

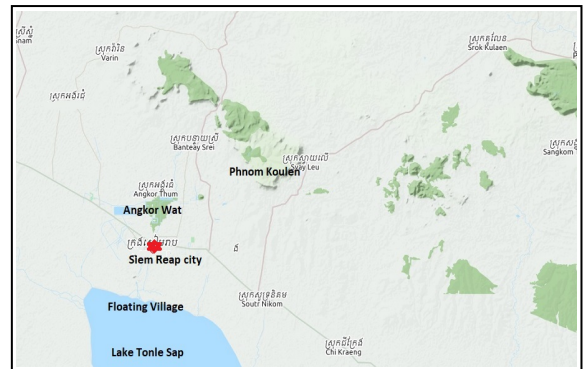
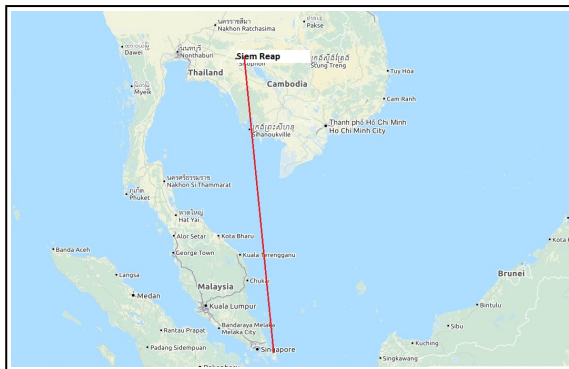


4. Cambodia 2019



by Johan Kjellander 2019

Early in April we left Bird of Passage in Sevana Cove for five days and took a cheap flight into Cambodia. We wanted to see Angkor Wat and hopefully something more if possible.



Siam Reap City in Cambodia is the natural place to stay for tourists that want to visit the world famous Angkor Wat temple so we booked a hotel in the city.



Cheapest way from the Airport to the city is by Tuc-Tuc, similar to the Philippine tricycle but with two wheels instead of one. We made a deal with a driver to take us to the hotel. His name was Lem Radi and he became our guide for 4 days.



It was only a 5 minute walk from our hotel, over the river on a wooden bridge, to the centre of the city and a big market.



Pub Street was a nice place to find a good restaurant...



...and one of them was the *Paper Tiger*. We had dinner there and then noticed that the placemats that the waitress put under our plates had a motive with the old comic hero Tintin and his friends celebrating with a toast in front of the restaurant. Having read many of the Tintin stories and learned to like them I was curious about why he was celebrating outside the Paper Tiger. Was there maybe a title like "Tintin in Cambodia" that I had missed or had Hergé (Tintin's creator) actually been to the restaurant?

A week later, back in the boat, I decided to Google a little and try to find out what it was all about. I soon learned that Tintin was never in Cambodia and that he has no connection at all to any Paper Tiger. What I did find was a picture with exactly the same motive as the placemats, where Tintin and his friends celebrate with glasses in their hands. Where did this picture come from ?

After some more digging I found an Indonesian illustrator on Blogspot. His name is "Kaka Nami Rai" and he seems to be a real fan of Tintin. On his blog, [Myowntintin](#) he has a big gallery of his own Tintin illustrations. One of them is the one where Tintin and his friends celebrate. So, I found the origin of the picture and it is not an original from Herge but I still don't know how it found its way from the Indonesian illustrator to a restaurant in Siem Reap, Cambodia and I would sure like to know why it says "Nami and Herge" in the lower right corner of the picture. Should anyone of you out there know, please send me a line, I'm very curious.



The lotus flower is an important symbol in Buddhist countries. According to legend, "everywhere the baby Buddha stepped, a lotus flower bloomed".



They grow in muddy waters (baby Buddha must have had dirty feet), flowers are used for decoration and fruits contain nuts that are nice to eat. We saw a lot of them during our days in Cambodia.



We also saw many vendors of sugercane juice. They all had the same machine, driven by a noisy gasoline engine, to squeeze the juice out of the canes.



After a visit to the market our Tuc-Tuc-driver Lem took us to Tonle Sap, a very big lake, close to Siem Reap, that houses a number of so called "floating villages". We visited one of them, Chong Khneas, where poor vietnamese immigrants live a hard life. To get there you need to go by boat and now we got the opportunity to study the strange "long tail" riverboats.



They come in many sizes but all have a long extended tube for the propellershaft sticking out from the stern. This way you can raise or lower the propeller as needed depending on the water depth. A very specialized solution for shallow waters that seems to work well.



New boats were built on the shore using old traditional methods.



