

Focus.

Cambodia

ISSUE
2024/25

VOL. 10 | \$7



6
TO KNOW
LEADERS SHAPING
CAMBODIAN BUSINESS



100+
TIPS
WHERE TO EAT,
SLEEP & EXPLORE

GET STARTED
HOW TO LIVE,
WORK & INVEST
IN CAMBODIA

HEART OF THE REGION

CAMBODIA'S FUTURE
IN ASEAN AND BEYOND



IN CONVERSATION
INTERVIEWS WITH VANNDA,
CHEA SEREY, KEO ROTTANAK,
AND HENG SOUR

UNBROKEN
PIECING TOGETHER
CAMBODIA'S ANCIENT PAST

INTO THE BLUE
EXPLORING PICTURESQUE
ISLANDS AND UNDERSEA
TREASURES

313 QUAYSIDE



313 QUAYSIDE offers an exciting dining and leisure destination located in Phnom Penh's vibrant Riverside district.



វត្ត
RUKKHA
SKY BAR & TAPAS



PIZZA 4P'S



WATERSIDE



313 Quayside, Preah Sisowath Quay, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel: +855 23 992 063

*Home
away
from
home*



CENTRAL MANSIONS

Central Mansions luxurious serviced apartments feature two swimming pools, Jacuzzi, and many more top-notch facilities making your home a place of comfort and relaxation.

+85510678777 info@centralmansions.com 1A, Street 102, Wat Phnom, Daun Penh, Phnom Penh.



Post Office Square

No. 47, Corner Street 01 and Street 94, Village 9, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, 12202, Cambodia

- Post Office Square
- postofficesquare_riverside
- PO2 - Post Office Square Riverside



LE MANOLIS DEN OF EPICUREAN

Le Manolis is a place designed for epicureans, offering a wide variety of wine and délicatessen including over 200 references of quality wine with some rare vintages and rare fine spirits), best paired with fresh tapas to and accompanied by great music performed by only the finest local and international DJ's. Plus a large selection of cigars which can be enjoyed on a beautiful terrace that offers a magnificent view of the iconic french quarter, giving you a feeling of what Phnom Penh was like during the old days.

- Le Manolis
- 085 369 300



HONG BAO

Hong Bao is one of the finest Cantonese-Style restaurants in Cambodia, providing various menus in a modern and sophisticated dining environment. Hong Bao uses fresh and seasonal ingredients to present delectable gastronomy. Each of the dishes always has a flavorful taste created by the experienced team from China. In addition, Hong Bao offers daily chef-crafted dim sum with the slogan "The Best Dim Sum in Town." Guarantee an unforgettable and excellent dining experience you've never had before!

- Hong Bao - Tribe Phnom Penh
- 099 542 430

KANDO

KANDO IS NOW OPEN

KANDO is a stylish and distinctly western twist on the traditional Japanese yakitori joint known for its high-spirited atmosphere, cheerful, energetic vibe and superlative food and drink. Executive Chef Luis Gonzales' menu offers a wide selection of dishes from three separate kitchens--the izakaya, the sushi counter and the robata grill-- as well as customized omakase experiences & catering options for outside clients. The bar features innovative cocktails and hi-balls alongside an extensive sake and wine menu.

- Kando
- 070 303 575



THE SPA BY KHMER TONICS

In the heart of Phnom Penh, our urban sanctuary offers the finest Khmer-inspired spa treatments and facials. With the prestigious COSMOS-standard certification, our Khmer Tonics products are crafted to meet global regulations for natural, organic, and sustainable cosmetics. Our expert spa therapists provide authentic and professional experiences in a clean and intentional setting. Every treatment and ritual is thoughtfully designed to bring balance, reduce stress, and evoke feelings of tranquility and well-being.

- Khmer Tonics Spa & Wellness
- 023 902 032



IL VICOLO RESTAURANT

Il Vicolo Restaurant is a modern Italian establishment opened at the beginning of 2023. Its concept focuses on classic Italian recipes twisted in a creative key you'll hardly find somewhere else, all accompanied by a wide selection of Italian wines and craft drinks made with the finest Italian liquors. The attentive staff and dedicated chefs will ensure that each guest will have the greatest experience for a night to remember!

- Il Vicolo
- 089 987 469

KOKO

KoKo STEAKHOUSE

The new steakhouse on the block blending in the cosmopolitan restaurant scene of Post Office Square. Where a team of young and dynamic chefs, led by Chef Pheak using the best produce to create an international menu and offering a selection of creative international street food served in a sharing style. While steak remains a cornerstone, KoKo Steakhouse pays special attention to alternative proteins sourced from the sea and garden, a series of decadent desserts and classic- as well as elegant-gastronomic wines.

- KoKo Steakhouse
- 010 566 688



BAI SOR - REAL REAL KHMER

As one of the latest additions of the Post Office Square, BAI SOR adapts the urban style while being fully loyal to the authentic Khmer flavours. The menu respects the roots of Khmer cuisine and culture, a tribute to the bounties of Cambodia's lands and waters.

Preserving and celebrating the art of age-old culinary methods, BAI SOR uncovers authentic flavours through meticulously honoured and masterfully applied traditional cooking techniques.

- Bai Sor បាយស៊ុរ
- 017 774 500



TRIBE PHNOM PENH

TRIBE Phnom Penh is surrounded by French colonial heritage and iconic New Khmer architecture, just a short stroll from the city's most famous landmarks. Part collaborative workspace, part social hub, the hotel is an ideal hangout for guests and locals alike.

Take in the sights and the flavours of the ever-evolving city of Phnom Penh at Hemisphere, our rooftop restaurant with panoramic 360° views and enjoy our menu of curated drinks and signature dishes experience.

- TRIBE Phnom Penh
- 023 965 500



Welcome to the Kingdom of Wonder

Cambodia doesn't come by that description lightly. It is, after all, home to the ancient empire of Angkor and its namesake centrepiece, Angkor Wat, the single most monumental work of religious architecture on earth. Cambodia's tropical beaches and island resorts are among the most untouched in Southeast Asia. Its people are among the most welcoming to visitors and its increasingly cosmopolitan metropolis, Phnom Penh, stands out among other Asian capitals for its remarkable resilience through a turbulent history and a contemporary drive to modernisation.

But that's all at first glance. We want you to know some of the stories that lay beneath the surface. Angkor's millennium-old temples are famed across the globe, but most tourists only see the heart of the UNESCO-acclaimed archaeological park in a day or three. We sent a team into the remote jungle fringes to Koh Ker, another heritage site once victimised by foreign treasure hunters while the nation had its attention turned to domestic conflicts. The return and painstaking restoration of priceless artefacts is the subject of our feature, "Peace by Piece."

What the Cambodian coastline lacks in length, it balances with islands that until now have been free from overdevelopment. Dive centres tell us about corals and shipwrecks that have become mini-sanctuaries for ocean life. But even here change is looming, as evidenced by a rapidly expanding tourism and transportation infrastructure that is streamlining travel.

A new leadership assumed control of the Cambodian government in August 2023, immediately moving forward with multiple initiatives to guide the Kingdom into a new era of development. Thus we introduce you to the nation's political, business and educational leaders, many of whom speak for themselves. But we also speak with the Kingdom's already iconic rapper VannDa, who tells you why he believes it's Cambodia's "Time to Rise."

Please use this publication as your starting point for discovering all the wonders that make Cambodia a very special nation at the heart of Southeast Asia.



We want you to know some of the stories that lay beneath the surface



Photo: Thomas Cristofolletti for Discover Cambodia



**NORTHBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
CAMBODIA**

A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

CREATE YOUR FUTURE

**Your child will leave our school with everything they need for success -
whatever they choose to be or do in life**

Call **+855 78 666 884** or email admissions@nisc.edu.kh to arrange a personal visit



CONTENTS.

- 6 EDITORIAL**
A warm welcome from our team
- 10 SNAPSHOTS OF A KINGDOM**
Captivating photos to show off Cambodia
- 16 HISTORY OF WONDER**
A trip back in time gives context to the Kingdom's present and future
- 18 IN FOCUS**
Select briefs from the business, tech and governance landscape
- 26 THE NEXT CHAPTER**
A guide to the government leaders navigating the path ahead
- 28 INTERVIEW: A GREENER VISION**
Our conversation with Keo Rottanak, Minister of Mines and Energy, on the future of power
- 32 LINKING TO THE FUTURE**
Infrastructure projects to meet a vision of becoming a regional hub
- 36 INTERVIEW: INDUSTRY FAMILY**
CEO and expert Hiroshi Uematsu explains Special Economic Zones
- 38 TO FINTECH AND BEYOND**
What's next for Cambodia's digital economy
- 44 INTERVIEW: LEADING LADY**
A conversation with Chea Serey, the ambitious National Bank Governor shaping the nation's finance sector
- 48 LOOKING AHEAD**
Our author puts the economic outlook into perspective
- 52 HOMEGROWING**
The agriculture industry rests on adding value to local production
- 54 FISHING FOR NEW WATERS**
A new quality seal provides Cambodian agriproducts a path to global markets
- 56 INTERVIEW: THE LEADING EDGE**
Pisal Chanty shares on skill building efforts to compete in a digital world



- 60 INTERVIEW: JOB PROPOSITION**
Heng Sour, Minister of Labour and Vocational Training, on upskilling the new generation
- 66 FOUNDATIONS OF CHANGE**
Young women to transform the future
- 68 SIX TO KNOW**
From hip hop to conglomerates, get to know some of the leaders driving Cambodia forward

- 74 PERFECT TIMING**
The Kingdom's first foray into the world of precision timepieces
- 80 AT A GLANCE**
A quick look at developments across sectors
- 82 CULINARY CAPITAL**
Celebrate Battambang's international recognition as home to unique gastronomical delights

THE GUIDE

Our top picks serve as a roadmap to food, fun and adventure in Cambodia

- 88 CAMBODIAN MUST-SEES**
The bare minimum
- 90 PHNOM PENH**
Explore the vibrant capital's explosion of sights, sounds and tastes
- 98 SIEM REAP**
This delightful town offers much more than the ancient ruins of Angkor Wat
- 106 THE SOUTH**
Head south for a taste of the good life
- 110 ELSEWHERE**
Get off the beaten track to see a different side of the country
- 112 HEAVENLY SHORES**
Discover Cambodia's islands, resorts and clear waters
- 115 DEEP DOWN DISCOVERIES**
Diving made fun and easy
- 116 GREEN, GREENER**
Golf discovers Cambodia



Photos: Raul Ariano for Focus Cambodia (1); Arjay Stevens (1)

- 118 THE HOMECOMING**
Follow ancient Khmer treasures as they are reunited with their Kingdom
- 124 CURRENCY CURATED**
A behind-the-scenes look at Phnom Penh's interactive monetary museum
- 128 CREATIVE COLLECTIONS**
Discover inspiring art in the Kingdom
- 130 INTERVIEW: TIME TO SPEAK**
A conversation with VannDa, Cambodia's rising star
- 136 ECO ESCAPES**
Have a taste of Cambodia's greener side with our guide to eco-resorts
- 138 A TASTE OF TRANQUILITY**
Find the perfect spas and resorts
- 140 INTERVIEW: GET BETTER**
Sofitel's Samuel Dixon, who implements an eco-sensitive hospitality philosophy
- 142 A CORPORATE AFFAIR**
Great locations for business gatherings large and small
- 144 THROUGH THE WORD**
Add these books to your reading list and dive deeper into Cambodia
- 146 GET GOING IN CAMBODIA**
Essential information whether you are investing, living or visiting



IMPRINT

Publisher: Tassilo Brinzer
CEO: Daniel Marchette
Editors: John Gottberg Anderson, Stew Post
Lead designer: Navet Tab
Contributors: Raul Ariano, Anton L. Delgado, Leila Goldstein, Coby Hobbs, Ian Hollinger, Phearum Khen, Cristyn Lloyd, Jack Malipan
Accounting: Chanvisal Meng, Chry Soklay
Administration: Sambath Phath
Digital: Mengtech Khov
Business Manager: Chea Eak Muy
Channel Manager: Chia Chi Hsu
Published by
 Globe Media Asia
 Southeastern Globe Communications Ltd.
 Unit #2, Floor 13A, Diamond Twin tower
 Koh Pich, 12301, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
www.globemediaasia.com
info@globemediaasia.com



Do you like the printed magazine? Use the QR code to visit Focus-Cambodia.com and find all of our stories, original videos and more!



Information and travel details are correct at the time of going to press and may change. All content is owned by the publisher and may not be reproduced without prior permission.



SOUTHEAST ASIAN METROPOLIS
PHOTO: PHEARUM KHEN
Phnom Penh's vibrant skyline is testimony to the capital's population growth, its progress in infrastructure, and its burgeoning energy supply. The flagged Koh Norea bridge (far left) links new urban developments and has fast become a city landmark. This photo was shot from the rooftop bar of the Peninsula Hotel.



ON THE ROCKS

Guests at the Shinta Mani Wild resort in the Cardamom Mountains of Kirirom, in southern Cambodia, get a bird's-eye view of the Thmor Rung River racing past their luxurious tented jungle villas. Designed by famed architect and hotelier Bill Bensley, this ultimate upscale getaway destination boasts 15 residences and a zipline, Southeast Asia's longest, that soars over the jungle and past a waterfall.



