guesthouse** (☎ 012 957003; 91 Ph 8; r US\$2-5) This is another good spot for weary travellers to rest their head, with rooms that are clean and kempt. The restaurant has a serious veggie selection, including tofu mushroom burgers and tofu curries (meal prices range from US\$1 to US\$3).

**Santhepheap Hotel** (☎ 971537; r US\$5-20; ☎) The reliable Santhepheap offers smart, comfortable accommodation, with the front-facing rooms providing a good view of the riverfront action.

**Red Sun Falling** (Ph Preah Suramarit; mains US\$1-3) The larger-than-life owner of Red Sun Falling has created a relaxing retreat with fine furnishings, good music and a small bookshop. The menu includes some Asian greatest hits and some home comfort food, including excellent homemade brownies. By night, it doubles as Kratie's leading bar.

Cheap dining can be had during the evening, when food stalls set up shop overlooking the Mekong. This area doubles as a superb spot for a sunset drink.

## Getting There & Away

The 348km road south to Phnom Penh is now entirely surfaced, cutting journey

times dramatically. **PPST** (☎ 012 523400) and **Hour Lean** (☎ 012 535387) each run one bus a day to the capital (18,000r, six hours) at 7.30am. More frequent and faster, though less comfortable, are the share taxis (departing from Taxi Park) to the capital (25,000r, five hours).

Hour Lean also serves Stung Treng (14,000r, two hours), leaving at around 1pm and heading along the recently surfaced NH7. You can also take a share taxi (US\$7.50) to Stung Treng.

For Mondulkiri take a share taxi to Snuol (8000r, 1¼ hours) and hop on Hour Lean's noon bus to Sen Monorom (17,000r, 2½ hours).

## STUNG TRENG

☎ 074 / pop 27,700

Stung Treng is back on the map thanks to the popular Cambodia-Laos border crossing just 50-odd clicks north. It's no longer the ends of the earth, but the downside is that the new road connections mean many travellers are only passing through on their way to more exciting Ratanakiri and Kratie.

There are no banks, but Riverside Restaurant & Guesthouse can cash travellers cheques. If you're coming from Laos, US dollars are accepted everywhere. There are several internet places around the market.

Whether just off the boat, bus or bumpy moto, the shady riverfront rooftop at **Riverside Restaurant & Guesthouse** (☎ 012 439454; mains 3500-10,000r; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is the place to enjoy fine food and cool drinks. The menu includes Khmer, Thai and Chinese specials to go with the odd international dish. Rooms here

## GETTING TO LAOS

The beautiful river border (open from 7am to 5pm) between Stung Treng Province in Cambodia and Champasak province in Laos has been open to foreigners since late 2000 and is growing in popularity as an adventurous and cheap way to combine northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos. Have you got your Lao visa (see p411)? OK, read on...

In theory, if you're armed with a Lao or Cambodian visa, there should be no extra charges at the border, but in reality expect border officials on both sides to ask for more money (up to US\$5) in 'stamp fees'.

Take a minibus from Stung Treng to the border at Dom Kralor (US\$10, two hours). Transport at Voen Kham on the Lao side is very hit and miss for those arriving from Cambodia, but easy when leaving Laos. It's probably going to be necessary to take a motorcycle taxi or tuk-tuk to Nakasong, where there are good public transport connections to points north, including Don Khong island.

See p402 for information on doing the trip in the opposite direction.

are only US\$3 and include private bathroom, plus reliable travel information is available.

Cheap food stalls can be found on the riverfront and around the market.

An early-morning Hour Lean bus leaves at 7am for Kratie (22,000r, 3½ hours) and Phnom Penh (42,000r, 10 hours) along NH7. Crowded share taxis travel south to Kratie (30,000r) and east to Ban Lung (30,000r, 4½ hours) along a rough but gradually improving road. There is also a minibus to Ban Lung (US\$8, four hours) at 7.30am; book your seat the night before and the bus will pick you up from your hotel. Times given here are for the dry season; count on longer during the wet season. All transport leaves from the transport stop, near the Riverside Restaurant & Guesthouse.

## RATANAKIRI PROVINCE

Up-and-coming Ratanakiri is making a name for itself as a diverse region of outstanding natural beauty that provides a remote home for a mosaic of minority peoples (including the Jarai, Tompuon and Kreung) with their own languages, traditions and customs. Adrenaline-rush activities are plentiful. Swim in clear volcanic lakes, shower under waterfalls, glimpse an elephant or trek in the vast Virachey National Park – it's all here.

The roads through the province look like a papaya shake during the wet season, so the ideal time to explore is from December to February. Prepare to do battle with the red dust of Ratanakiri, which will leave you with a fake tan and orange hair.

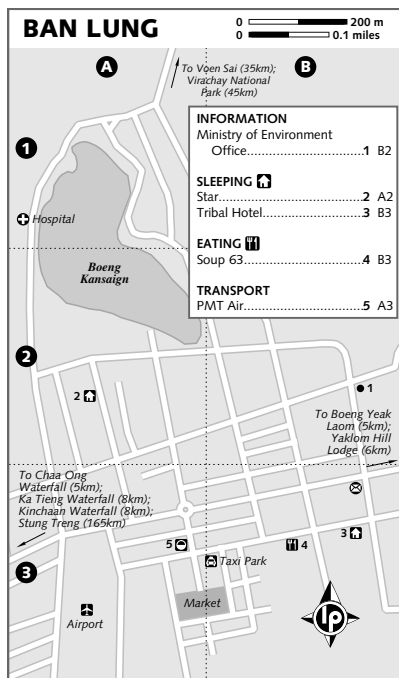
### Ban Lung

☎ 075 / pop 17,000

Cloaked in dust in the dry season, mired in mud in the wet season, Ban Lung isn't the best introduction to Ratanakiri, but it is a functional base for some romps around the region. Check out the kingdom's best swimming pool, lurking in the nearby volcanic crater of Yeak Laom, or take the plunge under a quiet waterfall to cleanse your skin and soothe your soul.

