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Cambodian Center for Human Rights

Internship Handbook

Introduction

This handbook is intended as a short, practical guide for your stay in Cambodia and your work at the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR).

About the CCHR

What we do

The CCHR is a non-political, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia. Our focus is primarily on civil and political rights, although we work on a variety of interlinked human rights issues.

Why we do it

We believe that every Cambodian has the right to participate in democracy and to have their fundamental human rights respected. We work to give Cambodians a voice. The CCHR's logo shows a white bird flying out of a circle of sky blue - this symbolizes Cambodia's claim for freedom.

History

The CCHR was founded in 2002 by Kem Sokha, former Senator, current National Assembly Member and leader of the Human Rights Party. It was officially launched on 12 November 2002 to promote and protect democracy and human rights in Cambodia. During Kem Sokha's leadership, the CCHR became renowned for organizing regular public forums throughout Cambodia. In December 2006, Kem Sokha and other civil rights leaders were arrested and imprisoned for allegedly defaming the Cambodian government. They were released after a campaign led by Ou Virak, the CCHR's president since April 2007. Ou Virak is the founder of the Alliance for Freedom of Expression in Cambodia (AFEC), and in 2007 he won the Reebok Human Rights Award for his campaign to secure the release of Kem Sokha and the decriminalization of defamation.



Our Units

CCHR staff are grouped into four specialist Units that reflect the scope of our work. These Units work through our three Programs.

Freedom of Expression

Through its recognition of international human rights instruments in Article 31 and expressly in Article 41, the Constitution of Cambodia provides for Freedom of Expression for all Cambodians.

The Freedom of Expression Unit works to make freedom of expression the norm in Cambodia, restriction the exception. Without freedom of expression - where space is provided for dialogue, criticism and new ideas - Cambodia's human rights problems will never be resolved.

Fair Trials

Our Fair Trials Unit works to encourage fairer trials in Cambodia to reflect constitutional guarantees and protections.

Land Rights

The Land Rights Unit works to discourage unlawful land-grabbing in Cambodia and to promote peaceful resolution where conflict does arise.

Democracy

The Constitution of Cambodia states that the country has united for 'the restoration of Cambodia into an "Island of Peace" based on a multi-party liberal democratic regime guaranteeing human rights, abiding by law, and having high responsibility for the nation's future destiny of moving toward perpetual progress, development, prosperity, and glory'.

The Democracy Unit works to bring elected officials and political party representatives face to face with marginalized groups, with the objectives of holding these leaders accountable to their electorate and providing space for citizens to understand democracy, experience the democratic process, raise issues of concern relating to development, poverty and rights, and engage with political parties and polices to advocate for change

Our Programs

Community Empowerment

Our Community Empowerment Program is designed to empower marginalized Cambodians at the grassroots level, enabling them to understand principles of democracy and human rights, giving them the voice and opportunities to air their concerns and advocate for change, and providing alternative mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Monitoring, Research, Documentation & Information

Through our Monitoring, Research, Documentation & Information Program we work with other NGOs to monitor human rights, research issues of concern, document our findings and provide information to Cambodians and other interested stakeholders on the human rights situation in Cambodia. We aim to encourage a more sophisticated and collaborative approach by civil society in Cambodia.

Advocacy

Our Advocacy Program is based on the solid foundations of our Community Empowerment Program and Monitoring, Research, Documentation & Information Program. The former enables communities to set the agenda for our advocacy. The latter provides us with the data and analysis with which to back this up. Based on these solid foundations, our Advocacy Program includes policy and legislation proposals, dialogue, report writing, lobbying and campaigning. Collaboration with other NGOs and engagement with all stakeholders including the government underlie the program.

Human Rights in Cambodia

The Kingdom of Cambodia has a strong international and domestic legal framework that in theory should protect the human rights of its citizens. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia provides, in Article 31, that Cambodia shall recognize and respect human rights as stipulated in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the covenants and conventions related to human rights. However, despite this protection on paper, Cambodia still suffers from regular and severe human rights violations. Areas of particular concern include, but are not limited to land rights, the right to freedom of expression and assembly, fair trials, and impunity.

Legal Framework

Article 15 of the Paris Peace Accord - intended to restore and maintain peace in Cambodia after decades of bloody civil war - provides that "*All persons in Cambodia ... shall enjoy the rights and freedoms embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international human rights instruments.*" The UDHR was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and provides for human rights standards accepted by all UN Member States. Much of the UDHR is regarded as having acquired legal force as customary international law and, as noted above, is binding on Cambodia as part of its Constitution. The "*other international human rights instruments*" to which the Paris Peace Accord refers include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Cambodia acceded in 1992, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Cambodia acceded in 1992. The ICCPR and ICESCR are legally binding and expand on the UDHR.

