

ABOUT CAMBODIA

Present day Cambodia is the successor state to the mighty Khmer empire which once ruled vast swathes of land across what is now Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The remains of this empire can be seen at the fabled temples of Angkor – monuments that are unrivalled in scale and grandeur anywhere else in South East Asia. The country covers a land area of 181,035 sq.-km. It is bounded on the west by Thailand; on the north by both Thailand and Laos; on the east by Vietnam; and on the south by the Gulf of Thailand. Administratively, the country is composed of 22 provinces, three municipalities, 165 districts, 1,621 communes, and 14,073 villages. Cambodia's two dominant topographical features are the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Lake.

FAST FACTS

AIRPORTS

The country has three international airports: Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville International Airport. All of these are served by flights from neighbouring Asian destinations although the airlines flying the route change often. When coming from America, Australia, or Europe, it is usually best to book a flight to Thailand, Singapore or Vietnam and make your travel arrangements for the short distance to Cambodia from these larger flight hubs. Over the past years, more international airlines have opened routes to Phnom Penh in particular, giving visitors more flight options entering Cambodia.

ARRIVAL / DEPARTURE INFORMATION

The majority of visitors to Cambodia require a visa to enter the country and all must have a passport that is valid for six months after their planned exit date from the country. Most nationalities are eligible for a visa on arrival at Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville international airports without prior registration. Visa on arrivals are valid for 30 days. To get up-to-date information on visa regulations and costs etc., please access: <http://www.evisa.gov.kh/>

Only a few border crossing immigration points accept e-visas and visa on arrival; however it is recommended to double check beforehand. The International departure tax is now included in the airfares and there is no need to pay any tax upon departure from Cambodian Airports.

Electronic Visas are available through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation's website: <http://www.evisa.gov.kh/> with a processing time of three business days. The applicant must email a scanned copy of their passport and a US dollar fee paid by credit card. They will receive an emailed visa certificate, which they must print out and bring with them on their journey to Cambodia.

It is essential for customers to know that one requires at least 2 blank pages in their passport for visa (one for the visa and one for the various stamps) for every entry into Cambodia.

All the above information may change without prior notice. It remains the traveler's responsibility to check visa requirements before traveling.

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices are usually open from Monday to Saturday, from 7.30am or 8am until 5pm, and often close for lunch between 12-2pm. Shops open early and close any time between 6pm and 10pm. Most shops are open seven days a week.

BANKS

Banks are open Monday to Friday, from 8am-3pm, and Saturday morning until 12 noon. In the major cities, exchange bureaus and most hotels will change US dollars – although for other currencies it is usually necessary to visit a bank. The banks generally offer the best rate of exchange. Traveller's checks can be exchanged at banks and some hotels but they can be difficult to change outside of the major cities. Also, a commission applies (around two to five per cent). Very few shops, hotels or restaurants accept traveller's checks. Visa Card and MasterCard are accepted in most hotels, restaurants and shops in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. US dollars are still the most reliable form of currency to carry. It is advisable to carry small denominations of dollars to pay tuk-tuk drivers and vendors who may not have small change.

CLOTHING

Due to Cambodia's tropical climate, we recommend light cotton clothing in order to remain comfortable while out and about during the day. Smart casual is the attire for the evening (Some hotels and higher-end restaurants impose dress codes so it is always best to check in advance with your Asian Trails guide). It is advisable to cover arms and legs in the evenings to protect against mosquito bites. An umbrella is a good idea in both the hot and rainy seasons as it will offer protection from the strong sun and the tropical downpours respectively. Tourists should respect a dress code to enter temples and palaces which are sacred places. Visitors should not wear the following when entering these places: sleeveless shirts; sportswear; tights/leggings; shorts; short skirts; three-quarter length trousers; flip flops/sandals without a strap behind the heel; swimwear/beachwear; and shirts with offensive texts or images.

CURRENCY

Officially, the currency of Cambodia is the riel but the prevailing currency in Cambodia is US Dollars, preferably in small denominations. Almost all prices in the popular tourism destinations are displayed in US Dollar. Please be aware that ripped, torn, or old dollar bills will not be accepted. ATM machines that supply US dollars are widespread.

CUSTOM ALLOWANCES

The following goods may be imported into Cambodia without incurring a customs duty:

- 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 200 grams of tobacco;
- 350 ml of perfume;
- Two liters of wine;
- Medicines for personal use.

CAMBODIA (Do's and Don'ts)

Dos in Cambodia

- Ask for permission before taking photographs of Cambodian people or monks.
- It is customary to remove your shoes when entering a place of worship such as a pagoda or a temple, as well as someone's home.
- Though not always expected, a respectful way of greeting another individual is to bow the head slightly with hands pressed together at the chest (known as the sampeah).
- If invited to dine in a Cambodian family's home, it is polite to bring a small gift for the host such as fruit, dessert, or flowers.
- If invited to attend a Cambodian wedding, it is customary to bring cash as a wedding gift.
- Keep business cards ready, and present them with both hands. Accept business cards with both hands.