### INFORMATION

There are no banks, but travellers cheques can be exchanged for a stiff commission at some guesthouses. Internet access is possible at some guesthouses, but prices are high and connection speeds woefully slow.



### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

#### Boeng Yeak Laom

Through a clearing in a dark green forest is the bright blue water of this crackling **crater lake** (admission US\$1), a mere 5km east of town. Get the swimming togs on and make a splash. There's a small **visitors centre** (admission free) on the west shore run by **Yeak Laom Community Based Eco-Tourism** (☎ 012 981226; yeak\_laom@camintel.com). The centre offers community walks with English-speaking guides (US\$3 to US\$7 per person depending on numbers), which are an interesting insight into the life of the Tompuon minority.

A moto here will cost about US\$1, or US\$2 if they stick around to drive you back.

#### Waterfalls

For a power shower, head to **Chaa Ong Waterfall** (admission 2000r), which is set in a scenic rocky jungle gorge, allowing you to clamber straight under the falls. **Ka Tieng Waterfall** (admission free) is perhaps the most fun, as there are some vines on the far side that are strong enough to swing on for some Tarzan action. Another beautiful waterfall in the neighbourhood is **Kinchan Waterfall** (admission 2000r).

These three waterfalls are located separately about 5km to 8km west of town. Although they're signposted en route to Stung Treng, hook up with a local as they're difficult to find.

### Trekking

With many local minority villages and attractive areas situated around Ban Lung, trekking has really started to take off here. Figure on US\$15 to US\$25 a day for a good guide, plus more for transport, food and accommodation along the way. You'll need a group to make it affordable. Star Hotel and Yaklom Hill Lodge are the best places to make arrangements for treks, but make sure you get what you sign up for. See right for trekking options in Virachey National Park, as well as treks run by the Ministry of the Environment.

Ask around town about arranging **elephant treks** (per hour from US\$10), although Mondulkiri is the better choice for a date with Dumbo.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Star Hotel** (☎ 012 958322; r US\$5-10; 🍽️) This large villa has spacious rooms, but it's more about the friendly service. The effusive Mr Leng runs a tight ship and ensures guests are wanting for nothing. The restaurant is one of the best in town, particularly for the *phnom pleung*.

**Lakeside Chheng Lok Hotel** (☎ 390063; lakeside-chhenglokhotel@yahoo.com; r US\$5-20; 🍽️) Pristine rooms in the main building and gorgeous brick bungalows by Boeng Kansaign out the back make this address one of the most appealing in Ratanakiri.

**Tribal Hotel** (☎ 974074; tribalhotel@camintel.com; r US\$5-25; 🍽️) This huge compound of watlike buildings houses a wide range of options. Cheap budget rooms include bathroom but, if you want the world according to CNN, you should splash out on the more expensive rooms in the main building.

**Yaklom Hill Lodge** (☎ 012 644240; www.yaklom.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$10/13/16) This option promotes itself as Ratanakiri's ecolodge, and its gorgeous garden is dotted with wooden bungalows that have been decorated with tribal touches. There's no electricity during the day, but the fan and lights work at night. The restaurant at this place serves tasty Thai and Khmer food. It's about 6km east of town.

Star Hotel, Tribal Hotel and Yaklom Hotel all offer tasty fare at their respective restaurants. **Soup 63** (mains 5000-8000r; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is popular with locals for *sait ko ang Ratanakiri* (Ratanakiri grilled beef). Although not on the menu, great tofu and veg meals are also available.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**PMT Air** (code U4; ☎ 974098; www.pmtair.com) offers erratic connections between Ban Lung and Phnom Penh (one way/return US\$100/200). The high price is meant to 'guarantee' three departures a week, but cancellations are common.

For details of costs to Stung Treng and continuing south overland, see opposite and p115. For more on the hard-core ride south to Mondulkiri, see p119.

### GETTING AROUND

Most guesthouses rent motorbikes (from US\$8 to US\$10 per day), as well as pick-ups (US\$35) and jeeps (US\$50), which both include a driver. A moto for the day ranges from US\$7 to US\$10, depending on your destinations.

## AROUND RATANAKIRI PROVINCE

Located 35km northwest of Ban Lung on the Tonlé Sap, **Voen Sai** is a kaleidoscope of a community that includes Chinese, Lao and Kreung villagers. Across the river is an old **Chinese settlement** dating back to the 19th century that's a slice of Sichuan, and further downstream are several **Lao** and **chunchiet villages**, some with traditional cemeteries complete with effigies of the dead.

**Virachey National Park** (www.bpamp.org.kh) is the largest protected area in Cambodia, stretching east to Vietnam, north to Laos and west to Stung Treng. The park has not been fully explored, but is probably home to a number of larger mammals, including elephants, leopards and tigers. Many guesthouses offer 'treks' in the park, but this usually means an expensive walk in denuded forest near the park, as it's at least a day's walk just to reach the park boundary.

For some serious trekking, contact the **Ministry of Environment office** (☎ 075-974176; virachey@camintel.com) in Ban Lung. Treks on offer include a four-day adventure that heads off into the forest, over the Ho Chi Minh Trail and down the river in kayaks, and the

seven-day **Phnom Veal Thom Wilderness Trek**, a challenging affair over mountains and through forests.

## MONDULKIRI PROVINCE

A world away from lowland Cambodia, Mondulhiri is the Wild East of Cambodia, home to the hardy Pnong people and their noble elephants. Climatically and culturally, it's also another world, which comes as a real relief after the heat of the plains. The landscape of the province is a seductive mix of pine clumps, grassy hills and windswept valleys that fade beguilingly into jade green forests and hidden waterfalls. Wild animals are more numerous in Mondulhiri than elsewhere, including bears and tigers, although chances of seeing these are about as good as winning the lottery.