The protection and promotion of human rights that is expressly provided for in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia was reinforced by a decision of the Cambodian Constitutional Council dated 10 July 2007, which held that all human rights instruments to which Cambodia has adhered form part of the Constitution.

Human Rights Infrastructure

Cambodia signed the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR on September 27, 2004; however, Cambodia has not ratified it and it is not therefore legally binding. Cambodia hosts a country office for the Office of the Higher Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR), which plays an important role in monitoring human rights.

In Cambodia, the Constitutional Council is the supreme body through which citizens should be able to challenge the constitutionality of laws, regulations and state decisions that affect their constitutional rights. The procedures involved in making such challenges, however, prevent citizens from accessing the Council. A citizen who wishes to make a complaint has to either get the King, the Prime Minister, the President of the Senate, the President of the National Assembly, one tenth of Cambodia's MPs or one quarter of its Senators to request that the Council adjudicate the case. Further, the Constitutional Council is not independent from the Government.

Articles 147 to 149 of the Constitution provides for an annual National Congress - an institution of direct democracy whereby Cambodians can meet their rulers "*to be directly informed of various matters of national interest*" and "*to raise issues and make proposals for the state authorities to address.*" Unfortunately the National Congress has never been convened, and on 4 March 2009, Prime Minister Hun Sen said that it should be removed from the Constitution.

Three other state institutions have a role in protecting human rights. The National Assembly and the Senate each have a Human Rights and Complaints Reception Committee, and the Government has its own Cambodian Human Rights Committee. These bodies are able to conduct investigations, but have failed in providing protection and redress to victims or in bringing perpetrators to justice. They are widely regarded as being politically controlled. In September 2006, Prime Minister Hun Sen announced plans to create a new National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to be "*based on the Paris Principles.*" The Paris

Principles relate to the status and functioning of independent national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights. Cambodia currently has no national action plan or policy for protecting and promoting human rights.

Regionally, Article 14 of the ASEAN Charter calls for the creation of an ASEAN human rights body that will protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, Cambodia is bound to negotiations and engagement with civil society.

Cambodia has a thriving civil society that is supported by international donors and has attracted wide praise. However, NGOs face continuing harassment from the Government, as reflected in this report. Further, they face new Government attempts to control them through a planned NGO Law. The draft NGO Law gives the Government control over NGOs' finances, provides for complex registration rules, and outlaws "political" aims.

Land Rights

Cambodia is obligated under the terms of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to protect the right to adequate housing by all appropriate means including the adoption of legislation and the provision of judicial remedies. The Land Law (2001) provides a legal framework that lays out how people acquire land ownership individually and collectively.

However, governmental social and economic land concessions have resulted in the forcible removal of thousands of families from their homes and land that they have owned. According to Article 30 of the 2001 Land Law: *"Any person who, for no less than five years prior to the promulgation of this law, enjoyed peaceful, uncontested possession of immovable property that can lawfully be privately possessed, has the right to request a definitive title of ownership"*. Further, article 42 offers added protection of land for *"any person who, due to ignorance or negligence, failed to register his possession has the right to the protections of Article 29, Article 30, and Article 31 of this law"*.

It is estimated that 11% of the population of Phnom Penh has been evicted since 1992. Moreover, at least 150,000 Cambodians currently live under the threat of forced eviction, including approximately 70,000 in Phnom Penh. In its State Party report to the UN Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee ("the ESCR Committee") the Government of Cambodia states that evictions are carried out only when necessary in the public interest; that evictees are provided fair and just compensation in advance and that those evicted are provided with financial support or re-housed in development areas with full access to necessary public services. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground, and especially in the case of marginalized urban and rural communities, is not demonstrative of the claims made by the Government in its report to the ESCR Committee.

In fact, Cambodia consistently fails to meet the international human rights law requirements. Indeed, by relying on vague and undefined terms such as 'public interest' the Government has a carte blanche in determining the use to which land is put, regardless of the consequences that follow for the people they purport to represent. Evictions are carried out in the absence of exceptional circumstances, and very often for private developments or land speculation for private profit. Alternatives to eviction are not explored. Those affected by evictions have had no opportunity for participation and consultation prior to evictions; rather, "take it or leave it" offers are made, in the form of monetary compensation or resettlement, which are consistently inadequate and well below the market value of people's houses and/or land.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

The last few years have seen freedom of expression and assembly seriously undermined with opinion restricted, parliamentarians silenced, the media controlled, access to information blocked, and assembly and public demonstration prevented. The Government has breached its international and constitutional

human rights obligations, and has relied on national legislation which itself breaches these obligations.

