

LEGEND

- Provincial / City
- International Airport
- Domestic Airport
- Port
- Railway Track
- Check Point
- International Boundary
- Provincial Boundary
- District Center

THE DECISION

Two years ago I visited Vietnam, starting from Hanoi, to Ha Long, Hue, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh City. I liked the country and people and was thinking about visiting Cambodia.

End of last year, I learned from my brother Jean-Pierre, that he will spend about one month at the coast of Cambodia to work for a hotel management training centre. I thought about the possibility to meet there. However in South Africa you need to plan and book your trip well ahead to get favourable flights and accommodation. His final plans were too late to wait for my booking, which I have done few months ahead. Therefore unfortunately I missed him and his wife Heidi at their holiday trip in Cambodia and during the time I was there, I was too far away from his location and he was too busy in his job to meet me.

TO GET THERE

After a long, trip from Durban, via Dubai, I finally reached Ho Chi Minh City the preliminary destination, where I stayed overnight to catch the plain to Phnom Penh . The seats in the “Wood Class” of Emirates Airways are a torture and I envied the people travelling business class. They got proper beds to sleep and the Stewardesses probably tell the passengers a good night story and give them a good night kiss. But this is not for common folk like me. Unless your trip is paid for by

your employer, you need to be a pop star, multimillionaire or a lucky bastard like my brother Max, being in the million miles club.

TRANSFER TO THE HOTEL

After about 80 minutes in customs I consulted my script sheet prepared in the air plain whilst my brain somewhat was working. Debra, the star, who organised my trip, advised to use Mai Linh or Vinasun cabs (I presumed, that any other cab are run by sharks). At the taxi rank, of course no such cab was in sight and I was too tired for a lengthy search. So I decided to negotiate a fixed price of Don 150'000 to the hotel, which I got translated and confirmed by an official looking person with name tag. The transfer to the hotel was as usual for Vietnamese conditions. From the Saigon side hundreds of motorbikes, many missing a serious crash by centimetres and a couple of near heart attacks from my side. Of course the driver has no idea regarding location of the hotel, which he gave me to understand after about 15 minutes driving. In the hotel voucher from "gta" is the address of the hotel. Printing ink is expensive, "gta" knows and has chosen the tiniest print available from Microsoft Word, which makes it a pleasure to read in the near dark taxi. Ah yes, the driver says, the hotel is right there, pointing ahead. After half an hour, I enquire again the distance to the hotel. Right there he repeats, stopping at a policeman asking for direction. The taximeter is running, I noticed, but put not much thought to it, since we agreed a

price. After many U-turns, we finally reached the hotel and the meter 184'000 Don. In the hotel reception, where I got change, the huge argument started! 150 we agreed, I don't give a damn about your meter! 192 the driver insisted. Finally I gave him 170 and told him to get lost.

THE IQ TEST

From the restaurant of the hotel, where I ate a sandwich, there was an incredible view. Finally I reached the hotel room. Bed sweet bed and sleep were my thoughts, but first I needed a shower. There was a bath with a shower head, no shower curtain. I tried hard not to create a water feature for the guest one floor below.



A few minutes of TV is the best sleeping pill for me. So I switch on the TV. Sochi Olympics Ice Ballet, without sound, pretty frustrating. On the remote I first tried volume control - no effect, mute button - no effect. Then I fiddled a view minutes with unmarked buttons and knobs at the TV set and finally

managed to get sound. I am sure, secretly it was monitored, how long it took me to restore the sound, a factor to work out my IQ. It is very important to the hotel management to know the guest's IQ in order to set up the hotel bill accordingly.

After a short and hard sleep I am catching the Vinasun cab, which, ordered the night before, arrived in time. It reached the airport in 25 minutes, the taximeter read 127'000 Don!

CAMBODIA

Cambodia, pronounced Cambootye in Khmer (pronounced Kamere) or Kampuchea in Khmer, officially known as the Kingdom of Cambodia and once known as the Khmer Empire, is a country located in the southern portion of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. Its total landmass is 181,035 square kilometers, bordered by Thailand to the northwest, Laos to the northeast Vietnam to the east, and Thailand to the southwest.

The population of Cambodia is over 14.8 million. The official religion is Theravada Buddhism, which is practiced by approximately 95% of the Cambodian population. The capital and largest city is Phnom Penh, the political, economic, and cultural center of Cambodia. The kingdom is a constitutional monarchy with Norodom Sihamoni, a monarch chosen by the Royal Throne Council, as head of state. The head of

government is Hun Sen, who is currently the longest serving non-royal leader in South East Asia and has ruled Cambodia for over 25 years.

