



In 2008 I moved to Cambodia for work with a few basic belongings and even less of an idea about the country itself. Since then, I've visited again many times for both business and adventures, and have made a real effort to explore more than just the usual tourist attractions.

Sure, I've seen the famous temples including the incredible Angkor Wat, but if you're considering a visit to Cambodia, there's much more to see and do than just visit the temples.



*While Cambodia is so well known for their temples, there is so much else to see and do.*

## Phnom Penh

The capital of Cambodia is most famous, or perhaps a better word might be 'infamous', for the terrible things that happened there during the time of the Khmer Rouge when an estimated two million, of their less than ten million population at the time, died or were killed as a direct result of that conflict.

I loathe to call it an 'attraction' but Choeng Ek Genocidal Centre, or 'The Killing Fields' as it's generally referred to, is certainly a place a lot of people visit. Have I been there? Yes. Did I want to throw up because it was so disturbing? Also yes. Should you go? I really don't know. If you do, listen to as much of the audio tour as you can stomach, as it's a good way to get a feel for what the Cambodian people went through then, and are still recovering from now. If you think you can handle it, a visit to the 'S21' Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is also educational, but equally, gut churning. This is the old, converted school that was used as a prison and interrogation (i.e., torture) centre. Personally, I found this place even more disturbing than the killing fields so I can't say I'd necessarily recommend it as such.



*The people of Cambodia have been through a lot, so if you are going to visit these places, please be respectful.*

## Outside of those places, things worth considering are:

### Central Market

The market itself is pretty typical of South East Asian markets with everything from food to clothes to electronics to trinkets. But, the Art Deco building itself is pretty cool.

### Wat Phnom

The historically significant temple in the centre of Phnom Penh.



*The Wat Phnom temple was built in 1372 and is definitely worth a visit.*

### Wat Ounalom and Langka

There are plenty of other Wats worth checking out including Wat Ounalom, the centre of Cambodian Buddhism and the home to one of Buddha's eyebrow hairs; and Wat Langka, the



oldest pagoda in Phnom Penh where you can even take a free meditation class.

## Koh Dach

Grasshopper Tours do a nice morning cycling tour over to 'Silk Island' – Koh Dach – where you can see silk being spun. And if you're not feeling energetic, you can also do it in a Tuk Tuk.



*If you want to see some of Cambodia by bike, you can book a cycle tour.*

## Oudong and Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre

Two other day trips worth considering are a trip to Oudong, the old capital, to explore its history and temples, and Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre which is not a zoo.

This is a centre that actually rehabilitates and takes care of animals that have been rescued from illegal trade. And, Rove Mcmanus even sponsors a tiger there.



*The Old capital of Cambodia is a destination to consider as it has a lot of history.*

## Siem Reap

If you haven't seen the temples before, obviously they're an absolute must. You can easily hire a guide to take you around and show you the sights and tell you the stories. This can be arranged at your hotel for between USD \$20-\$50 depending on whether you want an air-conditioned car or are happy to rough it in a tuk-tuk.

Having done the main temples, (Angkor Wat, Bayon, Ta Prohm, etc.) several times myself, I now try and explore at least one or two new ones every time I'm in the area. Sometimes that involves research and a plan, sometimes it involves stopping at random places.



*The Ta Prohm temple in Angkor was built in 1186.*

There are the 'famous' and 'must do' things like sunrise at Angkor Wat, but because they're famous, you'll likely be shoulder to shoulder with fifty busloads of tourists which makes the experience a lot less special.

So, it's worth considering taking off and making up your own plan. You may not get to tick the 'must do' bucket list box, but there's every chance you'll have a much better time.



*Angkor Wat is by far Cambodia's most iconic and recognisable temple.*

## South coast

There are three main coastal towns down south, and this is honestly my favourite part of Cambodia. Unless you're a backpacker looking to party, you probably won't be interested in the main port town of Sihanoukville, but some of the nearby beach areas are okay, with new ones opening up all the time.

You can also use it as a base to explore some of the nearby islands. For me, Kampot and Kep to the southeast are epic little destinations with some great opportunities for adventure.



*The stunning sunset at Kampot.*

## Kampot

Kampot is on a river with the opportunity to check out a few waterfalls. Go for a SUP or kayak, or simply kick back on a 'houseboat', and enjoy a cool drink at sunset.

They even have fireflies, which are pretty incredible but almost impossible to photograph, so you'll have to take my word for it.



*Kayaking is a great way to explore Kampot by river.*

## Kep

Slightly further east is the much quieter seaside town of Kep. A walk around, or over, Kep Mountain is pretty cool - 'Sunset Rock' at sunset is usually pretty spectacular. Just be aware the hike down will be in the dark so bring your torch!