HOLY CHARMS

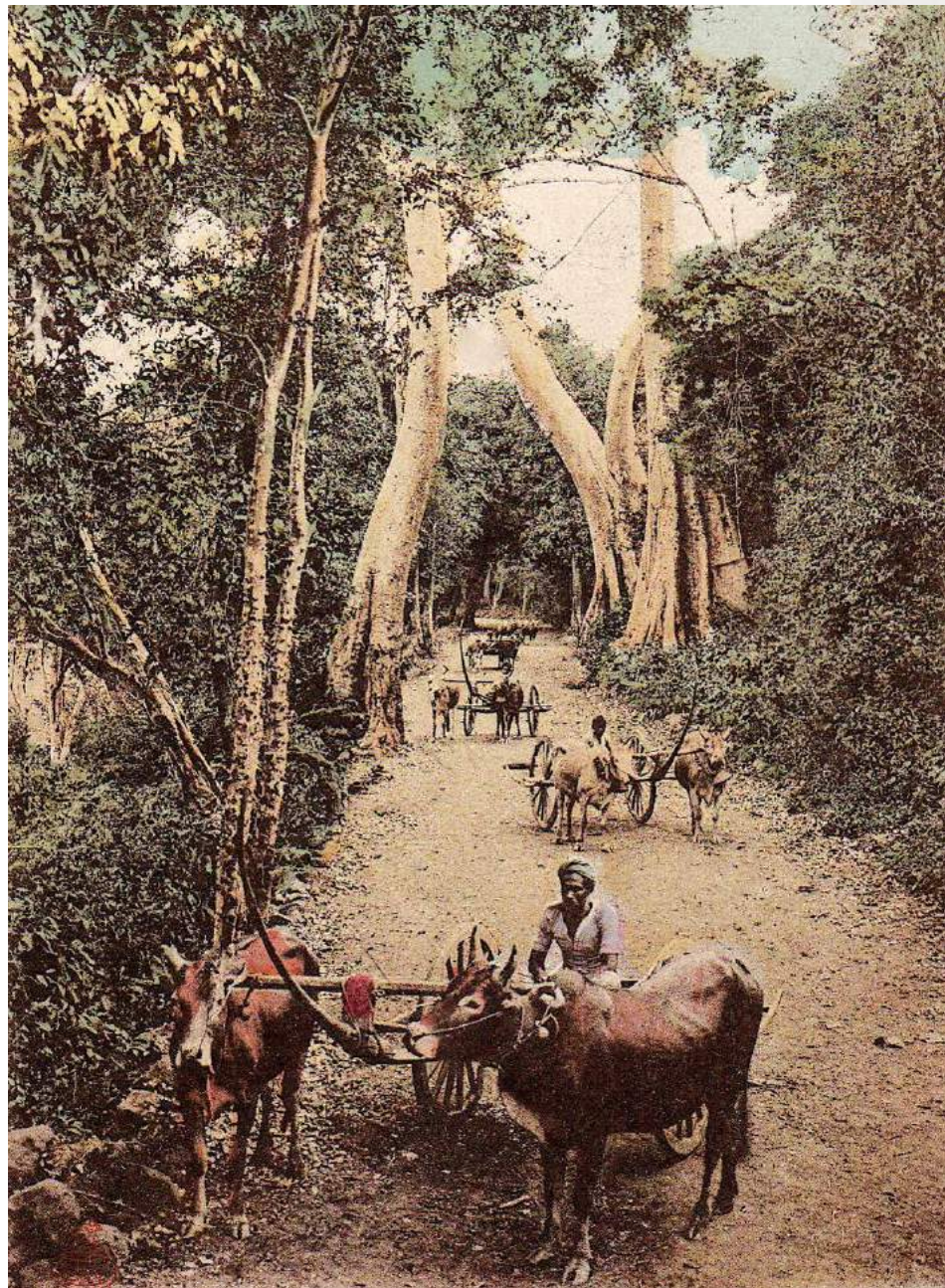
PHOTO: JACK MALIPAN

The elegant movements of a classically trained Apsara dancer bring the culture of ancient Angkor to life. Said to represent celestial maidens, dancers have been depicted in temple friezes dating back to the 10th century.

KHMER HISTORY AT A GLANCE

'BORN FROM THE NAGA,' CAMBODIANS REFLECT UPON A REMARKABLE PAST OF EMPIRE AND WAR AS THEY FOCUS ON A BRIGHT FUTURE

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON



Road to the future: Ox carts maneuver a primitive road in Kampong Cham during the 19th century. Cambodia was a French colonial protectorate for nine decades beginning in 1863

Tradition holds that Cambodia only exists because of the Naga – that its people are descended from the union between Preah Thong, an Indian prince, and Neang Neak, whose father ruled over a half-reptilian empire in the Pacific. Chinese travellers in the early Funan period, nearly two millennia ago, described how the prince was instructed in a dream to take a magic bow from a temple to defeat the princess. The initial fury turned to passion. The couple married and the powerful Naga king offered his blessing, drinking up the ocean waters until the Mekong Delta was revealed. Thus was the royal lineage of Funan (today's Cambodia) established.

Today, Khmer people still say they are “born from the Naga,” symbolic of the Kingdom’s land, water, rain, fertility and general prosperity. A Sanskrit word, Naga can refer to any serpent, but especially cobras. Seven-headed nagas are a common decoration on temples and bridges. Immortal, they may be a bridge between mankind and the gods. As spiritual beings, they can transform into mostly-human protectors against evil. There’s a fundamental Theravada belief that the Buddha himself, in one of his many earthly incarnations, was born a Naga.

The historical timeline on the following page takes you away from legend and into the world of substantiated fact. By fits and starts, from Funan to Chenla, from Angkor to French colonisation, from chronic civil strife and tragedy in the late 20th century to the progressive modern Kingdom in the 21st, the nation has never lost sight of its desire for a better future for the Cambodian people. We offer this summary to help you understand the nation’s roots, as historians tell them.

PREHISTORY

Archaeologists have confirmed remnants of a Neolithic culture that existed in modern Cambodia at least 9,000 years ago. Extensive human settlement in the Mekong Delta region goes back at least to the 4th century BCE.

AD 100-600 (approximate)

The Hindu kingdom of Funan controlled the lower Mekong region from a hub at Oc Eo (now southern Vietnam). A mercantile state, it was linked by canals to coastal harbours and to inland trade centres.

CIRCA 600-802

The Chenla Kingdom replaced Funan as the dominant power of the region, though its influence was not as centralised. By the late 8th century, it had fractured into an inland (or northern) section, where a Hindu aristocracy arose, and a maritime portion impacted by Indonesian powers on Java and Sumatra.



802-1431

King Jayavarman II established the great Khmer Empire at the start of the 9th century. A succession of Hindu devaraja (god kings) ruled, building a capital at Angkor near modern Siem Reap. The construction (in 1122-1150) of Angkor Wat by King Suryavarman II, followed soon thereafter by the reign of Buddhist king Jayavarman VII (1181-1219), highlighted the golden era of Angkor. As a barter society, the empire was acclaimed for its architecture, art and culture, as well as achievements in urban planning, agriculture and water management.

1431-1863

“Post-Angkor Cambodia” began with an occupation by the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1431. First contact with Europeans came via the maritime trade in the 16th century. In the 1800s, squeezed between strong dynasties in Vietnam and Siam, Cambodia yielded to colonial France’s offer to sustain the monarchy. A protectorate was formally declared in August 1863.



1863-1953

French colonial control gradually increased until 1941, when Prince Sihanouk, then 18, took the throne. The young ruler proclaimed an independent Kingdom of Kampuchea during a brief Japanese occupation in 1945, and although the French reimposed colonial administration later that year, Sihanouk had lit the fuse of a “royal crusade.” A declaration of independence in October 1953 was confirmed by the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina.

1993-PRESENT

Over 4 million Cambodians cast a vote in the new elections. The royalist Funcinpec party, headed by Sihanouk’s son, Prince Ranariddh, won 45.5% of the vote and formed a coalition government with the runner-up Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), whose leader, Hun Sen, had been prime minister since 1985. Hun Sen consolidated power in a 1997 coup that purged the royalists. Opposition parties were disqualified from the national elections of 2018 and 2023 as the CPP enacted tighter curbs on mass media. The CPP solidified its rule when it won every seat in the National Assembly. In August 2023, Prime Minister Hun Sen, after 38 years in power, was succeeded by his son, Hun Manet.



1979-1993

After the People’s Republic of Kampuchea was established, more than half a million Cambodians continued to flee to camps along the Thai border to escape ongoing domestic turmoil. Starting in 1991, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) oversaw a ceasefire and prepared the country for free and fair elections in May 1993. Displaced Cambodians returned home as factional armies disarmed.

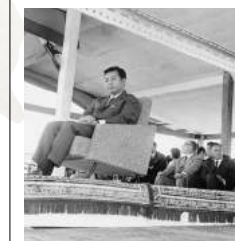


1975-1979

The CPK under Pol Pot set out to restructure Cambodia as an agrarian society. The new Democratic Kampuchea evacuated cities, sending an unprepared population to work on collective farms. Banks were shuttered. Religion was viciously suppressed and Buddhist monks persecuted. Those who raised their voices were imprisoned and soon executed: Historians estimate almost 2 million Cambodians, a quarter of the population, died. Responding to increasing border clashes, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December and January of 1978-79 and the Khmer Rouge army scattered.

1970-1975

The Republic survived five years of civil war. US support was ineffective as North Vietnam overran large areas of eastern Cambodia and gave them to the Khmer Rouge. Soon the CPK outgrew its North Vietnamese benefactors and by 1973 controlled nearly 60% of Cambodia’s territory and 25% of its population. The Lon Nol government capitulated on 17 April 1975.



1953-1970

Sihanouk strived for neutrality in his foreign policy. But the war along Cambodia’s border with Vietnam stymied peace efforts. In 1969, the United States targeted unauthorised North Vietnamese bases inside Cambodia in a series of bombing raids. Caught between the pro-American government of prime minister Lon Nol and the left-leaning Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), which he had dubbed the Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk was deposed in a March 1970 military coup by Lon Nol. By October, the Cambodian monarchy was abolished. The country was renamed the Khmer Republic.

TODAY’S ECONOMY

With the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic behind it, the Cambodian economy is now showing steady growth, according to World Bank statistics – up 5.4 percent in 2023, with projections to 5.8 percent in 2024 and 6.1 percent in 2025.

Tourism is essential to economic growth, yet net receipts at major destinations, notably Siem Reap’s Angkor, remain far below pre-pandemic levels. Investment in the garment industry, long an economic mainstay, has also fallen off. Nevertheless, investments in infrastructure and trade, including new airports and highways, help to offset shortcomings in logistics and energy.

Upgrading connectivity with regional peers and job skills to boost productivity and competitiveness are important elements in the “Pentagonal Strategy” for economic growth, as unveiled by the new Hun Manet government in August 2023. In addition to job creation, economic diversification, strengthening the private sector and governance and administrative reforms, the ambitious plan highlights sustainable resources as fundamental to growth, along with a society-wide transformation to a digital economy for socioeconomic resilience.



PENTAGONAL STRATEGY TAKES HOLD



Presented in August 2023, Cambodia’s “Pentagonal Strategy - Phase I” serves as a roadmap for job creation, economic growth, and the Kingdom’s overall development over the next five years. This successor to the Rectangular Strategy embodies a five-pillar approach, aiming at areas critical for the improvement of the nation’s economic and social progress. It addresses existing challenges such as limited resources, regional and international market competition and poverty, as Cambodia’s new leadership seeks to transform the country into a high-income economy by 2050.



Declaration: The Pentagonal Strategy will serve as an economic roadmap for Cambodia for the next five years

“Achieving the ambitious 2050 goal will require the successful application of the Pentagonal Strategy and its priorities, regardless of changing geopolitical circumstances”

Prime Minister Hun Manet



Public Sector Reform

The strategy emphasises enhancing efficiency, transparency and good governance within the public sector



Economic Sector Development

Diversifying the Cambodian economy and attracting both domestic and foreign investment are key objectives



Financial Sector Development

Expanding access to financial services, particularly for the under-banked and underserved, is crucial for economic progress



Human and Social Capital Development

Investing in quality education, health-care and social welfare programmes is pivotal to building a skilled and healthy population



Environmental Sector and Climate Change Response

The strategy recognises the importance of sustainable development and tackling environmental challenges like climate change

Public service & judicial reforms

The Ministry of Justice announced that it will review and revise Cambodia’s Civil Code, the Code of Civil Procedure, the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Economic diversification & competitiveness enhancement

Laying out plans to create more than 26,000 jobs and raise exports of the electronics sector by 1.6 billion USD by 2027, the Automotive and Electronic Sectors Development Roadmap was created to support economic diversification.

Development of private sector & employment

The National Strategy for Informal Economic Development 2023-2028 was created to increase resilience and reduce poverty. Its framework aims to streamline registration and incentivise the transition to the formal economy.

Human capital development

Launched in early 2024 under the Ministry of Labour, a plan to provide 1.5 million young people from poor households with technical and vocational training is considered essential to government goals of social and economic development.

Resilient, sustainable, & inclusive development

Revised targets aim to achieve 70% of Cambodia’s total energy generation from renewable sources by 2030. Focusing on hydro and solar energy, a host of policy updates will increase resilience and work towards energy independence.

A CHANNEL TO THE WORLD

A 180-km navigational canal, linking the Mekong River with the Gulf of Thailand, is scheduled to begin construction in 2024 and take up to four years to complete. The Funan-Techo Canal, officially known as the Tonlé Bassac Navigation and Logistics System, was approved by the Cambodian government in May 2023 at an estimated cost of 1.7 billion USD.

The canal will begin south of Phnom Penh, cross over the Tonlé Bassac and continue through Kandal, Takeo and Kampong Speu provinces to the coast in Kep. It is designed to be 100m wide and no less than 4.7m deep, sufficient for shipping and security patrols. It will require three watergate dams, 11 bridges, a 208-km sidewalk and other infrastructure.

It will allow Cambodia to become less dependent upon Vietnamese ports, which it will bypass. “It will become a lifeline for our own nation and people, and will eventually improve our economic growth and distribution,” said Prime Minister Hun Manet. He said the canal will reduce transportation costs, expand agricultural development, create new port jobs, and encourage urban development, particularly at the expanded port in Sihanoukville.

The Funan-Techo Canal takes its name from the ancient Funan Empire that once ruled over the Mekong Delta.



Lifeline: The Funan-Techo canal will connect the Cambodian capital to its coast without having to cross into Vietnam



Homegrown: Investment in skill development is key to maintaining market competitiveness. Here a TVET centre operated by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training

NEW STATUS BRINGS NEW CHALLENGES

The loss of LDC status would remove much of the preferential market access and trade benefits that have contributed to economic growth

Cambodia met the criteria to graduate from least developed country (LDC) status in 2021 and could be listed as a “developing country” as early as 2027. While this would be a testament to the progress the nation has made over the past 30 years, the loss of LDC status would also remove much of the preferential market access and trade benefits that have contributed to economic growth.

Listed as a “least developed” country for decades, Cambodia was admitted to the United Nations framework categorising states based on human resource weaknesses, economic vulnerability and poverty indices in 1991. Assessed during triennial reviews conducted by the UN Economic and Social Council, Cambodia’s most recent assessment in 2021 demonstrated improvements on two of three key benchmarks – Gross National Income per capita and Human Development Index. However, the nation’s Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index score was deemed insufficient. Government stakeholders and private sector experts believe this last criterion is likely to be met in the upcoming 2024 review. If Cambodia can make this transition, important international economic policy changes will follow.