Cambodia's ancient name is "Kambuja". In 802 AD, Jayavarman II declared himself king marking the beginning of the Khmer Empire which flourished for over 600 years allowing successive kings to dominate much of Southeast Asia and accumulate immense power and wealth. The Indianized kingdom built monumental temples including Angkor Wat, now a World Heritage Site, and facilitated the spread of first Hinduism, then Buddhism to much of Southeast Asia. After the fall of Angkor to Ayutthaya in the 15th century, Cambodia was ruled as a vassal between its neighbors until it became a protectorate by the French in the mid-19th century. Cambodia gained independence in 1953.

The Vietnam War extended into Cambodia, during which the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh in 1975 and later carried out the Cambodian Genocide from 1975-1979 when they were ousted by Vietnam and then fought against the Vietnamese backed People's Republic of Kampuchea in the Cambodian–Vietnamese War (1979-1991). Following the 1991 Paris Peace Accords Cambodia was governed briefly by a United Nations mission (1992-1993). The UN withdrew after holding elections in which around 90% of the registered voters cast ballots. The 1997 coup placed power solely in the hands of Prime Minister

Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party who remain in power as of today.

Cambodia has an economic growth averaging 6 percent for the last 10 years. Strong textiles, agriculture, construction, garments, and tourism sectors led to foreign investments and international trade. Oil and natural gas deposits found beneath Cambodia's territorial waters in 2005 remain mostly untapped, due in part to territorial disputes with Thailand. Despite economic improvements as of 2013 the Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Cambodia 138th place (tied with Laos) in terms of human development indicating that Cambodia has medium to low development presently.

Iron was worked by about 500 BC, with supporting evidence coming from the Khorat Plateau, in modern day Thailand. In Cambodia, some Iron Age settlements were found beneath Baksei Chamkrong and other Angkorian temples while circular earthworks, were found beneath Lovea a few kilometers north-west of Angkor. Burials, much richer than other types of finds, testify to improvement of food availability and trade (even on long distances: in the 4th century BC trade relations with India were already opened) and the existence of a social structure and labor organization.

During the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries, the Indianized states of Funan and its successor, Chenla, coalesced in present-day Cambodia and southwestern Vietnam. For more than 2,000 years, Cambodia absorbed influences from India, passing

them on to other Southeast Asian civilizations that are now Thailand and Laos. Little else is known for certain of these polities, however Chinese chronicles and tribute records do make mention of them. It is believed that the territory of Funan may have held the port known to Alexandrian geographer Claudius Ptolemy as "Kattigara". The Chinese chronicles suggest that after Jayavarman I of Chenla died around 690, turmoil ensued which resulted in division of the kingdom into Land Chenla and Water Chenla which was loosely ruled by weak princes under the dominion of Java.

The Khmer Empire grew out of these remnants of Chenla becoming firmly established in 802 when Jayavarman II (reigned c790-850) declared independence from Java and proclaimed himself a Devaraja. Devaraja is the Hindu-Buddist cult of deified royalty in Southeast Asia. It could be simply described as Southeast Asian concept of divine king. He and his followers instituted the cult of the God-king and began a series of conquests that formed an empire which flourished in the area from the 9th to the 15th centuries. During the rule of Jayavarman VIII the Angkor empire was attacked by the Mongol army of Kublai Khan, however the king was able to buy peace. Around the 13th century, monks from Sri Lanka introduced Theravada Buddhism to Southeast Asia. The religion spread and eventually displaced Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism as the popular religion of Angkor; however it was not the official state religion until 1295; when Indravarman III took power.

The Khmer Empire was Southeast Asia's largest empire during the 12th century. The empire's center of power was Angkor, where a series of capitals were constructed during the empire's zenith. In 2007 an international team of researchers using satellite photographs and other modern techniques concluded that Angkor had been the largest pre-industrial city in the world with an urban sprawl of 1,150 square miles. The city, which could have supported a population of up to one million people and Angkor Wat, the best known and best-preserved religious temple at the site, still serve as reminders of Cambodia's past as a major regional power. The empire, though in decline, remained a significant force in the region until its fall in the 15th century.

After a long series of wars with neighboring kingdoms, Angkor was sacked by the Ayutthaya Kingdom and abandoned in 1432 because of ecological failure and infrastructure breakdown. This led to a period of economic, social, and cultural stagnation when the kingdom's internal affairs came increasingly under the control of its neighbors. By this time, the Khmer penchant for monument building had ceased. Older faiths such as Mahayana Buddhism and the Hindu cult of the god-king had been supplanted by Theravada Buddhism for good.

