



CAMBODIA

a nine day kingdom crawl



AUTHOR'S NOTE

When my friend Alyssa told me that she had received a Fulbright grant to work in Cambodia, I don't think she expected me to be immediately invested in visiting. While other friends dawdled in their promises to make the lengthy 24-hour flight to see her, I was already scheduling PTO and refilling my Imodium stockpile. Alyssa's nine months in Cambodia would steer our nine day trip.

I knew little of Cambodia – of its food, language, or dress code. In fifth grade, I wrote a paper about the country after my teacher brusquely told us to “pick a genocide.” So I had slightly more context than the friends who asked why I was visiting Africa.

I did some healthy research – I binged Bourdain, bought the Lonely Planet, and reluctantly read blogs written by nomads with monikers like ‘The Wandering White Lady’ and ‘Chad Untethered.’ But these learnings were paltry in comparison to what I learned from my new Khmer friends. They showed us Cambodia’s temperaments and machinations; they spoke the language and could fight back when tuk-tuk drivers charged us 5x the fare upon seeing my fanny pack.

Now, I am all but a Khmer nationalist. Not in the political sense, but in the indignant sense that Cambodia must be discovered for all of its good. It sucked to see backpackers ignoring the culture in favor of cheap beaches, booze, and drugs. Go behave badly in your own country.

Writing this guide was tough – there are so many things we would not have been able to do without having experienced flip flops on the ground. Even if you don’t follow our trip to a tee, there will still be beauty, and boba, everywhere you look.

Arkoun chraen!

WHERE TO BEGIN?



Welcome to Southeast Asia.

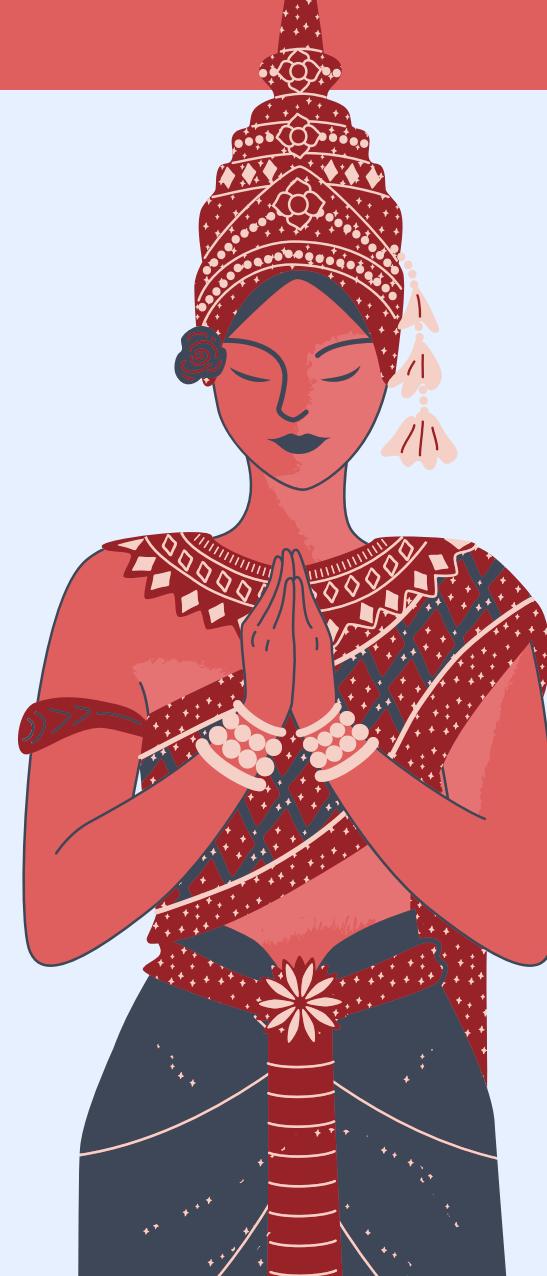
Let's say you now have a burning itch to eat durian and temple run. We've all been there. But where do you start?

