

The first in our series of destination close-ups designed to keep your holiday hassle-free



WHAT TO DO

Tackling Angkor Archaeological Park

The temples of Angkor is a complex covering 160 hectares, but in its heyday it was more than just a clutch of temples. Airborne laser technology has uncovered that the temples were integrated into a huge network of roads, houses, canals and ponds

- in other words an enormous, complex city.

Angkor Wat is the largest and most visited of all the temples and is a source of fierce national pride. The twentieth century saw much restoration of Angkor Wat. Jungle was pushed back exposing the stonework

of the temples, although in the 1970s work was interrupted by the Cambodian Civil War. Relatively little damage was done during this time - more was inflicted after the war by art thieves.

Since the 1990s, Angkor Wat has become a major tourist

destination. In 1993 there were just 7,650 visitors to the site; by 2013 that figure had reached over two million. After Angkor Wat, the most popular temples are Angkor Thom, Ta Prohm (star of the Tomb Raider movie) and the Bayon.

Pottery making at Khmer Ceramics & Fine Arts Centre

The centre offers both pottery and art classes, so dig deep for your inner Henry Moore. Absolutely no skill is required and children are welcome from three years and up. There is a free pick-up and drop-off service from your hotel and classes run at 8am, 10am, 2pm and 4pm daily. The US\$25 cost includes instruction on creating an Angkorian bowl on the potter's wheel with Khmer carving techniques and one fired piece. khmerceraamics.com

Cruising Tonle Sap floating villages

Tonle Sap is the largest lake in Southeast Asia and one of Cambodia's most important landmarks. It is home to around 1.2 million people who make their living from fishing. During the dry season the lake is around 160km long, but in peak wet season in August it swells to 250km in length. The four main floating villages open to tourism from Siem Reap include Chong Kneas, Kampong Phluk, Mechrey and Kampong Khleang. Chong Kneas is the closest to the city and therefore the most popular. There are various tours on offer, or you can pay for a private boat at the dock. Scams abound but Tara River Boat is one of the more reputable tour operators. taraboat.com

All the fun of Phare The Cambodian Circus

Highly recommended comes Phare The Cambodian Circus. Phare performers use theatre, music, dance and modern circus to tell Cambodian folk stories. The performers are students and graduates from Phare Ponleu Selpak's vocational training centre in Battambang in southern Cambodia. The association was formed by nine former refugees

ANGKOR WAT WITH CHILDREN

- ★ Buy a three-day pass. These must be used within a week so you can take your time and mix temple days with days 'off' in between.
- ★ Hire a driver or tuk tuk, the distances between the temples in the heat are tough on foot.
- ★ Bring plenty of water, cover shoulders and shorts/skirts must fall below the knees.
- ★ A parasol or umbrella can also be useful.
- ★ Limit yourself to a couple of temples a day - be realistic about the heat and little legs.
- ★ If you can stand the heat, noon is often one of the quietest times of the day when many visitors head back to town for lunch.
- ★ There is a zipline in the middle of the Angkor Wat complex - Flight of the Gibbon
- is the perfect antidote for kids who have had too much temple-time.
- ★ Don't ride the elephants. If you want to spend time with these native animals, seek out an elephant sanctuary.
- ★ Invest in a copy of *Leap & Hop Cambodia* by Isabelle Demenge. The book is packed with fun activities and kid-friendly information about the Angkor Wat complex.



Above from left - Phare Cambodian Circus in action; taking time out at the Happy Ranch Horse Farm



of the Khmer Rouge regime. Phare The Cambodian Circus offers students somewhere to hone their skills and receive an income. Tickets cost from US\$10 for children aged five years and above and from US\$18 for adults (12+). pharecircus.org

Uncovering history at War Museum Cambodia

The War Museum in Siem Reap is the biggest in Cambodia. It looks back at Cambodia's 'war years' during the last three decades of the 20th century. The museum collection includes a T-54 tank, MiG-19 jet fighter aircraft, a Mil Mi-8 helicopter and various artillery. There is also rare wartime photography on display. Free guides are on hand to show you round - they include war veterans and eye witnesses of the war. The purpose of the museum is to keep the memory of this chapter

of Cambodian history alive. warmuseumcambodia.com

Trail riding with The Happy Ranch Horse Farm

Canter your way across the Siem Reap countryside. Farm founder Sary Pann grew up in Siem Reap and when civil war broke out in 1975 was offered a job with the US embassy in California. He retired back to Cambodia, bought a horse, bought another, fell in love with them and the rest, as they say, is history. The Happy Ranch Horse Farm today stables more than 50 horses and ponies. The ranch offers countryside trails from one to four hours and from sunrise to sunset. Amble your way through tourist-free rice paddies, temple ruins and villages. Prices start at US\$38 for a one-hour countryside trail ride. The farm can arrange lead rides on gentle ponies for young children. thehappyranch.com

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ANGKOR WAT IS THE MOST VISITED OF ALL THE TEMPLES AND A SOURCE OF FIERCE NATIONAL PRIDE

Angkor Wat is stunning at sunrise and sunset



WHERE TO EAT

Foreign Correspondents Club Angkor

This upscale boutique hotel is an FCC in name only and is managed by Avani Hotels & Resorts. It began life as a 1960s French Khmer villa on the Siem Reap River. The old villa serves as the club's restaurant and was originally the French governor's residence. There is a restaurant on the first floor but the al fresco terrace on the ground floor is a great spot for evening drinks. fcccambodia.com

