



ABOUT SIEM REAP

WELCOME TO SIEM REAP

Siem Reap, a resort town in northwestern Cambodia, is one of those places that caters to every taste.. The variety of cuisine, accommodation, shopping, modes of transport, and daily activities is quite astonishing for what is actually a relatively small – and new – city on the edge of the Tonle Sap lake.

The central highlight is of course the Temples of Angkor – the seat of the Khmer kingdom from the 9th–15th centuries, most of which are just a short trip from the center of town.

However, it would be a mistake to see Siem Reap as merely a bed for the night to allow for days at Angkor Wat. Whether it's enjoy sipping a coffee and people-watching in the town, taking a quad bike out into the countryside, or bargaining for silks and silver in the burgeoning markets, there are plenty of reasons to extend a stay after becoming "templed out".



POPULATION

The population of Siem Reap Province is around 1 million, and is growing at approximately 2.5% per year. Spanning an area of land of 10,299 square kilometres, the province has a population density of around 100 people per square kilometers.

Out of the twelve districts in the province, the most populous by a large margin is central Siem Reap – accounting for 20% of the province’s population. Despite this, and even taking into account the tourist swell, which doubles and triples the population at different times of the year, Siem Reap still has a charming small-town feel.

The hotels and restaurants are clustered in a small area, making the city center easy to navigate, easy to escape from, and leaving the rest of the province relatively untouched by the tourist masses.



FOREIGNER AND TOURISTS

Siem Reap hosts expatriates from around the world working in the tourism and development industries.

Initially, the dominant nationality of this group was French, due to the strong connection between the two countries from the days of the French protectorate. In fact, many Cambodians still refer to anyone who doesn't look Asian as "barang" – which means "French" in Khmer – regardless of where they are from, as 100 years ago all the non-Asians in Cambodia were pretty much guaranteed to be French.

Now Cambodia is developing as a tourist destination and more working opportunities are available, the mix of expatriates is far greater. The tourist population is dominated by visitors from ASEAN nations, particularly China, as well as South Korea and Japan. From outside Asia, the American, French and Australian visitors are the most common..



INCOME

The low life expectancy in Cambodia compared to neighboring Thailand and Vietnam demonstrates the difference in prosperity in Cambodia in relation to its neighbors.

Strikingly, despite the huge numbers of tourists visiting Siem Reap, the province still remains one of the poorest in the country. According to the World Bank research, 45% of the population under the poverty line, which, for rural areas is approximately 3,200 riel per day – roughly equivalent to \$0.75USD.

While there are many opportunities within the service industry in the city of Siem Reap, travel just a few kilometers outside and the potential to earn a living wage decreases dramatically.

A child growing up just 1 hour outside of Siem Reap city (still within Siem Reap province) is twice as likely to drop out of school as a child growing up within the town.



MIGRATION

Many families in Siem Reap who are struggling to survive unsurprisingly look for a solution outside their own community. However, this solution is not found in the tourist dollars of Siem Reap, but instead through illegal migration to Thailand for seasonal labor – generally in the construction industry.

While the process of migration can be dangerous, and working illegally leaves people vulnerable to exploitation, many people are willing to take the risk in order to make the \$5 a day that is on offer across the border.

This is substantially more than many people can hope to make in a day in rural Cambodia and even in unskilled jobs in the city. Starting salaries in hotels and restaurants don't pay much more than this (some pay less) and if employers require a completed high school education then most rural students won't even bother to apply.



WEATHER

The high season is between November and February. Although the crowds are at their peak, the weather is dry and cool (by “cool” think around 25 degrees) and the rice fields give the whole countryside an amazing iridescent green glow.

The dry season is between February and May, the heat kicks in and the countryside is dry and harsh.

The rainy season is from June to October the rains gradually increase with short showers gradually becoming continual downpours. The rains often cause flooding, and some years whole areas of the town can be totally under water for days at a time.

Despite this, Siem Reap in rainy season can be very beautiful. There are substantially fewer tourists, and the moats around the temples are full to bursting, giving amazing reflections of the monuments in their still waters. The forests are green and lush and the waterfalls at their max. With a rain poncho handy, there’s nothing to worry about.



RELIGION

Buddhism is the official religion of Cambodia.

Approximately 97% of Cambodia's population follows Theravada Buddhism, with Islam, Christianity, and tribal animism making up the bulk of the small remainder.

Religion is a very important part of everyday life in Cambodia and is present throughout the country as seen in the vast amount of temples where ceremonies and rituals occur daily.



USEFUL READINGS

Move to Cambodia website

<http://www.movetocambodia.com/>

is a complete and updated online guide to Cambodia for expats, with tips on living and working (travelling or volunteering) in Cambodia

Siem Reap online guide

<https://www.siemreap.net/>

offer tips on things to do, places to visit, where to eat or sleep in Siem Reap.