Green grass or brown brush, messy mud or the dreaded dust, the contrasts between the wet and dry season are stark – take your pick.

## Sen Monorom

☎ 073 / pop 7900

Mondulhiri means 'Meeting of the Hills', and sitting in the spot where this occurs is sleepy Sen Monorom, an overgrown village of exiles from distant parts of Cambodia, drawn here to start afresh.

The town is set at more than 800m, so when the winds billow it's notably cooler than the rest of Cambodia. It's the perfect base to explore the province and is a popular stop for domestic tourists.

## INFORMATION

There are no banks, so carry US dollars or riel. Everything from food to transport is slightly more expensive here than the rest of the country. Phone calls are possible from mobiles around town and sporadic internet access is available at **Arun Reah II Hill Lodge & Restaurant** (per hr US\$4). The local tourist office is more helpful than most, plus Long Vibol, who runs a guesthouse, is loaded with useful information and can arrange English-speaking guides.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

About 3km northwest of town are **Monorom Falls**, the closest thing to a public swimming pool for Sen Monorom. More enticing falls are found slightly further afield; see opposite for details.

**Elephant day treks** in nearby Pnong villages such as Putang and Phulung can be arranged by guesthouses or the local tourist office for around US\$30 per elephant (two passengers), including moto transport. Bring a comfy pillow to sit on or you'll be waddling like a duck for days. It's possible to negotiate an overnight trek from US\$60 per person.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Sen Monorom has erratic electricity, so a torch is useful for late-night toilet trips. With chilly evening temperatures, hot water is a welcome touch.

**Sovankiri Guesthouse** (☎ 012 821931; s/tw US\$3/5) Just a stroll from the ambitiously named 'airport', this is where the Hour Lean buses from Phnom Penh alight. The wood-trim singles are large and include a bathroom for a top deal.

**Arun Reah II Hill Lodge & Restaurant** (☎ 012 999191; r US\$5-10; ☑) This place pulls in the punters, as it has a strategic setting on the road into town. Big views of rolling hills, attractive bungalows with bathroom and TV, plus extras such as free bicycles, cheap motorbike hire and internet access ensure its popularity.

**Long Vibol Guesthouse** (☎ 012 944647; r US\$5-15) Set amid a flourishing garden, this place buzzes with a lively mix of international and Khmer guests, all ably managed by English-speaking staff who are helpful and knowledgeable about the area. The more expensive rooms include a welcome hot shower. Good restaurant too.

**Pech Kiri Guest House** (☎ 012 932102; r US\$5-15) Aim for the newer spacious bungalows, as the older rooms are smaller and less airy. The garden is a peaceful retreat and the restaurant turns out decent Khmer and European dishes.

**Nature Lodge Café** (☎ 012 230272; Mains US\$1-3; ☑ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Boasting an atmosphere as chilled as the hilltop air, this unique café occupies a picturesque setting. Offering an eclectic menu ranging from Israeli salad to pad thai (fried noodles, bean sprouts, peanuts, eggs, chillies and often prawns), it also has a herbal sauna for weary travel bones.

## DRINKING

**Middle of Somewhere Bar** (☎ 012 1613833; ☑ 3pm-late) Fairy lights twinkling at the back door will lure you into the yard with a delightful beer garden. The only bar in town, it serves cheap beer.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Amazingly, there is a scheduled bus linking Sen Monorom with Phnom Penh (32,000r, eight hours), leaving at 7am. From Phnom Penh, share taxis depart from the southwest corner of Psar Thmei (70,000r, nine hours). If you want to return to Phnom Penh by share taxi, guesthouses in Sen Monorom can arrange for a morning pick-up. There is a 7am bus from Sen Monorom to Stung Treng (50,000r, eight to nine hours), via Kratie and with a changeover at Snuol. Get your ticket the night before as it fills up fast. It leaves from opposite the Pech Kiri Guest House. Pick-ups also service Snuol (outside/inside 15,000/20,000r, three hours).

An adventurous and extremely arduous path connects Sen Monorom with Ban Lung in Ratanakiri Province – hard-core bikers should see Long Vibol Guesthouse for advice. Leaving Sen Monorom, the road has been sealed to Koh Nhek (two hours). From there on, it's an old-skool mess and takes at least five more hours to Ban Lung in Ratanakiri.

## GETTING AROUND

Guesthouses rent out 100cc motorbikes for US\$5 to US\$10 per day. If you want a 250cc bike, you'll have to rent it in Phnom Penh (p80). Jeeps cost US\$40 to US\$50 a day, depending on the season and how far you want to go.

## Around Sen Monorom

The real joy of the Mondulhiri Province is exploring by motorbike or on foot at your own pace, following small paths to hidden tribal villages or waterfalls spilling out of the jungle. Popular waterfalls include the low and wide **Romanear Waterfall**, 18km southeast of Sen Monorom, and the single-drop **Dak Dam Waterfall**, 25km to the city's east. Both are very difficult to find without a guide.

**Bou Sraa Falls**, a 35m-high double drop into a jungle gorge, is one of the largest and most famous waterfalls in Cambodia. No longer the bastard son of the devil himself, the road to the falls is now in reasonable shape, with new bridges across the major rivers. Hire a moto driver for the day or charter a Russian jeep (US\$60) with a group.

# CAMBODIA DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

There are budget guesthouses in popular destinations throughout Cambodia, costing around US\$3 to US\$5 for a room. In many rural parts of Cambodia, the standard rate for the cheapest hotels is US\$5, usually with attached bathroom and satellite TV, although there may be a few places starting at 10,000r that make more by the hour as brothels than they do by the night – don't count on much sleep!

All rooms quoted in this chapter have attached bathrooms unless stated otherwise.