A number of duty-free, quota-free arrangements will expire, notably Cambodia’s Everything But Arms (EBA) agreement with the European Union. Other preferential schemes would also be rescinded.

The loss of these beneficial arrangements has some worried for Cambodia’s ongoing competitiveness in global markets. The Kingdom’s place in garment and apparel and bicycle manufacturing supply chains is considered particularly vulnerable. To address the impacts, experts recommend a number of economic strategies.

Forming and expanding bilateral free-trade agreements (FTA) with countries around the world is seen as a key action to mitigate risk. Recently signed FTAs with China, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates target a number of key Cambodian exports. Agricultural products including cassava and cashew nuts – the latter targeted for value-added processing – as well as garments and textiles and, increasingly, electronic components could all benefit from these trade deals.

Building on the FTA, the Cambodia UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement went into effect at the end of 2023. It is hoped this will improve trade, boost tourism from the Arab state and promote knowledge-sharing in energy and petroleum exploration.

Regional trade is also considered vital to the Kingdom’s post-LDC competitiveness. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) brings together Cambodia, Australia, New Zealand and 12 other Asia-Pacific nations to form the world’s largest FTA, streamlining trade and promoting economic cooperation.



ROADMAP FOR THE GARMENT SECTOR LOOKS AT ADDED VALUE

Long a bulwark of the national economy, textile and apparel (T&A) and associated industries employ nearly 1 million people in Cambodia, the majority of whom are women. In 2023, T&A, footwear and travel goods accounted for more than 11 billion USD collectively, according to the nation's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training. However, these figures all represented reductions from the previous year, with footwear's 21 percent drop being the most significant.

With many of the products destined for international markets, the Ministry of

Commerce's Secretary of State Penn Sovicheat cited reduced demand globally, and particularly in Europe, for these slumping figures. Far from the only contributing factor, this underwhelming performance serves to emphasise the need for a re-examination of the sector and its role in the national economy.

To this end, the Cambodian government developed the Industrial Transformation Map for Textile and Apparel Industry 2023-2027.

Alignment with foreign markets, namely the United States and Europe, is seen as

There are efforts to incentivise the private sector to participate in human resource development

a key strategy for future growth, with market development and targeted product diversification central to these efforts. Similarly, the industry's current reliance on imported materials is a shortcoming; backwards integration of locally produced materials is seen as a promising remedy. Supporting business transformation towards value-added products and comprehensive production strategies is also a key goal for the transformation.

In line with broader government initiatives, upskilling and improving worker productivity are also aspects of this framework. Besides education and vocational training through government programmes, there are efforts to incentivise the private sector to participate in human resource development. Internships, job portals, and online learning apps are all in the works to help bridge the skills gap in the sector.

As global trends continue on the path of clean production and renewable energy, these goals are incorporated into the roadmap. Encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices at the firm level, incentivising R&D, and increasing the share of renewable energy powering value chains are goals of the framework. Finally, establishing mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and refine the implementation of the industry transformation map will foster interagency cooperation. One of a handful of government initiatives aimed at improving the Kingdom's competitiveness in global markets, this roadmap could prove essential if Cambodia's textile and apparel industry is to remain a significant source of employment, income and investment in the coming years.

SOCIAL SECURITY CONTINUES TO EXPAND

The Cambodian government has enacted numerous policies aimed at laying the groundwork for a more equitable society.

The National Social Security Fund (NSSF) is a social support framework that covers healthcare, unemployment, and old-age and disability pensions for workers around the country. It was recently expanded to cover the nation's many self-employed workers. The IDPoor programme, which identifies poor and at-risk households, became an important tool for the government's COVID-19 response. These programmes have benefited more than 170,000 people and 700,000 households, respectively.

The Family Package, the latest social initiative, is hoped to ease the transition for IDPoor households as the government's Cash Transfer Programme is scaled back. The pandemic-inspired emergency relief transferred more than 1 billion USD to those holding IDPoor Cards since 2020, according to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.

The Family Package, unlike the Cash Transfer scheme, is a permanent programme. Financial support for pregnant women and children under 2 years old, scholarships for students from impoverished families, and cash assistance for the disabled and people over 60, are all aspects of the programme that aims to leave no one behind.

“WITHOUT ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INDIVIDUALS TEND TO STICK TO THE STATUS QUO”

Focus Cambodia sat down with Khmer Enterprise's CEO, Dr Chhieng Vanmunin, to discuss entrepreneurship in Cambodia, the group's role in the ecosystem, and what the future holds for enterprise in the Kingdom

How do Cambodia's thousands of SMEs contribute to the national economy and why is it important to support this level of entrepreneurship here?

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) contribute to local communities in distinct ways compared to large corporations. As SMEs expand, they bolster the local economy by sourcing necessary raw materials, thereby supporting the surrounding community.

Nevertheless, for SMEs to thrive and expand, they must establish connections with medium enterprises and larger corporations. While corporate entities typically engage with other sizable businesses, the benefits often fail to trickle down to communities. By facilitating partnerships between numerous SMEs and a select few major corporations, a value chain will emerge, linking the benefits directly to the people.

How does Khmer Enterprise support SMEs and startups in expanding into regional and international markets?

We are involved in supporting a number of different projects, with one particular initiative standing out as having the potential to significantly boost the economy: assisting SMEs in producing high value-added products through processing. Processing, whether aimed at local or international markets, can significantly enhance the appeal and profitability of businesses.

In general, we believe that the international market offers greater value for many businesses. However, to enter the international market, producers must adhere to strict compliance standards, ensuring they meet all the laws and regulations of destination countries.

Consequently, we are actively collaborating with various stakeholders in this area. We support businesses in exporting their products to Europe, Canada, and Japan through partnerships with local entities. These initiatives align with our goal of fostering and supporting robust value chains.

What are your hopes for the future of Khmer Enterprise and Cambodia's entrepreneurial ecosystem?

I am hopeful that more people will be interested in Khmer Enterprise programmes. While not all participants will achieve success, the number of successful ventures depends on the quantity and quality of SMEs participating.

Without entrepreneurship, individuals tend to stick to the status quo, hindering the creation of innovative solutions. Therefore, entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in generating new wealth. For example, startups create numerous new jobs worldwide. Similarly, we are dedicated to creating a new source of innovation and income for people. It is important to provide opportunities for young people with aspirations to build something new.

We believe Cambodia harbours numerous hidden gems. By engaging with people and exploring their capabilities, one often discovers unexpected talents. This realisation leads to the question: How can we be part of their journey and help them achieve their ambitions?

Khmer Enterprise (KE), led by CEO Chhieng Vanmunin, has become a key player in Cambodia's dynamic entrepreneurial landscape, backing startups and SMEs across the four priority sectors of information and communication technology (ICT), agriculture, manufacturing, and services.



COMMERCIAL CENTRES TO PROMOTE A KINGDOM

At the end of February 2024, Cambodia opened its first private commercial centre in the United Arab Emirates' capital of Abu Dhabi. A signal of the deepening of economic ties between the two nations, the launch

follows the January enactment of the UAE-Cambodia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

Presided over by Tekreth Kamrang, secretary of state for the Ministry of Commerce, the event was attended by UAE officials as well as business associations and representatives from Oneroad Group, the Cambodian firm which exported the first shipment of milled rice to the Arab state in late 2024. According to Cambodia's commerce ministry, non-oil trade between the two countries totaled 151 million USD in 2021. For comparison, Oneroad's single 60,000-tonne rice shipment was valued at 54 million USD,

marking a promising start to the economic partnership.

The CEPA aims to drive Cambodia-UAE trade to 1 billion USD. Currently, trade mix between the two countries includes clothing, footwear, bicycles, milled rice, electrical components and animal feed.

The agreement is also hoped to promote tourism between the two nations. 2023 saw a 56 percent year-on-year increase of Emirati visitors to the Kingdom compared to 2022 and, with Emirates airlines restarting daily flights to Phnom Penh in May 2024, experts are hopeful for the continued increase of tourists in the coming years.

One of a number of recently signed FTAs between the Kingdom and its trade partners around the world, the UAE CEPA is part of Cambodia's broader strategy to further expand international trade and compete in global markets.





FROM RUIN TO REDEMPTION

Once a sleepy beach town, Sihanoukville was transformed into a hotbed of Chinese investment in the 2010s – much of it in the form of hotels and casinos – only to become embroiled in controversy, followed by a COVID-fueled collapse of the real-estate market in 2020.

Now, as the pandemic fades into the rearview and Cambodia is set on a steady economic recovery, the government is implementing a strategy to reinvigorate the coastal city. Announced in January 2024, Prime Minister Hun Manet unveiled the Special Investment Promotion Programme in Sihanoukville 2024, a collection of economic and tax incentives designed to rebuild market confidence and drive investment.

According to 2023 government estimates, there are more than 350 unfinished buildings with an additional 170 completed but sitting idle. An estimated 1.6 billion USD is needed to finish these stalled projects.

Tax incentives are being offered to businesses and investors that commit to finishing or improving buildings. These include income tax exemption and minimum tax for three more years; value-added tax (VAT) exemption for the completion of unfinished buildings; five year withholding tax exemption

on real estate; exemptions from property tax, and concessions on fees and certifications related to construction projects.

The Cambodian government will also facilitate and streamline permit processes and investment and business procedures, including applications for licences and certificates. Policies will be established to provide investor matching services and to develop reference pricing for real estate in Sihanoukville.

These targeted economic and tax incentives are in addition to the broader developments that hold promise for the future of Sihanoukville. The 2 billion

USD Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway was opened in 2022 and greatly improved logistics between the cities. The expansion of a container terminal will massively increase the capacity of the Sihanoukville Autonomous Port from 700,000 TEUs (a measurement representing one 20-foot container) to 2.5 million. A 1.8 billion USD join tourist venture called the Sihanoukville Royal Heritage Village was announced in January 2024.

Government incentives and expanding infrastructure could signal a new wave of opportunities washing ashore at Cambodia's largest coastal city.

Sitting idle: Sihanoukville's empty structures are a reminder of the gold rush that swept the coastal destination

520
stagnant construction projects

\$1.6B
needed to finish stalled construction

2.5M
TEU expected capacity of improved SHV port

ROAD SAFETY IN FOCUS

Traffic accidents are the leading cause of deaths and injuries in Cambodia, according to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Road Safety Committee – and they cost the Kingdom about 466 million USD each year. In 2023, “80 percent of the dead were motorcyclists, and 73 percent of them were unhelmeted,” Minister of Interior Sar Sokha said.

Although the number of highway fatalities in the Kingdom declined by 7 percent in 2023, from 1,709 to 1,590, the total number of injury-related accidents continued to rise by more than 10 percent, according to a January 2024 National Police report. While speeding was by far the leading cause of accidents (41 percent), followed by ignoring traffic laws (22 percent), another important factor was driving while intoxicated.

In the first week of 2024 alone, more than 20 people died in road accidents in Cambodia. That included an incident in Phnom Penh's Russey Keo district when a drunk driver ploughed his pickup truck through an intersection, killing four motorcyclists and injuring several more. Almost immediately, there were widespread calls for preventative police action.

Prime Minister Hun Manet instructed the National Police chief to enhance the enforcement of alcohol control to prevent tragic accidents. “The road toll recorded thus far is shocking,” he said. “No one wants accidents to happen, not even the offenders. We know that alcohol is often involved, so what can be done to prevent reckless driving? Strengthen the law! Strengthen inspections.”

If a driver who causes a death has a blood alcohol level of 0.40 mg/l or higher, they can be sentenced to prison for two to five years, Sar Sokha said.



Anatomy of a fall: As traffic accidents cause daily mayhem, a stricter application of road safety laws is envisioned



Plastic collectors: An Everwave boat clears garbage from a riverbank near Phnom Penh

“ROBOT” BOAT CLEANS CAMBODIAN WATERWAYS

It's not exactly a “floating rubbish-eating robot,” as one report called it, but a German garbage-collection boat has begun to serve a similar function in the Tonlé Sap river and lake. Featuring a new technology, it can remove as many as 20 tonnes of plastic a day from polluted waters.

Together with the Everwave boat company and the River Ocean Cleanup organisation, Cambodia's ministries of Environment, Tourism and Public Works and Transport first partnered with the Phnom Penh municipality from March to June 2022 to clean up the Mekong, Bassac and Tonlé Sap rivers. They're back at it again in 2024, with the cleaning of the Tonlé Sap being an urgent concern.

“We need to remove all plastic to ensure clean water and prevent the loss of fish and biodiversity,” Minister of Environment Eang Sophalleth said. “We must first prevent garbage from flowing through the

canals and dump[ing] into the Tonlé Sap, because the Tonlé Sap is not a trash can or plastic container.” Plastic bags, he warned, can “decompose into fish food, and when people eat fish, it also damages our health.” The Ministry of Environment said it will continue to cooperate with the Tonlé Sap Cleanup Partnership by requesting more garbage collection machines on the surface of the water in Cambodia.

Everwave takes the position that plastic itself is not an evil, that a “circular economy” can minimise environmental damage and allow plastic its place in the modern lifestyle. Through a system of “plastic credits,” companies may compensate Everwave one euro per kilogramme of waste collected, sorted, evaluated and recycled. In Cambodia, non-recyclables are sent to Kampot, where Chip Mong Ecocycle works the plastic into cement in lieu of natural resources.

TIGERS TO ROAM CAMBODIA (AGAIN)

The tiger was officially declared extinct in the Kingdom in 2016, a victim of deforestation and rampant poaching. But now there's a plan to reintroduce the great cat to its former terrain in the Cardamom Mountains. One male and three female Bengal tigers have been scheduled for removal from a refuge in India by the end of 2024.

They will be transplanted to a 90-hectare forest reserve within Cambodia's Tatai Wildlife Sanctuary, where



their behaviour will be monitored by over 400 cameras. If the project is successful, the cats will be joined by another 12 tigers before 2030. Other Southeast Asian countries have endeavored to retain dwindling populations of native tigers, though experts believe they are functionally extinct in Vietnam and Laos as well. India, however, has had success in rebuilding its wild population to an estimated 3,600 following extensive conservation.