- On 15 July 2009, Moeung Sonn, head of the Khmer Civilization Foundation, an NGO with a mandate to protect and promote Cambodian culture, was sentenced to two years imprisonment on a charge of disinformation as a result of concerns he raised in regards to a lighting installation at Angkor Wat.
- On 10 July 2009, Dam Sith, the owner of *Moneaksekar Khmer* (Khmer Conscience), one of Cambodia's oldest and most influential opposition papers, closed the newspaper to avoid criminal prosecution for criticism of government officials.
- On 26 June 2009, Hang Chakra, the editor-in-chief of the opposition-aligned Khmer Machas Srok newspaper received a one-year jail sentence and \$2,250 fine following stories accusing a Council Minister, Sok An, of corruption.
- On 21 June 2009 Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) MPs, Mu Sochua and Ho Vann were stripped of parliamentary immunity for pending lawsuits. Mu Sochua has been accused of defaming Prime Minister Hun Sen after her own allegations against the prime minister were dropped. Ho Vann, is accused of defaming and incitement after publicly criticizing the value of the certificates awarded to the officers by the government of Vietnam.
- On 8 June 2009 the Phnom Penh Municipality reportedly sent armed forces to close the Lazy Fish guesthouse in the Boeung Kak area after its owner agreed to rent the premises to CCHR for a public forum on 'Human Rights and Development' on June 12, 2009. The intimidation culminating in the temporary closure of this guesthouse caused CCHR to decide to suspend its public forum.
- On 4 June 2009, Soung Sophorn, a law student, SRP activist and a resident of Boeung Kak, was arrested after he had unveiled banners at his home reading; "Absolutely fighting against communist policy," and "People Suffer due to Cheap Government and Company". After spending two days in police custody, the young activist was hurriedly convicted of criminal defamation by the Municipal Court of Phnom Penh on 6 June, a non-working day for the court.
- On 24 January 2009, the violent eviction of the Phnom Penh Dey Krahor community also saw law enforcement personnel preventing journalists from reporting on the case.
- Most notoriously, on 12 July 2008 journalist Khim Sambo of the *Monaksekar Khmer* (*Khmer Conscience*) newspaper was shot dead with his son in Phnom Penh just weeks before the general election. Still, no arrests have been made. Sambo often reported on corruption, illegal logging and land grabbing by powerful government figures. *Moneakseka Khmer*, which is linked to the opposition SRP, is one of only a handful of consistently critical publications in Cambodia.
- From January to October 2008, the CCHR organized 48 public forums of which nine were disrupted and two banned. The local authorities banned the two forums (in Takeo and Kampong Chhnang) because they wanted to keep "good order" for the general election period.
- In December 2007, the police dispersed with excessive force a peaceful demonstration by Khmer Krom monks in front of the Embassy of Vietnam. Two monks were seriously injured.
- A June 2007 report by a London-based watchdog group, Global Witness, exposed corrupt officials linked to illegal logging, was met with condemnation and censure from the Government. The Government blocked the website and distribution of the report in Cambodia and expelled Global Witness staff from the country.

Fair Trial Rights

Exacerbating rights violations is a non-independent judiciary that is largely influenced by the executive branch of government. During her 2006 visit to Cambodia, the then UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights Louise Arbour stated that the strengthening of the judiciary in Cambodia was of capital importance. Arbour noted that “an independent, professional judiciary with recognized integrity would not only be essential in protecting fundamental human rights and freedoms but also facilitate the resolution of a number of difficulties evident in Cambodia – including impunity, conflicts over land and corruption”. Unfortunately, little has changed in the three years since the visit of Ms. Arbour. The difficulties remain and political influence continues to be a serious problem throughout the Cambodian legal system, compromising the judiciary and the Bar Council and preventing lawyers from freely representing their clients. All this despite the guarantee in Article 109 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia of a judiciary that is independent and impartial.

The recent spate of criminal charges of defamation, disinformation and incitement initiated against members and supporters of the main opposition party, the SRP, in 2009 are testament to the function the Cambodian judiciary plays in silencing dissent and anti-government opinions. These cases have targeted the pillars of democracy; politicians, lawyers, journalists and members of civil society, and are evidence of attempts by the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) to dissolve the main opposition party and move Cambodia towards becoming a one-party state similar to Vietnam or China.