- 1) Buy your flight. Singapore Airlines deftly manages your 24 hours in the sky – and you can even consider layovers as small as 50 minutes.

- 2) Get an [e-visa](#) to the Kingdom of Cambodia. Super easy – it comes back in two days.

- 3) Chart out your trip. I only visited Cambodia, but that doesn't mean you can't see cities like Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam or Bangkok in Thailand.

- 4) Start booking shit. Booking.com is your best option, but be careful reading the reviews. Try not to get got.



ACCOMMODATIONS

Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia, formerly known as 'The Pearl of Asia.' I stayed in Alyssa's apartment in BKK1, a super vibrant neighborhood replete with NGOs, embassies, and expat bars. Basically, perfect for a Fulbrighter. But I've read cool things about [Onederz Hostel](#), right next to the Mekong River, Wat Phnom, and Central Market. And only \$12 a night.

Koh Rong

This remote island off the coast of Cambodia is a lil' slice of heaven. It takes a second to get there, but once you do, it's yours forever. HIGHLY recommend a stay at [Long Set Resort](#) – locally-owned, and \$35 a night for luxury.

Siem Reap

Temple Town™. There are a lot of cool places to stay in Siem Reap, so don't limit yourself in your search. We stayed in a very respectable locale called [The Unique Angkor Villa](#), which had a pool and was walking distance to Pub Street.

PHNOM PENH

Things To Do

Kun Khmer Boxing

Beat your jet lag immediately with a \$5 lesson at Cambodian Top Team

Wat Phnom

Ease yourself into amazing Cambodian architecture and Buddhist spirituality

Friend's Future Factory

Participate in amazing events like a sustainable fashion show or Cambodian Pride

Russian Market

Eat delicious fruits like rambutan and buy \$5 knockoffs

Bassac Lane

Experience boutique, intimate bars and hidden clubs in this unique lane (HClub!)

Genocide Museum and Killing Fields

To keep you is no benefit, to destroy you is no loss.

For many travelers, reckoning with a country's past is usually not part of their itinerary. It's hard to explain why people must visit 'killing fields' on their vacation, where a vast amount of people were bludgeoned to death, or where babies were smashed against trees – truly horrible things. However, to me, visiting Choeung Ek is an imperative. Especially in learning the role that Americans played in bombing parts of Cambodia that radicalized so many civilians into joining the Khmer Rouge.

To learn is to avoid future complicity in heinous political decisions, and to understand how justice is still out of reach for many Cambodians. If you only have time to do one, skip the museum, which I found to raise more questions than answers.

KOH RONG

The Story of Sihanoukville

To get to Koh Rong, one must go through Sihanoukville. When reading about this infamous city, I came across articles like "The Demise of Sihanoukville" and "'No Cambodia left': how Chinese money is changing Sihanoukville." Obviously, we were a bit wary. Basically, this coastal city was infiltrated by Chinese developers hoping to lure gambling tourists and establish their influence in Southeast Asia; a Belt and Road-esque endeavor. Except when COVID hit, the city was left to rot in the ruins of promised casino construction. Local business owners were bulldozed.

On our way back from the islands, we freshened up at a gold-plated casino. Locals there told us that gambling was their main source of income. My friend was denied the poker rooms – those were for Chinese VIPs. We won \$18 playing roulette and left.

Things to Do

Secret Garden

A small, secret beach resort that is hella pristine. Get the rum coconut

Sok San Village

A cute collection of colorful homes on stilts overlooking white beaches

Coconut Oil Massage

Only \$18 for an hour. Get the aloe massage if you're burnt

Nest Beach Club

A trippy backpacker haven and hostel. Beware the Joss shots

Moto Around

Rent a motorcycle for \$15 a day. Try not to fall – twice

SIEM REAP

Angkor Temples

While we spent ten hours running around seven temples, you could probably get away with doing four. **Angkor Wat** is the most stunning and complete, but chaotic temple running is most fun at **Ta Prohm**, where you can see the cannibalistic tree roots interweave with the temple. The pink sandstone carvings at **Banteay Srei** are the most intricate – the name means 'citadel of women' because men could never be so detailed in their craftsmanship! **Bayon** emanates otherworldly power, **Neak Pean** sits in a small green lake, and **Preah Khan**'s walkway could be studied for years.