## ACTIVITIES

Tourism in Cambodia is still in its infancy, with few activities on offer. Snorkelling and diving are popular in Sihanoukville, and boat trips on rivers and around coastal areas can usually be arranged with locals keen to make some money. Improving roads are drawing an increasing number of cyclists, while the few remaining roller-coaster roads are paradise for experienced dirt bikers. Elephant rides and rewarding trekking are both possible in the wilds of Ratanakiri and Mondulhiri provinces.

## BOOKS

For the full story on travelling in Cambodia, pick up Lonely Planet's *Cambodia*.

There's also a great selection of books on Cambodia in the better bookshops located in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, but prices are relatively high. Markets and disabled street sellers pawn cheap copies of most titles, but we know you wouldn't dream of buying a photocopied Lonely Planet guide. Be warned, if this is a photocopy, it may self-destruct in five seconds.

The best introduction to the history of Cambodia is David P Chandler's *A History of Cambodia*, which covers the ups and downs of the Khmers over two millennia. Also by Chandler is *Brother Number One*, the menacing biography of Pol Pot. However, Philip Short's biography *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare* is more detailed and a riveting read.

*When the War was Over* by Elizabeth Becker is an insight into life in the last days



of Pol Pot's regime and its aftermath by one of the few journalists to visit Democratic Kampuchea back in 1978.

In *The Gate*, François Bizot recounts being kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge and interrogated by Comrade Duch, the head of Tuol Sleng prison; he is believed to be the only foreigner to have survived capture. Later he was holed up in the French embassy in April 1975 and became the negotiator between the foreigners inside and the Khmer Rouge outside.

Jon Swain's *River of Time* is as much about a personal hell as Cambodia's descent into hell, but it takes us back to an old Indochina and includes the real story behind the film *The Killing Fields*, in which Swain was played by Julian Sands.

The classic travel literature option is Norman Lewis' *A Dragon Apparent* (1951), an account of his 1950 foray into an Indochina that was soon to disappear.

*To Asia With Love: A Connoisseur's Guide to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam* (2004), an anthology edited by Kim Fay, is a delightful introduction to Cambodia and the Mekong Region for those looking for some inspiration and adventure. A new *To Cambodia with Love* will be out by the time you read this.

See p96 for books on Angkor.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Most Cambodians get up very early and it's not unusual to see people out exercising at 5.30am when you're heading home – ahem, sorry, getting up – at that time. Government offices (closed Sundays) theoretically open at 7.30am, break for a siesta from 11.30am to 2pm and end the day at 5pm. However, it's a safe bet that few people will be around early in the morning or after 4pm, as their real income is earned elsewhere.

Businesses and shops open from around 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, and most are open on Sunday too.

Banking hours vary slightly, but you can reckon on core weekday hours of 8.30am to 3pm. Most are also usually open Saturday mornings.

Local restaurants are generally open from about 6.30am until 9pm and international restaurants until a little later. In this chapter, we consider 7am to 10am breakfast, noon to 3pm lunch and 5pm to 9pm dinner.

Any exceptions to these hours are listed in individual reviews.

## CLIMATE

The climate of Cambodia is governed by two seasons, which set the rhythm of rural life. The cooler, dry season occurs from around November to May, with temperatures increasing from February; from June to October, there are strong winds, high humidity and heavy rains. Even during the wet season, it rarely rains in the morning – most precipitation falls in the afternoon and, even then, only sporadically. See the climate charts on p916 for more information.

## CUSTOMS

A 'reasonable amount' of duty-free items is allowed into the country. Travellers arriving by air might bear in mind that alcohol and cigarettes are on sale at well below duty-free prices on the streets of Phnom Penh – a branded box of 200 cigarettes costs just US\$8! International spirits start as low as US\$7 a litre.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

As memories of war grow ever more distant, Cambodia has become a much safer country in which to travel. However, remember the golden rule – stick to marked paths in remote areas! Check on the latest situation before making a trip off the beaten track, particularly if travelling by motorcycle.

### HOW TO AVOID A BAD TRIP

Watch out for *yama* (known as *yaba* in Thailand), which ominously shares its name with the Hindu god of death. Known as ice or crystal meth back home, it's not the usual diet pills but instead homemade meta-amphetamines often laced with toxic substances, such as mercury and lithium. It's more addictive than users would like to admit, provoking powerful hallucinations, sleep deprivation and psychosis.

Also be very careful about buying 'caine' in Cambodia. Most of what is sold as coke is actually pure heroin and far stronger than any smack found on the streets back home. Bang this up your nose and you're in serious trouble – several backpackers die each year.

The *Cambodia Daily* ([www.cambodia-daily.com](http://www.cambodia-daily.com)) and *Phnom Penh Post* ([www.phnompenhpost.com](http://www.phnompenhpost.com)) are good sources for breaking news on Cambodia – check their websites before travelling here.

## Border Crossings

Cambodian immigration officers at the country's land-border crossings have a bad reputation for petty extortion. Travellers are occasionally asked for an 'immigration fee', particularly at the Lao crossing. Overcharging on the Thai borders is common, usually between 1000B (Thai baht) and 1300B for the US\$20 (less than 800B) visa. Some travellers are even forced to change US dollars into riel at a poor rate in Poipet. Hold your breath, stand your ground, don't start a fight and remember that not all Cambodians are as mercenary as the boys in blue.

## Mines, Mortars & Bombs

*Never, ever* touch any rockets, artillery shells, mortars, mines, bombs or other war material; Cambodia is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world with an estimated four to six million of these 'enemies within' littering the countryside. A gentle reminder: *do not* stray from well-marked paths under any circumstances, as even stepping from the roadside in some areas could have horrific consequences.

De-mining organisations are working throughout the country to clear these arbitrary assassins but, even with their dedicated work, the most common way a landmine is discovered is by a man, woman or child losing a limb.

## Theft & Street Crime

Given the number of guns in Cambodia, there's less armed theft than one might expect. Still, hold-ups and motorcycle theft are a potential danger in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville. See p69, p84 and p106 for more info. There's no need to be paranoid, just cautious. Walking or riding alone late at night is not ideal, certainly not in rural areas.

