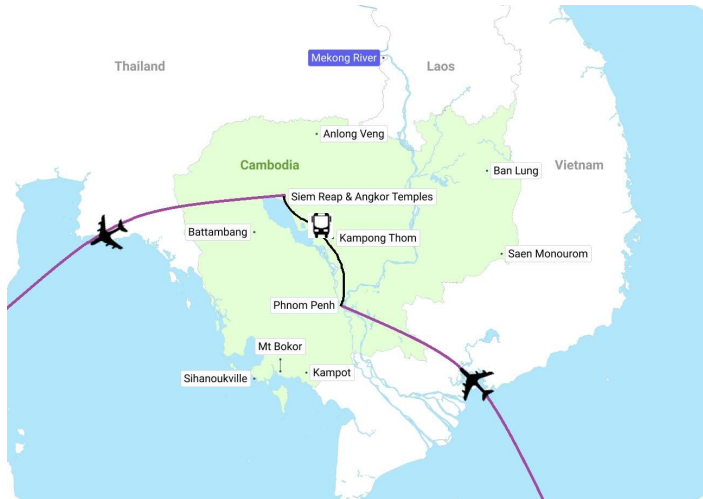


Service learning, History & Environment (10 days)

Cambodia



Please note: This itinerary can be modified to best suit your school's aims, learning objectives and budget.

Many The magnificent Temples of Angkor, constructed between the 9th and 16th centuries, are widely regarded as Cambodia's most remarkable achievements. The temple-rich Khmer Empire, based in Siem Reap, once ruled over regions of present-day Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos. Renowned for its technological innovations and mastery of water management, the ancient capital was among the most

advanced civilisations of its time.

In more recent history, Cambodia has endured significant political turmoil, conflict, and hardship. Throughout much of the 20th century, the country was subject to French colonial rule and the brutal Khmer Rouge regime led by Pol Pot. This was followed by a decade-long occupation by Vietnamese forces. Peace was eventually restored in 1993 after UN-brokered negotiations and elections. Today, Cambodians are working to rebuild their nation, but many, particularly those on the margins of society, continue to face considerable challenges due to years of instability and conflict.

This 10-day educational tour to Cambodia is designed for students and educators seeking to make a meaningful and lasting contribution through service-learning programs. The itinerary offers deep insights into Khmer society, culture, values, and traditions, while also exploring pressing environmental issues such as the damming of the Mekong River, the loss of wildlife, and unregulated urban development.

Day 1

Arrive Cambodia (Phnom Penh)



Upon arrival at Phnom Penh International Airport, we are warmly welcomed by our tour leader and transferred to our hotel. Our tour leader provides a brief introduction to the Khmer language along with essential information about Phnom Penh.

The city is characterised by bustling local markets and colonial-era buildings adorned with intricate entranceways. The lively streets are filled with the sounds of daily life—commerce, motorbikes, and street vendors offering their wares from mobile soup carts. Our exploration begins with a visit to Wat Phnom, where we learn about the city's origins

in the 15th century. From here, we take in panoramic views of the surrounding neighbourhoods and the riverside esplanade.

Next, we embark on a tuk-tuk tour to immerse ourselves in Phnom Penh's vibrant local neighbourhoods, French-inspired architecture, and key landmarks. Highlights include the Independence Monument and Diamond Island, known for its modern entertainment district. We also pass notable sites such as the Prime Minister's residence and the Royal Palace. Along the way, our local guide shares insights into the daily lives of Phnom Penh's three million residents and discusses how the city addresses challenges like urban sprawl. (meals: lunch, dinner)

Day 2

Phnom Penh



This morning, we visit the haunting Tuol Sleng Prison and the Killing Fields, sombre reminders of Cambodia's dark history under the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979. During this period, an estimated two million people lost their lives through overwork, starvation, and execution. We hear firsthand accounts from either a survivor or a former perpetrator, shedding light on their harrowing experiences. Our guide provides context, explaining the Khmer Rouge's ideology and the justifications they gave for their atrocities, including genocide and torture.

Shifting from the grim realities of the past to the opulence of royalty, we visit the Silver Pagoda within the Royal Palace grounds. Here, we explore the history of Cambodia's royal family and the enduring influence of French colonialism. The grounds once hosted Cambodia's kings in full regalia, alongside their royal elephants. Among the most notable monarchs was King Sihanouk, who led Cambodia to independence from France in 1953, pursued a filmmaking career in the 1960s, was overthrown in the 1970s, and later formed an uneasy alliance with the Khmer Rouge. He was reinstated as king in 1993 and served until his passing in 2012.