The court moved the capital to Longvek where the kingdom sought to regain its glory through maritime trade. The first mention of Cambodia in European documents was in 1511 by the Portuguese. Portuguese and Spanish travelers described

the city as a place of flourishing wealth and foreign trade. The attempt was short-lived however, as continued wars with Ayutthaya and the Vietnamese resulted in the loss of more territory and Longvek being conquered and destroyed by King Naresuan the Great of Ayutthaya in 1594. A new Khmer capital was established at Udong south of Longvek in 1618, but its monarchs could survive only by entering into what amounted to alternating vassal relationships with the Siamese and Vietnamese for the next three centuries with only a few short-lived periods of relative independence.

The hill tribe people in Cambodia were "hunted incessantly and carried off as slaves by the Siamese (Thai), the Anamites (Vietnamese), and the Cambodians."

In the nineteenth century a renewed struggle between Siam and Vietnam for control of Cambodia resulted in a period when Vietnamese officials attempted to force the Khmers to adopt Vietnamese customs. This led to several rebellions against the Vietnamese and appeals to Thailand for assistance. The Siamese–Vietnamese War (1841–1845) ended with an agreement to place the country under joint suzerainty. This later led to the signing of a treaty for French Protection of Cambodia by King Norodom I.

In 1863, King Norodom, who had been installed by Thailand, sought the protection of France from the Thai rule. In 1867, the Thai king signed a treaty with France, renouncing suzerainty over Cambodia in exchange for the control of

Battambang and Siem Reap provinces which officially became part of Thailand. The provinces were ceded back to Cambodia by a border treaty between France and Thailand in 1906.

Cambodia continued as a protectorate of France from 1867 to 1953, administered as part of the colony of French Indochina, though occupied by the Japanese empire from 1941 to 1945. Between 1874 and 1962, the total population increased from about 946,000 to 5.7 million. After King Norodom's death in 1904, France manipulated the choice of king, and Sisowath, Norodom's brother, was placed on the throne. The throne became vacant in 1941 with the death of Monivong, Sisowath's son, and France passed over Monivong's son, Monireth, feeling he was too independently minded. Instead, Norodom Sihanouk, a maternal grandson of King Sisowath was enthroned. The French thought young Sihanouk would be easy to control. They were wrong, however, and under the reign of King Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia gained independence from France on 9 November 1953.

Cambodia became a constitutional monarchy under King Norodom Sihanouk. When French Indochina was given independence, Cambodia lost hope of regaining control over the Mekong Delta as it was awarded to Vietnam. Formerly part of the Khmer Empire, the area had been controlled by the Vietnamese since 1698, with King Chey Chettha II granting Vietnamese permission to settle in the area decades before. This remains a diplomatic sticking point with over one million

ethnic Khmers (the Khmer Krom) still living in this region. The Khmer Rouge attempted invasions to recover the territory which, in part, led to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and deposition of the Khmer Rouge.



Norodom Sihanouk and Mao Zedong in 1956

In 1955, Sihanouk abdicated in favor of his father in order to participate in politics and elected prime minister.



was

Upon his father's death in 1960, Sihanouk again became head of state, taking the title of prince. As the Vietnam War progressed, Sihanouk adopted an official policy of neutrality in the Cold War, although he was widely considered to be sympathetic to the communist cause. Sihanouk allowed the Vietnamese communists to use Cambodia as a sanctuary and a supply route for their arms and other aid to their armed forces fighting in South Vietnam. This policy was perceived as humiliating by many Cambodians. In December 1967 Washington Post journalist Stanley Karnow was told by Sihanouk that if the US wanted to bomb the Vietnamese communist sanctuaries, he would not object, unless Cambodians were killed. The same message was conveyed to US President Johnson's emissary Chester Bowles in January

1968. Members of the government and army became resentful of Sihanouk's ruling style as well as his tilt away from the United States.

While visiting Beijing in 1970 Sihanouk was ousted by a military coup led by Prime Minister General Lon Nol and Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak. U.S. support for the coup remains unproven. However, once the coup was completed, the new regime, which immediately demanded that the Vietnamese communists leave Cambodia, gained the political support of the United States. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces, desperate to retain their sanctuaries and supply lines from North Vietnam, immediately launched armed attacks on the new government. The king urged his followers to help in overthrowing this government, hastening the onset of civil war. Soon Khmer Rouge rebels began using him to gain support. However, from 1970 until early 1972, the Cambodian conflict was largely one between the government and army of Cambodia, and the armed forces of North Vietnam. As they gained control of Cambodian territory, the Vietnamese communists imposed a new political infrastructure, which was eventually dominated by the Cambodian communists we now refer to as the Khmer Rouge. Between 1969 and 1973, Republic of Vietnam and U.S. forces bombed Cambodia in an effort to disrupt the Viet Cong and Khmer Rouge.

