

Day Twelve: Cambodia – Angkor Wat



Day 11 was spent traveling. The morning at leisure to pack in Thailand, then bus to airport. One hour flight back to Bangkok where we had a 3 hour layover before taking our puddle jumper over to Siem Reap, Cambodia. The flight was just an hour and we arrived at our hotel at 9PM. The airport at Siem Reap is tiny, but cute. Immigration as the weirdest thing ever, you stand in a line to pay \$20 for your entrance visa, they pass the passport down a row of 9 different people who then return the passport to you and then you go to passport control and get it stamped. Sign at airport security on left: *Pack (Pace) Maker? I don't have one of those!!*

The hotel is very new (built in 2007) and quite luxurious. We received an upgraded room. Hotel prices are somewhat more than Thailand, beers out the mini bar are \$2.50 but only 50 cents at the supermarket.

Our room:



The hotel:





A 9AM start this morning and headed off to Angkor Wat only 10 kms away. Angkor is an ancient city covering 220 square km that was built in 802 AD. At its height there were one million people living here!

However like all civilizations, it crumbled after 600 years and the city was left empty for over 400 years and the jungle took it over. It was only rediscovered in the late 1800s completely over grown. Wat means temple, so Angkor Wat is the “Temple City” or “City of Temples”. I will let the pictures speak for themselves.



We broke for lunch going to a local restaurant to sample some Cambodian food. It was absolutely DELICIOUS!! After lunch we moved on to Angkor Thom – a temple built 30 years after Angkor Wat by the next King. Both temples switched several times between Hinduism and Buddhism over the 500 years they were in service.



And yes, there are monkeys living in the temples of Angkor!

We were then supposed to watch the sunset from an old temple on the top of a hill, but it was so crowded with tourists that we couldn't get near it (this is peak tourist season in Cambodia).



Instead we decided to take a tuk-tuk back to the hotel rather than wait for the bus. That way we could also stop off at the supermarket in town and buy some wine and beer.

The 10km trip cost a grand total of \$7 after he charged us an extra dollar for waiting outside the supermarket while we shopped. Tuk-tuks in Cambodia are a little different, basically a scooter with a three/four seater trailer strapped to the back of it. I gave him \$10 and said to keep the change and you have never seen a face light up like that!!!

Cambodia has only been open for tourism for a little over 10 years because they've had a civil war/occupation since WWII and only in 1993 was the infamous Khmer Rouge overthrown. The country finally returned to an elected monarchy and peace was slowly restored.



While our guide in Thailand indicated that Cambodia was basically the same exact culture as Thailand, I can tell you emphatically IT IS NOT! Whilst only being here one day there are vast differences in the people and culture. Surprisingly, we found more locals speak much better English in Cambodia than Thailand. Here's something INTERESTING....

While they have a government issued currency of Real, which is R4,000 to \$1USD

→ You can only spend US DOLLARS in this country! You can only get US Dollars from the ATM. All prices are in US DOLLARS in all street markets, regular stores, hotel menus, etc, etc, etc!!!!!!

Cambodians have hi-jacked the US dollar! Can someone tell me when we made them a protectorate or 51st State? LOL!



Here I am drinking a beer from a street bar!

Cambodians physically have different features than Thai's. I personally feel Cambodians are genuinely more gracious than Thai's; perhaps because Cambodians have only had 10 years of tourism to corrupt them where as the Thai's have been in the tourism industry for over 60 years. ;)

Cambodia is the epitome of a 3rd world country. The "Save the Children" commercials you see on TV. We didn't see this type of abject poverty to the same extent in Thailand as we do in Cambodia.

To this day, 85% of Cambodians are farmers compared to 60% of Thai's. In Siem Reap, because

they have made Angkor Wat such a tourist attraction and a UNESCO Site, they have build mega hotels on all the rice paddies, forcing many farmers out of house, home and profession. This area leads the country in the poorest of its citizens.



However, tourism is growing at a phenomenal rate since the country is so at peace now and stable. Tourism just to Angkor Wat has grown exponentially from a mere 100,000 visitors 5 years ago to over 2 million visitors last year.

In conclusion, while we NEVER thought of Cambodia as a destination to visit, it only became a spark of interest from our dear friend Kathy (AKA: Sis K - - LL&KS!!). This is truly a magical place in which we would love to spend much more time learning the culture and being with the people. They have such a wonderful sense of humor and truly love life now they are free and safe.

ABOVE: This Daddy and son rode behind us in our tuk-tuk. The little guy was blowing kisses at Wendy and she was just having a ball waving and playing with him. The smile on the little boys face (and his daddy) should give you an idea of how beautiful the people are inside and out.



For Rocky...

Cab ride from tourist attraction to hotel... \$6.00

Bottle wine from the supermarket... \$5.00

A Cambodian beer from a street vendor for only a dollar on every corner of every street in the country...

...Priceless!!!

(note how they mark the price in USD on every can in the mini-bar in the hotel, just so there can be NO

MISTAKE when you check out!) They even stack the used cans next to the mini-bar fridge just to prove you drank them!

Until tomorrow....

B & W