

Cambodia Unveiled (9 days)

Cambodia



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

Cambodia has endured significant hardship and political turmoil. Throughout much of the 20th century, the country was under French colonial rule, followed by the brutal Khmer Rouge regime led by Pol Pot. This was succeeded by a decade-long occupation by Vietnamese forces. It was not until 1993, after UN-backed elections, that Cambodia finally achieved peace. The legacy of over a century of conflict and foreign occupation has left deep

scars on a nation now focused on reconciliation and rebuilding.

Despite this turbulent past, Cambodia boasts a rich and fascinating history. Many consider the magnificent Temples of Angkor, dating back over 600 years, to be the country's crowning achievement. Once the heart of a powerful Khmer kingdom that ruled much of Southeast Asia, these temples stand as a testament to the ingenuity and artistic brilliance of the Khmer civilisation. Today, Cambodians are working to rebuild their country, often with the support of foreign aid. While the population continues to grapple with the trauma of the past, their resilience and determination to create a brighter future are among Cambodia's most inspiring qualities.

This 9-day educational journey is designed for students and educators seeking a deeper understanding of Khmer society, culture, and traditions. The program includes service-learning projects in collaboration with local communities and NGOs, providing meaningful support to underprivileged areas. Participants will also explore Cambodia's environmental challenges and political landscape through a variety of engaging and interactive activities.

The itinerary covers key cultural and historical landmarks as well as lesser-known coastal regions, offering students authentic opportunities for cultural immersion and interaction. The goal is to provide lasting insights into the critical issues facing Cambodia, enriching participants' understanding for years to come.

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. To help us settle in, our tour leader provides a brief introduction to the Khmer language and shares essential information about Phnom Penh.

The city is a vibrant blend of bustling markets and colonial-era architecture, characterised by ornate entranceways and lively streets filled with the sounds of commerce, motorbikes, and street vendors selling food from mobile carts. Our exploration begins with a visit to Wat Phnom, where we learn about the city's founding in the 15th century. From the temple grounds, we take in

panoramic views of the surrounding neighbourhoods and the riverside esplanade.

As the sun sets, we embark on an exciting tuk-tuk tour through the city's local neighbourhoods, passing French-inspired buildings and iconic landmarks. Highlights include the Independence Monument and Diamond Island, known for its modern entertainment district. We also pass the Prime Minister's residence and the Royal Palace. In the evening, we enjoy a traditional Khmer dinner at a riverside restaurant, soaking in the vibrant atmosphere of Phnom Penh. (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 perished due to overwork, starvation, and execution. We gain a personal perspective from either a survivor or former perpetrator, who shares 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 brutality of politics to the splendour of royalty, we visit the Silver Pagoda, located within the Royal Palace grounds. Here, we learn about Cambodia's royal family and the enduring influence of French colonialism. The grounds once hosted kings in full ceremonial regalia, along with royal elephants. One of the most notable monarchs was King Sihanouk, who led Cambodia to independence from France in 1953, directed films in the 1960s, was overthrown in the 1970s, and later collaborated reluctantly with the Khmer Rouge before being reinstated as king in 1993. He remained a central figure until his passing in 2012. As the day winds down, we board a relaxing evening boat cruise along the Tonle Bassac and Mekong Rivers, offering a stunning view of Phnom Penh's skyline from the water. Onboard, our guide highlights the significance of Cambodia's river system, particularly its connection to the vast Tonle Sap Lake. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 3

Tamao - Kampot



After breakfast, we explore the bustling Russian Market, named after the Soviet shoppers who frequented it in the 1980s during a period of strong Soviet influence in Cambodia. A visit to this lively bazaar is a must for young travellers, offering a vibrant atmosphere, engaging interactions, and the thrill of bargaining—an unforgettable cultural experience.

Next, we venture beyond the city to the Ta Mao Wildlife Sanctuary. Upon arrival, park rangers provide an overview of their efforts to protect Cambodia's fragile and fragmented natural habitats. We then embark on a bicycle tour of the sanctuary, encountering a variety of animals, including tigers, gibbons, and Malayan sun bears. The sanctuary staff also explain their

work in breeding programs, animal husbandry, and the rescue and release of wildlife, carried out in collaboration with the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team.

In the afternoon, we board our coach and travel to Kampot, a picturesque town near Cambodia's coastline bordering Vietnam. The surrounding province is famous for its Kampot pepper and durian farms. While exploring the outskirts of Kampot, we visit a local cave and a nearby Buddhist monastery, where we have the opportunity

to speak with monks in training, gaining insight into their daily lives and spiritual practices. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 4

Mt Bokor, Preah Monivong National Park - Phnom Penh



Mt. Bokor Hill Station, established in 1917, served as a retreat for the French to escape the lowland heat. Perched atop the mountain plateau, the French constructed a small town that included a grand casino hotel, post office, school, and garage. However, the site was abandoned during the civil war in the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Khmer Rouge Army occupied the area, using it as a strategic military base due to its reliable freshwater source, fertile soil, and commanding panoramic views. Following the return of peace in the 1990s, the site was designated as part of Preah Monivong National Park to preserve its unique environment and wildlife.

This afternoon, we explore the park's scattered rustic ruins, take in the breathtaking views from a cliff overlooking neighbouring Vietnam, and cool off with a swim at a nearby waterfall. We then return to Phnom Penh for a relaxing dinner. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 5

Phnom Penh - Siem Reap



We take a short walk to the Silver Pagoda, located within the Royal Palace grounds, where we learn about Cambodia's royal family and the life of the controversial Prince-turned-King, Norodom Sihanouk.