The ongoing conflict at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) between the national and international co-prosecutors as to whether there will be charges against further suspects, suggests that political control stretches beyond the local and municipal Courts and into an institution that purports to be applying international fair trial standards in prosecuting those alleged to hold the greatest responsibility for the crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge period. Though the names of the potential additional suspects remain unknown it has been suggested that they may include members of the current government. Questions necessarily arise as to whether the stance of the national co-prosecutor, who is the niece of the Deputy Prime Minister Sok An, is influenced by the government.

The UN Special Rapporteur for the Independence of Lawyers and Judges, Leandro Despouy, recently voiced his concerns over the independence of lawyers and restrictions on their freedom to represent their clients. The Special Rapporteur was speaking out in response to the following three instances in which the independence and freedom of lawyers has been interfered with:

- In April 2009, Kong Sam Onn, the lawyer for SRP Parliamentarian Ms. Mu Sochua, was charged with defamation and threatened with expulsion from the Cambodian Bar Council after his client initiated defamation proceedings against Prime Minister Hun Sen. Mr. Kong, in order to avoid prosecution and the loss of his livelihood, apologized to the Prime Minister. The charges against him were dropped.
- In January 2009, Cambodian Judges threatened with possible legal action defence lawyers at the ECCC, who had called for allegations of corruption at the Court to be investigated by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court.
- In June 2007, lawyers representing an indigenous community in Ratanakiri Province who were involved in a land conflict with a private individual with close links to the government, were alleged to have ‘incited’ their clients to file a lawsuit to retrieve their land. The lawyers were threatened with criminal charges and disciplinary action before the Bar Council.

According to international principles, bar associations are intended to be non-partisan entities working to promote and protect the independence of lawyers from outside interference, especially government interference. In their 2007 briefing paper entitled *Restriction on the Legal Profession by the Bar Association: A Threat to Free & Independent Legal Aid in Cambodia* Cambodian NGO Licadho noted however that “sadly, in the context of Cambodia’s feeble and dysfunctional justice system, the Bar has shown itself to be part of the problem, not the solution”.

The Bar has close ties with the government and the ruling CPP. As Licadho have stated; “In 2004, Prime Minister Hun Sen and three senior CPP-affiliated government officials were granted bar association membership even though they lacked legal credentials.” The Bar’s stance is indicative of a legal system “compromised by the Cambodian government’s interest in controlling the judiciary and undermining the development of rule of law.”

Furthermore, allegations of endemic corruption continue to cast a shadow over the Cambodian judicial and legal systems. The Cambodian people consider that the judiciary is amongst the most corrupt institutions in the country where low pay makes judges and members of the legal profession easy targets for bribery by the rich and the powerful. These corrupt practices necessarily give rise to an unfair power dynamic in which wealthier Cambodians can use the legal system as a means to attack those in less fortunate positions who, for example, refuse to sell them their land.

Culture of Impunity

As is evident from the foregoing, the Cambodian justice system serves the rich and powerful. This necessarily gives rise to a culture of impunity in Cambodia such that in instances in which members of the elite are implicated in crimes, such as the murders of opposition journalist Khim Sambo in 2008 and labour union activist Chea Vichea in 2004, those responsible are rarely brought to justice. In the case of Chea Vichea, two men were found guilty of the murder and sentenced to 20 years in prison despite having strong alibis and a dearth of evidence against them. Although one of the men, Borng Samnang, originally admitted to the killing, he subsequently withdrew his confession stating that it was made under duress. The other man, Sam Sok Oeun, denied any involvement in the crime. The criminal investigation and the trial were condemned by the then Special Representative of the United Nations' Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, Peter Leuprecht, as lacking any credibility. The trial verdict was subsequently upheld by the Court of Appeal despite the Prosecutor's admission that there had been a lack of evidence against the two men. The two men were eventually released on bail in 2008, having served 1799 days in prison, after the Supreme Court ordered the Court of Appeal to reinvestigate the case.

The impunity benefiting the powerful perpetrators of serious crimes remains the most pervasive evil affecting Cambodia today. As the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia wrote in his 2006 report to the Human Rights Council, "Impunity means that Cambodia's citizens are not protected by law... With impunity there is no protection of human rights. Impunity is the opposite of accountability and the antithesis of the rule of law." This culture of impunity that pervades Cambodia today is the basis on which human rights violations in all of foregoing sections are invariably committed.

