

# Angkor Wat



Angkor Wat (/ˌæŋkoːr ˈwɒt/; Khmer: អង្គរវត្ត, "City/Capital of Temples") is a Hindu-Buddhist temple complex in Cambodia, located on a site measuring 162.6 hectares (1,626,000 m<sup>2</sup>; 402 acres). It resides within the ancient Khmer capital city of Angkor. Guinness World Records considers it as the largest religious structure in the world.[2] Originally constructed as a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Vishnu for the Khmer Empire by King Suryavarman II during the 12th century, it was gradually transformed into a Buddhist temple towards the end of the century; as such, it is also described as a "Hindu-Buddhist" temple.[3][4]

Angkor Wat was built at the behest of the Khmer king Suryavarman II[5] in the early 12th century in Yaśodharapura (Khmer: យសោធរបុរៈ, present-day Angkor), the capital of the Khmer Empire, as his state temple and eventual mausoleum. Angkor Wat combines two basic plans of Khmer temple architecture: the temple-mountain and the later galleried temple.

## HISTORY OF ANGKOR WATT

### History

Angkor Wat lies 5.5 kilometres (3+1/2 mi) north of the modern town of Siem Reap, and a short distance south and slightly east of the previous capital, which was centred at Baphuon. In an area of Cambodia where there is an essential group of ancient structures, it is the southernmost of Angkor's main sites.[citation needed]

The construction of Angkor Wat took place over 28 years from 1122 to 1150 CE, during the reign of King Suryavarman II (ruled 1113–c. 1150).[1] A brahmin by the name of Divākarapaṇḍita (1040–c. 1120) was responsible for urging Suryavarman II to construct the temple.[12] All of the original religious motifs at Angkor Wat derived from Hinduism.[13] Breaking from the Shaiva tradition of previous kings, Angkor Wat was instead dedicated to Vishnu. It was built as the king's state temple and capital city. As neither the foundation stela nor any contemporary inscriptions referring to the temple have been found, its original name is unknown, but it may have been known as Vrah Viṣṇuloka after the presiding deity. Work seems to have ended shortly after the king's death, leaving some of the bas-relief decoration unfinished.[14] The term Vrah Viṣṇuloka or Parama Viṣṇuloka literally means "The king who has gone to the supreme world of Vishnu", which refer to Suryavarman II posthumously and intend to venerate his glory and memory.[10]

In 1177, approximately 27 years after the death of Suryavarman II, Angkor was sacked by the Chams, the traditional enemies of the Khmer.[15]

## Style

Angkor Wat is the prime example of the classical style of Khmer architecture—the Angkor Wat style—to which it has given its name. By the 12th century, Khmer architects had become skilled and confident in the use of sandstone (rather than brick or laterite) as the main building material. Most of the visible areas are sandstone blocks, while laterite was used for the outer wall and hidden structural parts. The binding agent used to join the blocks is yet to be identified, although natural resins or slaked lime has been suggested.[52]

The temple has drawn praise above all for the harmony of its design. According to Maurice Glaize, a mid-20th-century conservator of Angkor, the temple "attains a classic perfection by the restrained monumentality of its finely balanced elements and the precise arrangement of its proportions. It is a work of power, unity, and style." [53]

### SITE AND PLAN

## Architecture

Angkor Wat is a unique combination of the temple mountain (the standard design for the empire's state temples) and the later plan of concentric galleries, most of which were originally derived from religious beliefs of Hinduism.[13] The construction of Angkor Wat suggests that there was a celestial significance with certain features of the temple. This is observed in the temple's east–west orientation, and lines of sight from terraces within the temple that show

specific towers to be at the precise location of the solstice at sunrise.[39] The temple is a representation of Mount Meru, the home of the gods according to Hindu mythology: the central quincunx of towers symbolise the five peaks of the mountain, and the walls and moat symbolise the surrounding mountain ranges and ocean.[40] Access to the upper areas of the temple was progressively more exclusive, with the laity being admitted only to the lowest level.[41]

The Angkor Wat temple's main tower aligns with the morning sun of the spring equinox.[42][43] Unlike most Khmer temples, Angkor Wat is oriented to the west rather than the east. This has led many (including Maurice Glaize and George Coedès) to conclude that Suryavarman intended it to serve as his funerary temple.

## DECORATION AND DESIGN

### Decoration

Integrated with the architecture of the building, one of the causes for its fame is Angkor Wat's extensive decoration, which predominantly takes the form of bas-relief friezes. The inner walls of the outer gallery bear a series of large-scale scenes mainly depicting episodes from the Hindu epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Higham has called these "the greatest known linear arrangement of stone carving".[66] From the north-west corner anti-clockwise, the western gallery shows the Battle of Lanka (from the Ramayana, in which Rama defeats Ravana) and the Battle of Kurukshetra (from the Mahabharata, showing the mutual annihilation of the Kaurava and Pandava clans). On the southern gallery follow the only historical scene, a procession of Suryavarman II, then the 32 hells and 37 heavens of Hinduism.[67]