Documents uncovered from the Soviet archives after 1991 reveal that the North Vietnamese attempt to overrun Cambodia in 1970 was launched at the explicit request of the Khmer Rouge and negotiated by Pol Pot's then second in command, Nuon Chea. NVA units overran many Cambodian army positions while the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) expanded their small-scale attacks on lines of communication. In response to the North Vietnamese invasion, U.S. President Richard Nixon announced that US and South Vietnamese ground forces had entered Cambodia in a campaign aimed at destroying NVA base areas in Cambodia. Although a considerable quantity of equipment was seized or destroyed by US and South Vietnamese forces, containment of North Vietnamese forces proved elusive.

B-52 Bombers over Cambodia during Operation Menu.



The Khmer Republic's leadership was plagued by disunity among its three principal figures: Lon Nol, Sihanouk's cousin Sirik Matak, and National Assembly leader In Tam. Lon Nol remained in power in part because neither of the others was prepared to take his place. In 1972, a constitution was adopted, a parliament elected, and Lon Nol became president. But disunity, the problems of transforming a 30,000-man army into a national combat force of more than

200,000 men, and spreading corruption weakened the civilian administration and army.

The Communist insurgency inside Cambodia continued to grow, aided by supplies and military support from North Vietnam. Pol Pot and Ieng Sary asserted their dominance over the Vietnamese-trained communists, many of whom were purged. At the same time, the CPK forces became stronger and more independent of their Vietnamese patrons. By 1973, the CPK were fighting battles against government forces with little or no North Vietnamese troop support, and they controlled nearly 60% of Cambodia's territory and 25% of its population. The government made three unsuccessful attempts to enter into negotiations with the insurgents, but by 1974, the CPK were operating openly as divisions, and some of the NVA combat forces had moved into South Vietnam. Lon Nol's control was reduced to small enclaves around the cities and main transportation routes. More than 2 million refugees from the war lived in Phnom Penh and other cities.

On New Year's Day 1975, Communist troops launched an offensive which, in 117 days of the hardest fighting of the war, collapsed the Khmer Republic. Simultaneous attacks around the perimeter of Phnom Penh pinned down Republican forces, while other CPK units overran fire bases controlling the vital lower Mekong resupply route. A US-funded airlift of ammunition and rice ended when Congress refused additional aid for Cambodia. The Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh

surrendered on 17 April 1975, just five (5) days after the US mission evacuated Cambodia.



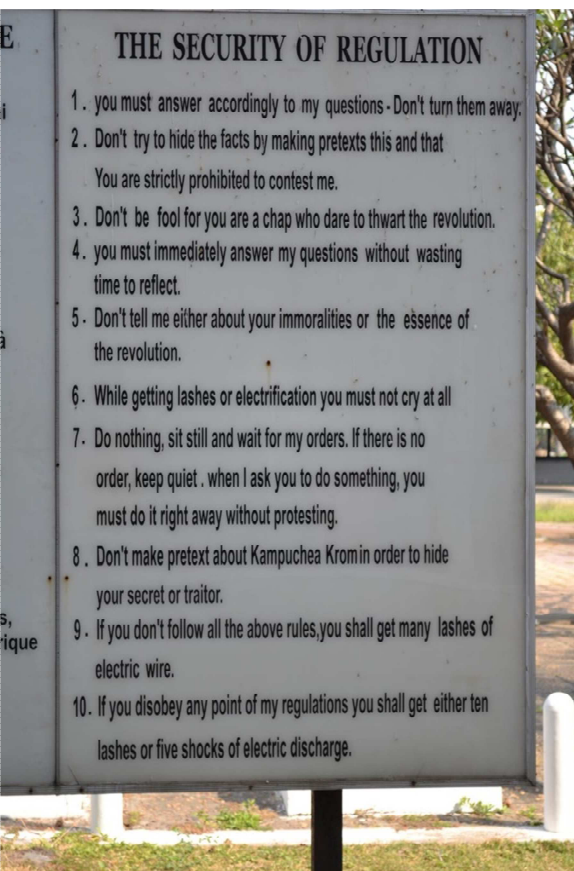
Tuol Sleng High School was taken over by Pol Pot's forces and was turned into the S-21 prison camp, where people were detained and tortured.

Rooms of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum contain thousands of photos taken by the Khmer Rouge of their victims.

The class rooms divided into tiny cells where the prisoners



were kept. The cells were built by roughly laid bricks or wooden boxes. The feet of the prisoners were shackled. Their toilet consisted of little boxes for feces and bottles for urine.



The security regulation gives you an idea about the conditions in the prison.

The prisoners were tortured also by hanging them upside down, until they lost consciousness. The smell of buckets of foul water brought them back to consciousness when the torturers held their heads over it.