As evening falls, we embark on a scenic boat cruise along the Tonle Bassac and Mekong Rivers, offering a stunning view of Phnom Penh's skyline from the water. Our guide discusses the vital role of Cambodia's river systems, particularly their connection to the Tonle Sap Lake, a critical source of fish and sustenance for much of the country. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 3

Phnom Penh (Service-learning component)



Today, we begin our community service at the People Improvement Organisation (PIO), working alongside staff and local students. PIO is dedicated to providing quality education to underprivileged children who might otherwise be unable to complete their schooling. The organisation supports students from kindergarten through to university, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, or race. Every PIO student is provided with school uniforms, supplies, a daily meal, clean water, and access to healthcare—all at no cost to the child or their family.

In the late afternoon, we relax by observing the vibrant local culture.

Dance troupes perform graceful exercise routines, while nearby hip-hop artists showcase bold moves to energetic music. Meanwhile, senior citizens engage in the flowing movements of Tai Chi. Later, we visit a suburban shopping centre to enjoy a locally produced Cambodian film, offering a glimpse into the country's cinematic storytelling. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 4

Phnom Penh – Siem Reap



A short 40-minute flight brings us to Siem Reap, the gateway to the awe-inspiring Temples of Angkor. Over the past 30 years, Siem Reap has transformed itself multiple times and now stands as the cultural and culinary heart of Cambodia, renowned for its vibrant arts scene and fine dining. Before we begin our exploration, our tour leader provides insights into the city's glittering tourism industry, highlighting the importance of understanding the dynamics of privileged tourism in this rapidly developing region.

We start with an orientation tuk-tuk tour, offering a glimpse of Siem Reap's urban landscape. Our tour includes a visit to the APOPO

Landmine Centre, where we learn about Cambodia's ongoing struggle with landmines. With over 25,000 amputees, the country has one of the highest per capita ratios of landmine survivors in the world. Here, we see how giant African pouched rats, trained for their acute sense of smell, are used to detect explosives—a cost-effective and innovative solution.

Later, we delve into Cambodia's rich culinary heritage with a hands-on Khmer cooking class. Guided by a skilled local chef, we work in pairs to prepare traditional dishes such as chicken amok and Khmer spring rolls, using unique ingredients and techniques. The session concludes with a delicious feast of our creations, offering a taste of Cambodia's distinct flavours. (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 5

Siem Reap – Temples of Angkor



This morning, we set off to explore the breathtaking Temples of Angkor by bicycle. These temples represent the pinnacle of artistic and engineering achievement of the Khmer Empire, which flourished from the 9th to the 16th century. Over 70 stone and brick structures remain, blending Hindu and Buddhist influences to form a stunning temple complex that once served as the ancient capital. The Khmer civilisation's success was largely built on its ability to manage water resources, enabling the empire to expand its armies, conquer new territories, and construct some of the most remarkable structures in human history. This

monumental task was achieved with the help of elephants, oxen, river barges, and the labour of engineers, artisans, and enslaved people.

We begin our journey at Angkor Wat, a massive three-tiered pyramid and the largest religious monument in the world, covering over 400 acres. Built by King Suryavarman II in dedication to the Hindu god Vishnu, it was later converted into a Buddhist temple after his death. After lunch, we visit Ta Prohm, made famous by the film Tomb Raider. This sprawling complex is partially enveloped by the jungle, with giant fig and silk-cotton trees growing through its towers and corridors, creating an otherworldly atmosphere. Our final stop is the

impressive Preah Khan Temple, known for its maze-like layout and vibrant moss-covered statues and carvings.

Throughout the day, our expert guide provides insights into the role of temples in ancient Cambodian society, explaining who worshipped there and the purposes they served. From intricate bas-reliefs, we learn about the tools used by artisans, such as diamond-tipped chisels, and see vivid depictions of daily life, including cockfighting, meal preparation by enslaved workers, and grand processions of kings and army generals. We also explore the fascinating history of Angkor's decline, its abandonment in 1432, and its rediscovery in 1860. This is a compelling tale of an empire's rise, dominance, and eventual fall.

Note: The bike ride covers approximately 15-20 km on flat roads and trails. We use sturdy mountain bikes, with helmets provided, and a support crew accompanies us to handle any repairs. Students are required to carry bottled water for this activity. (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Days 6, 7 & 8

Siem Reap (agricultural and dwelling construction project)



This morning, we travel to a remote village on the outskirts of Siem Reap to commence a three-day community service project focused on housebuilding and agriculture. Over the next few days, we will construct bamboo greenhouses and plant fruit trees and vegetables, enabling villagers to grow cash crops throughout the year. As part of a broader service-learning initiative, we collaborate with locally employed tradespeople to build a sturdy brick house.

