

Blog 47 Cambodia



A little over 4 million people visited Cambodia in 2013. This year, my family and I along with another family from NIS took a trip to this Kingdom of Wonder during our one-week long Chinese national holiday break. We visited the capital city Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, where the famous tourist site Angkor Wat is located.

Angkor Wat is an ancient tomb for a Cambodian king that is around 800 years old. At the end of the 13th century, the Chinese ambassador at the time, DaGuan Zhou, stayed there for an entire year and wrote down his journey as a travel documentary. His book was then translated to many different languages including French and English. A lot of people thought that this book was entirely fiction, but there was one French botanist, Henri Mahout, who thought differently. He took a bunch of adventurers with him in the 19th century and, according to the directions in the book, found the Angkor Wat temple. Although the Angkor Wat temple is only a small part of an entire area that had many different temples dedicated to each reign of ancient Cambodian kings, it is the best preserved and consists of quite the finest structure. We visited this site twice. The first time, our two families were only capable of wandering around in the maze-like temple without a tour guide, gawking open-mouthedly at the remains of what the ancients were trying to tell us. With a bucket load of question marks hanging all around us, we decided to take a second trip over to the temple and, this time, with a tour guide. Our tour guide gave us a long history lesson about the temple, the Hindu history, the origins and the carvings in the hallways surrounding the temple. The entire hallway was around 8 kilometers long and had a wall of carvings on one side and was opened on the other side. The carvings were all depicting famous ancient Hindu tales. One of them was called the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, which gave me the deepest impression. This ancient religious temple seemingly became our outdoors classroom, a place we collected much new knowledge in.



Cambodia is a country very strict with their religion and also quite conservative. This could be seen from a little incident that happened on our very first day in Siem Reap. That day, we arrived in the afternoon and wanted to see the sunset on the mountain Phnom Bakheng. We dropped our luggage off at the hotel and raced to the mountain (which is also in the Angkor area) with our cameras and hiking sticks at the ready. But when we got there, we were stopped by the guard at the park entrance. He slowly placed his palms together and bowed. The guard pointed towards me and the girl from the other family (Julia) and said: "Shorts too short, shirt no sleeve." As I looked down, both Julia and I were wearing a tank top and running shorts. Oh, a dress code! Although we were already sweating under the scorching sun, I guess we still had no choice but to cover ourselves up. My dad dug up his long sleeve shirt from the bottom of the bag and tied it around my waist, buttoning it up to make it look just like a long skirt. I then threw on my mom's jacket and zipped it up to my throat. Julia was in the same sort of unique apparel. As we were dressing up by the gate, more and more people were stopped by the guard. They all struggled and tried very hard to come up with the proper apparel. Some of them were very lucky that they could cover themselves up with extra clothing, but some had to leave and come back another time. Let me tell you first, it was NOT pleasant. By the time we reached the top of the mountain, we looked like we'd just taken a trip in a sauna. Our faces looked like tomatoes and our tongues hung out of our mouths lazily. We took any paper we had and immediately sank down onto the platform, fanning ourselves frantically. We were begging for the sun to set ASAP. The first thing we did when we got off that

mountain was to buy long and “local” pants, as many as we could... But my mom and I are crazy shoppers so we restrained our limit to *only* seven ☺



If you go on the streets of Siem Reap or even Phnom Penh, you won't see any subway stations, busses or any public transportation, even taxis were considered rare. But what you *will* see are: motorcycles, e-bike and tuk-tuk's *everywhere*! Tuk-tuk's are basically a *motorcycle*-drawn carriage. Our two families had personal experience with tuk-tuks time and time again. They aren't quite the fastest and definitely not quiet, but, hey! At least I never got carsick (which is something that happens very often for me)! In Siem Reap, we tried another way of getting around - elephant riding, which required *skill*. We saddled up in the Angkor area, two people to an elephant, and took off. The big animal trudged its way down the path around the temple, dragging its trunk on the ground. The elephant swayed slightly from left to right and up to down. We were bobbing up and down like a balloon being forced into the water and swaying uncontrollably, following the movements of the elephant like it was some exotic tribal dance. As a reward after the ride, we fed her small bananas. As I took out my phone to take pictures, she even came over to me, trying to snatch away my phone, probably mistaking it for a banana because of its yellow case. My eyes widened as I quickly spun around and speed walked away half singing, half whispering “no, no, not my phone! Please no, not my phooooone!”



The Kingdom of Cambodia isn't such a big country, but its religion and history give it a mysterious whole new layer, which the locals are very a proud of. That probably explains why the Cambodians had put a symbol of Angkor Wat on their National flag.