Pickpocketing isn't a huge problem in Cambodia, but it does happen in crowded markets. Bag snatching is a possibility here, particularly in popular parts of Phnom Penh.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Embassies & Consulates in Cambodia

The following embassies are found in Phnom Penh:

**Australia** (Map p70; ☎ 213470; 11 Ph 254)

**Canada** (Map p70; ☎ 213470; 11 Ph 254)

**China** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 720920; 256 Mao Tse Tung Blvd)

**France** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 430020; 1 Monivong Blvd)

**Germany** (Map p70; ☎ 216381; 76-78 Ph 214)

**Indonesia** (Map p70; ☎ 216148; 90 Norodom Blvd)

**Laos** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 982632; 15-17 Mao Tse Tung Blvd)

**Malaysia** (Map p70; ☎ 216177; 5 Ph 242)

**Myanmar** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 223761; 181 Norodom Blvd)

**Philippines** (Map p70; ☎ 222303; 33 Ph 294)

**Singapore** (Map p70; ☎ 221875; 92 Norodom Blvd)

**Thailand** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 726306; 196 Norodom Blvd)

**UK** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 427124; 29 Ph 75)

**USA** (Map p70; ☎ 728000; 1 Ph 96)

**Vietnam** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 362531; 436 Monivong Blvd)

There's also a handy **Vietnamese consulate** (Map p105; Ph Ekareach) in Sihanoukville, which turns out the fastest Vietnamese visas in Southeast Asia (one month US\$35).

## Cambodian Embassies & Consulates Abroad

**Australia** (☎ 02-6273 1259; 5 Canterbury Cres, Deakin, ACT 2600)

**France** (☎ 01 45 03 47 20; 4 rue Adolphe Yvon, 75116 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-48 63 79 01; Arnold Zweig Strasse, 1013189 Berlin)

**Japan** (☎ 03-5412 8521; 8-6-9 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo 1070052)

**UK** (☎ 020-8451 7850; 64 Brondesbury Park, London NW6 7AT)

**USA** (☎ 202-726 7742; 4500 16th St NW, Washington, DC, 20011)

For information on visas, see p126.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The festivals of Cambodia take place according to the lunar calendar, so the dates vary from year to year.

**Chinese New Year** The big Chinese community goes wild for the new year in late January or early to mid-February, with dragon dances filling many of Phnom Penh's streets. As it's also Tet, the Vietnamese live it up too.

**Chaul Chnam** Held in mid-April, this is a three-day celebration of Khmer New Year, with Khmers worshipping in wats to wash away their sins, and plastering each other with water and talc.

**Visakha Puja** Celebrated collectively as Buddha's birth, enlightenment and *parinibbana* (passing in nirvana), this festival's activities are centred on wats. The festival falls on the eighth day of the fourth moon (that's May or June to you and me) and is best observed at Angkor Wat, where there are candlelit processions of monks.

**P'chum Ben** This festival falls between mid-September and early October, and is a kind of All Souls' Day, when respects are paid to the dead through offerings made at wats.

**Bon Om Tuk** This festival is held in early November to celebrate the epic victory of Jayavarman VII over the Chams in 1177 and the reversal of the Tonlé Sap river. This is one of the most important festivals in the Khmer calendar and a wonderful, if hectic, time to be in Phnom Penh.

## FOOD & DRINK

### Food

It is definitely no secret that Cambodia's neighbouring countries, Thailand and Vietnam, are home to some of the finest food in the world, so it should come as no surprise to discover that Khmer cuisine is also rather special. *Amok* (baked fish with coconut and lemongrass in banana leaf) is sublime and *kyteow* (a rice-noodle soup packed with a punch), otherwise known as Cambodia in a bowl, will keep you going throughout the day.

Rice and *prahoc* – a fermented fish paste that your nose will soon recognise at a hundred paces – form the backbone of Khmer cuisine. Built around these are flavours that

### WE DARE YOU! THE TOP FIVE

Try these Cambodian treats:

- crickets
- duck embryo
- durian
- *prahoc* (fermented fish paste)
- tarantulas

give the cuisine its kick: secret roots, pungent herbs and aromatic tubers. Together they give salads, snacks, soups and stews an aroma and taste that smacks of Cambodia.

Cambodian meals almost always include *samlor* (soup). *Samlor machou banle* is a popular hot and sour fish soup with pineapple and a splash of spices. Other popular soups include *samlor chapek* (ginger-flavoured pork soup), *samlor machou bawng kawng* (prawn soup similar to the popular Thai *tôm yam*) and *samlor ktis* (fish soup with coconut and pineapple).

Most fish eaten in Cambodia is freshwater, and *trey aing* (grilled fish) is a Cambodian speciality (*aing* means 'grilled' and can be applied to many dishes). Fish is traditionally eaten as pieces wrapped in lettuce or spinach leaves and dipped into a fish sauce known as *tuk trey*, similar to Vietnam's *nuoc mam* but with ground peanuts added.

### Drink

Don't drink tap water. Guzzle locally produced drinking water (500r per litre), which is available everywhere. Ice is made from treated water in local factories, so relax and enjoy it. Don't be surprised if waitresses try to put it in your beer or wine.

Soft drinks and coffee are found everywhere and a free pot of Chinese-style tea will usually appear as soon as you sit down in local restaurants.

Excellent fruit smoothies, known locally as *tukalok*, are omnipresent in Cambodia. Look out for stalls with fruit and a blender. If you don't want heaps of sugar and condensed milk, even an egg, keep an eye on the preparatory stages.

The most popular beer is the local Angkor, but Anchor, Beer Lao, Tiger, San Miguel, Stella Artois, Carlsberg and Heineken also grace many a menu. Cans sell for around US\$1 to US\$1.50, and local draughts are similarly priced.

