

**GOLDEN
GUIDE**

**to
South and East
Asia**

1961

CAMBODIA

CAMBODIA, an old Buddhist kingdom with a very modern ruler—Prince Norodom Sihanouk—is renowned for Angkor, the splendid and astonishing remains of the old Khmer empire. These temples and other buildings in the forests and glades of Siem Reap constitute the most striking architectural complex in South-East Asia and should be missed by no visitor to the region. They are now easy of access and tourist facilities are well developed.

Cambodia, with its sleepy charm, is otherwise of less interest for the quickly moving tourist, though the more leisurely traveller will get good value out of exploring. Like Vietnam and Laos, overtones of French influence provide a pleasant atmosphere of graceful culture.

1. Entry

OCEAN VESSELS call at Phnompenh and Sihanoukville (though they are relatively few) and you can reach Cambodia by rail from Thailand or by road from Thailand and South Vietnam. The rail link is practicable, although you will have to walk across the actual border, and formalities on the road are not too harassing.

But the air provides the most popular method of access. Phnompenh is served weekly by Air

France from Paris, and Royal Air Cambodge, Air Vietnam, Air Laos, Thai International and CPA also connect the capital with Saigon, Bangkok, Hongkong and other neighbouring points. There are in addition direct flights from Bangkok and Saigon to Siem Reap, the airfield for Angkor.

I. VISAS: an entry visa is required, obtainable from Cambodian consular authorities or, in their absence, from the French. Exit visas are also required for departure, but there is no difficulty.

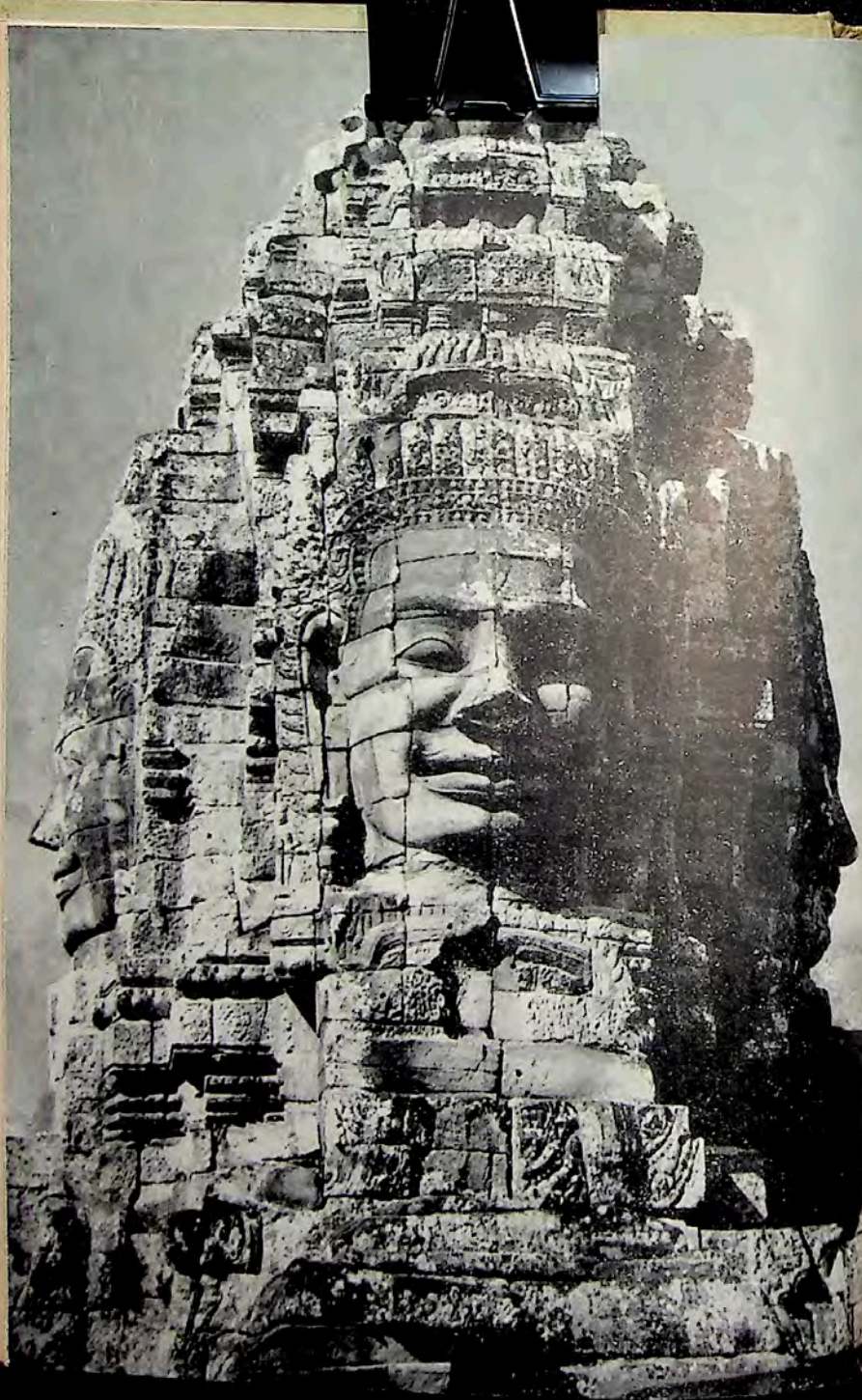
II. HEALTH: cholera and smallpox vaccination certificates are necessary.