Indulge in the finest Japanese cuisine at Hachi, where you can savour a blend of traditional and contemporary flavours carefully curated by our talented Head Chef.



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION



SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA
26 OLD AUGUST SITE - SOTHEA'S BOULEVARD - 12301
PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA
023 999 200 - H6526@SOFITEL.COM

WWW.SOFITEL-PHNOMPENH-PHOKEETHRA.COM



CAMBODIA HOSTS GLOBAL DE-MINING CONFERENCE



Frontman: Ly Thuch, senior minister and first vice president of the CMAA, is Cambodia's most prominent face in the global struggle against war remnants buried in the ground

Cambodia will become the first Asian country to host an international conference on land mines when the Siem Reap – Angkor Summit on a Mine-Free World convenes on November 25 to 29, 2024. Formally the Fifth Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, it will be chaired by Cambodian senior minister Ly Thuch, first vice-president of the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA).

In all, 164 member countries and observer states are expected to send representatives, along with many international organisations and institutions. Cambodia has committed to being mine-free by the end of 2025. In 2023 alone, the states of Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Cham and Takeo were declared to be mine-free.

Prime Minister Hun Manet said the Kingdom will use the occasion of the conference to reaffirm that commitment and review the progress of past action plans, including continued support for bomb and mine victims. To achieve its mine-free goal, Manet said, the nation must clear more than 1,800 square km contaminated with land mines and cluster munitions, especially in the Thai border areas.

Between 1979, the end of the Khmer Rouge era, and October 2023, war remnants killed nearly 20,000 people in Cambodia and caused injury and amputation to another 45,000, according to a government report. Casualties have dramatically decreased in recent years, from 4,320 in 1996 to only 32 in 2023.

Previous conferences on land mines and munitions were held in Kenya in 2004, Colombia in 2009, Mozambique in 2014, and Norway in 2019.

SALT 'N PEPPER

Where there's pepper, there might also be salt. As tourism continues to climb in Kampong Speu province, its salt fields are prepared to join pepper plantations as an attraction of visitor interest. Kampong annually produces about 100,000 tonnes from its 3,000 hectares of salt fields.



Savoury attraction: Cambodian salt fields are ready to welcome tourists

Closed since the COVID pandemic, the Cambodia Natural Salt Production Exhibition Centre has reopened on the road to Kep. Displays here describe how throughout the dry season, from December to April, ocean water is allowed to flow into the fields, which are then blocked off while the water evaporates, leaving salt crystals. The cycle is repeated as raw salt is collected before delivery to a salt factory, where it is cleaned and iodine is added. The salt is then packaged for shipment.

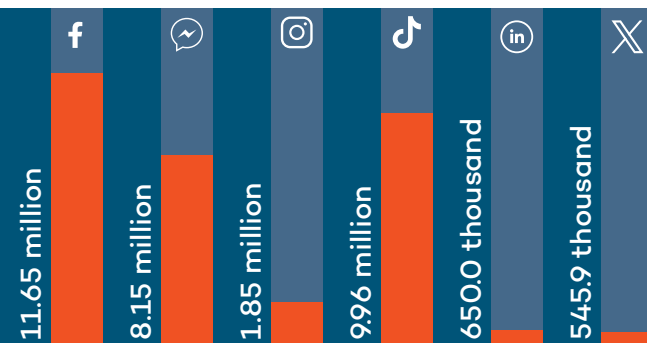
“Our acknowledgement goes to the convention itself, which stands as a beacon of hope guiding us in our collective mission to rid the world of anti-personnel mines”

Ly Thuch, Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Social media has become an essential part of life for billions of people around the world and Cambodia is no exception. Facebook and Meta's Messenger dominate the space, although TikTok and Instagram have growing followings. Popular within the business community, LinkedIn's reach saw steady growth in 2023 and X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, saw increased traffic, although use by marketers dropped in 2023.

Source: Datareportal - Digital 2024: Cambodia



Game changer: The impressive Techo International Airport is designed to handle 30 million travellers per year by 2030

REGIONAL MEGA AIRPORT TO OPEN IN 2025

When Phnom Penh's new Techo International Airport opens in mid-2025, it will be the world's ninth largest, according to its designer, the British architectural firm Foster + Partners.

Located about 20 kilometres south of the capital in Kandal province, the land and development area will cover 2,600 hectares of former farmland and land reclaimed through lake-filling projects. Foster + Partners envisions a "future airport city" that interlinks the airport with business and industrial parks.

The airport itself will occupy 700 hectares. Ranked as 4F-class, the world's highest level, it will accommodate the largest commercial aircraft, including the Airbus A380-800 and the Boeing 747-800, on long-distance intercontinental flights. According to Minister of Civil Aviation Mao Havannal, it will be able to handle 13 million passengers a year upon opening, 30 million passengers by 2030 and 50 million in 2050.

It is being financed by the Cambodia Airport Investment Co., Ltd., at a cost of 1.5 billion USD. The China Construction Third Engineering Bureau Group Co., Ltd., began construction work in 2020. It employs nearly 3,500 engineers and technical personnel, both Cambodian and Chinese. As of March 2024, 66 percent of the work had been completed, Prime Minister Hun Manet said. "This airport will be a catalyst for Cambodia's economic growth, tourism and logistics development," he explained.

The old airport will continue to be used for the head of state, government officials and foreign leaders, military and domestic flights, and private jets.



Campus 1
#6, St. 214

Campus 2
#71, St. 242



Campus 3
#28, National Road 1

Program Highlights

- Cambodian and British National Curriculums
- International Early Years Curriculum
- Chinese as a Foreign Language
- Character Building
- E-STEAM



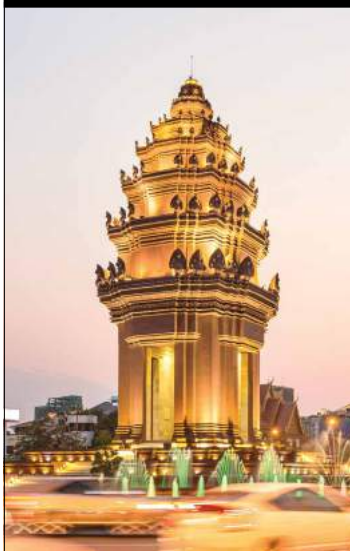
087 456 776



077|87 456 776



eis-edu.com



LEADING GENERATIONAL CHANGE

THE 7TH GOVERNMENT IN THE POST-CONFLICT ERA HAS SET ITSELF AN AGENDA FILLED WITH RESTRUCTURING, REFORM AND A COMPETITIVE MINDSET

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON



THE CABINET

The Cabinet of Cambodia, officially known as the Office of the Council of Ministers, is the executive body of the Kingdom of Cambodia. It is led by the Prime Minister, assisted by Deputy Prime Ministers, Senior Ministers, Ministers and Secretaries of State. Members of the Cabinet are nominated by the Prime Minister and appointed by the Monarch. The members of the seventh and current Council of Ministers were sworn in on 22 August 2023. The National Assembly voted Hun Manet as Prime Minister for a five-year term. All ministers are members of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Of the 30 ministries, 23 changed hands following the 2023 elections. Indeed, the children of some of the most powerful figures within the CPP inherited their fathers' portfolios. The ages of the previous cabinet members were mostly above 60. Now, the mean age of ministry leaders is about 49 years old. Among the youngest incoming ministers is Hun Many, 41, the younger brother of Prime Minister Hun Manet. Only three of the current ministry leaders are female; two of them are incumbents. *Ages are listed as of 1 January 2024, positions and titles as of March 2024.*



PRIME MINISTER

Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet, 46, succeeded his father, Hun Sen, as Prime Minister in August 2023, following a 28-year military career. The Khmer title translates to "Great Lord and Supreme Leader." He was the first Cambodian to graduate (in 1999) from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and has a PhD in economics from the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom. Hun Manet was a general

in the Royal Cambodian Army and deputy commander-in-chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, and is a vice-president of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Manet is Hun Sen's second-eldest son and father to three children with his wife, businesswoman Pich Chanmony. His government has embarked on a path of economic and governance reform through the Kingdom's "Pentagonal Development Strategy."



Aun Pornmoniroth, 58, is the incumbent Minister of Economy and Finance since 2013. Previously he was the economic adviser to Prime Minister Hun Sen for 15 years. He is a member of the National Assembly from Kandal province.

Sun Chanthol, 66, was Cambodia's Minister of Public Works and Transport from 2004 to 2008 and 2016 to 2023. He was Minister of Commerce from 2013 to 2016, and has been a National Assembly member from Kandal province since 2003.

Hun Many, 41, the youngest son of Hun Sen and brother of Prime Minister Hun Manet, has represented Kampong Speu province in the National Assembly since 2013. He is also the president of the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia.

Vongsey Vissoth, 58, previously served 10 years as Secretary of State for the Ministry of Economy and Finance. In his new post, Vissoth schedules all cabinet meetings and sets the agendas. He was elected to the National Assembly from Kandal province.

Sar Sokha, 43, was elevated to his new post to replace his father, Sar Kheng. Previously he was Secretary of State for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. A lieutenant general in the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, he is from Prey Veng province.

Dith Tina, 44, was appointed Agriculture Minister in October 2022, following eight years as Secretary of State for the Ministry of Mines and Energy. The son of retired Supreme Court President Dith Muntly, he represents Tbong Khmum province in the National Assembly.

Neth Pheaktra, 41, previously served as spokesperson for the Ministry of Environment. He has a background in communications and journalism and previously was a director of Apsara Media Services.

Chhay Rithisen, 54, is the son of former Planning Minister Chhay Than. Previously, he was Secretary General of the Department of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction. He is from Tbong Khmum province.

Tea Seiha, 43, formerly the governor of Siem Reap province, replaces his father Tea Banh, Defence Minister since 2006. Educated in France, Seiha was awarded the rank of major-general in the Cambodian armed forces in 2014.

Eang Sophalath, 53, has served as Secretary of State in this ministry for the previous five years, and as a spokesperson for Prime Minister Hun Sen for over 25 years.

Heng Sour, 49, began working at the Labour Ministry in 2008 and has served as its spokesperson since 2013. He also serves on the Secretariat of the National Council, a body established to resolve wage issues in the garment sector. *See our full interview on page 60.*

Chea Somethy, 47, formerly the governor of Prey Veng province, is a son of late Senate President Chea Sim. He obtained a bachelor's degree in economics from university in Thailand and did postgraduate studies in the US.

Hang Chuon Naron, 61, has held this ministerial post since 2013. Prior, he was Secretary of State of Economy and Finance. As Minister of Education, Naron has overseen several major reforms. He is from Kampong Cham.

Cham Nimul, 43, is the daughter of former Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister and Minister of Commerce (1994-2013) Cham Prasidh. She previously served as a Secretary of State in Commerce. She was elected to the National Assembly from Kampot.

Keo Rottanak, 50, was managing director of Cambodia's state-run electricity provider, Électricité du Cambodge (EDC), from 2008 until his recent ministerial appointment. He is from Pursat. *See our full interview on page 28.*

Sok Soken, 40, was previously a Secretary of State in the Foreign Affairs Ministry beginning in 2020. Soken is the son of the late Sok An, formerly Minister of the Council of Ministers, and the brother-in-law of new Commerce Minister Cham Nimul.

Sok Chenda Sophea, 67, previously served 26 years as Secretary-General of the Council for the Development of Cambodia, an agency that assesses foreign investment opportunities. He was elected to the National Assembly from Kandal.

Chay Borin, 50, elected to the National Assembly from Tboung Khmum, has moved up from serving as a Secretary of State at the same ministry. He has been closely associated with Hun Manet within the youth organisation supporting the Cambodian People's Party.

Huot Hak, 50, previously served as the Secretary of the Ministry of Inspection. He is the president of the Khmer Youth in Europe and a member of the ruling CPP's Central Committee.

Thor Chetha, 46, has worked as a Secretary of State for the Water Resources Ministry since 2013 and holds a degree from Nanyang University in Singapore. He has previously led efforts to improve Cambodia's agricultural production.

Koeth Rith, 44, has been Minister of Justice by royal decree since 2020, and a deputy prime minister since 2023. An expert in criminal codes, he is leading a push for legislative and governance reform to improve judicial processes.

Phoeurng Sackona, 64, has been the head of this ministry since 2013 following her father-in-law, Chheng Phon, who previously held the position. She has overseen the return of numerous stolen antiquities to Cambodia from foreign museums and collectors (see story on page 118).

Bin Trochhey, 44, is the son of Bin Chhin, outgoing Minister for the Council of Ministers. As Planning Minister, he is responsible for socioeconomic planning and statistics management. He was formerly in private law practise.

Ing Kantha Phavi, 63, has headed this department for nearly 20 years. After earning a doctorate in medicine from Paris' St-Antoine University, she returned to Cambodia in 1995. Her late father, Ing Keat, was a personal counsel to King Norodom Sihanouk in the 1990s.

Say Sam Al, 43, the son of outgoing Senate President Say Chhum, previously was the Minister of Environment from 2013 to 2023. He holds a PhD from Monash University in Australia. He was elected to the National Assembly from Preah Sihanouk province.

Chheang Ra, 53, was formerly the director general of state-run Calmette Hospital. Upon taking his ministerial post, Ra said he is committed to improving health facilities and education nationwide.

Chea Vandeth, 52, who represents Takeo province, became minister in April 2020, overseeing laws and regulations on digital technology and independent media. Vandeth was the founder of the American University of Phnom Penh in 2013.

Mao Havannal, 57, as a young man served as a Royal Cambodian Air Force pilot and has been in his civil-aviation post for two decades. He is an elected lawmaker representing Takeo for the ruling CPP.

Neth Savoeun, 66, was Cambodia's national police chief from 2008 to 2023. His entire career has been in law enforcement, previously as police chief of Phnom Penh and as head of the justice department in the Interior Crimes division.

Hem Vandy, 44, formerly served for three years as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Economy and Finance. In his ministerial post, he oversees national strategy decisions, policy dialogue and operational project management.

Peng Ponea, 43, is the son of former Deputy Prime Minister Men Sam An. Ponea previously worked as a Secretary of State at the Ministry of Public Works.

Lam Chea, 54, was appointed to a newly formed ministerial role overseeing Cambodia's borders. He was formerly Secretary of State of the Ministry of Interior.