Preparations

Air Ticket

Book your flight as early as possible. Flights might get more expensive the later you book them and there is also a chance that they are already fully booked a couple of months ahead.

It is difficult to get a flight directly to Phnom Penh. Some airlines offer through rates to Phnom Penh but this might be pricy. It's better to just book a flight to Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong or Kuala Lumpur and from there book a separate ticket from a discount airline to Phnom Penh International Airport.

Discount airlines include:

- Air Asia: www.airasia.com
- Jetstar Asia: www.valueair.com.sg

If you want to fly with a discount airline you should be aware that the baggage limits might be low (15 kg at Air Asia) and that you have to pay for excess baggage.

An even cheaper way to get from Bangkok to Phnom Penh is by bus. You should know though that scams and touts are common at the border crossing. So watch out if you choose this option! Bus tickets are available at guesthouses and travel agencies in Bangkok.

Visa

It is not necessary to organize a visa in advance. When you arrive in Cambodia you can purchase a one-month business visa; all you need is a passport that is valid for at least 6 months, US\$ 25 for the visa and a passport photo.

The business visa is issued for one month, but can be extended as many times as you want for one, three, six, or twelve month periods at a time.

Please also note that these visas are *not* usually multiple entry visas. Every time you leave Cambodia you will be required to purchase a new visa.

If you overstay your visa, you pay a \$5/day penalty when you leave.

For further information or for organizing the visa in advance you can contact the Cambodian Embassy in your country.

Health Insurance and Vaccinations

Before your travel, ensure that you have adequate health insurance. Make sure that you are insured for motorbike accidents and emergency evacuations.

There are several vaccinations recommended for travel to Cambodia. Check with your General Practitioner at least 6 weeks before departure what vaccinations are needed. At the least, you should be vaccinated for Hepatitis A & B, Typhoid, and Tetanus if you haven't already, and consider Japanese Encephalitis, Meningitis, and Rabies.

You may also consider bringing anti-malaria medication with you. Although Phnom Penh is considered to be malaria-free, it is very likely during your time in Cambodia that you will venture into the provinces where malaria is common. Regardless of whether you are taking anti-malaria medication, it is important to minimize your exposure to mosquito bites as cases of dengue fever are reported throughout Cambodia.

You should also bring enough of your prescription medication to last the entirety of your stay, as well as some common antibiotics for travelers' diarrhea.

Organizing Accommodation

Once you arrive, you might want to share private rented accommodation.

Alternatively, there are excellent guest houses in Phnom Penh and they will usually offer monthly rates. Check out one of the guide books or internet reviews for a complete listing.

The CCHR might be able to arrange you a family home stay. Please contact us if you are interested in finding out more.

You should probably expect to pay between US\$100 and \$300 a month for your accommodation.

What to Pack?

Generally, you can buy nearly everything in Phnom Penh. However, we suggest that you pack the following items:

- laptop (you MUST bring this for your work at the CCHR)
- camera
- mobile phone
- adapter
- flash light (occasionally there are power cuts/outages at night)
- toiletries
- first aid kit
- mosquito repellents
- sunscreen (very expensive)
- light clothes
- some pairs of shoes
- towel

Clothing

Cambodia is situated within the tropics, so it is pretty hot all year round. However, there is some seasonal variation. From June to October the weather is hot and rainy, from November to January it is cooler with little rain, and February to May is the hottest part of the year. Lightweight, breathable clothing is important.

Clothes in Cambodia are also usually hand washed, which will wear them out quickly. Luckily, clothes are very cheap to buy here. At the traditional markets, you can get shirts for US\$1-2 and trousers for around US\$5. So you might want to leave open some space in your baggage for your Cambodian acquisitions.

Tailors are also widespread throughout Phnom Penh and can make new clothes for you at cheap prices. They can copy an item of clothing that you bring them, or produce something similar if you show them a picture.

The dress code in Cambodia is relatively modest and should be followed in most situations, including whilst working at CCHR. Women are expected to cover their shoulders and typically wear long or short-sleeved shirts and long skirts or trousers. Men usually wear long pants and button-down shirts. Either sandals or shoes are appropriate.

Further Reading

Given that this handbook is only designed as a short overview of Cambodia, we suggest that you purchase either the Rough Guide or the Lonely Planet Guide to Cambodia.