Things to Do

Phare, The Cambodian Circus

An NGO-run circus that tells the story of rice and societal corruption

Kulen Nature Trails

A thousand lingas, a reclining buddha, and an amazing swimmable waterfall

The Tavern

A beautifully-designed restaurant set amidst paddies and greenery

Temple Club

A three-story club, perfect for a night out on Pub Street

Crocodile Farm and Floating Villages

Still not sure how I feel about supporting these industries. The farm hawked baggies of crocodile meat and village was poverty porn – unsure if revenue actually goes to locals

PACKING LIST

COMFORT SNEAKERS
FLIP FLOPS
COTTON PANTS
COTTON SHIRTS
LIGHT WATERPROOF JACKET
ADVIL AND IMODIUM
WATER BOTTLE W/ FILTER
MOISTURIZER
SUNSCREEN
TOOTHBRUSH AND TOOTHPASTE
CONTACT SOLUTION
FACE WASH
SHAMPOO & CONDITIONER
BATHING SUITS
FAST DRYING TOWEL
UNDERGARMENTS
SOCKS
SUNGASSES
PORTABLE POWER BANK
INSECT REPELLENT
FIRST-AID KIT
SARONG
PASSPORT
HAND SANITIZER
FANNY PACK

BUDGET

PER PERSON, USD

FLIGHT EXPENSES = \$1,100
INCLUDES FLIGHT AND RELATED EXPENSES

ACCOMODATION = \$120
INCLUDES TWO HOTELS AND NIGHTBUS

FOOD AND DRINKS = \$200
INCLUDES RESTAURANTS, SNACKS, AND ALCOHOL

TRANSPORTATION = \$155
INCLUDES TUKTUKS, VANS, FERRIES, NIGHT BUS, AND MOTOS

ACTIVITIES = \$80
INCLUDES ANGKOR WAT, FLOATING VILLAGE, MUSEUM, AND CIRCUS

PERSONAL EXPENSES = \$60
INCLUDES SOUVENIRS AND TWO MASSAGES

TOTAL = \$1,715

MAP

From Sihanoukville, take a nine-hour night bus to Siem Reap using [Giant Ibis](#). Use Kao to get around Siem Reap!

From Phnom Penh, take a six hour van and a two hour [ferry](#) to the island of Koh Rong



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do you pronounce Khmer?

Khmer is the language and ethnicity of Cambodian people – Khmer people comprise 90% of the population. And it is pronounced like 'Kh-mai,' which no one seems to get right.

What does a durian smell like?

I originally thought we kept passing sickly-sweet smelling garbage until I realized the scent was always accompanied by a durian stand. It wasn't THAT bad – but apparently the smell lingers, which is why durian is banned in hotels and airplanes.

How did you fall off your motorcycle, dumbass?

I fell twice, once going over a shifty sand trap (not my fault) and once going up a hill (totally my fault). I stalled at the top, started rolling down, and realized it was either die or fall to the side. My fanny pack is still covered in blood stains.

Did you get culture shock?

Honestly, no. The food was reminiscent of Indian curry, the tuk-tuks were arranged haphazardly on the street like Pakistani rickshaws, and the expat nature of the trip reminded me of Mexico City. But if you've never been to Asia, prepare yourself.

What was your favorite part?

I feel like Dora with this question. I loved the remoteness of Koh Rong, the feeling that I was discovering pockets of the world untrdden by most. Other highlights were boxing, Bassac Lane, and the Kulen waterfall.



QUESTIONS? EMAIL
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