POWERING A KINGDOM

BIG BETS ARE IN THE CARDS FOR CAMBODIA'S ENERGY TRANSFORMATION, AS MINISTER OF MINES AND ENERGY KEO ROTTANAK LOOKS TO MEET AMBITIOUS TARGETS BY 2030

WORDS BY STEW POST
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK MALIPAN

As Managing Director of Électricité du Cambodge, the entity responsible for the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity across Cambodia, Keo Rottanak oversaw impressive growth throughout 15 years in the influential position. Sitting behind his desk at the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME), adjacent to Phnom Penh's central Wat Phnom, he's proud of the quasi-government agency's accomplishments during his tenure.

"When I joined, the household connection to the grid was 14 percent," he said. "Today almost 90 percent of households are connected to the national grid and more than 50 percent of the power they use comes from renewable sources, compared to more than 90 percent from heavy fuel, oil and diesel 15 years ago."

Now the head of the MME following Cambodia's 2023 government shakeup under Prime Minister Hun Manet, Rottanak's enthusiasm for tackling a new set of challenges is clear. He believes his knowledge of the sector puts him in a prime position to facilitate the ambitious energy goals of the new administration.

"My experience allows me to marry both the operational challenges and opportunities as well as to look at policy within a complete picture," he explained with quiet confidence. "Normally you would have a bit of a disconnect, where politicians at the policy level won't

have experience from the field."

These ambitions are reflected in the MME Policy Dialogue 7th Mandate, a document defining the goals and strategy of the government's plans for the energy sector. Laying out Cambodia's transition to clean energy, the mandate outlines the expansion of renewables in the sector, the diminishing but ongoing role of legacy technologies, and an emphasis on the importance of inter-ministerial and international cooperation to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

Seasoned observers of the sector were surprised, as some of these policies and developments are an about-face from the direction taken by the previous administration. One in particular was the cancellation of a 700-megawatt Koh Kong coal-fired power plant. Set to be built on land in the Botum Sakor national park, Prime Minister Hun Manet suggested that the would-be 1.5 billion USD project could instead be developed into a cleaner liquefied natural gas operation.

Previously, coal power was expected to have a growing role in the energy sector with a number of projects planned at locations around the country. However, an updated and ambitious goal of reaching 71 percent renewables in the nation's energy mix by 2030 signals a reversal of the trend. Additional revisions to targets for renewable power generation further demonstrate the new government's prioritisation of clean energy and the need to address the role of legacy technologies in the coming years. ■

"Projects on the Mekong mainstream or hydro near the Tonlé Sap are simply a no-go"

Energetic: Keo Rottanak in his office near Phnom Penh's historical Wat Phnom





Sunny outlook: Cambodia's potential for solar and wind energy, combined with its hydropower capacities, offers opportunities for a promising economic sector surrounding renewable energies



“If you look at our energy policy going into 2030 and beyond 2040, coal will further shrink in terms of its share in the generation mix. It has to be this way,” Rottanak said, taking on a tone of gravity. “When our PM announced the cancellation of the 700-megawatt coal project in Koh Kong, it showed the world that we mean what we say.”

The scrapping of the coal-fire project was made official at the damming ceremony for the 150-megawatt Upper Tatay Hydroelectric Project at Botum Sakor. At the same event, the prime minister declared that no new hydroelectric dams will be developed on the Mekong mainstream, highlighting Cambodia's complex navigation towards net-zero emissions.

Rottanak stands by the government's commitment not to build dams on the Mekong mainstream, calling it “a matter of value judgement” and stating that “projects on the Mekong mainstream or hydro near the Tonlé Sap are simply a no-go.” He recognises the potential of hydropower as a source for renewable energy and an important part of the broader energy transition, with Cambodia having produced 44 percent of its total energy mix from domestic hydropower projects in 2021. However, Rottanak acknowledges the environmental and social impacts often associated with these types of energy projects.

“We employ economic and financial analysis tools but also go one step further by looking at projects beyond monetary value,” the minister said. “We all know very well about shadow and environmental costs.”

Developing a new hydro project usually takes between eight and 10 years with extensive studies, consultations and inter-ministerial cooperation required before approval. Rottanak emphasised that

“We employ economic and financial analysis tools but we also go one step further by looking at projects beyond monetary value”

community outreach is also an important part of the process, with leaders of affected communities sometimes even being transported to existing projects to be shown the potential impacts and benefits that could be coming their way.

While hydropower projects continue to

dominate Cambodia's renewables sector, the new minister is bullish about the incorporation of other technologies into the nation's energy mix.

“Hydropower should take a back seat and solar power should take a front seat,” he said. “Solar energy is easy to scale up, easy to deploy and it has less adverse impacts on the environment.”

According to the MME 7th Mandate, 31 percent of Cambodia's renewables – accounting for 71 percent of total energy generation – should come from solar

KEO ROTTANAK

Transitioning away from fossil fuels towards cleaner, sustainable energy generation is considered the most important strategy to mitigate the impacts of climate change. In Cambodia, this responsibility falls upon the Ministry of Mines and Energy, a government body led by Keo Rottanak. As Managing Director of Électricité du Cambodge (EDC) for more than 15 years, he oversaw a surge in connectivity that brought millions of Cambodians onto an ever-growing grid. Rottanak is now primed to turn the new government's ambitious clean-energy goals into reality.



energy and pumped storage hydro by 2030. By 2040, renewables should account for 74 percent of the total energy mix. Solar power and pumped storage hydro are scheduled to represent 43 percent of this clean energy.

To drive this ambitious vision towards reality, the MME has developed a tariff scheme to encourage rooftop solar, leveraging financial incentives for both residential and commercial users.

“We've already started a discount programme and we've even adopted a new policy to eliminate the charges for rooftop solar deployment,” Rottanak stated during this interview, which took place in December 2023. “We used to charge industry and households (but) soon we are going to remove that charge so that people can start to scale up their rooftop solar.”

Expanding access and driving adoption of these technologies is an important part of increasing the impact of clean energy on the national grid. However, the intermittency of renewables – whether hydro, solar or wind power – remains an issue to be addressed.

“Intermittent renewable energy requires storage capacity, simply because we don't have sunlight or wind 24 hours a day. We have to look into storage capacity,” Rottanak said.

While the potential of pumped hydro as a means to offset the fluctuations associated with renewables is important – Rottanak is confident a new 1,000-megawatt project will carry a significant portion of the future energy load – the MME recognises that it will not in itself be sufficient for the expected rise in energy demand of the country's growing and diversifying economy.

“Pump-storage hydro projects require suitable geography. You cannot choose just anywhere to build,” he explained. “So we will be using both, some lithium-ion battery storage and some pumped-hydro storage to be able to leverage and regulate intermittency.”

Strategic application of these technologies is essential for the future of renewables in Cambodia. However, as demonstrated by the proposed replacement of coal with natural gas in Botum Sakor, legacy technologies will continue to play a role in the nation's energy mix.

There are also plans to enhance and expand the domestic petroleum industry, through research, investment and regional cooperation. In particular, the Apsara field, an offshore oil deposit which has yet to be fully exploited due (in part) to overlapping claims issues with Thailand, is still seen as a promising enterprise. Rottanak takes a pragmatic approach to the role that petroleum may play in Cambodia's future.

“Our government sees oil and gas as an interim strategy. It will help us with our current economic needs, it will help our transition to net-zero by 2050,” he said. “But we must also see that this is not a sustainable solution. Every time we extract oil and gas, it will have a counter-effect in terms of our commitment to climate change.”

The long-awaited Apsara field – marred by missed exploitation targets and the bankruptcy of the first oil company with a concession to explore – also demonstrates the importance of, and challenges to, regional cooperation for Cambodia's energy future. The minister points out that plans for the ASEAN power grid (APG) have been around for 30 years but the network has yet to be realised. Instead, a number of bilateral energy agreements between countries have been signed, hinting at the potential of broader cooperation.

To this end, Rottanak has pushed dialogue with neighbouring countries such as Singapore. The island nation has recently signed on to receive up to one gigawatt of exported Cambodian solar energy.

“When we began our dialogue with Singapore,” the minister said, “we wanted to try and resuscitate [the APG] but there was still reluctance from some members. But after a year, some nations are willing to cooperate.”

While ASEAN-wide initiatives have not been solidified, growing alignment on increasing the use of renewables, improving infrastructure and expanding cross-border cooperation could prove Rottanak's optimism justified.

“I am now encouraged more than ever that Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore and perhaps even Thailand are willing to start phase one of the APG,” the minister said.

Rottanak and his team are looking to develop a technical task force that would consist of neighbouring utility providers backed up by ministers of energy and national leaders. He believes regional agreements will allow “electrons to flow” across multiple borders in the next five years, mitigating many of the energy challenges that face countries in the region.

However, for the ambitious new Minister of Mines and Energy, there is a more profound goal for collaboration across the sector.

“The way we see energy interconnectivity, it is more than just the supply of clean energy itself, it is more than just the commitment to the environment,” he said.

“It is about opening ways for Cambodians, for Singaporeans, Malaysians, Vietnamese, Laotians, Thais, to come closer together. Because at the end of the day we have a bigger agenda,” Rottanak said. “Each of us is not only about our own needs. It's about the protection of our planet as well.”



Author Stew Post and Focus Cambodia multimedia specialists filming at the Ministry of Mines and Energy. Watch the complete video interview at Focus-Cambodia.com

READY TO COMPETE

TO INTEGRATE AND ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT IN REGIONAL MARKETS, THE KINGDOM IS EXPLORING NEW AVENUES OF CONNECTIVITY

BY IAN HOLLINGER

The past decade has been witness to quantum changes in the nature of the Cambodian economy. The nation no longer relies solely on traditional mainstays such as garment manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and construction. New industries are booming. Exports of electronics and automotive parts, for instance, have more than quadrupled from 2015 to present, albeit from a low base.

One major reason for this development is Cambodia's attractiveness as a location for satellite manufacturing hubs, primarily for companies already established in the region and looking to implement a "Country Plus One" strategy. Geopolitical headwinds such as western countries' de-coupling strategies from China, and a growing number of extreme weather events brought on by climate change, are forcing companies to rethink how they structure their supply chains. By diversifying the locations in which they produce, they are spreading the risk. Cambodia, with its low cost of labour, business-friendly policies, and highly strategic location between Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor and the industrial suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City, is proving itself to be a very appealing destination for regional manufacturers.

Thanks to these and other factors, Cambodia is leveraging itself into the more labour-intensive elements of supply chains. The country's ambition to gradually move into more advanced economic activities – the path to development

taken by many other Asian nations from Taiwan to Thailand – is increasingly dependent on its further integration into the regional economy. The more time and money consumed in transporting goods to and from the country, the less appealing the country's comparative advantages are to investors.

Cambodia's logistics costs are still some of the most expensive in ASEAN, according to World Bank figures. The high cost of customs clearance procedures is a primary cause, with informal payments and the involvement of middlemen serving to balloon the costs even further. The unpredictability in the overall logistics system forces companies to stockpile inventory and industrial inputs, further driving up carrying and administrative costs.

On the right track

Hun Manet's new administration has moved rapidly to make Cambodia cost-competitive in the logistics space.

"I think they are on the right track, and we can feel the push from the top," said Suy Bunthan, head of operations at DHL Express Cambodia and chairman of EuroCham Cambodia's Transport and Logistics Committee. "The new prime minister has good intentions and good strategies and good mechanisms to get a new regulatory framework out as soon as possible. I think if this was something the prime minister could do just by himself, the reforms would happen overnight."

On 13 November 2023, Hun Manet announced that customs processing fees

"The new prime minister has good intentions and good strategies and good mechanisms to get a new regulatory framework out as soon as possible"

Suy Bunthan, DHL Express Cambodia

would be entirely removed for goods worth less than 1,000 USD and reduced by almost half for goods over 1,000 USD. Whereas previously a scanning fee was required for every container entering the country, regardless of whether or not it was being screened, a scanning fee will now be owed only for those containers actually screened. The government has plans to develop a legal framework enabling e-documents to be used for official paperwork, and to reduce hard-copy paperwork and face-to-face meetings with customs officers to a minimum.

The single largest change to the "soft infrastructure" of Cambodia's logistics ecosystem has been the introduction of

pre-arrival processing for customs declarations. Now, companies importing goods into the country will be able to digitally submit and receive approval for their declaration documents well before the cargo reaches the border, enabling the goods to clear customs the same day even if they need to be inspected.

There is real potential for reforms and increased transparency in the customs process to rapidly and significantly cut down the high logistics costs that have long bedevilled the Cambodian economy. The simple act of eliminating middlemen from the process enabled the Phnom Penh SEZ to reduce its logistics costs by as much as 50 percent for its clients.

Door to the world:

The Sihanoukville port is growing to help fulfil the vision for Cambodia to become a regionally integrated manufacturing and logistics hub

However, it is one thing to announce changes and another to effectively implement them. The country's last attempt at major customs digitisation, ASYCUDA, ended with importers still being forced to print out digitally entered material, then go desk-to-desk to receive multiple stamps and signatures from an assortment of customs officials. The end result is that, while hopeful and very happy about this newfound governmental enthusiasm for tackling the roadblocks to cross-border trade, industry players are still hesitant. They are taking a wait-and-see approach to determine how the recently announced reforms will play out in practice.

Transportation overhaul

Linked to these reforms has been a concerted effort to overhaul Cambodia's transportation infrastructure. The Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville expressway has been completed and reduced travel times to the coastal port by 70 percent; a new expressway connecting Phnom Penh and the Vietnamese border is under construction with negotiations for an extension to Ho Chi Minh City underway; and plans are in development for another running from Phnom Penh to the Thai border by way of Siem Reap.

Feasibility studies for upgrading the existing northern and southern rail lines, with the aim to double their maximum speed from 80 kph to 160 kph, are





Location, location, location: Cambodia is centrally located in the Greater Mekong Subregion with a strategic position to connect to ASEAN and the world

in process or completed. A new rail link with Thailand was launched midway through 2023, with a new rail line to Vietnam under consideration.

This transformation is not limited to land-based transport. Phnom Penh’s river port has been expanded and cold-storage facilities were added to facilitate trade in agricultural products. A new port has been built in Koh Kong and another 1.5 billion USD seaport is under construction in Kampot. When completed, it will be the third largest commercial port in the country.