Apsara in the Bayon, Angkor.

Nymphs of Angkor, Cambodia.





III. MONEY: the *Riel* is the monetary unit and is officially worth 35 to the US\$ or 98 to the £ sterling, which makes Cambodia a very expensive country at present. In fact the *Riel* is worth less, and black market rates differ considerably from the official. The authorities are not too strict, but legally you are obliged to declare all foreign currency on arrival and change it only through authorised channels such as the banks at the official rate. You may not bring in more than *Riels* 400 of Cambodian currency.

IV. CUSTOMS: usual regulations, but the export of antiques is severely restricted.

V. THE MOTORIST: you may bring your car, as a tourist, for two months on a deposit which is returned on departure. Service and repair stations exist in the main cities. The best roads are from Phnompenh to Kampot, Saigon, Sihanoukville, Battambang, Siem Reap (all asphalted) and Kompong Cham. But the road linking the new Phnompenh-Sihanoukville highway to the mountain resort of Kirirom is in poor shape.

2. Where to go

PHNOMPENH, on the Tonle Sap river, is the capital. Its administrative and residential quarters, with their quiet, shady roads and luxuriant gardens, occupy the northern part of the town. The Central Market and commercial districts, mostly peopled by Chinese and Vietnamese and full of noise and bustle, lie towards the south.

Facing the river is the Royal Palace, a relatively new building modelled on traditional styles. The National Museum stands close by: dedicated primarily to ancient Khmer art, it also houses the royal

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relics, an ethnographic section and a collection of pottery. The city has a peaceful charm that is partly French, partly Cambodian.

The Royal Palace, a walled park embracing a multitude of gorgeously gilt and painted pagoda roofs, is open to the public for five hours a day; guides are available. Among the parts that may be visited are the Throne Room, the Silver Pagoda which houses the celebrated Golden Buddha, the Royal Museum where the royal treasures are on show and the Chhanchaya Room where the royal corps de ballet—the fame of Cambodian dancing is second only to that of Thailand—gives its displays on great occasions.

HOTEL LE ROYAL (Telephone 510). 68 rooms and 28 airconditioned suites. Hotel in the grand style, with gardens.

HOTEL RAJA 20 airconditioned rooms. Small, elegant, building with gardens, excellent restaurant.

INTERNATIONAL HOTEL (Telephone 860). 34 rooms, of which 20 airconditioned.

HOTEL SUKHALAI (Telephone 342). 67 rooms, of which 11 airconditioned, near shopping and business district.

One hour's flight from the capital is Siem Reap, the centre for Angkor—also linked by air directly from Saigon and Bangkok and accessible from the capital (or from the Thai border) by road—bus services are cheap, but not too comfortable—or rail to Battambang or Sisophon, thence by road.

