

Indonesia #5 Cambodia

June 2010

Cambodia is the last stop on one of the longer trips I have taken over the years. We flew to Phnom Penh from Singapore and stayed in a great, \$20 per night hotel in the centre of the city! It was great because it was clean, hot water, breakfast included and right in the middle of dozens of sidewalk café's in the tourist section of town, yet it was owned and run by Cambodians.



The most surprising aspect of a drive in central Cambodia is that 3 out of 10 cars are the Lexus brand! These are high end models, LX470 SUV's. They are everywhere. Toyota has scored here with their brands probably accounting for 50% plus of the vehicles. The Lexus automobiles, although cheaper in this country, indicate a high level of corruption. They are handed out to government officials and army honchos as perks for contracts. Cambodia consistently makes the top ten list in corrupt countries.

The primary mode of transport for most Cambodians, is a Tuk-Tuk, a 125cc motorcycle tricked-out with a carriage on the back that holds 3 North Americans or 6 Cambodians. \$2 gets you anywhere in town. US Dollars are universally used. The Cambodian 'Riel' is only used for small change. This is an inexpensive place to live. Food is good and costs little.

We visited a number of ministry leaders around the capital. Cambodia is still recovering from 30 years of war; a war that petered out 2000 with no conclusive armistice. People seemed to get tired of the fighting and went back to their farms. It is a country that saw nearly ¼ of its 7 million population exterminated while the world did nothing from 1975 to 1979. The late Pol Pot, the infamous murderer, killed almost 1.7 million of his own people to implement his bizarre communist ideology. The events were documented in the 'Killing Fields' book and movie.

Most traces of Christianity were eliminated, as the Kymmer Rouge murdered hundreds of thousands or people fleeing the country. Since then, the church has rebounded a hundred fold with encouraging signs everywhere. Christians number about 3% of the 14 million populace now.

No visit to Cambodia is complete without





seeing the Angkor Wat complex near Siem Reap. 100's of acres of Hindu-Buddhist-Hindu temples have been uncovered in the jungles of north Cambodia. It is estimated that more than 1 million people occupied this city one millennia ago. It is certainly an amazing place. The architecture, engineering and beauty rival any heritage site in the world. I found it interesting that the most popularly photographed parts of the complex are the gigantic fig trees that have been slowly deconstructing the buildings for centuries!

Six hours of temple touring in 37C heat in the blazing sun sated my appetite. John decided to climb to the top of the main temple complex while I sat it out in the shade. It

was a good decision on my part.

We begin the long trek home today. Interestingly, with all the flights, connections and schedules, we were able to meet up with an old friend and his family from the Spokane Washington area. Carlos Calderone was traveling with his wife Lorena and daughter, Carla (1 of 9 !). We met in the Kuala Lumpur airport. We also meet up with my son Jon tonight in Dubai! He is returning from a six week assignment in Australia with his software company and we just 'happen' to meet in Dubai and fly home on the same plane.

See you soon

Phil Dempster

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