In Phnom Penh, foreign wines and spirits are sold at bargain prices. 'Muscle wines', something like Red Bull meets absinthe, with names such as Commando Bear Beverage and Brace of Loma, are popular with Khmers. They contain enough unknown substances to contravene the Geneva Chemical Weapons Convention and should only be approached with extreme caution.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

While Cambodian culture is tolerant of homosexuality, the scene is certainly nothing like that of neighbouring Thailand. Phnom Penh and Siem Reap have the best of the action. As with heterosexual couples, passionate public displays of affection are considered a basic no-no, so it's prudent not to flaunt your sexuality. That said, same sexes often hold hands in Cambodian society, so it's unlikely to raise eyebrows.

**Utopia** ([www.utopia-asia.com](http://www.utopia-asia.com)) features gay travel information and contacts, including detailed sections on the legality of homosexuality in Cambodia and some local gay terminology.

## HOLIDAYS

Banks, government ministries and embassies close down for public holidays, so plan ahead during these times. Holidays usually roll over if they fall on a weekend, and some people take a day or two extra during major festivals. See p121 for longer holidays that move with the lunar calendar.

**International New Year's Day** 1 January

**Victory over the Genocide** 7 January

**International Women's Day** 8 March

**International Workers' Day** 1 May

**HM the King's Birthday** 13 to 15 May

**International Children's Day** 1 June

**Former Queen's Birthday** 18 June

**Constitution Day** 24 September

**Paris Peace Accords** 23 October

**King Father's Birthday** 31 October

**Independence Day** 9 November

**International Human Rights Day** 10 December

## INSURANCE

Do not visit Cambodia without medical insurance. Anyone who has a serious injury or illness while in Cambodia may require emergency evacuation to Bangkok. With an insurance policy costing no more than the equivalent of a bottle of beer a day, this evacuation is free. Without an insurance

policy, it will cost between US\$10,000 and US\$20,000 – somewhat more than the average traveller's budget!

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access has spread throughout much of Cambodia. Charges range from 2000r per hour in major cities to US\$4 an hour in the smaller provincial capitals.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Angkor.com** (<http://angkor.com>) When it comes to links, this site has them, spreading its cybertentacles into all sorts of interesting areas.

**Cambodia Tales** (<http://andybrouwer.co.uk>) A great gateway to all things Cambodian, it includes comprehensive links to other sites and regular Cambodian travel articles.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Summaries on travelling to Cambodia, the Thorn Tree bulletin board and travel news.

**Tales of Asia** ([www.talesofasia.com](http://www.talesofasia.com)) Up-to-the-minute road conditions, including Poipet to Siem Reap, and other overland Cambodian travel information.

## LEGAL MATTERS

Narcotics, including marijuana, are not legal in Cambodia and police are beginning to take a harder line – the days of free bowls in guesthouses are long gone. However, marijuana is traditionally used in some Khmer food, so its presence will linger on. If you're a smoker, be discreet as police may soon turn the busting of foreigners into a lucrative sideline.

Moral grounds alone should be enough to deter foreigners from seeking underage sexual partners in Cambodia but, sadly, in some cases it's not. Paedophilia is a serious crime and now many Western countries have also enacted much-needed legislation to make offences committed overseas punishable at home. See also p125.

## MAPS

Unless you're looking to head into the wilds on the back of a dirt bike, you won't require additional maps to those in this guidebook. If you need one, the best all-rounder for Cambodia is Gecko's *Cambodia Road Map* at 1:750,000 scale, which has lots of detail and accurate place names. Another popular foldout map is Nelles' *Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam Map* at 1:1,500,000, although the detail is limited.

### TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

You're going to encounter food that's unusual, strange, maybe even immoral, or just plain weird. The fiercely omnivorous Cambodians find nothing strange in eating insects, algae, offal or fish bladders. They'll dine on a duck embryo, brew up some brains or snack on some spiders. They'll peel live frogs to grill on a barbecue or down the wine of a cobra to increase their virility.

To the Khmers, there's nothing 'strange' about anything that will sustain the body. They'll try anything once, even a burger.

For obvious reasons, please avoid eating endangered species.

## MEDIA Magazines & Newspapers

The *Cambodia Daily* ([www.cambodiadaily.com](http://www.cambodiadaily.com)) is a popular English-language newspaper, while the *Phnom Penh Post* ([www.phnompenhpost.com](http://www.phnompenhpost.com)) offers in-depth analysis every two weeks. Local travel magazines include the informative *AsiaLIFE Phnom Penh* ([www.asialifecambodia.com](http://www.asialifecambodia.com)) and the mildly amusing *Bayon Pearnik* ([www.bayonpearnik.com](http://www.bayonpearnik.com)), both free.

## Radio & TV

The BBC (100MHz FM) has broadcasts in Khmer and English in the capital.

Many guesthouses and hotels in Cambodia have satellite TV, offering access to BBC World, CNN, Star Sports, HBO and more.

## MONEY

Cambodia's currency is the riel, abbreviated here by a lower-case r written after the sum. The riel comes in notes with the following values: 50r, 100r, 200r, 500r, 1000r, 2000r, 5000r, 10,000r, 20,000r, 50,000r and 100,000r.

Throughout this chapter, each establishment's prices are in the currency quoted to the average punter. This is usually in US dollars or riel, but in the west of the country it is sometimes in Thai baht. While this may seem inconsistent, this is the way it is done throughout Cambodia and the sooner you get used to thinking comparatively in riel, dollars or baht, the easier travelling will be.

Currency exchange rates at the time this book went to press:

Country	Unit	Riel (r)
Australia	A\$1	3396
Canada	C\$1	3912
Euro zone	€1	5590
Japan	¥100	3497
Laos	10,000 kip	4185
New Zealand	NZ\$1	2875
Thailand	10B	1259
UK	UK£1	8089
USA	US\$1	4029
Vietnam	10,000d	2483

## ATMs

There are now credit-card-compatible ATMs (Visa and MasterCard only) in most major cities, including Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Sihanoukville, Battambang and Kompong

Cham. Machines dispense US dollars. Stay alert when using them late at night.