The Khmer Rouge reached Phnom Penh and took power in 1975. Led by Pol Pot, they changed the official name of the country to Democratic Kampuchea. The new regime modeled itself on Maoist China during the Great Leap Forward, immediately evacuated the cities, and sent the entire population on forced marches to rural work projects. They attempted to rebuild the country's agriculture on the model of the 11th century, discarded Western medicine and destroyed temples, libraries, and anything considered Western.

Estimates as to how many people were killed by the Khmer Rouge regime range from approximately one to three million;

the most commonly cited figure is two million (about a quarter of the population). This era gave rise to the term Killing Fields, and the prison Tuol Sleng became notorious for its history of mass killing. Hundreds of thousands fled across the border into neighboring Thailand. The regime disproportionately targeted ethnic minority groups. The Cham Muslims suffered serious purges with as much as half of their population exterminated.

In the late 1960s, an estimated 425,000 ethnic Chinese lived in Cambodia, but, by 1984, due to Khmer Rouge killings and to emigration, only about 61,400 Chinese remained in the country. Forced repatriation in 1970 and deaths during the Khmer Rouge era reduced the Vietnamese population in Cambodia from between 250,000 and 300,000 in 1969 to a reported 56,000 in 1984. However, most of the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime were not ethnic minorities but ethnic Khmer. Professionals, such as doctors, lawyers and teachers, were also targeted. According to Robert D. Kaplan, "eyeglasses were as deadly as the yellow star" as they were seen as a sign of intellectualism.

Hearing from this barbarism I found to be depressing and also sent me a warning message. Fanatical groups can flare up and causing this kind of events, particularly in the African continent.

In November 1978, Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in response to border raids by the Khmer Rouge. The People's

Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), a pro-Soviet state led by the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, a party created by the Vietnamese in 1951, and led by a group of Khmer Rouge who had fled Cambodia to avoid being purged by Pol Pot and Ta Mok, was established. It was fully beholden to the occupying Vietnamese army and under direction of the Vietnamese ambassador to Phnom Penh. Its arms came from Vietnam and the Soviet Union. In opposition to the newly created state, a government-in-exile referred to as the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was formed in 1981 from three factions. This consisted of the Khmer Rouge, a royalist faction led by Sihanouk, and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front. Its credentials were recognized by the United Nations. The Khmer Rouge representative to the UN, Thiounn Prasith, was retained, but he had to work in consultation with representatives of the noncommunist Cambodian parties. The refusal of Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia led to economic sanctions by the U.S. and its allies.

Peace efforts began in Paris in 1989 under the State of Cambodia, culminating two years later in October 1991 in a Paris Comprehensive Peace Settlement. The UN was given a mandate to enforce a ceasefire and deal with refugees and disarmament known as the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

In 1993, Norodom Sihanouk was restored as King of Cambodia, but all power was in the hands of the government established after the UNTAC sponsored elections. The stability established following the conflict was shaken in 1997 by a coup d'état led by the co-Prime Minister Hun Sen against the noncommunist parties in the government. Many of the noncommunist politicians were murdered by Hun Sen's forces. In recent years, reconstruction efforts have progressed and led to some political stability through a multiparty democracy under a constitutional monarchy.

In July 2010 Kang Kek Iew was the first Khmer Rouge member found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity in his role as the former commandant of the S21 extermination camp and he was sentenced to life in prison. However, Hun Sen has opposed extensive trials of former Khmer Rouge mass murderers. He says that this is because he wishes to avoid political instability.

PHNOM PENH

My first impression of Phnom Penh I got from the air plain before landing were several large rivers.

Phnom Penh is the capital and largest city of Cambodia. Located on the banks of the Tonlé Sap and Mekong River, Phnom Penh has been the national capital since French

colonization of Cambodia, and has grown to become the nation's center of economic and industrial activities, as well as the center of security, politics, cultural heritage, and diplomacy of Cambodia.

The Tonlé Sap, meaning "Large Fresh Water River" in Khmer, but more commonly translated as "Great Lake" is a combined lake and river system of major importance to Cambodia.

The Tonlé Sap is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia and is an ecological hot spot that was designated as a UNESCO biosphere in 1997.

The Tonlé Sap is unusual for two reasons: its flow changes direction twice a year, and the portion that forms the lake expands and shrinks dramatically with the seasons. From November to May, Cambodia's dry season, the Tonlé Sap drains into the Mekong River at Phnom Penh. However, when the year's heavy rains begin in June, the Tonlé Sap backs up to form an enormous lake.

Once known as the "Pearl of Asia," it was considered one of the loveliest French-built cities



in Indochina in the 1920s. Phnom Penh, along with Siem Reap and Sihanoukville, are significant global and domestic tourist



destinations for Cambodia. Founded in 1434, the city is noted for its beautiful and historical architecture and attractions. There are a number

of surviving French colonial buildings scattered along the grand boulevards.