Don'ts in Cambodia

- Don't use your feet to point at someone.
- Don't touch a Cambodian person on the head.
- Don't begin eating if you are a guest at a dinner and the host has yet to take a bite.
- Women should never touch male monks or hand something directly to them.
- Keep public displays of affection to a respectful minimum.

ELECTRICITY

Cambodia uses 220V and a mixture of flat two-pin, round two-pin, or three-pin plugs. It is recommended to bring a universal plug adaptor. Power outages happen occasionally but most hotels have their own generators to provide an emergency power source.

ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE

Bars and restaurants are plentiful in the major tourism destinations of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. These range from cheap and cheerful beers bars to smart cocktail lounges. Phnom Penh also has an emerging sophisticated night club scene. In Phnom Penh, the bar and restaurant venues on the popular riverfront area offer a laidback charm with cooling breezes. Most major hotels offer entertainment, with properties in Siem Reap especially good at hosting traditional dance performances during the high season. Gambling is a major pastime in Cambodia and there are casinos in Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, and on the border with Thailand and Vietnam.

FOOD

Generally, the food in Cambodia is not as spicy as the cuisines of Thailand or Laos but it is flavored heavily with herbs. Fish and rice are the mainstays of Cambodian cuisine. The country has the benefit of a complex river system that feeds South East Asia's largest freshwater lake, plus a coastline famous for its shrimp and crab. Prahok, a mainstay of Cambodian cuisine is a fermented fish paste that nourishes the nation. Amok; fish-and-coconut milk steamed in a banana leaf is also a core dish on dinner tables. Meals in Cambodia usually consist of three or four different dishes, reflecting the tastes of sweet, sour, salty, and bitter. A legacy of former French colonial occupation is authentic Gallic cuisine at a fraction of the cost in the European country. Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Sihanoukville all attract a large volume of Western and Asian visitors and this is reflected in the wealth of global cuisine that is widely available in these major tourist destinations, including American fast food, Italian pizzas and pasta, British fish and chips, German meat dishes, Japanese sushi, and spicy Thai specialties. As in all of the countries that Asian Trails operates in, international brand hotels have food outlets that cater for all tastes.

HEALTH

No vaccinations are required prior to entry to Cambodia except if travelling to remote regions inside the Kingdom. It is advisable to be inoculated when traveling off the established tourist trail and to contact your local physician or check with your hospital for the appropriate vaccinations needed. We recommend taking precautionary measures before entering Cambodia by visiting a physician for any medical recommendations and/or requirements.

HOTELS

The standards of accommodation across Cambodia are excellent and diverse with options for all pockets. Most staff at key positions (front office, reception, restaurants etc.) speak excellent English, but please be patient if you do not get what you want right away. During check-in you will be requested to complete a registration card. The hotel may ask for an imprint of your credit card as a guarantee for extra purchases. Ask the cashier to return this slip upon check out. Please check that you receive meal coupons (where applicable) with your room key. Many hotels do have a hotel directory inside each room where all facilities are described. Reception desks are usually open 24 hours. For Internet connections please check with reception for login requirements, (extra costs may apply). General check-in time is from 2-pm and check out time is 11-am. If you require a late check-out (extra costs may apply) please check with reception.

INSURANCE

Medical facilities are limited in Cambodia, especially outside of the capital Phnom Penh and the popular tourism destination of Siem Reap. It is therefore essential to take out a good travel and medical insurance policy prior to travelling. The policy should cover the cost of an evacuation flight out of Cambodia. For adventure excursions such as cycling tours, proof of purchase of a travel insurance policy is usually required.

INTERNET

Internet access is widely available in every major city in Cambodia. Particularly in the larger destinations such as Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, it is very common to find good to excellent internet speed. Most hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars offer free Wi-Fi.

LANGUAGE

English is widely spoken in the main tourist destinations across the country. Cambodia's national language is Khmer and unlike other languages in the South East Asia region, it is not a tonal language. Outside the major centres of Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and the coastal tourism hot spots, most people speak only Khmer but it is usually easy to find someone who can communicate in English.