For more up-to-date information on Cambodia, take a look at the following websites:

- <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php>
- <http://www.voanews.com/khmer/>

There are also many interesting books written on Cambodian history. Some we recommend are:

- *When the War Was Over* by Elizabeth Becker
- *When Broken Glass Floats* by Chanrithy Him
- *First They Killed My Father* by Loung Ung
- *Sideshow* by William Shawcross
- *The Gate* by Francois Bizot
- *Cambodia: Year Zero* by Francois Ponchaud
- *A History of Cambodia* by David P. Chandler
- *The Death and Life of Dith Pran* by Sidney Schanberg
- *River of Time* by Jon Swain

Work at CCHR

Upon arrival in Phnom Penh your Mentor will explain to you the tasks you will be undertaking at CCHR. These will depend on your skills and previous work experience.

Interns are expected to work Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm with a 2 hour lunch break.

Life in Phnom Penh

How to Get Around

The normal way to get around Cambodia's cities is by motorcycle taxi or by tuk tuk. You find drivers everywhere or they find you as soon as you appear on the roadside. Motorcycle taxis are cheaper but for the transport of a couple of persons a tuk tuk is more comfortable.

To the CCHR office from the Independence Monument will cost around US\$2 in a tuk tuk and around \$1 on a motorcycle. Transport is readily available, although be sure to bargain with the driver for a satisfactory fair before accepting the ride.

The traffic here is dangerous! Stop signs and traffic lights mean nothing, and people routinely drive in the oncoming lane. You MUST buy a helmet (costs around US\$10) if you often drive with a motorcycle taxi. Also, it is important to always keep your personal belongings close to you during transit.

Medical Advice

Regarding health concerns while in Phnom Penh, although there is a pharmacy on every corner, you may want to stick with Pharmacy de la Gare, No. 81 Monivong Ave., well-known among westerners. They sell western medicine, they speak English, and their staff are trained pharmacists.

There are a number of decent medical clinics; many westerners have had good experiences with International SOS, 161 St. 51., which has foreign and Cambodian doctors (and dentists).

Money

Although Cambodia has its own currency, the Riel, the operating currency currently is the US dollar. The dollar is used for payment, and the riel is used as change. US coins are worthless in Cambodia.

ATMs are generally found inside gas stations, and dispense US dollars. Be sure to always carry riel or small US currency as many places will not accept large US bills.

Despite exchange rate fluctuations, local vendors will always accept 4000r = US\$1.

Credit cards are very rarely accepted in Cambodia; the economy relies on cash. Only high-end hotels, restaurants and medical clinics will accept cards.

There are lots of banks in Phnom Penh that for a fee will give you credit card cash advances or cash traveler's checks.

Internet

You can find internet cafes everywhere in Phnom Penh. The connections aren't fast at all but for charges varying from 1500 to 4000 riels an hour you can't expect high speed internet.

Many have headphones and microphones making Skype an incredibly cheap way to keep in touch with home, especially as Cambodia hardly has any payphones.

Eating and Drinking

Tap water must absolutely not be drunk under any circumstances. Bottled water is very cheap and is readily available. Due to the heat and humidity it is very important to always keep your fluids up and prevent dehydration.

A standard Khmer meal will cost no more than US\$2 (less if from a street vendor), and a Western meal will cost about double. There are local Khmer restaurants absolutely everywhere in Phnom Penh, although many staff do not speak any English so it is usually necessary to bring a Khmer phrase book.

There are Western restaurants scattered throughout Phnom Penh, although the biggest selection is found along the riverfront area.

You should probably be familiar with Lucky Market, a supermarket on Sihanouk Boulevard. It sells all sorts of western and local food, and is a good place to stock up on croissants and baguettes for breakfast. It also has an ATM upstairs, and Lucky Market is one of a small number of places in town that will break a \$50 bill.

Social Customs

Public displays of affection are entirely inappropriate throughout Cambodia.

Monks (identifiable by their saffron robes) cannot touch women under any circumstances. Women should be cautious about standing too close to monks and about blocking their way in a crowd.

Virtually every Cambodian has been affected in some way by the Khmer Rouge period. This is a sensitive topic and you should approach it cautiously.

When visiting temples or shrines, you should wear something that covers your legs and shoulders.



What to See

Interesting places to visit in Phnom Penh include;

- Toul Sleng Genocide Museum (formerly S-21)
- The Killing Fields (Choeung Ek)
- National Museum
- Russian Market
- Phnom Chisor Temple
- Royal Palace
- Silver Pagoda
- Central Market
- Wat Phnom

Guidebooks offer a much more extensive account of the attractions in Phnom Penh and surrounding areas.

Contact Us

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