Situated on the banks of the Tonlé Sap, Mekong and Bassac rivers, the Phnom Penh metropolitan area is home to about 2.2 million of Cambodia's population of over 14.8 million, up from about 1.9 million in 2008. The city is the wealthiest and most populous city in Cambodia and is the country's political hub.



Phnom Penh (literally, "Penh's Hill") takes its name from the present Wat Phnom ("Hill Temple"). Legend has it that in 1372, an old nun named Lady Penh went to fetch water in the Tonle Sap and found a dead Koki tree floating down the stream. Inside a hole of the Koki tree were four bronze and one stone Buddha statues.



Daun (Grandma) Penh brought the statues ashore and ordered people to pile up earth northeast of her house. She then used the Koki trunks to build a temple on the hill to house the five Buddha statues, and named the temple after herself as Wat Phnom Daun Penh, which is now known as Wat Phnom, a small hill of 27 metres in height.

Phnom Penh was also previously known as Krong Chaktomok meaning "City of Four Faces". This name refers to the junction where the Mekong, Bassac, and Tonle Sap rivers cross to form

an "X" where the capital is situated. Krong Chaktomuk is an abbreviation of its ceremonial name which was given by King Ponhea Yat, which in full is Krong Chaktomuk Mongkol Sakal Kampuchea Thipadei Sereythor Inthabot Borei Roth Reach Seima Maha Nokor This ceremonial name is composed from Pali, and loosely translates as "The place of four rivers that gives the happiness and success of Khmer Kingdom, the highest leader as well as impregnable city of the God Indra of the great kingdom".

Phnom Penh remained the royal capital for 73 years—from 1432 to 1505. It was abandoned for 360 years—from 1505 to 1865—by subsequent kings due to internal fighting between the royal pretenders. Later kings moved the capital several times and established their royal capitals at various locations.

It was not until 1866, under the reign of King Norodom I (1860–1904) the eldest son of King Ang Duong, who ruled on behalf of Siam, that Phnom Penh became the permanent seat of government and capital of Cambodia, and also where the current Royal Palace was built. Beginning in 1870, the French Colonialists turned a riverside village into a city where they built hotels, schools, prisons, barracks, banks, public works offices, telegraph offices, law courts, and health services buildings. In 1872, the first glimpse of a modern city took shape when the colonial administration employed the services

of a French contractor Le Faucheur, to construct the first 300 concrete houses for sale and rental to the Chinese traders.

By the 1920s, Phnom Penh was known as the Pearl of Asia, and over the next four decades Phnom Penh continued to experience rapid growth with the building of railways to Sihanoukville and Pochentong International Airport (now Phnom Penh International Airport). Phnom Penh's infrastructure saw major modernization under the rule of Sihanouk.

A period of reconstruction began, spurred by the continuing stability of government, attracting new foreign investment and aid by countries including France, Australia, and Japan.

Phnom Penh and the surrounding areas consist of a typical flood plain area for Cambodia. Although Phnom Penh is situated at 11.89 meters (39 ft.) above the river, monsoon season flooding is a problem and the river sometimes overflows its banks.

The city has two distinct seasons. The rainy season, which runs from May to October, sees high temperatures accompanied by high humidity. The dry season lasts from November to April when temperatures can drop to 22 °C (72 °F). But temperatures can approach 40 °C (104 °F) in April. The best months to visit the city are November to February when temperatures, humidity and rainfall are lower.

THE ROYAL PALACE

The Royal Palace in Phnom Penh was constructed over a century ago to serve as the residence of the King of Cambodia, his family and foreign dignitaries, as a venue for the performance of court ceremony and ritual and as a symbol of the Kingdom.



It serves to this day as the Cambodian home of King Norodom Sihamoni and former King Norodom Sihanouk. The



Royal Palace complex and attached 'Silver Pagoda' compound consist of several buildings, structures and gardens all located within 500x800 meter walled grounds overlooking a riverfront park. The Silver Pagoda, named after the 5000 silver tiles covering the floor, each weighing 1 kg. Marking the approach to the Palace, the high sculpted wall and golden spired Chanchhaya Pavilion stand distinctively against the riverfront skyline. Inside the Palace grounds, street sounds are silenced by the high walls and the various Royal buildings sit like ornate islands rising from the tranquil, manicured tropical



gardens. Except for the area of the actual Royal residence, the Khemarin Palace, most of the Palace grounds and Silver Pagoda are open to the public.