The Khmer Grill

Serving a varied menu, from traditional Cambodian food to Western-style dishes, The Khmer Grill is a relaxed venue. Friendly staff and a good value menu (don't miss the grilled frog) make this a popular choice, so advanced booking is recommended. The Khmer Grill is vegetarian-friendly with gluten-free and vegan options. khmergrill.com

Malis

This high-end eatery has put Cambodian cuisine at the top of its menu. Under the Khmer Rouge, many of Cambodia's centuries-old recipes were lost, but Malis is determined to turn that around. The restaurant is located next to the Siem Reap river, but if you want to eat outside, book in advance. Upstairs are private dining rooms and a cooking school. malis-restaurant.com

Touich

A simple, casual, family-run restaurant offering friendly service and tasty local dishes. The restaurant is a little off the beaten track three kilometres outside the centre of Siem Reap. It also offers Siem Reap Jeep Traks tours by jeep or motorbike as part of its 'Eat and Drive' project. touich-restaurant.blogspot.com

Haven

Located on the rather promisingly-named Chocolate Road, Haven is a social enterprise and training restaurant for young adults who have grown up in local orphanages. Managed by two Swiss nationals and a Cambodian head chef, the eatery takes in 15 trainees a year. Expect fresh local dishes, including fusion specials, Swiss favourites and lots of vegetarian influences. havencambodia.com

Marum

A member of TREE global alliance of training restaurants, all profits are invested in the students who train in the restaurants. Marum offers 'creative local cuisine', cocktails, shakes and sharing plates. The restaurant is run by Kaliyan Mith, a non-government organisation that supports street children and other marginalized young people. marum-restaurant.org

Lily's Secret Garden Restaurant

Serving Khmer and Asian fusion dishes, Lily's is a convenient ten-minutes walk from Pub Street and the Old Market. This is simple, fresh cuisine at its best, all cooked by Lily. She also offers morning and afternoon cooking classes, beginning in the local markets sourcing local produce and finishing up in her home and garden putting it all together. lilysecretgarden.com

Damnak Lounge

Definite date-night territory, Damnak prides itself on high-end Khmer cuisine blended with the finesse of French techniques. Staff are keen to share their knowledge of the Cambodian dishes and there's an a la carte, set and degustation with wine pairing menu. All dishes are made to order with ingredients often plucked from the ground just moments before cooking. damnak.com

WHERE TO STAY

Raffles Grand Hotel D'Angkor

The property is set amongst lush gardens and is an ocean of calm after a busy day of sightseeing. Pint-sized facilities include a children's pool and kids' menus in all hotel restaurants. Cots and nannies are also available. raffles.com

Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort

A beautifully laid out hotel with a large pool that's perfect for kids looking to cool off. There are connecting rooms available as well as babysitting and in-room video games to keep kids entertained if they're all templed-out. sofitel.com

La Residence d'Angkor by Belmond

Interconnecting rooms, babysitting and tailored menus make this a family favourite. The Belmond opened in 2017 following a full refurbishment and is nestled within lush landscaped

gardens surrounding a saltwater swimming pool. residencedangkor.com

Victoria Angkor Resort & Spa

A family-friendly property with a stunning pool and old world, colonial-style rooms.

There's a kids' club, a spa offering child-friendly treatments, kids' menus in the restaurants, plus babysitting services, board games and a library. Some interconnecting rooms are available as well as cots and extra beds. victoriahotels.com



Jaya House River Park eco-hotel

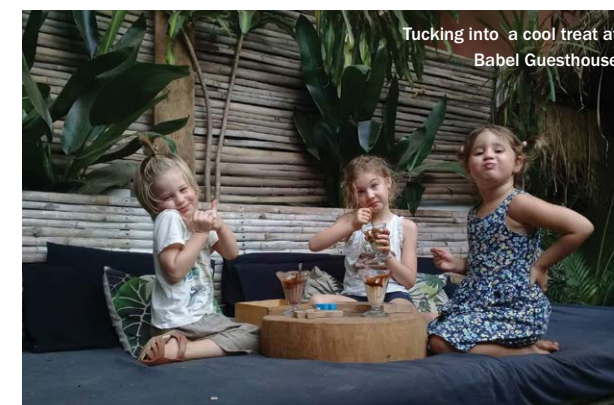
BEST ECO-FRIENDLY HOTELS

Jaya House River Park

This 36-room hotel located along the Siem Reap River has two swimming pools, a spa and an all-day dining restaurant. Each room has a balcony or direct garden and pool access. Guests are provided with a complimentary aluminium canister that can be refilled at water stations across town. Plastic straws and rubbish bags have been banned on the property and general manager Christian de Boer is one of the founders of Siem Reap's Refill, Not Landfill scheme to reduce single-use plastic in Siem Reap. Suitable for older families. jayahouseriverparksiemreap.com

Babel Guesthouse

A 22-room, eco-friendly guesthouse in the heart of Siem Reap and a 20-minute ride from the Angkor Wat temples. The property actively promotes the benefits of tourism to the local community and works with local organisations to reduce the impact of mass tourism in Siem Reap. The guesthouse also offers an Eco Shop and refill station - keep yourself topped up with packaging-free shampoo, conditioner, body lotion, shower gel, laundry detergent and mosquito repellent. The shop collaborates with a range of local businesses to keep its shelves laden



Tucking into a cool treat at Babel Guesthouse

with environmentally friendly products. babelsiemreap.com

Treeline Urban Resort

This 48-room hotel is located on Siem Reap's Riverside. An art collection curated by leading Cambodian artists along with an interior design that uses sustainably sourced local

timber and locally handmade soft furnishings puts the property firmly on the eco map. The four restaurants use seasonal, local ingredients in their regional dishes. A spa and infinity pool with river views completes the picture. treelinehotels.com