One of the town's biggest attractions is the strip of 'crab shacks' along the beach with the local crab being quite the speciality. I'd also recommend a trip to the Kep Sailing Club at sunset. Stay two nights and do both!

In and around Kampot and Kep you'll find salt farms, pepper plantations, and various caves of varying degrees of difficulty - and safety. Most of these caves wouldn't pass muster for us in the western world in terms of safety.

You'll more than likely have an eight-year-old as a guide and want to step and crawl and climb reasonably carefully. For a real climbing and caving adventure that operates to western safety standards, go see the team at [Climbodia](#). Truly epic!



*There are caves to explore around Kampot and Kep if you thrive on adventure.*

A trip up nearby Bokor Mountain is pretty good too. At an elevation of around 1,000m, the weather is usually cooler up there. There's also a great waterfall during the wet season and a variety of buildings and ruins.

The famous old French casino and resort ruins used to be really cool to wander through. Now they're now being restored so we'll have to see how that turns out.



*If you're craving a cooler breeze, the waterfall at Bokor Mountain is an option.*

## Other places

Kirirom National Park between Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville is worth a visit, especially after the wet season when it's nice and green. You can do everything from camp in supplied tents, to stay in a swanky hotel there. It's a great place for doing a bit of hiking and there are opportunities to mountain bike.

You could probably do this as a day trip from Phnom Penh if you were enthusiastic. It makes a pleasant, cool change from the hot dusty city.

Mondulkiri in the northeast gets an honourable mention for its waterfalls and elephant sanctuaries, but you'll need a full day to get there by car. Koh Kong in the southwest towards



the Thai border is also worth a look as it remains relatively untouched and undeveloped. This makes it a superb place to spot rare wildlife, trek, relax and soak up nature, or all of the above.



*There are heaps of places to hike that contrast against the bustle of the city.*

## Visas

As an Australian resident, you can apply for and purchase a Visa online [here](#), just make sure you use the official government website and not a lookalike site. And, remember to take a printout with you.

If you forget, you can always fill in the form at the airport. If you don't have any extra passport photos handy, they can do that for you as well – for a small fee, of course!

## Tours

If you're keen to go exploring but would prefer to do it with someone to show you the way, you can check out the info on our tours [here](#).



*If you'd prefer an expert to show you the way, a tour is the way to go.*

## Accommodation

There's almost always plenty of accommodation options available and the usual travel websites ([booking.com](#) or [Agoda](#)) can often offer better prices than you'd get directly. A decent 3-4 star hotel will cost you USD \$50-100 depending on the location and your tastes.

## Weather

It's almost always hot there. Wet season (May-Nov) can be tricky as the streets flood easily and it's not much fun. It's better to go in the warmer months such as Dec-Jan, as it's dry and slightly less hot. Feb-May can be extra hot though so keep that in mind.



The weather is almost always warm, so prepare for the heat.

## Currency

Riel is the official local currency, but almost everything is done in US Dollars. The exchange rate is fixed at 4,000riel for USD\$1. There's plenty of ATMs if you want to take cash out on the go.

## Gear to take

- Like many South East Asian countries, tap water can't usually be trusted. You should



definitely take some sort of water purification if you can. When hiking or trail running I usually take my hydration pack plus my Lifeproof straw for emergencies.

- To reduce single-use plastic, consider taking a reusable bottle i.e., Camelbak etc. – and buying one big bottle of water rather than lots of little ones.
- It's also best to wear lightweight, breathable and quick drying clothing due to the warm weather.
- Mosquito repellant is also a must.
- A lightweight daypack is also a must to carry your essentials around.
- A torch is also a good idea – for the caves and the blackouts. I carry a LED Lenser torch and a Black Diamond head torch.



*A reusable drink bottle, daypack, water purification system are a must for a trip like this.*

## Visit sooner rather than later

One note for all of these places – Cambodia is on the move. For better and for worse, it is still very much the Wild East, but it's changing. Fast. When I first lived there ten years ago, there was a distinct lack of modern 'stuff'. Now there's big shopping centres, cinemas and all the usual generic modern city attractions.

I suppose you could call it progress. But for me personally, I liked it when it was behind the times and different to the places around it. Now it's in danger of becoming a standard South East Asian destination with a few temples thrown in for good measure. On my last visit, I discovered one of my favourite jungle hikes was gone as it's all been cleared for a development which broke my heart.

So, if you're thinking of going, go sooner rather than later so that you can experience the wonders that Cambodia has to offer in the present.

**Have you ever explored South East Asia before? What was your favourite destination?**