The ruins of Angkor extend over 60 square miles and the enthusiast could spend many weeks there without boredom. The major sites

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(Angkor Wat, the Bayon and the enclosure of Angkor Thom) can, however, be inspected rapidly in a single day—but you must be prepared for a lot of walking in the hot climate.

Angkor was the capital of the Khmer civilisation for a long period before being vacated under pressure from the invading Thais—and forgotten, in the consuming jungle, for four hundred years. It was rediscovered in the last century and is still in the process of being restored.

The temple of Ta Prohm has been deliberately left more or less as it was found by French archaeologists, and so gives a tremendously vivid impression of the force of the jungle that during those centuries infiltrated into the buildings and covered and almost uprooted them.

The principal edifice, Angkor Wat itself, is a vast moat-surrounded square with an outer wall and a central temple area—around which runs the famous frieze depicting scenes from the Ramayana. Some of the smaller temples outside Angkor Wat are almost equally fine examples of the Khmer art, and sometimes boast even more exquisite decoration—especially Banteai Kdei, Prah Kahn and Banteai Srei (which is a good way farther out than the rest and must be reached by a longish jeep ride). The usual short tour omits it.

The various parts of Angkor Thom, the old city of the Khmers, must be seen, and you should look out for the Terrace of the Leper



Terrace of the Leper King.

King with its superb hidden rows of sculptured figures. The Angkor group dates chiefly from the 9th to the 12th centuries A.D.

Access to the ruins is entirely free, but there is a strict prohibition against removing stones or other objects. You will be prudent to use only the routes clearly marked. A good way of spending two days is to take in Baksei Chamkrong, the Bayon, the Baphuon, the Terraces of the Leper King and of the Elephants and Angkor Thom on the first morning; Sra Srang, Ta Prohm, Ta Keo and Phnom Bakheng on the first after-

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noon; Prasat Kravan, Pre Rup, Ta Som, Neak Pean and Preah Kahn on the second morning; and Angkor Wat on the final afternoon. It is sensible to start early in the morning and rest during the heat of mid-day.

Organised tours are available at *Riels* 100 per person with French or English speaking guides, starting from the Grand Hotel, and you can hire private jeeps. Trishaws will take you out to the nearer ruins at modest rates. The tourist facilities at Siem Reap are, in general, efficient and good.

Angkor is best visited between November and February. After February the weather turns very hot and by the end of May it is raining hard, which makes it difficult or impossible to get about. During the winter months however the air is pleasantly dry and the heat by no means oppressive. If you have a gregarious disposition go at the Chinese and Vietnamese New Year—around late January or early February—when hundreds of visitors come in from Saigon and elsewhere; but book your accommodation in good time.

GRAND HOTEL. Under French management, airconditioned rooms with bath, *Riels* 600 single, 945 double, including all meals. Restaurant, bar, shops, elephant rides, sightseeing and travel offices.

HOTEL DES RUINES. Also French-managed, opposite Angkor Wat, air-conditioned rooms with modern facilities.

More modest hotels are to be found in Siem Reap—which is a lively market town—at moderate rates.

Other temples and sanctuaries worth seeing in Cambodia are Phnom Chisor, Phnom Bayang (28

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miles south of Takeo), Phnom Baset (20 miles north of Phnompenh), Wat Nokor (near Kompong Cham) and Sambor Prei Kuk (about 20 miles north of Kompong Thom).

Kep, 165 miles south of the capital on the Gulf of Thailand, is a beautiful seaside resort with accommodation limited to one comfortable bungalow.

Oudong, 25 miles north of Phnompenh, is another former capital of Cambodia now a place of pilgrimage. The **Bokor,** 20 miles from Kampot, is a hill dominating the sea from 3,200 feet. The mountain resort on the top, destroyed during the war, is to be rebuilt with modern hotels and a casino.

3. General Information

I. WEATHER: the average temperature in Phnompenh is 81°F. There is no true winter, but November to February are noticeably cooler than the other months—and Siem Reap is cooler than the capital. The dry season is from November to May. Only light clothes are necessary—and a raincoat in the rainy season.