Bidding farewell to Phnom Penh, we head north to Siem Reap. This 320-kilometre journey offers a window into Cambodia's predominantly agricultural society. Along the way, we stop at a roadside market to sample unique local delicacies, such as durian, and observe the sale of fried spiders, a regional specialty.

After checking into our hotel, our tour leader provides insight into the glitzy tourism facade of Siem Reap. Most workers in the city's tourism and hospitality sectors come from rural provinces, earning minimal wages and living in shared accommodations. Understanding this socio-economic context helps frame our experience as we begin exploring the city.

In the evening, we visit an NGO dedicated to empowering Cambodian youth through education. We learn about their impactful projects, including initiatives focused on women's health, nutrition, and vocational training, which are making a meaningful difference in the lives of local communities. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 6

Siem Reap (Service-learning activity)



Our day begins with a tuk-tuk ride to a local market, where we purchase educational materials and cooking equipment for later distribution.

We then switch to bicycles for a short ride to a public school, where we are warmly welcomed by the headmaster and teaching staff. Together with our Cambodian peers, we put our pre-arranged lesson plans into action, providing tutoring in basic English. As part of this educational exchange, we also deliver lessons on health and hygiene.

This collaborative experience offers students a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the lives of Cambodian youth and the country's education system. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 7

Siem Reap – Temples of Angkor



This morning, we explore the magnificent Temples of Angkor by bicycle. These temples represent the pinnacle of artistic and engineering achievement of the Khmer Empire, which flourished between the 9th and 16th centuries. More than 70 stone and brick structures remain, blending Hindu and Buddhist influences to create a stunning temple complex that once served as the empire's capital. The temples reflect a civilisation whose mastery of water management enabled it to expand its armies, conquer new territories, and construct some of the most remarkable structures in human history. This monumental effort relied on the labour of elephants, oxen, river barges, and enslaved workers, along with the ingenuity of engineers and artisans.

We begin our tour at the iconic Angkor Wat, a massive three-tiered pyramid temple covering over 400 acres. After lunch, we visit Ta Prohm, made famous by the film *Tomb Raider*. This temple is partly reclaimed by the jungle, with giant fig and silk-cotton trees growing through its towers and corridors, creating a surreal and atmospheric experience. Our final stop is Preah Khan, known for its labyrinthine layout and intricate carvings, with statues and walls beautifully draped in moss.

Throughout the day, our specialist guide provides fascinating insights into the role of these ancient temples in Khmer society, explaining their religious, social, and political significance. From the intricate bas-reliefs, we learn about the tools and techniques used by ancient artisans, including diamond-tipped chisels, and observe vivid scenes of daily life, such as cockfighting and meal preparation by enslaved workers. The guide paints a vivid picture of the empire's rise, dominance, and eventual decline, highlighting its extraordinary engineering achievements.

NB: The bike ride covers a distance of around 15-20 km on flat roads and trails. The bikes we use are sturdy mountain bikes with helmets provided. We also employ a support crew to follow our group and make running repairs. Students are required to carry bottled water during this activity. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 8

Siem Reap - Tonle Sap Lake



Understanding the importance of water in this country is integral to any student trip to Cambodia and why we visit the Tonle Sap Lake. Travelling by boat, we explore isolated lake communities near Kampong Phluk, gaining insights into the lives of these landless inhabitants who make a living by fishing. In addition, we visit a local floating school and see river communities. Our local guide explains that many families living on the lake are ethnic Khmer or Cham minority people whose livelihoods are constantly challenged by environmental factors.

In the afternoon, we visit a handicraft village to see local artisans and craftsmen create arts and crafts that are truly unique. Students can try charcoal painting and bas-relief temple rubbing, assisted by local artisans.

We enjoy a traditional dance and cultural performance at the Phare Circus tonight. The spectacle leaves us in awe at the talents of these young performers. The show combines traditional and modern music, dance, acrobatics, and flame juggling, all beautifully choreographed into several skits showcasing Cambodian folklore and performing arts. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 9

Depart Siem Reap



We travel to the rural hinterland of Siem Reap to participate in an agricultural project, planting trees to help support impoverished families by supplementing their incomes. With approximately 75% of Cambodia's population reliant on agriculture, this activity provides valuable insight into the lives of farmers and rural village communities, whose traditional practices have remained largely unchanged for generations.

After lunch, we embark on the Great Race urban challenge, a dynamic and engaging activity designed to explore Siem Reap and its surroundings.

Working in small teams, we navigate the city independently, completing tasks, gathering information, and documenting our experiences. This

competitive challenge is both educational and enjoyable, offering a unique perspective on the city.

As our journey comes to an end, our tour leader manages our onward travel arrangements, accompanies us to the airport, and bids us farewell. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Summary

Grading

Easy; To get the most out of this trip, you need to be in good health. However, anyone with reasonable fitness will be able to take part. There are no real physical difficulties, but you will be expected to walk every day and carry your luggage for short distances. The itinerary may include bike riding and climbing steps. If your itinerary includes community service work of any description, you will be expected to work diligently during this component. 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 and boat.

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.

**Smaller or larger group sizes priced on application*

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.

- **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\$ 1,700

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 *Edventure 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 \$3000
- Spending money
- Travel Insurance

Contact details

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