

## **The cultural wealth of Cambodia**

I spent one night in Chau Doc, a small city on the river Mekong in the south west of Vietnam, before taking a boat to Cambodia border.

The river near Cambodia is quite large and branches into different watercourses. The boat left Chau Doc in the morning and the gentle sound of the water accompanied me. The landscape around alternated, creating a myriad of bucolic images. The intense blue sky created a large idyllic garden. It gave me such a unique sensation, being along the sweet water of the river Mekong and learning about the education of Asian people.

While waiting at the border, local people served me fresh seasonal fruits and as I observed each of the many faces, I gleaned how much they enjoyed expressed the simplicity and happiness of their lives from their revealing faces.

A minivan got me from the border to the capital of Cambodia across a flat green landscape, where appeared a pagoda on both sides of the road, quite every five kilometers.

The old town of Phnom Penh is small with some quite narrow streets and buildings that still conserve the architecture of the colonial period. Many shops in this area sell handmade objects and clothes.

Along the promenade, on the bank of the river Mekong, there are different bars whose architecture and furniture remind the viewer of the colonial period. In these places, one may taste and dine on a variety of fresh fruits while enjoying a stunning view of the river.

After a walk through the old town, I explored the famous National Museum, which is located next to the Royal Palace. It showcases different sculptures of the Khmer empire and displays several texts explaining its history. This museum gives you an important explanation of the Khmer history and religious beliefs. While viewing these items, one becomes enshrouded and enchanted by all these beauties. I would highly recommend a meaningful visit of this museum to enhance your trip to the archeological site near Siem Reap , before moving on Angkor, as It gives you an useful overview of what you will learn up there.

The shape of the museum imitates the ancient architecture of the Khmer temples. Its terracotta color brings visitors into the ancient Khmer empire.

Nearby to the museum, the Royal Palace dominates and enlightens the city with its brilliant yellow, orange colors and with its architecture typical of the Khmer period.

At sunset, it is worth your time to see the view of the city from the terrace of your hotel, or from the top of one of the buildings. At this time of enchantment, the contrast between the color of the sky, Royal Palace, National Museum and the water of the river Mekong is amazing. Each of them changes color, producing within you a unique sensation.

The next day, I took a minibus to Siem Reap during which a flat and green landscape accompanied me. There is nothing to remember about that journey except the beautiful sunset, namely the clear yellow light of the sun at that time.

In Cambodia, I remember the exquisite and lovely character of the women, who welcomed me warmly and made me feel at home, upon my arrival to the hotel. They explained me many things about Angkor, the visit to the temples and gave me useful advices. Some of them wore colored dresses and had beautiful smiles and smooth skins.

The build is amazing and furnished following the ancient Khmer traditions. Different decorations reminiscent of that period are set on the wall, including the colors similar to the surrounding temples, and contribute to giving to this hotel an amazing atmosphere.

Siem Reap is abounding with locals, clubs and restaurants with music, but nothing of great importance to remember.

Angkor is one of the most beautiful and attractive places in the world to me. I was truly amazed by the beauty and originality of some of the monuments. It took me three whole days to visit and take in the most important monuments of the archaeological site. Although some of them look quite similar, it is worth it to visit all of them since every monument, both engages visitors and adds to the atmosphere, each different from the rest, and each has enchanting statues and bas-reliefs.

In Siem Reap, it is possible to hire a tuk tuk<sup>1</sup> for reaching the temples. This is in my opinion the best mode of travel around Angkor, as one expends great energy while visiting the archeological sites and the temples, as some of these monuments are quite big and have strict and steep steps for reaching the top.

Bayon, the most beautiful temple I saw astonished me. Its shape is totally original. No other monuments in the world recalls its architecture. The various faces carved into the different towers (so called face towers) are situated around the temple and give this monument a magical yet heartening appearance. If one carefully observes the towers, it appears that the faces seem to smile while the light of the sun reflects on them.

On the walls of the inner and outer enclosure of the temple, the bas-reliefs clearly represent episodes from daily life, battle wars, military processions, worship moments. By intently studying these bas-reliefs one may note the fine art and architecture of the Khmer empire. The human figures and the other objects are so well preserved that seem to draw you into the ancient period itself while viewing them, seemingly to be watching a film or a documentary. Because of this, one may perfectly understand some of the episodes represented in the bas-reliefs without having to read an explanation. This beautiful temple and the episodes represented in the bas-reliefs stirred up in me and enshrouded me with such intense emotions.

At sunset, the monuments reflect the golden rays and seem to dance and change their colors and it is exciting to view this incredible show from the top of some of the temples.

If one has a passion for photograph, history and archeology, I highly recommend a visit to these temples which are pregnant with much to photograph. All of them have different kind of ancient sculptures, bas-reliefs representing episodes belonging to the Khmer empire.

If you wish to visit the beautiful temple of Angkor Wat in solitude, I recommend a morning visit, before the crowds amass. In this quiet morning hour, one may better enjoy the marvels of this place in isolation. In the temple, the beautiful bas-reliefs give you an idea of the life during the Khmer empire, many of which are enchanting. Some of the statues and bas-reliefs of the temples are well preserved. This is the biggest temple of Angkor and the architecture of some parts of it remind the other smaller temples. If one compares Angkor Wat and the Bayon, he can note that the later has a more sophisticated architecture.

Although there is much traffic on the road around the Archaeological site of Angkor, once arrived at the temples the traffic fades away and one feels a calm atmosphere.

---

<sup>1</sup> A small taxi with three wheels.

While visiting Angkor, I almost felt as if I had stepped back in time, and was one of the characters who had lived during the Khmer empire and I could image how was the life during that period in Angkor.

Cambodia was an amazing trip from which I left with a myriad of memories. As in many other Asian states, kindness and the simplicity of people stood out to me, surrounded by an enchanting atmosphere.