Under the guidance of these tradespeople and local community members, we receive hands-on training in tasks such as cement mixing, bricklaying, tiling, hammering, and moving materials. At the end of each day, we return to our hotel. During our time in the village, we gain insight into daily life, subsistence farming, and the challenges and aspirations of villagers striving for a better future.

Once the house is completed, we participate in a brief handover ceremony. Any remaining fixtures and fittings will be completed by local tradespeople in the following days. As part of this experience, we also develop project management skills and engage in discussions about how to measure the success and sustainability of this and future community projects. (meals: 3 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 2 dinners)

Day 9

Siem Reap (Great Race, water park, circus)



This morning, we head to a remote village on the outskirts of Siem Reap to begin a three-day community service project centred on housebuilding and agriculture. Over the coming days, we will construct bamboo greenhouses and plant fruit trees and vegetables, providing villagers with the means to cultivate cash crops year-round. As part of a larger service-learning initiative, we work alongside local tradespeople to build a durable brick house.

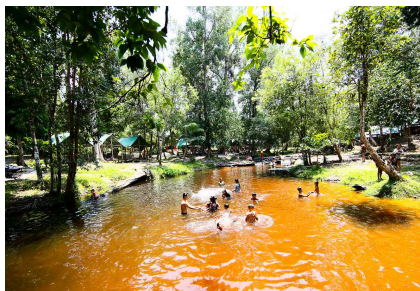
Guided by these skilled professionals and community members, we gain hands-on experience in tasks such as mixing cement, laying bricks, tiling, hammering, and transporting materials. At the end of each day, we return to our hotel. Throughout the project, we deepen our understanding of village life, subsistence farming, and the hopes and challenges faced by those seeking to improve their livelihoods.

Upon completing the house, we take part in a handover ceremony. Any final touches, such as fixtures and fittings, will be completed by local tradespeople in the days following. This experience also provides an opportunity to develop project management skills and explore methods for evaluating the success and sustainability of this and future community initiatives. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Options (alternative to day 9)

Day 9 (option 1)

Siem Reap - Mt. Kulen



We set out on a day trip to the sacred site of Mt. Kulen, a place of great historical and cultural significance in Cambodia. In 2012, researchers uncovered the remains of a previously unknown ancient city atop the Kulen mountain plateau, featuring temples, waterways, and roads. Near the summit, we enjoy a picnic lunch before exploring key attractions, including a reclining Buddha, intricate riverbed carvings, and a stunning three-tiered waterfall. There is also time for a refreshing swim before visiting the National Park Information Centre, where we learn about the park's unique flora and fauna and the environmental challenges it faces.

In 1973, Pol Pot, leader of the Khmer Rouge, secretly visited Mt. Kulen with the deposed King Sihanouk to garner support for his political movement, which would seize power two years later. The Kulen Mountains served as a strategic base for the Khmer Rouge army until the early 1990s. Today, the site is a popular weekend picnic destination for locals. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 9 (option 2)

Siem Reap – Anlong Veng



Our journey takes us northeast to Anlong Veng District, near the Thai border. Once the final stronghold of the Khmer Rouge, Anlong Veng remains home to many former Khmer Rouge soldiers and their families. This was the refuge for the regime's leaders and thousands of soldiers as the civil war drew to a close in the 1990s. Pol Pot was arrested and tried here in July 1997. He died in April 1998 and was cremated three days later, marking the collapse of the Khmer Rouge military shortly thereafter.

Our local guide provides a comprehensive account of the Khmer Rouge's rise to power, their brutal reign, and eventual downfall. We visit the remnants of the structure where Pol Pot was famously tried and his cremation site. We also explore the former home of General Ta Mok, which served as the Khmer Rouge Army's last headquarters.

During our visit, we have the unique opportunity to speak with a former Khmer Rouge member, gaining personal insights into life within the regime. Old photographs help us piece together this turbulent period, depicting significant events and the high-ranking leaders who once resided in Anlong Veng. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 10

Depart Siem Reap

As a developing nation, Cambodia faces numerous social and economic challenges. Low wages drive many young people to cross the border into Thailand illegally in search of better job opportunities. To gain a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by those seeking a better life or those vulnerable to exploitation, we spend half a day with Free to Shine, a reputable non-government organisation (NGO). This organisation is dedicated to preventing child exploitation in Southeast Asia, focusing on child protection initiatives. Staffed primarily by local Cambodians, Free to Shine works closely with authorities to identify and support at-risk girls, reducing their vulnerability to trafficking. Their programs include educational and health initiatives aimed at keeping children in school and providing essential social support.