The 1.7 billion USD Tonlé Bassac Navigation Road and Logistics System Project, also known as the “Funan-Techo Canal,” is expected to hold a groundbreaking ceremony in the fourth quarter of 2024, according to a press release by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. It stretches 180 km from the Mekong River’s Prek Takeo and passes through four provinces, including Kandal, Takeo, Kampot and Kep.

Ground broke in 2023 on the first stage of an expansion of Sihanoukville’s port, to quadruple capacity and enable it to handle much larger ships. The Japanese government has pledged financing

of 430 million USD for the project over the coming years. The channel into the port, too shallow for 82 percent of currently used large container ships, will be dredged to improve access.

Distribution hub

The two halves of this logistics renaissance come together at the Sihanoukville port. There the results of a years-long collaboration between the Cambodian and Japanese governments are bearing fruit. Aeon Mall (Cambodia) Logi Plus Co. has been brought on to operate a new logistics centre in a free trade zone bordering the port. It is the first to offer nonresident inventory management, enabling businesses to use the port as a regional distribution hub without legally establishing a corporation in Cambodia. It also has the first bonded warehouse in the Kingdom: Here, companies may store industrial products without having to pay customs duties until they leave the zone, freeing up capital for other uses.

Six months into its operations, the logistics centre is already seeing significant use from manufacturers in the automotive, electronics, garment and footwear sectors looking for a more



“Many of the companies that are doing research on potentially expanding to Cambodia already have factories in Thailand and Vietnam, and are trying to connect all their factories in the Mekong region”

Marisa Haruta
JETRO

streamlined way to import industrial inputs. At least one company (a supplier to manufacturers of electronic parts) has made the decision to use the port as a regional logistics hub.

It is here, according to Marisa Haruta, chief representative for the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), that Cambodia’s logistics sector shows the most promise. “Many of the companies that are doing research on potentially expanding to Cambodia already have factories in Thailand and Vietnam, and are trying to connect all their factories in the Mekong region,” Haruta said.

While port expansion is critical for enabling larger ships and containers to be brought to Cambodia, helping to reduce logistics costs to a regionally competitive level, the presence of services such as bonded warehouses is equally essential.

“Even if the port terminal is expanded, without access to services like bonded warehouses and storage for non-resident companies, interest from international investors in expanding their operations in Sihanoukville would be limited,” said Tsuboya Masayuki, managing director of Aeon Mall Cambodia. F.

ZONING IN ON INVESTMENT

A GUIDE TO SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN CAMBODIA HIGHLIGHTS THE VALUE OF CLUSTER-BASED MANUFACTURING

BY IAN HOLLINGER

Special: Manufacturers increasingly settle in SEZs to build their businesses



After more than 10 years, the Cambodian government’s efforts to diversify its manufacturing sector are beginning to bear fruit.

A recently published guidebook on Alternative Manufacturing and Special Economic Zones in Cambodia, prepared by the European Chamber of Commerce’s German chapter and GIZ, highlights a promising start to efforts to branch out from the nation’s traditional mainstay.

Garments have long dominated manufacturing in the Kingdom: 80 percent of exports by 2022 came from the sector. While a major driver of economic growth and the single largest source of formal sector employment in the country, its predominance has left Cambodia’s manufacturing sector vulnerable to volatility in the global garments market. Without diversification, any downturns in global demand have an outsized impact on the country’s economy and on the employment and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of workers.

Diversification breeds economic resilience. Cambodia is well positioned geographically to integrate into manufacturing supply chains in Thailand and Vietnam. A “Thailand Plus One” or “Vietnam Plus One” strategy, in which firms locate labour-intensive manufacturing processes inside the Cambodian border to take advantage of cheaper labour costs, remains the most viable option for attracting foreign companies that want to invest in alternative manufacturing sectors.

Along the borders of Thailand and Vietnam, SEZs often are not only the most convenient options, but the only viable ones.

“If you do a greenfield investment at the Thai border you have to be very courageous,” said GIZ Business Scout for Development Christoph Janensch. “You need infrastructure, you need electricity, and if that’s not there, investing in the countryside could be unnecessarily risky compared to choosing an SEZ.”

Poipet has emerged as an early centre for this sort of “plus one” manufacturing. The first investments based on this model were launched around 2012 by Japanese automotive manufacturers, who imported wire to be assembled into electrical cable harnesses that were then shipped to Thailand for assembly in vehicles. Other firms, manufacturing automotive components and electronics, moved in later to take advantage of the available work force and to achieve ready access to the Thai transportation infrastructure.

Even away from Cambodia’s borders, industry in the nation’s SEZs remains far more diversified than outside. The Royal Group Phnom Penh SEZ (see page 36) includes companies ranging from family-owned recycling firms to major multinationals like Coca-Cola and Toyota. Indeed, unless a company has a local partner whose facilities it plans to use – or a need to locate itself in a particular area that lacks an SEZ – it is difficult to imagine a reason a manufacturer wouldn’t start operations in an SEZ, noted Janensch.



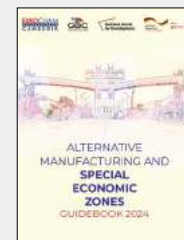
“They really enjoy having a business community in Cambodia that understands them, where they can work together very well”

Christoph Janensch,
GIZ business scout

The close-knit communities of companies that form within the SEZs, across a wide variety of sectors, have also proven appealing. They can open up new avenues for collaboration and cost-sharing on joint initiatives, such as installing renewable energy sources. Janensch observed that in the Royal Group Phnom Penh SEZ, the Japanese business community – which accounts for 40 of the 100 companies operating in the zone – is especially tight-knit.

“They really enjoy having a business community in Cambodia that understands them, where they can work together very well,” he said. “Because they come from the same background, they’re used to the same business practices.”

There are concerns that these SEZs are not sufficiently linked to the rest of Cambodia’s economy, as they often purchase their inputs abroad and sell their products overseas. But they remain Cambodia’s best bets when it comes to breaking into new manufacturing sectors. “As the country looks to diversify and upgrade its industrial base, SEZs will continue to be at the forefront of these efforts,” the GIZ report notes. F.



A guide to SEZs in Cambodia, and information for manufacturers on what the zones have to offer, is available for download via www.eurocham-cambodia.org. It has been produced by EuroCham Cambodia with support from GIZ and German Business Cambodia (GBC)

ONE-STOP SOLUTIONS FOR GLOBAL MANUFACTURERS

ROYAL GROUP PHNOM PENH SEZ CEO HIROSHI UEMATSU ON THE EVOLUTION OF MANUFACTURING IN THE KINGDOM

BY IAN HOLLINGER

The Royal Group Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone has long been the estate of choice for industry leaders in Cambodia. Outside the zone, manufacturing remains dominated by the garment sector; inside, international companies regularly pioneer new sectors for the Cambodian market and engage in activities seen nowhere else in the country.

Hiroshi Uematsu, CEO of the Phnom Penh SEZ and its sister estate Poipet SEZ, has overseen the zone since its inception. When Focus Cambodia sat down with Uematsu at the SEZ headquarters on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, he spoke about emerging trends in the Cambodian manufacturing sector, the importance of connectivity in driving the Kingdom's industrial growth, and the challenges the country still must overcome.



Investment expert: Hiroshi Uematsu has been at the forefront of SEZ developments for advanced manufacturing in Cambodia for more than 16 years

Why do companies investing in Cambodia decide to set up their facilities at your SEZ, instead of elsewhere?

Our major tenants are large multinationals from countries like Japan, Thailand, the United States and Singapore. These companies want to invest in a place where accommodation is transparent, accountable and in line with international standards. Their primary concerns, when looking at investing in emerging markets, are security, freedom from corruption, and access to adequate infrastructure and utilities. We provide these essential facilities at a level acceptable for international companies and facilitate communication between our tenants and the government to ensure predictable transparency in bureaucratic procedures. This includes a one-stop service hub for business registration, licensing and permits, with government officials on-site.

How have the kinds of companies interested in the SEZ changed since you started 16 years ago?

At first, there were more garment factories, focused on simple-to-produce items such as

shoes, garments and packaging materials. Nowadays, we see less interest from the garment sector and more from electronics-parts manufacturers and other products that require fine, precise operations to produce. For example, Laurelton Diamonds, a subsidiary of Tiffany & Co., operates Tiffany's largest diamond-polishing factory in the world here.

Why do companies set up new manufacturing facilities here in Cambodia, as opposed to existing hubs in Thailand or Vietnam?

Many of the companies investing in new production facilities at the SEZ have already been operating in places like China or Thailand for years. For them, Cambodia is about diversifying their supply chain to hedge against the risks posed by natural disasters and geopolitical tensions. The 2011 floods in Thailand were a major catalyst for this; they paralysed the supply chains and opened manufacturers' eyes to the risks of concentrating production


in one location. Cambodia is benefitting from this ongoing trend of companies adopting "Thailand Plus One" and "China Plus One" strategies, but we are not seeing companies relocate their primary manufacturing hubs to the country.

Cambodia's role as a satellite hub for these larger markets makes improving connectivity essential. To this end, we began offering our own customs clearance services to our tenant factories. Now with three customs brokers, we have seen the cost of customs clearance for our tenants who use this service drop dramatically compared to before, sometimes by as much as 50 percent.

How much are companies in the SEZ able to source inputs locally?

Right now almost 100 percent of our tenants' industrial inputs are imported, but we are seeing promising developments. After COVID, we began to see a trend where small supply chains began to form in the SEZ around anchor tenants – like MinebeaMitsumi, Denso and Sumi. For example, a Hong Kong-based supplier of plastic parts for [electronics manufacturers] MinebeaMitsumi decided to open a factory here to facilitate easier access to parts for MinebeaMitsumi's factory in the SEZ.

How much do you see companies in the SEZ sourcing from Cambodian companies?

I only know of one case, a Cambodian metal-processing company that supplies equipment for some of the production lines in the SEZ. There is definitely a willingness to source products from Cambodian companies when the option is available, and the Japanese companies especially are happy to work with and provide training to domestic partners, so they can produce the requisite quality. The problem is that there is very little domestic investment in manufacturing, and thus very few Cambodian suppliers from whom to purchase equipment and other industrial inputs. 

Design. Strategy. Impact.

In an era when digital is reshaping the global landscape, ASEAN stands at a pivotal crossroads, where innovation and technology are transforming organisations and uplifting societies. Brains is a leading communications and design consultancy in the heart of this dynamic region working on solutions to tomorrow's problems.

Tackling complex issues from educational reform and gender equality to helping businesses boost their market presence and meaningfully engage their communities, Brains leverages digital and AI-driven insights to design strategies that truly resonate.



Marketing and communication strategy



Brand identity and positioning strategy



Design research



Business innovation

Let's tackle your business or social challenges together. Reach out to us at:

+855 23 210 933

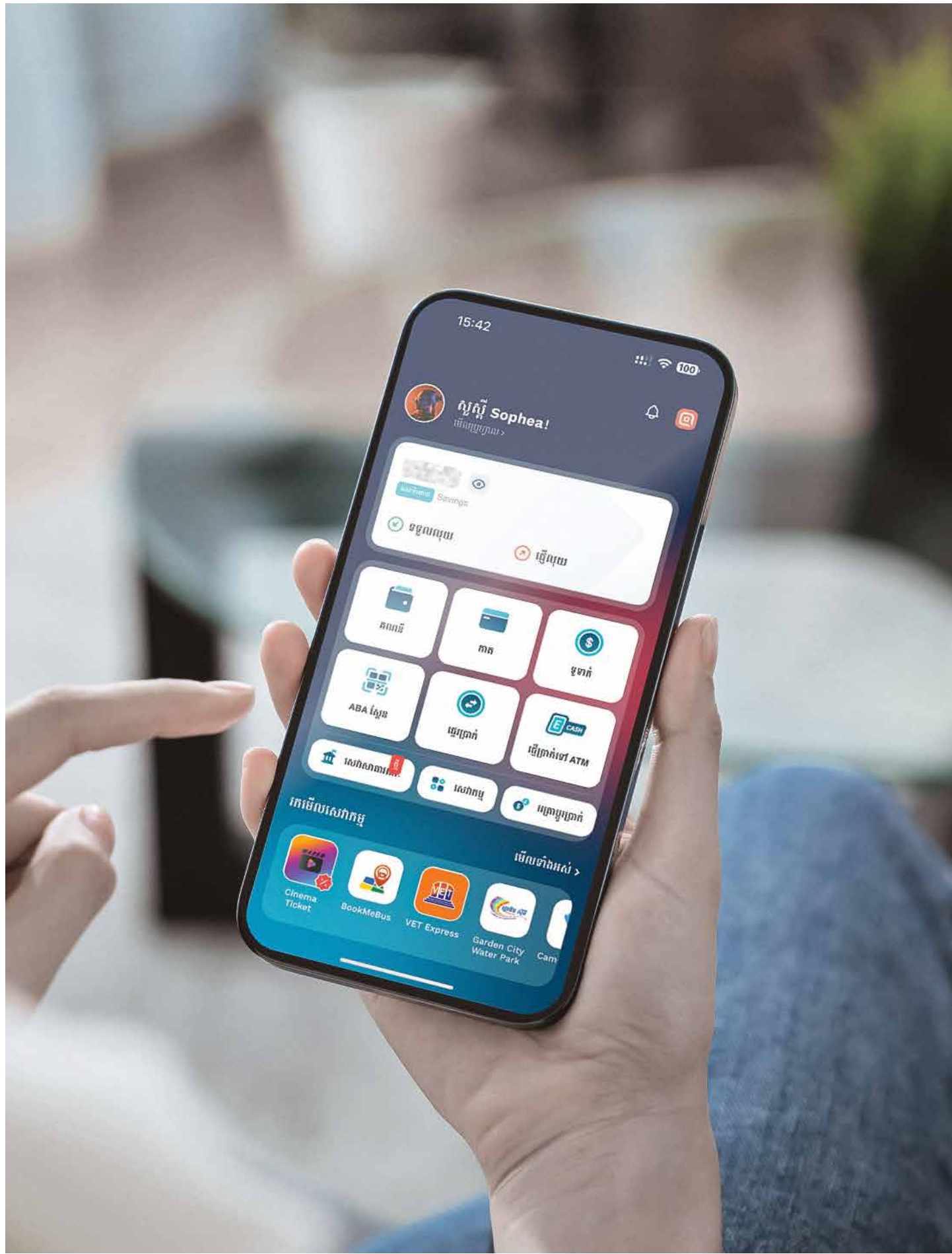
info@brains-comm.com

brains-comm.com

Follow us: @brains-comm

- Our clients:*
- GIZ Cambodia
 - EU Delegation to Cambodia
 - The United Nations
 - USAID
 - The Asia Foundation
 - Logitech
 - Smart
 - Dell
 - Total
 - Viber
 - and many more...





SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR CAMBODIA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY WHILE OTHERS LOOK BEYOND FINTECH

BY STEW POST

Walking into a market or shop just about anywhere in Cambodia, it is easy to see the impact of digital tools on the local economy. Smartphones are ubiquitous. QR codes hang in nearly every market stall, ready to accept payments. Customers use digital wallets for everyday purchases. While these tools and services are an important part of Cambodia's digital ecosystem, they only scratch the surface of the potential impact that technology can have on the national economy.

Thanks to high connectivity, a youthful demographic and favourable regulation, Cambodia's digital economy has expanded rapidly in recent years. Yet the ecosystem remains dominated by payment service and e-commerce providers while other use cases for technology have yet to be fully realised. Today, driven by industry leaders, technology associations, and startups, there is a renewed focus on expanding the scope of Cambodia's digital economy towards more innovative and cohesive solutions.

This need for broader functionality in the sector is echoed in the new government's Pentagonal Strategy, specifically in the Development of Digital Society and Economy section. Along with investing in digital infrastructure, developing human resources and building

trust in the environment, the government is committed to "continuing to develop the financial technology ecosystem to be more diverse," according to the comprehensive policy document.

As stated by the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC), 34 payment service providers vie for Cambodia's relatively small market – not to mention the dozens of banks and microfinance institutions operating in the country. A 2023 report from the Asian Development Bank found that the number of e-wallet accounts across the country grew from 4 million in July 2019 to nearly 18 million by the end of 2022. While some homegrown players such as Pi Pay and Bong Luy continue to play a significant role in the market, experts believe the space is reaching saturation.

"It may not be the best environment to deploy your QR code [startup] to try and compete with this particular solution. It would be naive to think you can do it now with the big guys, because they keep adding new features, e-commerce solutions, multiple things," explained Tomas Pokorny, Pi Pay co-founder and Secretary General of the Cambodian Association of Finance and Technology (CAFT).

Recognised by the NBC and partnered with dozens of financial institutions, payment service providers and fintech operators, CAFT plays a key role in

Easy banking: The ABA mobile app has helped to transform how money is moved

supporting tech innovators and linking them with businesses and government agencies. Two of Pokorny's "big guys" that continue to flex muscles in the digital financial space are Wing Bank and ABA bank.

As early proponents of Cambodia's fintech transformation, these firms set the standard for digital services offered by financial institutions. Once revolutionary solutions like internet banking, stand-alone cash-deposit machines and mobile apps have become industry standards. Currently, 37 of Cambodia's financial institutions offer mobile

"I think that digitalisation, tokenisation and cross-border integration will be on the top of the Cambodian ecosystem and across the region"

Tomas Pokorny, CAFT





On the fly: Digital payments have taken over from cash payments within record time

banking and, according to NBC reports, the total number of digital payment service transactions reached 1 billion in 2022.

Today, both Wing and ABA are exploring the potential of new technologies – including big data analytics, machine learning and generative AI – and how these tools can be folded into their operations. Likewise, robust cybersecurity protocols are being continually refined by the firms.

“We have a digital team of 200 people working on in-house product development,” said ABA’s Chief Digital Officer Zokhir Rosulov. “Once you are on this path of product development, the process is unstoppable. You continue working on new functions, new features, new developments, expansion.”

A broader network

While hardware and software developments will continue to impact the sector, other meaningful advances are approaching the crossroads of technology and diplomacy.

“I think that Cambodia is too small to think about these things alone. We need to be part of much larger ecosystems,” explained Pokorny. “I think that digitalisation, tokenisation and cross-border integration will be on the

top of the Cambodian ecosystem and across the region.”

To this end, a number of agreements have been signed both at home and abroad. Domestically, ABA has closed deals linking networks with Wing Bank and TrueMoney – another firm that started as a payment service provider and has since broadened its fintech services and established a strong presence in the country. According to Rosulov, this cooperation has further expanded his bank’s reach, allowing users to easily transfer funds between the three popular service providers. The deal also means that ABA customers are able to access their accounts from any of Wing and TrueMoney’s roughly 20,000 locations around the country, a development that significantly improves convenience in provinces far from the capital.

Internationally, deals with major players like Visa and Mastercard have expanded interoperability and brought ABA customers closer to the global market. Government efforts could take this to the next level.

“A milestone initiative is the Bakong National Payment Gateway by the National Bank of Cambodia,” said Wing Bank CEO Han Peng Kwang. “Using blockchain technology and open

APIs, Bakong has improved interoperability amongst many local financial institutions, streamlining transactions and benefitting all stakeholders.”

Launched in 2019, the NBC’s blockchain infrastructure, built on the open-source Iroha Hyperledger backbone, marked a significant step towards unifying Cambodia’s fractured digital payment service landscape. With 60 partners, from payment service providers to microfinance institutions and commercial banks, Bakong brought much-needed interoperability to the ecosystem, allowing merchants and customers to pay and receive funds from any group registered on the framework. The distributed-ledger technology, coupled with know-your-customer (KYC) protocols, can also reduce the threat of cybersecurity risks.

Alongside Bakong’s unifying impact domestically, the NBC is working to establish channels of interoperability within the region, broadening the scope of Cambodia’s digital economy through cross-border payment structures. A national QR code built on Bakong, called KHQR, was launched in July 2022 and quickly gained traction. With deals struck between the NBC and major players in Vietnam and China – including Alipay’s Ant International – and discussions with the Japanese government, Mastercard and Visa in the works, Cambodia’s network of partners continues to grow.

Visa is also partnering with Paypal, Venmo, TabaPay and other firms to build an international peer-to-peer

network while Mastercard is developing a platform to tokenise central bank digital currencies (CBDC) like Bakong for trade across networks.

As these trends continue, the NBC and private sector’s push for interoperability could have even more significant impacts in the coming years.

“You will be able to have any application in Cambodia, regardless of whether you have Visa card or Mastercard, and you will be able to go to any Union Pay QR merchant, any Visa QR merchant, any Mastercard QR merchant – which means pretty much the entire world including China – and pay using Bakong. That is game changing,” said Pokorny.

Levelling the field

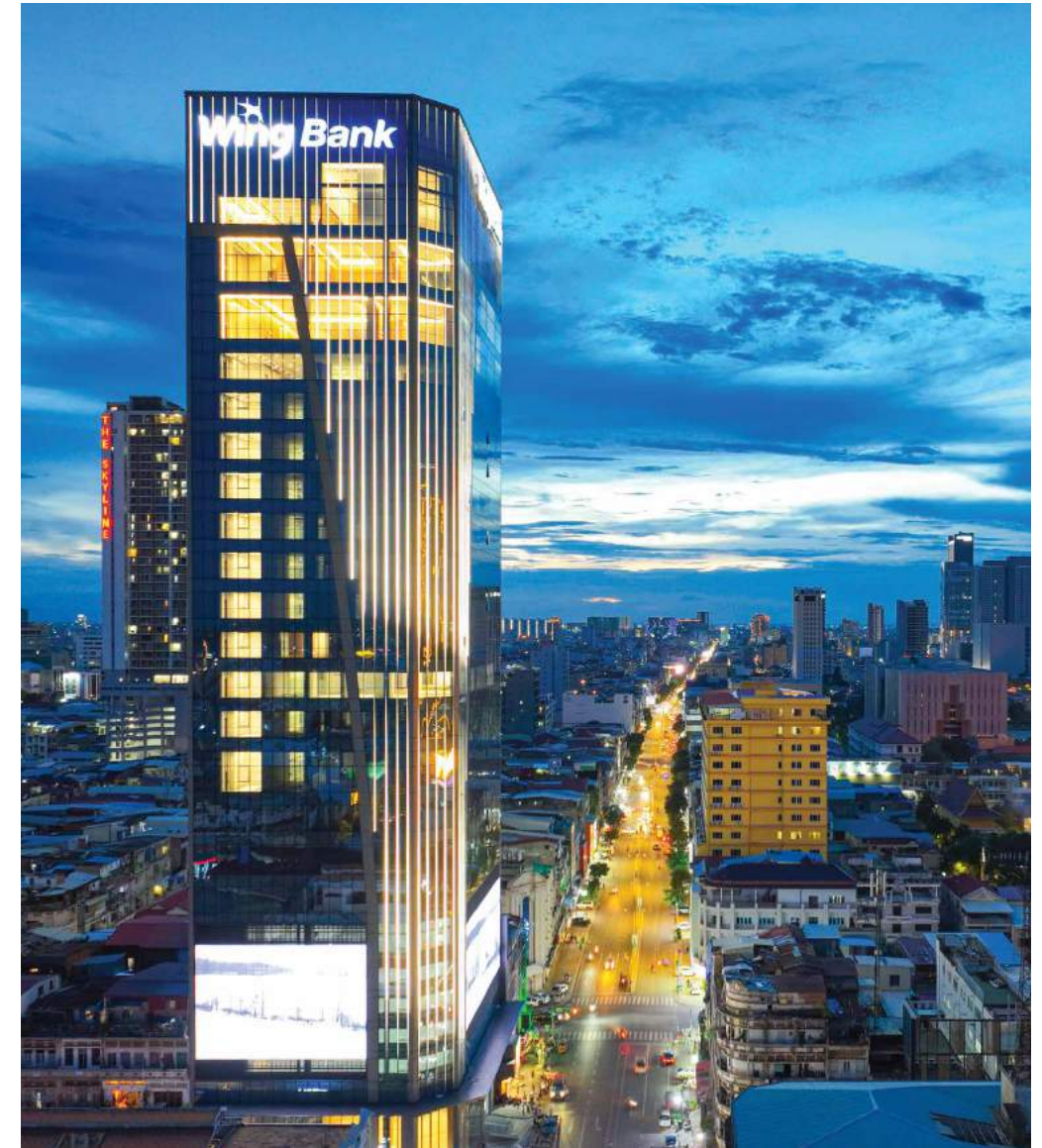
While the influence of government regulators and big players capable of investing millions on technology is undeniable, other firms in Cambodia’s fintech market have taken a different strategy to find success.

“There are banks that have good tech talent and good tech products,” said Gordon Peters, co-founder and CEO of Boost Capital. “But we think there is a good opportunity to level the playing field so that a greater number of banks have that type of technology advantage and can compete for customers digitally.”

Launched in 2018, Boost, along with such other firms as Morakot Technology, represent another side of Cambodia’s fintech sector. Recognising the opportunity presented by the growing demand for tech-forward services, Cambodia’s abundance of financial institutions and the challenge of competing with bigger players in the industry, these firms zeroed in on a Software as a Service (SaaS) model that leverages data analytics tools and other technologies to fill an important niche in the industry.

For Boost, a Facebook Messenger-inspired onboarding platform using chat services to ease the loan application process has become a core service offered to clients. By adapting a framework that users are already comfortable with – according to DataReportal, there were 11.65 million Facebook users in Cambodia in 2024 – Boost created an intuitive process that is well suited for the local population.

The chat-based format was also designed with financial education and inclusion in mind, as it offers customers



Progress: Originally a payment service provider, Wing has grown to a full-service bank

lessons on budget planning, personal loans and other financial strategies.

Initially working with financial institutions to streamline business procedures, Boost is expanding the scope of its focus and is currently planning its entrance into Cambodia’s growing insurance field. Offering electronic KYC functions as well as leveraging technologies like facial recognition, natural language processing, and utilising AI services from Google, Amazon and OpenAI, Boost provides digital solutions to more than 20 clients with plans to double that number by 2025. Since launch, the firm has processed over 2 million loan applications in Cambodia, the Philippines and Singapore and is in contract discussions with partners in Indonesia, India and Thailand to expand services in the coming years. ▶

“Once you are on this path of product development, the process is unstoppable. You continue working on new functions, new features”

Zokhir Rosulov, ABA Bank



“A milestone initiative is the Bakong National Payment Gateway by the National Bank of Cambodia”

Han Peng Kwang, Wing Bank



SaaS is likely to continue levelling the playing field for smaller operations and emerging businesses looking to go digital. Peters believes that firms like his and Marakot have had a significant impact on the fintech space. However, he sees the growing role of technology within Cambodia's economy reaching beyond financial institutions and banking software.

"The fintech space has been broadened out a lot by the large players, but it's both big and small players that are helping to develop it. Firms like ours are helping to do that," Peters said. "I think all of the other sectors that you see in tech and other spaces have some tangential fintech elements, so fintech growth is accelerating different markets as well."

Beyond finance

At Phnom Penh's Techo Startup Centre (TSC) – a government partner working to create a favourable environment for startups and promoting digital businesses through research, entrepreneurial support and technology – agriculture is just one these different markets being explored.

"Cambodia is an agrarian country. We produce a lot of agricultural products, but we still import a huge amount of vegetables from neighbouring countries. This is a problem," explained Ratha Hem, resident agricultural value chain expert at TSC. "We are trying to introduce technology that is available, affordable and useful, so that we can supplement human labour."

According to a 2021 report from the Cambodian Development Research Institute, "technology in agriculture such as AI, drone, and farm-based technology is immensely needed." Under the Ministry of Rural Development's overarching Sustainable Assets for Agriculture Markets, Business and Trade (SAAMBAT) programme, aimed at reducing poverty by increasing productivity and incomes in rural communities, TSC is exploring these use cases.

One project laying a foundation for the sector is the Khmer Agriculture Suite (KAS). An open digital platform, KAS will serve as the base layer upon which "satellite applications" can be connected in order to develop a comprehensive and unified agritech ecosystem. Producers, startups, service providers and community associations are just a few of the stakeholders that will be

linked on the platform. One element of the programme that is currently operational and gaining traction is the KAS Portal. This is an e-commerce marketplace in the style of Facebook that, similar to Boost Capital's strategy, leverages the familiarity of the social media platform to reach new users.

"Many people may not know how to use a lot of digital tools. But they can buy something from Facebook," said Vutha Kuong, Digital Technology Coordinator at the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the TSC. "Based on this, we built a portal that is easy to use so that people can place orders with a seller, they can negotiate, they can sell. They can send voice messages if they don't know how to write."

