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Rotarian Journey into Cambodia – Jan & Feb 2020 FAQs

In which hotels will we be staying?

- While in Phnom Penh: Two choices... Let us know in which one you would prefer to stay!!

The Billabong www.thebillabonghotel.com

The Billabong & Mito are 2 short blocks from each other, an easy 5-minute walk...



MITO Hotel www.mitohotel.com

The Mito is more modern than Billabong, but does not have the swimming pool.



- While in Pursat: The KM Hotel <http://www.kmhotel.com.kh/>
- While in Siem Reap: Ta Promh Hotel <http://www.tapromhhotel.com/>

Airport Transportation

- Inbound into Phnom Penh
 - We will pick you up at the airport. If you're arriving before Thursday, be sure to let us know so we can make pickup arrangements.
 - We'll pick you up (+ luggage) in either a car, van or a tuk-tuk.
 - Upon arrival at airport, pick up your luggage & then look for us at the airport exit doors where we will be holding a Rotary sign.
- Outbound from Siem Reap

Our formal trip concludes in Siem Reap. However, some air carriers don't fly out of Siem Reap (a smaller airport), and travelers must book round-trip into and out of Phnom Penh.

 - If you are flying home directly out of Siem Reap, we will arrange through our hotel to have you taken to the airport around two hours in advance of your departure from Siem Reap to enable ticketing and boarding.
 - If you are arranging to fly back to Phnom Penh to connect with your outbound flight, you will need to book with one of the regional carriers. There are several airlines we



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have used Cambodia Angkor Air (<https://www.cambodiaangkorair.com/>) or Bassaka Air (www.bassakaair.com). Lanmei Air (www.lanmeiairlines.com) would be out recommendation on the list as well. Again, we will arrange through our hotel to have you taken to the airport for your respective departure from Siem Reap (90 minutes in advance for domestic). You will want to give yourself at least three hours in between arrival from Siem Reap into Phnom Penh and departure from Phnom Penh (same PP airport).

- For those who are flying back in to Phnom Penh and staying an extra night or day in Phnom Penh, your flight times may be such that you would like an extra day in the Phnom Penh hotel we stayed in upon arrival. If so, we can arrange that for you.
- An Alternative: Returning to Phnom Penh by River Boat –
 - The Mekong Explore river cruise goes from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh. The boat departs around 7:30am (check times online to unsure no change). This is a river cruise that takes about 6 hours down the Mekong River to Phnom Penh. Here is a description from 2018 Rotarian travelers: "It is only for the adventurous person. The boat is long and narrow. The boat interior has two seats on either side of the aisle with windows along each of the seats but only has two windows that open. They do have a fan that has quite a bit of power as it blew the person's hair (sat in front seat) like he was in a wind tunnel. The outside of the boat has a very narrow walkway with a railing so it is possible to be outside on this walkway or there is the option of sitting on the roof of the boat. The views along the river are fantastic. People who live along the river are fishing with cast nets, traveling in boats with their families or other fishermen, and many different ways of fishing. It is interesting to see just how low the river gets when you see the long stair cases to houses up on the hillside. You also get to see Floating Villages. The cost is minimum and well worth taking the time to travel by river boat. BUT, the toilet situation is very rough and not for the faint-hearted person. With that said I highly recommend the Mekong Explore river cruise."

Visa Information:

- VERY IMPORTANT... **Be sure you have your passport.** AND, you must have **AT LEAST 6 months of remaining validity** on your passport to enter the country (this is true most places).
- Visa upon Arrival:
 - You can obtain your visa when you arrive at the airport if you wish. We always do this. It takes around 15 minutes. Last year it cost USD \$36. If it is more now, it won't be much more. You can either bring an extra passport-style photograph (2" x 2") for them to use, OR you can pay an extra couple of dollars for them to photocopy your passport photo (which we do). The incoming airline will pass out the Application forms during the flight in. You will be applying for a "Tourist Visa"; Destination in Cambodia is "Sustainable Cambodia, Hwy 5, Pursat". After deplaning you will see the visa line in the airport. You'll give your Application form (filled out in flight) and your passport and payment to the Immigration official, and then you'll wait with everyone else as they pass the documents down a line of officials, and produce your visa at the other end.
- Alternative Option - Visa in Advance:
 - You CAN get an online e-visa in advance, but it costs more. <https://www.evisa.gov.kh/>. The only advantage of an e-visa is that you won't have to wait in line at the airport. But the line moves quickly... it's usually under 15 minutes... and most of us will be in line. (You CAN also get your visa in advance from an Embassy, but it is probably a more difficult process).