## Bargaining

Bargaining is the rule when shopping in markets, when hiring vehicles and sometimes when taking a room. Siem Reap and Angkor aside, the Khmers are not ruthless hagglers and a smile goes a long way.

See opposite for appropriate bargaining etiquette.

## Cash

There are no banks at Cambodian land-border crossings, so arrive with some US dollars in hand. US dollars are accepted everywhere so there's no compelling need to change money, although riel is useful to pay for motos and such. Hardened travellers may argue that spending dollars makes things slightly more expensive, but you'll soon pick up plenty of riel in change along the way. Exchanging dollars is best done at markets, as there are no queues and no paperwork. Those with cash in another major currency can change it in major centres.

## Credit Cards

Cash advances on credit cards are now available in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Sihanoukville, Kampot, Battambang and Kompong Cham. Canada Bank offers the best service, with free MasterCard and Visa cash advances. Credit cards are accepted at some hotels, restaurants, shops, airlines and travel agents.

## Travellers Cheques

Like credit cards, travellers cheques aren't much use when venturing beyond the main tourist centres. Most banks charge a commission of 2% to cash travellers cheque, and dish out US dollars rather than riel. Some hotels and travel agents will also cash travellers cheques after banking hours.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Many internet cafés in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Battambang and Sihanoukville will burn CDs from digital images using card readers or USB connections. The price is about US\$2.50 if you need a CD or US\$1.50 if you don't. Digital memory is widely available in Cambodia and pretty cheap.

Film and processing are cheap in Cambodia. A roll of 36 exposures costs about US\$2.

Processing charges are around US\$4 for 36 standard prints. Cheap slide film is widely available in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, but elsewhere it's hard to find.

## POST

Don't send mail from provinces; stick with Phnom Penh's main post office and make sure postcards and letters are franked before they vanish from your sight. Postcards cost 1500r to 2100r – cross your fingers and hope your mail arrives in two or three weeks.

Phnom Penh's main post office has a poste restante service. Although it now checks identification, don't have anything valuable sent there. It costs 200r per item received.

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Cambodia continues to experience unprecedented growth in tourism and this inevitably brings the bad along with the good. Your goal is a simple one: minimise the negatives and maximise the positives.

If you witness suspicious behaviour of tourists with Cambodian children, it's your duty to report it. Child exploitation and sexual abuse is now rightly taken very seriously here. Report any suspicions to **ChildSafe** (☎ 012 296609; [www.childsafe-cambodia.org](http://www.childsafe-cambodia.org)). When booking into a hotel or jumping on transport, look out for the ChildSafe logo; each establishment or driver who earns this logo supports the end to child-sex tourism and has undergone child-protection training.

When bargaining for goods in a market or for a ride on a moto, remember the aim is not to get the lowest possible price, but one that's acceptable to both you and the seller. Coming on too strong or arguing over a few hundred riel does nothing to foster Cambodians' positive feelings towards travellers. Be thankful there's room for discussion in Cambodia, so try not to abuse it.

On the topic of money, Cambodia is an extremely poor country and begging is prevalent in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Try not to become numb to the pleas as there's no social security network and no government support. Amputees may also find themselves stigmatised by mainstream society and unable to make ends meet any other way. If you do give – which is viewed positively by Buddhists – keep the denominations small, so expectations don't grow too big. Many amputees now sell books on the

street and buying from them may encourage others to become more self-sufficient. Please don't give money to children as they rarely get to keep the money and it only fuels the problem – giving them some food is preferable. A great option in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap is to shop or eat in establishments whose profits benefit street children, disabled people and disenfranchised women – check out the restaurants listed on p76 and p87, and the shops on p78 and p88 for more details.

Looting from Cambodia's ancient temples has been a huge problem over the past couple of decades. Don't contribute to this cultural rape by buying old stone carvings. Classy reproductions are available in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, complete with export trafficking certificates. For more on the issue of trafficking in antiquities, check out **Heritage Watch** ([www.heritagewatch.org](http://www.heritagewatch.org)) or pick up a copy of its quarterly *Touchstone* magazine.

On a similar note, pick up a copy of the *Stay Another Day Cambodia* ([www.stay-another-day.org](http://www.stay-another-day.org)), which has a list of sustainable-tourism initiatives.

Finally, don't forget what the Cambodians have been through in the protracted years of war, genocide and famine. Support local Cambodian-owned businesses; if anyone deserves to profit from the new-found interest in this wonderful country, it's surely the long-suffering Khmers.

## STUDYING

Organised courses are few and far between in Cambodia. Sadly, the only Khmer language courses on offer are strictly aimed at Phnom Penh's expat community. However, travellers can indulge in Khmer cooking lessons in Phnom Penh (p75), Siem Reap (p85) and Battambang (p98).

## TELEPHONE

Brightly numbered private mobile phone booths found on every town's kerbs offer cheap local calls for about 300r a minute. Mobile numbers start with ☎ 011, ☎ 012, ☎ 015, ☎ 016, ☎ 092 and ☎ 099. The cheapest international calls are via the internet and cost 300r to 2000r a minute. Although the price is great, the lengthy delay can be infuriating. Hello? Hello? More expensive international calls can be made from public phonecard booths, which are found in major cities. However, prices are



dropping, particularly if you use the MFone network. Roaming charges are high in Cambodia; consider buying a local sim card if you are here for a full month.

The cheapest fax services are also via the internet and cost around US\$1 to US\$2 per page for most destinations.

## TOILETS

Although the occasional squat toilet turns up now and then, particularly in the most budget of budget guesthouses, toilets are usually of the sit-down variety. In remote regions you'll find that hygiene conditions deteriorate somewhat.