THE MISTERY OF THE SECOND KEY

When I received the keys for the hotel room I stayed in Phnom Penh, I noticed a second key on the key ring. Looking for a fridge with a lock, I couldn't find one. The safe worked with a keypad. For two days, I couldn't work out the purpose of the second key until I noticed a keyhole outside the balcony. There was none inside but a knob you turn to lock. When you spend time on the balcony, you lock your room, not your balcony door from outside. So the purpose of this key dawned to me. If you arrive very late back to the hotel, when the main entrance is locked, there is an alternative route to get into your room. You simply climb the two floors up the façade, carefully avoiding the shortcut back down, breaking a couple of bones etc. and enter your room through the balcony. Was this the IQ test (see page 4) or the fact, that the air-conditioning is well concealed with the remote hidden in one of the cupboards?

KOH DACH

We took a boat along the Mekong River to visit Koh Dach, also known as the “Silk Island”. We visited a monastery and a small village where silk weaving is their livelihood .



For transport we were using bikes. I wasn't on a bike for years and was a bit shaky at the beginning, but got used to it quite quickly.

First we were visiting a monastery, which was quite interesting. The old people often retire in a monastery.





The family we were visiting are growing the mulberry trees in their backyard to feed their silkworms. The larva is a caterpillar, not a worm at all. The pupa is what the silkworm changes

into after spinning its cocoon before emerging as a moth.

The cocoons are boiled and the silk unwrapped. There are different qualities of silk, for coarser to very fine.



After dyeing , winding



and warping the silk is woven. The weaving frame has about 12 shafts. The weaver operates the shafts with two pedals and hooks, to keep certain shafts in the upper position to create

the pattern. The two pedals create the plain weave. I was very impressed with the quality and designs of the silk fabrics.

For dyeing the yarn, they are using natural dyes also synthetic for certain colours. They are getting the imported dye from the local market. The quality is very good, but they are very expensive, they say. Their finished goods are sold to buyers from Phnom Penh or directly to customers like myself.



KRATIE

On the way to Kratie we stopped at Skun, affectionately known as “Spiderville”. The tarantula feels pleasant with its silky feet, walking



on your hand. When I saw them deep-fried, I decided to have a little snack. It tastes quite pleasant, however the crunchy part I discretely spat out.



During a Skype conversation with my brother Max, he advised me to visit the hairdresser. I did not understand him, because my hair is always

short and tidy, **always!**

I didn't fancy to taste the other creepy crawlies like worms cockroaches etc.



On the way we see these wooden houses on poles, typical for the Chhlong region. During the monsoon this area is flooded.

Sometimes I simply could not believe my eyes when I saw what the motor bikers are transporting and pulling. This



one got somehow stuck. Another was pulling a trailer carrying twenty people!



Northeast to Kratie we boarded a boat and cruised out into the mighty Mekong and encountered

the rare freshwater Irrawaddy dolphins. They never emerged completely and it was difficult to get a good picture.

Irrawaddy dolphins are fully protected as an endangered species under Cambodian Fishery Law. In 2005, The World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) established the Cambodian Mekong Dolphin Conservation Project with support from

government and local communities. The aim is to support the survival of the remaining population through targeted conservation activities, research and education. In January 2012, the Cambodian Fisheries Administration, the Commission for Conservation and Development of Mekong River Dolphin Eco-tourism Zone, and WWF signed the "Kratie Declaration on the Conservation of the Mekong River Irrawaddy Dolphin", and agreement binding them to work together, and setting out a roadmap for dolphin conservation in the Mekong River. On August 24, 2012 the Cambodian government announced that 180-kilometer-long stretch of the Mekong River from eastern Kratie province to the border with Laos has been stated as limit fishing zone which uses floating houses, fishing cages and gill nets are disallowed, but simple fishing is allowed. This area is patrolled by a network of River Guards, specifically to protect dolphins.

Later that afternoon we were ferried to Koh Trong Island where I stayed overnight in a hotel middle in the tropical wilderness. Since the water level difference between dry and wet season is big, the boat landing is very far away from the Island, between is the sandy beach. I took along my small suit case



which I use to take into the cabin of the airplane. On the back of a little motorbike I got a lift. The driver held my suitcase. It was very hairy; we drove on narrow planks placed on the sand. At one stage, I had to help with my feet, to avoid a backwards summersault on a very steep sand dune. On the Island I took a “tuck-tuck” traveling along the main highway of the Island. It was safer but very bumpy.

The hotel was very comfortable and the power came from a generator, which run at certain times only. No air-conditioning hence open windows with invitation to the mosquitos, some of them carrying malaria. After the room door was opened for me, I battled about 3 minutes, to remove the key from the lock until I realized that it has to be pulled out horizontally (another IQ test, see page 4).