Upon arrival at Phnom Penh airport :



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- Visa Line:
 - See the section on visas. For those getting their visa at the airport (most of us), you will be in line perhaps 15 minutes.
- Immigration:
 - Once you've picked up your visa and gotten your passport back, you'll walk to the immigration desks where an official will process your entry, and then to luggage.
- Picking up luggage:
 - Luggage functions like every international airport.
- Exiting the airport:
 - Once you've picked up your luggage and you leave the Arrivals area, going outside you will usually see throngs of people waiting. Just walk on through the throng toward the parking lot. There will be someone waiting to greet you with a Rotary sign. We will get you and your luggage to the hotel.

Healthcare & Vaccinations:

Here is where we put up the disclaimer that says: *"Please make any arrangements you wish to make in regards to healthcare and vaccinations. We can't give you medical advice, and these are all decisions that only you can make."* ☺... With that understanding, here are some thoughts:

- Of course bring any medications you know you may need.
- Three things are often needed, or are even necessary, in case of traveler's diarrhea (which is not uncommon to encounter): Antibiotics, an Anti-Diarrheal like Kaopectate and a probiotic like Acidophilus.
- Everyone deals with vaccinations and pre-trip medical preparation differently. We can't make any recommendations here. But we can tell you that your local health clinic probably has good information and recommendations. If it interests you, what many people often get is Hepatitis A/B, Typhoid and Tetanus.
- Some people choose to take an anti-malaria med, but many – certainly most of our long-term and short-term volunteers – do not. Most of the project sites are not in active malarial zones, and we are not there in the rainy season, but that doesn't mean there is zero malaria risk. Malaria is typically very treatable, and past volunteers have decided the risk of contracting malaria was better than taking a regular dose of antibiotics.

Internet Access & Communications:

- All the hotels in which we stay will have wireless internet access. And it will be available during the day while at the Sustainable Cambodia facilities.
- Those from Australia can probably get a SIM card easily for your phone if you wish. (US phones don't so easily accommodate international SIM cards, but your mobile provider can turn on access in Cambodia if you don't mind the high price).
- We often use Whatsapp for text and video communication when onsite, as all it requires is an internet connection.

Preparation & What to Pack...

Everyone is different about how light or heavy they want to travel, but here are some ideas from our Long-Term Volunteer Guidebook:

- We will be outside a lot, and for those on the October trip, it is a month that's in between rainy and dry. According to selectiveasia.com: *"Expect a few rainy days in October, although rainfall decrease as the months progresses, with the dry season just around corner. Days are warm, with average temperatures in the region of around 80°F (27°C). Cambodia is nearly back to its very best, with plenty of color in the country side."*



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- For those on the January and February trips: January is typically a nice temperature, just a touch cool in the evenings. February is often the same, but February can also become quite hot during the days.
- Clothing:
 - Styles have changed a lot in the past few years. Just a few years ago, short pants were very rare on men. Now you see adult Cambodian men wearing shorts. It isn't as common as in Australia or the States, but is no longer out-of-place.
 - Although styles for Cambodian women have also begun to shift, adult Cambodian women still typically dress conservatively in the sense that they don't usually expose the knees (wearing long pants or skirts below the knees) and most women wear a blouse or top that covers the shoulders. Most Cambodian women would not wear tops that expose their bare shoulders (exposed elbows are okay).
 - THIS IS IMPORTANT: This NOTICE was posted 7 July 2016 by the Apsara Authority at Angkor Wat for the temples: *"To encourage visitors to respect the sanctity of the temples and Cambodian culture, beginning August 4 (2016), **visitors will be required to wear pants or skirts below the knees and a T-shirt that covers the shoulders.** When visitors dress appropriately during their visit to the park, it means they are showing respect to Cambodian sacred temples, culture and Cambodian women's values."*
 - DO pack a swimsuit, as the hotels will have swimming pools and they will have western-style suits (women do not cover knees and shoulders when wearing swimsuits at the hotel...).
 - Pack a hat and sunglasses.
 - Jeans are often uncomfortable simply because they are so heavy and it is so hot. "Travel gear" clothing is highly effective.
 - Shoes: Anything will work. However, when entering an office or school room or someone's home, you will be taking your shoes off. Either bare feet or socks indoors. (But you keep your shoes ON in hotel lobbies, restaurants and stores). So having quick on-off shoes makes life easier. And most Cambodians wear sandals for that reason.
- Other packing ideas:
 - Any prescription medicine you are currently taking
 - Contact lens solution (if required)
 - Anti-diarrheals (not to scare you, but it happens...), light pain killers, allergy medicine, antacid (Tums), small first-aid kit if you'd like
 - Hygiene products
 - Sunblock (and hat)
 - Camera/smart phone/USB flash drive/laptop or tablet if you wish
 - Travel alarm clock if you have one
 - Books
- Other stuff:
 - There are a couple of western-type food markets in Phnom Penh (Lucky Markets) which will have nearly everything you would find in a grocery store.
 - Cambodia may be one of the world's poorer countries, but you can find most everything there. Kind of amazing...



