

Title:

Khmer Rouge Prison 21 - The Chilling High School In Phnom Pehn, Cambodia

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495

Summary:

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Article Body:

Most travel stories are of the happy-go-lucky variety. Every once in a while, however, one visits a place that evidences the vicious, dark side of mankind. Khmer Rouge Prison 21, known as Tuol Seng, is one such place. It is a stark reminder of the cruelties humanity can visit upon itself.

Tuol Sleng

In 1962, the high school of Ponhea Yat was opened in the center of Phnom Pehn. The school consists of three buildings in a horseshoe layout with each building having three stories. In the 1970s, the name was changed to Tuol Svay Prey High School. In May of 1976, the school became the headquarters of the Khmer Rouge genocide campaign in Cambodia.

The infamous Khmer Rouge was the ruling party of Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, with fighting going on for many more years. Led by Pol Pot, also known as Brother Number One, the party is estimated to have killed as much as 1/3rd of the population of Cambodia through murder and starvation. The Khmer Rouge has justly been compared to Hitler for its brutal genocidal actions. Tuol Sleng represents the most brutal example.

Tuol Sleng covers roughly a city block, but is tucked back among alleys in Phnom Pehn. During the Khmer's rule, two folds of iron sheets encased in electrified barbed wire to prevent escape enclosed it. Prisoners were chained to walls and tortured on a daily basis until they admitted crimes against the state. The prisoners were required to follow ten regulations. A shocking sampling include:

1. Do not try to hide facts by making excuses. You are strictly prohibited from contesting me.
2. While being lashed or electrocuted, you must not cry at all.
3. Disobey any rule and you will get 5 lashes with an electric wire.

Much like the Nazi concentration camps, the Khmer Rouge documented ever prisoner and atrocity. Upon arrival, each prisoner's picture was taken and a detailed biography was documented. Prisoners were then confined to cells approximately the size of a closet by chaining them to iron posts. Daily torture was undertaken through beatings, electric shock and other atrocities. At the end of their imprisonment, prisoners were marched about two miles to the killing fields. To save bullets, the Khmer Rouge beat them to death.

The atrocious numbers for Tuol Sleng:

From 10,500 to 14,500 adult prisoners.

Another 2,000 children prisoners.

7 survived.

Yes, just 7.

Only 2 Khmer have ever been prosecuted for the atrocity.

Today, Tuol Sleng is a genocide museum. The walls are full of pictures of the prisoners. Men and women. Boys and girls as young as 5 years old. There are still bloodstains on the floors of the interrogation rooms.

Why visit or write an article about Tuol Sleng? Traveling is about discovery, even if the subject is something horrible. Failing to recognize the dark side of humanity dooms us to repeat those failings. The Nazi concentration camps existed in the 40s, Tuol Sleng in the 70s, and today similar atrocities are occurring in North Korea and Darfur. Will we ever learn?