At the conclusion of our visit, our tour leader handles our onward travel arrangements, accompanies us to the airport, and bids us farewell. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Summary

Grading

Moderate; To get the most out of this trip, you need to be in good health. However, anyone with a good level of fitness will be able to take part. Some outdoor activities include physical exertion, and there may be long periods of exposure to the elements. You will be expected to walk every day and carry your luggage for short distances. The itinerary may include bike riding, climbing steps and trekking. If your itinerary includes community service work of any description, you will be expected to work diligently during this component. Conditions here may be basic with simple accommodation and bathroom facilities. Suitable packing lists will be provided to match the content of the itinerary.

Accommodation

School tours: Student accommodation is on a twin/triple share basis. Teacher accommodation is on a single room basis. Hotels usually hold a 3-star equivalent rating. Separate sleeping areas and bathrooms are provided for boys, girls, and staff members at homestays.

Transport

Depending on the tour, modes of transport may include modern air-conditioned private coach, boat, train, plane.

Your Tour Leader

A tour leader accompanies all group tours. Your tour leader is the person who most influences the success of your trip. They have been meticulously trained and are very experienced in running tours. Every tour leader is locally employed, therefore they are the best person to showcase their country and culture. Their expertise and knowledge creates an insightful and authentic experience of the region. They are with you throughout your trip from breakfast time until the group returns to the hotel in the evening. They are contactable 24/7.

For more information on the role of the tour leader, local guides and accompanying teachers, please refer to our website.

Group Size

School tours: Minimum group size is 16 students with a minimum of 2 staff members.

There are no maximum participant numbers on any tour.

Service-Learning Programs

The local community instigates all our service-learning programs in response to their genuine needs and goals. Every program is conducted *only* after careful consultation with local community leaders and authorities.

We assess each program during the consultation process to ensure that it's sustainable, ethical, and empowers local people. Each project is designed to have lasting economic benefits that build wealth within the community – we're not in the business of tokenistic hand-outs.

- **Physical construction projects.** These projects include building, repairing or improving housing, schools, libraries, washroom facilities or other infrastructure and fittings. We also work with communities that require water reservoirs, irrigation systems and animal pens.

As you can imagine, these projects require lots of physical exertion, sweat and some exposure to the elements. Undertaking a construction project involves hiring expert local tradespeople, assistant builders and transport providers. More substantial construction projects require purchasing locally produced materials, hiring cooks and booking local homestay accommodation, all of which inject money into the host community. Fundraising is usually required for these projects.

- **Environmental projects.** Our environmental projects are wide-ranging. They include activities such as: constructing greenhouses with suitable plants, planting cash crop gardens, such as mango and dragon fruit trees; constructing small dams; restoring native vegetation and habitat; setting up solar panels, installing fish farms, and maintaining conservation huts and hiking trails.

By taking part in these projects, students will develop their environmental awareness. They'll learn about environmental impacts and discover ways to measure the lasting success of an environmental project. As with physical construction projects, fundraising is usually required for these projects.

- **Community engagement programs.** Through our strong relationships with local schools and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), students can help deliver social service and education initiatives within a community. Your students will work in government-run classrooms or vocational training programs to help teach English (by following a lesson plan prepared in advance), help implement health programs, or work alongside local students as they learn small business skills.

For more details about our service-learning programs, please refer to our website.

Land Trip Cost and Details

Cost per traveller from A\$1,800

Based on a minimum of:

16 students & 2 accompanying teachers/staff members.

**Smaller or larger group sizes priced on application*

Inclusions

- All accommodation, transport, activities, entrance costs and other programs as described in the itinerary
- Professional Adventure Travel tour leader throughout the trip & additional specialist guides
- Extensive destination-specific risk management and assessment
- Meals (and drinking water) as listed in the itinerary
- 24-hour **IN COUNTRY** support
- Pre-departure support, briefings and planning meetings
- Tips for tour leaders, local guides & drivers

Exclusions

- International flights to/from Cambodia
- Travel Visa costs (if required)
- Cost of Community projects/Service-learning programs \$4,800
- Spending money
- Travel Insurance

Contact details

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