II. FOOD: in Phnompenh try the French cuisine of the **Hotel Le Royal** and **Raja** and of the **Taverne, Pa Paillote** and **Kirirom** restaurants. For Chinese cooking the **Quoc Menh** is recommended. Chinese food is available in most towns.

III. DRINK: French wines and spirits, as well as Scotch whisky, are available widely at reasonable prices, together with imported beers from a variety of countries.

IV. NIGHTLIFE: night clubs in Phnompenh are **La Nouvelle Eve**, **Le Cambodge** and **Le Petit Tricotin**.



Angkor Wat from the main entrance

V. TRANSPORT: trishaws are used everywhere in Cambodia at a minimum rate of *Riels* 3 for a short ride. There are no taxis with meters, but cars can be hired with or without drivers. There are bus services which are uncomfortable but lively, and the railway is quite good.

VI. SHOPPING: fine silverware and bronzes of many kinds are to be bought, as well as locally-made raw silk sarongs (called *sampot*) and wood carvings. Every visitor to Phnompenh should call at the *Ecole des Arts Cambodgiens* (School of Cambodian Arts) just behind the National Museum, which sells a wide and attractive range of metal work and brilliant textiles woven with gold or silver thread. You can also pass a pleasant half hour bargaining in simple English or French for a *sampot* of black silk, the national feminine garment, in the market at the head of Ang Eng Street.

VII. HUNTING: the season is from December 1 to May 31, although harmful wild animals can be hunted throughout the year. Licences are issued by the *Direction Générale des Eaux et Forêts, Chasse et Pêche* in Phnompenh.

There are three kinds of licence; the one for big game entitles you to kill 18 animals—two male elephants, 2 gaurs, 4 buffaloes and 10 wild oxen. Experienced guides are available, and you may bring (but must declare) reasonable amounts of arms and ammunition.

VIII. LANGUAGES: Cambodian is the national language, but French is

generally spoken and English is understood by most people engaged in the tourist business.

IX. HOLIDAYS & FESTIVALS: few countries have endowed themselves so generously with public festivities; probably only its neighbour, Laos, can compete with Cambodia in this line. No doubt they are destined to be curtailed by the press of modern business; all the more reason therefore to see them while their exuberance is still unimpaired.

The most famous is undoubtedly the Water Festival, the *Fête des Eaux*. This celebration marks the moment when the waters of the Tonle Sap river, which had been forced up into the Great Lake and flooded the land for miles around when the Mekong was in spate, reverse their course and flow back towards the Mekong and the sea. The *Fête* falls in October, a convenient moment for the start of a visit to Cambodia, and lasts four days. Beneath the eyes of the King or his deputy, enthroned in the Floating Palace at the river side, pirogue crews from every province of the kingdom race downstream and then paddle back again, chanting, beneath the royal dais. At intervals the royal *pin péat* orchestra breaks into silvery melody, night falls, an illuminated water pageant succeeds the races and a floating altar moves slowly past, ablaze with candles. At few points has the traditional east survived in purer form.

X. FURTHER INFORMATION: apply to the National Tourist Office, 151 Dachko Damden Street, Phnompenh.

CEYLON

CEYLON OR Sri Lanka, known to the Romans as Taprobane and to the Muslim traders who once dominated the Indian Ocean as Serendib, has a history going back 2,500 years and more. The first recorded visitor was Sita, wife of the god Rama, who was abducted by Ravana, king of the island. She was closely pursued by Rama and his army, aided by Hanuman king of the monkeys, who invaded the island to get her back.

Buddhism was brought in from

India by a son of the great emperor Asoka, and Ceylon has ever since been a metropolis of the Buddhist world, and especially of Hinayana Buddhism or the Little Vehicle, sending out in former days missionaries who carried the Buddhist scriptures and liturgical language, Pali, to Burma, Siam and elsewhere in South-East Asia.

The Portuguese occupied the coast from the early sixteenth century, to be followed by the Dutch, from whom descends the



Elephants bathing in a river in Ceylon