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Money

- Cambodia runs on both its own currency, the riel ("rEEL"), AND on the US dollar. USD is widely accepted everywhere and there is almost no difference in using riel and dollars. Both are widely accepted everywhere. If you pay US\$ 10, you will usually get some riel as change.
- The "official" exchange rate is close to 4,000 Cambodia Riel to the USD, but in small transactions at the markets, they will just use 4,000R = 1USD.
- There are many places to change money – the airport, the hotels, shops and banks. There is no need to get Cambodian money so long as you have USD.
- There are a growing number of ATMs that accept most foreign VISA/Mastercard cards. The ATM's in Cambodia will give you USD.
- Travelers' checks can be exchanged and purchased at the ACLEDA Bank in Pursat. Western Union and Moneygram is also available in Pursat, at the ACLEDA bank.

Water

- Water quality in the cities in Cambodia has improved HUGELY in the past 10 years. BUT you won't want to drink it. It's fine for bathing, though.
- The hotels will have bottled water for us in your room.
- On previous trips we have provided bottled water for the entire trip, several bottles per day. Our Aussie Rotarians suggested that instead of leaving 1,500+ empty plastic bottles in our wake for recycling, we can provide a refillable bottle from which you can refill from the 5 liter bottles we provide. OR, please feel free to bring your own water bottle for refilling. In this way, we can protect the environment and be a role model for the communities we will be visiting.

A Few More Tips:

- You might bring a small pocket supply of paper handkerchiefs & maybe hand-gel.
- Always remember to check for phones, camera, etc. before leaving each place. (Last time someone left their phone at the Silk Farm... we never got it back.)
- Do be a little careful around crowded places like the market. Like anywhere in the world, there can be pick-pockets. It's rare that things are stolen, but it can happen.
- Cambodians drive and walk on the right side of the road (yes, walking on the right, too).

About Helping the Families and Kids:

You're going to meet families and children that you want to help. Their situation will tug at your heart. But please remember the following:

- We request that **no cash donations** be made to individual families or to children. If you meet a particular family or child that you really want to help, individually, please speak with the Pursat Rotarians & SC team members about it. In some cases of particular need, it may be appropriate that the family or child be included in an SC/Rotary project that will result in them getting the resource needed (water filter, seeds, rain tank, etc.), and in having the training needed and the reciprocal commitment to "paying it forward".
- If, after discussing it with the Pursat Rotarians or SC team, you all agree that it will be helpful to support a particular family or child, you can contribute specifically to the program that the intended family or child will be participating in.
- We are an empowerment-based program, and in the long-run it isn't helpful for a family or child to just be "given" something. Also, giving money or help to one family in need has the effect of creating jealousy among the other villagers. And it can raise expectations that every time a foreigner visits a project site, there could be donations, which creates dependency instead of empowerment.



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From our Onsite Volunteer Guide: "Cultural Do's and Don'ts" -

- Cambodians don't judge foreigners' behavior too harshly. And a lot of these norms are changing as the country modernizes. But here are a few things that it may be useful to know about "traditional" Khmer (pronounced "KaMY") culture:
 - Khmer (Cambodian) people use the hands vertically folded in prayer in front of their face for greeting. Typically the more "elevated" one holds the hands, the more respect you are showing (for example in front of the nose vs in front of the throat).
 - Generally Khmer women cover up their shoulders and legs, so if you show a lot of skin you will attract more attention.
 - Touching a Khmer person's head is considered offensive.
 - Women don't make physical contact with monks or sit next to them.
 - In social situations, people don't show the soles of their feet while sitting (especially important when sitting in a pagoda or temple).
 - In restaurants people don't eat with their fingers. Most eat with chopsticks, but forks and spoons are available as well.
 - In smaller towns, Cambodian women rarely will be seen drinking beer, although cultural shifts are underway.
 - If you wear a hat or sunglasses, it's considered polite to take it off when speaking to people older than you, or when you enter someone's house or the pagoda or temple.

Government

- Multiparty liberal democracy under monarchy (Independence from France: 1953)
- Official name: Kingdom of Cambodia (Local short form: Kampuchea)
- Political system: Constitutional monarchy
- Per household income: USD \$1,228 in 2016 (World Bank)
- Membership in international organizations: United Nations system, World Bank, IMF, ADB, ASEAN, WTO

About Sustainable Cambodia

Sustainable Cambodia (SC) is a Rotary-supported nonprofit organization working to help families in rural Cambodian villages create a sustainable quality of life through wells, irrigation systems, schools, training and empowerment. SC employs only native Cambodians, and all international officers, directors and consultants are unpaid volunteers. While SC is an independent nonprofit organization and is not formally affiliated with RI or TRF, active Rotarians are key volunteers and founders, and Rotarians make up a majority of the SC Board of Directors. Sustainable Cambodia aligns its values with those of RI, including RI's ideals of empowerment, peace through understanding, world service and community service.