PEOPLE

The Cambodian people are famed for their welcoming smiles and friendliness. Despite two decades of tragedy and war, their present day positive and optimistic nature reflects the dawn of a new era as the country becomes a major tourism destination. Tourism offers new opportunities and the people are eager to play their part in this burgeoning sector and this is reflected in the happy smiles and eagerness to help those who arrive to see this slice of paradise in South East Asia.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Closure of tourist sites can occur at short notice on public holidays and our Asian Trails guides will give guests advice about this situation. The dates of national holidays may change every year.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Getting around the bigger cities is easy, especially in the tourist hotspots of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. The following forms of transport are available:

- Car hire can be arranged through Asian Trails.
- Taxis can be hired in Phnom Penh only. They are not all metered so the price may have to be fixed in advance. Various transportation apps are available in Cambodia to pre-book taxi services
- Motodops (motorcycle taxis) are an efficient and inexpensive way to get around. Given the predominant use of motorcycles for urban public transportation, travellers should ensure that their insurance policies provide cover for potential accidents.
- Other popular means of transportation are tuk tuks (rarely called any longer by its former name 'Remork') -a motorcycle with a cabin attached to the rear. This traditional form of transportation is also available in Cambodia to pre-book
- Bajaj's are unibody three wheelers that slowly make their way into the streets of various Cambodian streets. Also this form of transportation can be booked via various mobile apps.

RELIGION

Buddhism is the dominant religion in Cambodia with nearly 95 per cent of the population followers of this faith. Islam is practiced by a small percentage of the population, mainly the Cham people resident near the border with Vietnam. Christianity and Hinduism account for less than one per cent.

SAFETY

Despite its turbulent past, Cambodia is a safe country to visit. However, theft and bag batches do occur so never leave your bags unattended and always maintain a firm grip on cameras, mobile phones and shoulder bags. Be careful when riding motorcycles and remarks/tuk tuks as bags are easily snatched from front baskets. Leave your expensive jewelry at home and always use hotel safety deposits boxes or in-room safes for your valuables.

SHOPPING

Cambodia is a great place to buy unique items such as silks, woodcarvings, lacquer ware, rattan weavings and the krama, the traditional Cambodian scarf. The krama is one of the most popular Cambodian souvenirs and is similar to a sarong and can be used for bathing, cleaning and protection from the sun. Phnom Penh and Siem Reap have an abundance of local markets that offer great souvenirs. Our Asian Trails guides can offer advice on the best places to buy holiday purchases. Although the larger cities have supermarkets and gift shops, huge, glitzy shopping malls, like those found in Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong, do not exist – but that is one of the attractions of a country that offers something different from the more developed countries in South East Asia. Since 2014, Phnom Penh has a few modern shopping malls, with ongoing developments on a smaller and medium-size scale in Siem Reap.

STREET STALLS

Stalls mainly occupy the main streets of the major tourism destinations with everything from food, drinks to T-shirts and souvenirs for sale. You should always barter when buying anything on the street (a smile really does help!) Bargaining is not only expected, it is a way of life. Start at a third of the asking price and work your way up.

TELEPHONE

If you have mobile phone worldwide coverage, you can use your own mobile phone to make local or international calls. However, check with your mobile phone provider about potential costs before using it abroad as charges can be very high. It is very easy to buy a local “pay as you go” SIM/Micro SIM card on arrival for a few dollars. The country has an extensive 3G/4G internet network in place and various internet and calling plans are available for visitors when purchasing a local SIM card.

TIME ZONE

Cambodia is GMT + 7 and does not operate a daylight-saving system.

TIPPING

Tipping for good service is expected and is always appreciated. Tipping the guide and driver on your tours is becoming the standard and the amount depends on how satisfied you are with the service provided. Hotel porters should be tipped for carrying bags to the room. In other cases, it is totally up to the individual when and how much to tip. An applicable service charge may be included in your invoice but leaving a small tip as a token of appreciation is certainly not misplaced.

WATER

It is not safe to drink tap water but purified bottled mineral water is available everywhere. All hotels provide a complimentary bottle of local drinking water per person in the room. Ice cubes in drinks are generally okay in good standard hotels and restaurants, but it is best to avoid them on street stalls or in the countryside. Some minor stomach problems are always possible when travelling in exotic countries, so bring a supply of your usual anti-diarrhea medicine.

WEATHER

Cambodia has two distinctive weather patterns and seasons: the green season from June to October; and dry from November to May. The hottest days of the hot season rarely climb above 35C (95F) and the cool season may push the mercury as low as 20C (68F). The monsoons between June and October follow the same pattern with clear mornings and rain for around one-to-three hours in the afternoon. Afternoon rains can make touring a bit more difficult but a big bonus is that the rains turn the jungle and rice paddies lush and green. Evenings during the green season are often cool and bringing a thin jacket may be a good option. The dry season can be very dusty, but it ensures treks through the jungle terrain are more manageable.

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

Phnom Penh Police dial +855 (0)97 778 0002; Phnom Penh Emergency Medical Services dial +855 (0)23 724 891; Phnom Penh Fire service dial +855 (0)12 786 693; Phnom Penh International Airport dial + (855) (0) 23 862 800; Siem Reap Police dial +855 (0)12 402 424; Siem Reap Emergency Medical Services dial +855 (0)17 928 655; Siem Reap Fire service dial +855 (0)12 784 464; Siem Reap Airport dial +855 (0)63 761 261 and Sihanoukville Airport +(855) (0) 012 333 524

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