PROTECTION

It is important to protect yourself against the sun rays using sunscreen lotion with a SPF of at least 40, particularly if you spend time on a river. The reflection of the water enhances the intensity of the radiation. A senior employee of the South African Cancer Association informed me, that about 2/3 of the white population in South Africa get skin cancer at one stage of their lives. From a plastic surgeon, who used to be a member of the Swiss Club, I learned, that skin cancer can spread into the body within half a year! In malaria risk areas

it is even more important to protect yourself from mosquitos with mosquito repellent during the day and mosquito net at



night. You need to spend some time to tuck in the net carefully under the mattress all around, especially at the entrance slot where you have to overlap the ends as much as possible, making it difficult for the insects to crawl in between the layers. Also to spray little insect repellent inside is recommended, to kill any mosquitos there. Before you close up, you might take some items inside the net you may need during the night, to avoid repetition of the tedious sealing procedure, like water bottle, sleeping pills urine bottle (of different shape to reduce risk of mix up in the darkness at any stage), torch, reading glasses, a selection of journals, books, I-pad, lap top, bottle of wine, cork screw, bottle of whiskey, glasses, alarm clock, cell phone, spare cell phone, first aid kit (in case of injury by broken glass) etc.



The hotel takes safety very seriously, particularly around the pool with a safety notice board everybody can read and

understand!

Around Chamkar Leu there are extensive rubber plantations. The raw rubber, Kautschuk in German (from Indian: cao 'tree', and ochu 'tear' together: tear of the tree)



is exported, since Cambodia has not its own refinery plant. The raw rubber is quite smelly.

SAMBOR PREI KUK



The pre-Angkorian temples of Sambor Prei Kuk , "The City of Shiva in the Forest of Towers", are located 25 km north-east of Kampong Thom, near the west bank of the Saen River. Researchers recovered dikes which framed a nearly square city, 2 by 2 km. It was the capital of a regional kingdom, featuring some 50 temples.

Three groups of temples were built at the east of the city:

- The South Group, by Ishanavarman I (616 - 628).

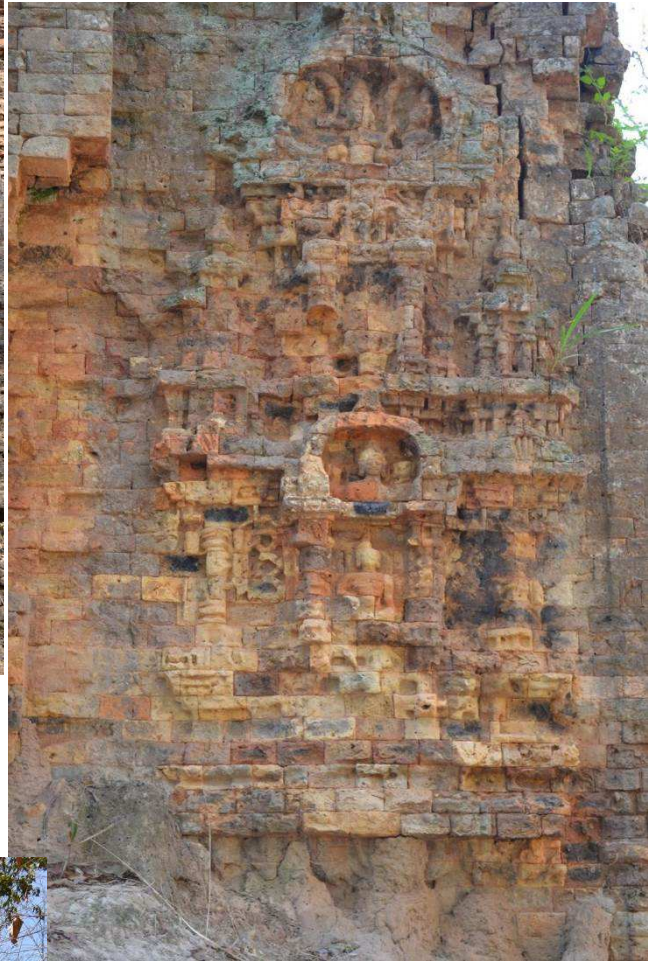
- The North Group, by Ishanavarman I to Rajendravarman (944-968)
- The Central Group, by Jayavarman II (800 - c. 835).

Each group is located in a square lay out surrounded by a brick wall. The buildings of Sambor Prei Kuk are characteristic of the Pre-Angkorean period with a simple external plan. The principal material is brick, but sandstone is also used for certain structures.^[1] Architectural features include numerous prasats (Cambodian and Thai term meaning palace or temple), octagonal towers, shiva lingams (representation of the Hindu deity Shiva used for worship in temples) and yonis (symbol of the goddess or of Shakti, female creative energy), ponds and reservoirs, and lion sculptures. Sambor Prei Kuk is located amidst mature sub-tropical forests.





False entrances carved from sandstone.



One of the lovely carvings



on brick.

Some of the temples are taken over or held together by nature.