Fishing is a major source of income



The floating village of Chong Khneas is built on a large number of floating houses. Mostly homes for living but also a school, a shop, a restaurant, a workshop for boat engines etc. etc. and several fish farms. We even saw a farm for crocodiles.



The people who live here are said to be poor vietnamese without citizenship not treated well by the Cambodian government. It was a real tourist trap full of chinese people on holiday taking selfies in front of the cute vietnamese children.

[This article by Cara Crawford](#) describes the situation more in detail.

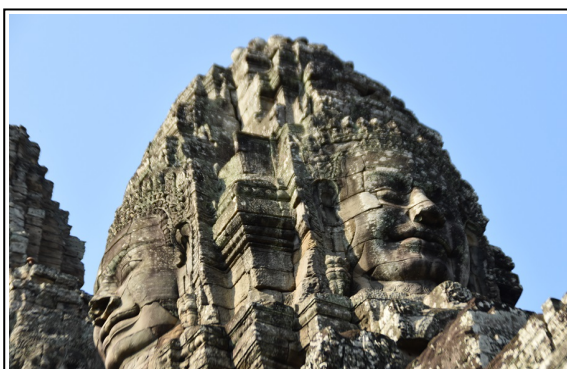


Next day it was time for Angkor Wat, a UNESCO world heritage with 2.5 million visits 2017. The same year tickets were sold for more than one hundred million US-dollars! Lem suggested that he would pick us up early in the morning so that we could take pictures at sunrise.

According to the guide book "Ancient Angkor" by Michael Freeman and Claude Jacques (ISBN 974 8225 27 5), Angkor Wat is the worlds biggest religious monument. It was built in sandstone between 1113 and 1150 to honour the Hindu god Shiva. It sure is impressing, but even more impressing was the number of mostly Chineese tourists that had gathered in the darkness to see the sun go up behind the temple. At least one thousand, probably more.



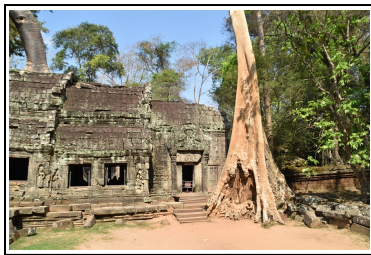
Angkor Wat is the biggest Khmer temple but not the only in the Siem Reap area. The guide book lists almost 50 temples. After Angkor Wat we visited two more, Angkor Thom and Ta Prohm.



Angkor Thom is beautiful with lots of fine ornamentation and the monkeys who lived there really amplified the impression of an old, mysterious ruin.



There were lots of Macaque monkeys and they were very domesticated, not afraid to steal food from visitors, just like the Macaques on the cliffs of Gibraltar.



The last temple we visited was Ta Prohm. It is here that some scenes of the film "Tomb Raider" were recorded, 2001 with Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft and 2018 again with Alicia Vikander.



Day 3 Lem picked us up with a car instead of his Tuc-Tuc. We were going to see the Preah Ang Thom pagoda and the waterfall in the Phnom Koulen national park some 50 kilometers north east of Siem Reap in the mountains.



The pagoda is a 16:th century Buddhist monastery on top of the sacred mountain of Phnom Koulen.



On the very top resides an eight meter long reclining Buddha carved out of the sandstone on spot. Quite impressive. Lem told us that 10 years ago as a young boy he was here with his parents to worship. At that time there was no road so you had to walk for many hours to reach the pagoda.



There were many nice stone carvings in the pagoda area. I think this little fountain was fantastic. I would love to have one in our garden.



A small scenic road from the pagoda leads down to a nice waterfall.



From 1970 to 1975 Cambodia suffered from a terrible civil war where the communist Khmer Rouge fought and finally defeated the old government. There is much to say about this war and the things that happened later but the short summary is that it was all so terrible you hardly want to think about it.

To learn more, we asked Lem to take us to the Siem Reap War Museum. There we saw all sorts of terrible war machines, like a Russian MI-8 transport helicopter...



...and a Soviet BM-14 rocket launcher.



Anti aircraft gun and light artillery.



A Russian T54 tank.



Various firearms, land mines, grenades and lots of other terrible things. Even a former mass grave.



And finally this. I'm not sure what it is or why it is on display on a war museum but it could be a war prison for one person.

After the war museum Lem took us to the airport and the next day we were back in the boat again. It was a tough week with many hours of traveling but also very interesting of course. In the war museum I bought a book about the Khmer Rouge era, "The Pol Pot Regime" by Ben Kiernan (ISBN 978-0-300-14434-5). I have just started reading it and I must say it's terrible what happened. Lets just hope that the Cambodian people will have peace in their country for ever in the future.



End of Cambodia 2019