The issue of what to do with used toilet paper is a cause for concern. Generally, if there's a wastepaper basket next to the toilet, that is where the toilet paper goes, as many sewage systems cannot handle toilet paper. Toilet paper is seldom provided, so keep a stash with you at all times.

Should nature call in rural areas, don't let modesty drive you into the bushes: there may be landmines not far from the road or track. Stay on the roadside and do the deed, or grin and bear it until the next town.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

Official tourist information in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap is pretty limited. In the provinces it's a different story, with more and more towns ambitiously opening somewhat helpful tourist offices. While the staff have little in the way of brochures or hand-outs, they'll do their best to tell you about local places of interest and may even drag the director out of a nearby karaoke bar to answer your questions. Guesthouses and free local magazines are generally more useful than tourist offices.

Cambodia has no official tourist offices abroad and it's unlikely that Cambodian embassies will be of much assistance in planning a trip, besides issuing a visa.

## TOURS

Despite every English-speaking moto driver in the country claiming to be a tour guide, there are actually few organised tours on offer in Cambodia. The most abundant are city tours of Phnom Penh and its surrounds, promoted by numerous guesthouses. Guesthouses in Sihanoukville promote boat tours to nearby tropical islands, as do some places in Kep.

Organised day trips to Bokor National Park are a popular option in Kampot. In the north-east, guesthouses in Mondulkiri offer elephant treks and village homestay trips, while in Ratanakiri it is possible to visit vast Virachey National Park. Even Siem Reap is at last getting in on the act, with some guesthouses offering trips to the remote temples of Preah Vihear province.

## TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Uneven pavements, potholed roads and, in Angkor, stairs as steep as ladders ensure that Cambodia isn't an easy country in which to travel for most people with mobility impairments. Few buildings have been designed with disabled people in mind, and transport in the provinces is usually very overcrowded, although taxi hire from point to point is at least an affordable option.

On the positive side, Cambodians are usually very helpful towards all foreigners, and it's cheap to hire someone to accompany you.

## VISAS

Most nationalities receive a one-month visa on arrival at land borders (except for the Phnom Den-Tinh Bien Vietnam crossing),

and Phnom Penh and Siem Reap airports. The visa costs US\$20 and one passport-sized photo is required. It is also possible to arrange a visa through Cambodian embassies overseas or an online visa (US\$25) through the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (<http://evisa.mfaic.gov.kh/>). Arranging a visa ahead of time can help prevent potential overcharging at some land crossings. Anyone planning an extended stay should get a one-month business visa for US\$25.

Visa extensions are granted in Phnom Penh; visit the shiny immigration office opposite Phnom Penh International Airport to arrange one. Tourist visas can be extended only once for one month, whereas business visas can be extended ad infinitum. Officially, an extension for one month costs US\$30, three months US\$60, six months US\$100 and one year US\$150. However, the police will keep your passport for about 25 days. Strangely enough there's an express, next-day service at inflated prices: one month US\$39 (for both tourist and business visas), three months US\$80 (business visas only) and so on. You'll need one passport photo for the extension. Overstayers are charged US\$5 per day at the point of exit.

## VOLUNTEERING

Cambodia hosts a huge number of NGOs, but most recruit skilled volunteers from home, so opportunities are few and far between. The best way to find out who is working in Cambodia is to hit the **Cooperation Committee for Cambodia** (CCC; ☎ in Phnom Penh 023-426009; 35 Ph 178, Phnom Penh). This organisation has a handy list of all NGOs, both Cambodian and international.

Grass-roots organisations are particularly appreciative of volunteers. Try the following places:

**Lazy Gecko Café** (Map p70; ☎ 023-012 1912935; 23B Ph 93) Based in Phnom Penh, it supports Jeannie's Orphanage; see p76.

**Starfish Project** (Map p105; ☎ 012 952011) Down in Sihanoukville this place helps to raise funds for local projects, and it encourages volunteers; see (p108).

Also check out these websites:

**Volunteer Abroad** ([www.volunteerabroad.com](http://www.volunteerabroad.com)) Has 53 programmes in Cambodia.

**Volunteer in Cambodia** ([www.volunteerincambodia.org](http://www.volunteerincambodia.org)) Organises voluntary teaching posts.

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women will generally find Cambodia a hassle-free place to travel, although some guys in the guesthouse industry may try their luck occasionally. If you're planning a trip off the beaten track it would be best to find a travel companion.

Khmer women dress fairly conservatively, and it's best to follow suit, particularly when visiting wats. In general, long-sleeved shirts and long trousers or skirts are preferred. In a skirt and hitting the town on a moto? Do as the Khmer women do and sit side-saddle.

Tampons and sanitary napkins are available in major cities and provincial capitals.

## WORKING

Job opportunities are limited in Cambodia, partly as Cambodians need the jobs more than foreigners and partly as the foreigners who work here are usually professionals recruited overseas. The easiest option is teaching English in Phnom Penh, as experience isn't a prerequisite at the smaller schools. Pay ranges from about US\$5 to US\$6 per hour (for the inexperienced) to about US\$15 to US\$20 per hour for those with a TEFL certificate teaching at the better schools. Places to look for work include the classifieds sections of local English-language newspapers.

### DOMESTIC TELEPHONE CODES

Banteay Meanchey	☎ 054
Battambang	☎ 053
Kampot	☎ 033
Kandal	☎ 024
Kep	☎ 036
Kompong Cham	☎ 042
Kompong Chhnang	☎ 026
Kompong Speu	☎ 025
Kompong Thom	☎ 062
Kratie	☎ 072
Koh Kong	☎ 035
Mondulkiri	☎ 073
Oddar Meanchey	☎ 065
Phnom Penh	☎ 023
Preah Vihear	☎ 064
Prey Veng	☎ 043
Pursat	☎ 052
Ratanakiri	☎ 075
Siem Reap	☎ 063
Sihanoukville	☎ 034
Stung Treng	☎ 074
Svay Rieng	☎ 044
Takeo	☎ 032

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