





# Asia

Cambodia is on everyone's 'let's go there next' list, and as the country opens up with more attractions, visitors will see the beauty here that has been hidden for so long under the cover of its terrible past. Following is India and a gentle walk around Mumbai – you don't think that's possible! It is. Followed by getting around Guangzhou by bus to find another side of the Chinese city.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Khmer (Cambodian) cuisine is one of the world's oldest living cuisines. With an emphasis on simplicity, freshness, seasonality and regionalism – Cambodian food is elegant and understated in its use of spice. It features contrasting flavours, textures and temperatures within the overall meal rather than a single dish. At times it displays extravagant presentation of dishes with herbs, leaves, pickles, dipping sauces, edible flowers and other garnishes and condiments.



# Untourist Cambodia



'Rediscovered' in the jungles of Siem Reap in 1901, Cambodia's World Heritage Angkor Wat temples are on many a 'desire' list. **Jane Hodges** visited the region, and stayed in style.

PHOTOS: MAFEE AZZOPARDI





**H**ow do you see one of the most touristy spots on the globe without feeling like a tourist? With a stay at Orient Express’s La Residence d’Angkor.

“We can show you a side of Siem Reap and Angkor Wat you just won’t find on your own’, says the exuberant Karin van Zyl, General Manager of La Residence d’Angkor.

And after three days in this lap of luxury, the perfect base from which to explore the ancient Angkor Wat sites, that’s a claim I can totally back.

The hotel is a verdant oasis in the hubbub of hotels that have sprung up along the Siem Reap River over the past 20 years. Every detail at La Residence is what you’d expect from Orient Express – exquisite suites, impeccable service, fabulous pool and massages and wonderful food.

Local flavour comes in the form of tasty Khmer cuisine and traditional Apsara dance at dinner on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. You can even meditate at dawn with a group of local Buddhist monks and then

share breakfast with them.

But it’s the individual attention that really makes your stay. On arrival Karin or one of her team explain your tour options and help plan your days. With more than 150 temples on offer and steamy temperatures year-round, this can be a mind-boggling and exhausting place. Some local smarts go a long way.

Karin’s advice was to take it easy and punctuate the day’s touring with rest and paddling in the pool. She and her team have designed a series of day trips to the temples and local attractions to ensure you see the best of Siem Reap in the time you have.

Photographer Maree Azzopardi and I spent an amazing day on a photography tour with Italian ex-pat photographer Alessandro Vanucci.

Since 2009 Alessandro has split his life and work between Siem Reap and Milan. His tours are tailor made to your needs – he can provide camera tuition if you need it, advise on the best location according to the light and show you interesting and untouristy places you simply wouldn’t know existed.

**FROM LEFT:** Young Buddhist monk and cook at Kompong Phhluk; Fish monger at Psa Krom markets; Southern gate of Angkor Thron Temple, Siem Reap.

Starting just after dawn we headed to one such place - a little-known locals-only market, Psa Krom, where the colour and movement was something to behold. The vibrant produce was only rivaled by the brightly dressed stallholders who were also the happiest I’ve seen – even rivaling the chatty Thai merchants in the land of smiles. It was a joy to be amid the happy bustle and hum of fruit and vegetable sellers, butchers chopping and trimming, fishmongers cleaning and weighing sea creatures and bargaining with buyers. Eels slithered in shallow trays, live frogs were beheaded then dismembered ready for sale, snakes were skinned, and everywhere people were busy but always with wide grins.

Next we went by long boat to Kompong Phhluk, a water village on the edge of the vast Tonle Sap – the largest ►





lake in South East Asia and one of the world's most productive fisheries. It's an other-worldly place where the villagers live in teetering stilt houses and adapt to life when in the wet season; the lake swells to 15,000km<sup>2</sup> – five times its normal capacity and floods the village for half of the year. Here we chatted to locals, watched children play and met nine monks in their pagoda – some swinging in hammocks, others going about their chores washing and preparing lunch. We rounded off the day with a canoe tour of the eerie Floating Forest, where trees grow partly submerged and their reflections provide beautiful picture opportunities.

Time permitting, Alessandro can also take you at dawn to get spectacular shots of Angkor Wat or to the more remote and jungle clad temples such as Beng Mealea where you can clamber over giant tumbled down stone structures without the crowds.

Under our own steam we visited

the gloriously air-conditioned Angkor National Museum – do this prior to seeing the temples as knowing the history makes them all the more fascinating. We also enjoyed La Residence's privately guided 'Best of The Best' temple day tour taking in Angkor Wat (the Temple City), Bayon Temple and the famous Ta Prohm where scenes for Tomb Raider were shot. Our guide, Mr Hong, painted a rich picture of the life of ancient Khmers, the influence of Hindu and Buddhist religions and the kings who build the monumental temples between the ninth and 15th-centuries.

The scale and beauty is vast and rich, and there is so much to see. And far from ticking Angkor off your list, my bet is you'll be planning your next, extended visit. Best reserve your suite at La Residence d'Angkor before you checkout. •

**ABOVE:** La Residence D' Angkor

## TRAVEL FACTS

### Getting there

Singapore Airlines and Virgin Australia fly from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to Siem Reap (via Singapore).

Visit [\[@\] www.singaporeair.com](http://www.singaporeair.com)

[\[@\] www.virginaustralia.com](http://www.virginaustralia.com)

### Stay at

La Residence d'Angkor, Siem Reap Orient-Express

**FREECALL 1800 000 395**

Visit [\[@\] www.orient-express.com](http://www.orient-express.com)

### Events to plan for (or avoid)

Chaul Chhnam Cambodian New Year, 14-16 April 2013

Angkor Photo Competition, December 2013.

Visit [\[@\] www.angkor-photo.com](http://www.angkor-photo.com);

[www.tourismcambodia.com](http://www.tourismcambodia.com)



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19

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