



Travel

Travel Editor Sarah-Kate Lynch

5 reasons to love CAMBODIA

From fab cuisine to sad reminders, this place has it all

This once war-torn country between Vietnam and Thailand is now an emerging tourist mecca, rich in history and food. What's more, the Cambodians have the best smiles in the world.

1 Phnom Penh
This tricky-to-spell riverside city is busy, but the swarms of motorcycles treat pedestrians politely, tuk-tuks take you anywhere for \$2 and we loved our hotel, The Pavilion, in a back street off the gorgeous boutique shopping stretch called 240. Highlights were a visit to the Royal Palace, drinks at FCC, where journos hung out during the war, and a crazy rickshaw ride through the city on a rainy night.

2 The killing fields
Pol Pot was a catastrophic, Hitler-like leader who reportedly murdered three million people between 1975-78. Anyone educated or otherwise deemed suspicious was rounded up and taken to a "killing field", where they were executed and buried in a mass grave. Some of the fields are open to the public as a reminder of what the Cambodians have survived, but be warned – I blubbed my way around the closest one to Phnom Penh. Here,

bones and teeth rise up through the mud after the rain, along with scraps of clothing. Even bogans in beer T-shirts were struck dumb by this sobering example of modern-day inhumanity.

3 Angkor Wat
The temple of Angkor Wat is Cambodia's biggest drawcard – right up there with the Taj Mahal, although the hawkers are not as well patrolled. How many pairs of elephant-patterned pants does a girl need, I wonder? But that's the only downside of visiting this 1000-year-old marvel, which sits surrounded by a moat on the outskirts of the city of Siem Reap. We visited the monument in the heat of a busy afternoon and loved it so much, we got a tuk-tuk back at sunrise the next day to watch it come to life. We loved our hotel, Siddarta, too. Located between the city and Angkor Wat, it provided a leafy oasis for R&R by the pool between temple visits.

4 But wait ... there's more
Angkor Wat was designed solely as a temple, while Angkor Thom, although smaller, was a whole city. You can, and indeed we did, circumnavigate it atop an elephant. Talk about a highlight! We also loved Ta Phnom, another temple that has been taken over

by trees, their roots growing up and around the crumbling walls. Angelina Jolie filmed part of *Tomb Raider* here. We also trekked 3km into the jungle one day to see ancient Hindu river carvings. Imagine our surprise when a policeman stopped us to ask if we wanted to buy a badge. "The people need to make some money," our guide chirruped. Can't argue with that! And a police badge is arguably more useful than another pair of pants.

5 The coast
On a recommendation from friends, we finished our nine-day stay in Cambodia at Knai Bang Chatt beach resort at Kep, a three-hour drive from Phnom Penh. The hotel is lovely, with fabulous modern rooms, an infinity swimming pool, delightful staff and two seaside restaurants, but we couldn't stay away from the seafood shacks a 10-minute walk down the road next to the local market. Prawns cooked with just-picked black peppercorns and crabs caught in the sea as you sit nursing an icy-cold Angkor beer? We had many a foodie highlight in Cambodia – no spring roll went un-turned and the fried banana bought roadside on the way to the airport was right up there too – but this topped them all.



Once we'd taken the high road to Angkor Thom, we wanted to travel everywhere by ele-copter.



Our Kep cooking class was yum, although my smile wasn't quite so big when I tried myself ...



Ange may have filmed around the corner, but I bet she didn't do the 3km hike like Rachy and me.

PICTURES: SARAH-KATE LYNCH