While developing an easy-to-use e-commerce system is important to increasing the profitability of the nation's millions of small farmers, this is the tip of the iceberg of the agritech developments being explored at TSC.

Two of four grantees from SAAM-BAT's Digital Agriculture Accelerator Challenge Fund developing new solutions to common problems in farming and food production are Solar Green Energy (SOGE) and Chalatex.

Both companies are exploring the ways that internet of things (IoT) can be used by farmers across the country, with some promising results.

Chalatex is working together with farmers to solve their water-usage issues through technology. Using sensors to measure soil moisture, temperature and humidity in real time, the



"There is a good opportunity to level the playing field so that a greater number of banks have that type of technology advantage and can compete for customers digitally"

Gordon Peters, Boost Capital

"We built a portal that is easy to use so that people can place orders with a seller, they can negotiate, they can sell"

Vutha Kuong, MEF and TSC



firm creates smart irrigation systems that can be scheduled, monitored and controlled through an app on farmers' smart phones.

Similarly, SOGE offers solutions incorporating renewable-energy that are already demonstrating their value for small-scale producers. A solar-powered electric pump fitted with a programmable SIM card has allowed a community in Kampong Chhnang province to ensure equal access to water for every household and farm plot.

With more startups exploring agritech, and thanks to the support of partners like TSC, there is hope that the strategic use of technology can be scaled up and expanded to energise Cambodia's underutilised agricultural sector. And while much of the groundwork for Cambodia's digital transformation has been laid by big players in the financial space, the overwhelming popularity of these solutions demonstrates the potential of broader use cases for digital tools. Eventually, new technologies could be leveraged across every important industry in the Kingdom.

"Currently we are seeing the adoption of fintech; we are finding new and easy ways to do traditional actions," explained Kuong. "Even if we are a little bit behind in terms of the development, if we cannot follow the path of innovation and technology in fintech, agritech, cleantech, our economy will be left behind." F

Paving the road to sustainable economic growth



Digital innovation in Cambodia presents exciting opportunities for financial inclusion and progress

Much of the Cambodian economy remains outside the formal sector, with many businesses and individuals still unbanked and making payments primarily with cash. How is Visa facilitating financial inclusion in Cambodia?

Financial inclusion plays a critical role in the development of emerging economies such as Cambodia's. Access to formal credit can be one of the key drivers of financial inclusion. Along with providing the commercial sector with liquidity, credit enables individuals to accomplish critical tasks such as starting a business, securing a mortgage, getting a student loan, and even purchasing daily necessities.

In this context, credit cards can act as a form of controlled micro-finance by allowing consumers to access credit and build a positive credit history. Unlocking modern forms of credit lowers the barrier to entry for financial services and brings more Cambodians into the formal financial sector, encouraging safe and responsible payment transactions.

Small businesses form the backbone of the Cambodian economy. What challenges and opportunities do these businesses face in a global marketplace? What benefits can digital transformation provide?

SMBs form about 98% of businesses in Cambodia, and often face barriers when it comes to digitalisation and finding the right payment solutions for their business. The convenience, ease and safety of digital payments enables SMBs to acquire more customers. Digital payments and platforms provide SMBs with access to important markets so they can grow their business. They also help owners manage inventory, workflow, sales and marketing – saving time and cost.

Take the case of smallholder farmers in Cambodia. Digital finance can integrate them into the value chain and vitalize

the agriculture sector. Digital solutions such as online payments can be a key instrument allowing farmers to conduct fast, safe, low-cost transactions in small amounts on their mobile phones, facilitating the shift from cash to digital for the trade of their crops.

Furthermore, formal proof of digital transaction receipts provides businesses with a depth and transparency of data, which can be required for them to access ongoing credit and raise funds to maintain strong cash flow. Digitally enabling a small business can have a dramatic impact on a business' performance.

Financial authorities in Cambodia have warned the public of the threat of fraud and scams. How does Visa balance convenience with security in the future of digital payment?

A challenge that Cambodia faces – along with other countries/territories in the region – is various forms of fraud. Last year, the National Bank of Cambodia urged the public to embrace financial education to safeguard against fraud. We applaud and support measures by authorities to thwart money scams.

To stay ahead of the dynamically shifting threat landscape, we refreshed the Visa Security Roadmap, outlining the steps we are taking in collaboration with our partners to make digital commerce safe for all stakeholders. As a global industry leader in payments, Visa has been a stalwart supporter of a strong digital payments ecosystem in Cambodia, by upskilling the banking sector in innovation and generating efficiencies.

Digital payments are increasingly international. How is Visa facilitating cross-border payments? What impact do you think this will have on Cambodia's tourist industry?

As Cambodia's economy emerges, it will



Ms Ivana Tranchini, Visa Country Manager for Cambodia – Interview with Focus Cambodia

need the latest cross-border payment technologies to help it thrive. We have seen Cambodia recently launch bilateral cross-border QR payment links with neighboring Vietnam, Laos and Thailand so that travellers pay in their local currencies.

Late last year, Visa expanded its services so now Cambodian travellers visiting Mainland China can link their Visa cards to accounts in WeChat Pay and Alipay wallets to pay for purchases at millions of stores for dining, transportation, shopping, daily spending and more.

These kinds of innovations that facilitate payments by anyone, anywhere will be a key to unlocking the potential of Cambodia's tourism industry. Visa is also a leader in business-to-business payment, with its Visa B2B Connect, a multilateral network that delivers B2B cross-border payments that are predictable, secure and cost-effective.

BOLD MOVES

CAMBODIA'S NATIONAL BANK GOVERNOR, DR CHEA SEREY, PUSHES MULTIPLE BOUNDARIES BEYOND THEIR ESTABLISHED STANDARDS

WORDS BY STEW POST
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAUL ARIANO

To say that Dr Chea Serey stays busy is an understatement. As Governor of the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC), she is responsible for overseeing the nation's crowded banking sector, as well as devising and implementing some of the most cutting-edge financial projects being developed in Cambodia. Gaining recognition locally, regionally and increasingly around the world thanks to a constant drive to innovate the Cambodian banking sector and the launch of Bakong, the NBC's flagship quasi-central bank digital currency project, Serey continues to push the boundaries of banking and finance in Cambodia's rapidly expanding digital economy.

One of few women in Cambodia holding high office, she represents a new generation of government officials and policy makers who are guiding Cambodia into a new era. From fintech and financial inclusion to global cooperation and climate change, the NBC policies that will shape the coming decade are, in large part, a product of Serey's forward-looking perspective and passion for her work, as well as a commitment to contributing to her country's socio-economic development.

One angle to fulfil this passion is creating a path for Cambodia's roughly 5.5 million under-banked citizens to take advantage of the financial services and tools offered by hundreds of financial institutions.

"Access to finance has been recognised by the United Nations as one of the key tools to reduce poverty," she said. "People who are able to access formal financial services are able to improve their livelihoods by freeing their income to grow their business using money that they've borrowed."

Serey believes that digital tools are key to achieving financial inclusion, including the e-wallets and payment service providers (PSP) that dominate Cambodia's dynamic fintech space. Serey sees these tools, which serve an important purpose by enabling digital transactions worth billions of dollars annually, as a

stepping stone rather than an end goal.

"Digital payments allow people to access financial services easier," she explained. "If we are able to bring them into the digital payment space, they'll create a digital footprint. With this footprint they can create a profile for themselves, when they become a student and need a student loan, or when they settle down and have a family and need to buy a house. These footprints create a history of their payment behaviour that would allow banks to better understand them and, therefore, create a credit product that is suitable for them."

Serey is not alone in her ambition for broader, more meaningful digital financial services to improve access to capital for Cambodia's students, entrepreneurs and homebuyers. Market leaders like Wing and ACLEDA, as well as a host of other players are all working to expand their digital services and provide access to loans, often without the need for collateral.

While getting capital into the hands of people across the country is important for individuals, families and the national economy, there are risks associated with the increased availability of loans. Due to Cambodia's saturation of providers, over-indebtedness has been cited by a number of economic watchdogs and human-rights organisations as leading to problematic outcomes for borrowers across the country. Understanding these potential risks, Serey believes that it is essential for education, outreach and training to go hand-in-hand with efforts to increase financial inclusion.

"Being able to access funding can help improve someone's life, of course, but not everyone knows how to use it properly and that is something that we need to work on. What is important is educating people on how to use

finance properly and not to fall into a trap of too much debt," she explained. "Financial literacy is definitely something that the central bank has been working on through various channels, whether on our website called Let's Talk Money, or on our Youtube channel where we publish short videos about educating people on managing their finances properly, and asking the right questions to financial institutions."

This outreach is a key part of the NBC's efforts to lay a foundation for financial literacy in the country. However, it's not the only strategy being used with education in mind.

Opened in 2019 to commemorate the NBC's 40th anniversary, Phnom Penh's SOSORO Museum is an interactive space chronicling

2,000 years of monetary history in the Kingdom (see page 124). It is carefully curated and home to dozens of exhibits. Guests follow Cambodia's lineage of empires and societies and learn about the different systems of payment, finance and economics that shaped these cultures. Designed to spark curiosity about the way that money works and influences society, the museum is a treasure

trove of interactive exhibits, ancient artefacts and unique learning experiences.

As visitors trace Cambodia's monetary history from the barter systems of Angkor through the vibrant currency of the French Protectorate period, they eventually reach the UNTAC era following the Paris Peace Accords of 1991. The US dollar became the main currency due to its reliability and strength, while the Khmer riel was rebuilt, establishing a de facto dual currency system that the NBC continues to manage. While much has been made in recent years of the efforts aimed at Cambodia's so-called de-dollarization, Serey is quick to

"We don't call it de-dollarization because it gives the understanding that we want to take the US dollar out of the economy, which is not the case. What we want to do is increase the use of the local currency"

Steady: Dr Chea Serey, Governor of the National Bank of Cambodia, has gained international recognition for her forward-looking policies



Authority: Dr Chea Serey markets her vision with verve and determination. Watch the full video interview, filmed at SOSORO Museum, at Focus-Cambodia.com

point out that the issue is more complex than simply switching from the US dollar to the Cambodian riel.

“We don’t call it de-dollarization because it gives the understanding that we want to take the US dollar out of the economy, which is not the case,” she said. “What we want to do is increase the use of the local currency.”

Citing the benefits of this quasi dual-currency system, Serey noted the relative monetary stability and increased confidence of international investors that the US dollar provides. However, she also laid bare the complications that using foreign currency can create at the macroeconomic scale and the reasoning behind the NBC’s efforts to promote the Cambodian riel.

“Ultimately, we need to strengthen the use of our own local currency, simply because if we don’t use enough of our own currency we will lose independence and certain tools used in conducting our monetary policies,” she explained. “As the name suggests, when you carry out monetary policy, you manage money and you can’t manage money that you don’t print. You can only manage money that you print, and in this case, I can only manage Khmer riel.”

Along with efforts to increase use of the riel, the NBC’s primary tools for monetary policy are managing reserve requirements for financial institutions and controlling the exchange rates on foreign currency. The NBC has also developed a money market by issuing Negotiable Certificates of Deposits (NCDs) that allow interbank lending on a secured basis and mitigate risks associated with liquidity management.

Her vision for Cambodia’s economic future reaches far beyond the borders of the Kingdom. Through a host of international projects – including memoranda of understanding (MoU) focused on fintech solutions and information sharing with other developing countries such as Rwanda, Fiji and the Solomon Islands – the NBC continues to cut a path as an innovator in the sector.



International growth: Dr Chea Serey and Saito Ken, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, celebrate a digital payment partnership agreement on December 18, 2023, in Tokyo

Closer to home, cooperation with neighbours Laos and Thailand has led to the launch of QR code payment systems that facilitate cross-border purchases and could help drive sub-regional connectivity and trade. Digital frameworks to streamline the remittance process for Cambodia’s roughly one million migrant workers in the region are under development as well. This global perspective can also be felt in Serey’s

concerns about climate change and the NBC’s responsibilities and policies regarding green financing and risk mitigation.

“As a central bank we have to lead by example,” she said. “So as part of our strategy, we make sure we don’t invest in projects that adversely affect climate change, such as deforestation and oil industries; even though those are sectors that are generating a higher return.”

Along with this careful investment strategy, the NBC is developing a green finance taxonomy to guide financial institutions in their own efforts to tackle climate change. Serey and her team are working on disclosure protocols to give banks and financial institutions a pathway to inform clients and regulators about the ways that they are investing in green finance and supporting Cambodia’s efforts to address the existential threat of the climate crisis at home.

Looking ahead, Serey and her colleagues at the NBC continue to examine all the available pathways to support Cambodia’s economic development in a globalised and increasingly digitalised world. Even when dealing with challenges as monumental as climate change, the ambition tempered by pragmatism that has become a hallmark of her work shines through.

“This is not something that one agency can work on. We need cooperation with many agencies. Not even just in a domestic context but also regional and global contexts,” she said. “These are much bigger issues. For us, we are just trying to do what we can within our understanding and within our power.”

Building a Better Bank, One Relationship at a Time

As CEO Nicolas Hollanders looks out from his office window onto the never-ending traffic on Norodom Boulevard, he can be more than pleased with the progress being made at BRED Bank Cambodia



“Since BRED arrived in Cambodia, our ambition has been to be the Kingdom’s best bank for business,” he says. “We now serve many of the biggest companies in the country and we have a comprehensive and compelling offer that appeals to progressive SMEs. So, I know that Cambodia’s businesses really appreciate the BRED way of working.”

Of course, globally, BRED has a definitive approach to business. “Wherever we operate in the world, from our HQ in Paris to Fiji, Djibouti or Phnom Penh, everything we do is built around strong, personal relationships,” says Mr. Hollanders. “Whether it’s business or personal banking, every customer has access to a talented Relationship Manager who can tailor the bank’s products and services

to each individual’s precise needs. That’s a powerful attraction for our customers here in Cambodia – especially successful businesses and wealthy individuals who have complex financial needs.”

Deputy CEO Sopha Min echoes his CEO’s sentiments. “Our customers need a bank they can really trust,” he says. “They know we’re backed by one of the biggest banking groups in Europe and they can see that BRED is absolutely committed to long-

term growth in the Cambodian market. With our exceptional sectoral expertise, market insights, dedicated relationship management and state-of-the-art digital banking, we’re able to help our customers to get exactly the right blend of products and services they require to drive their business forward.”

Although BRED Bank Cambodia has a strong business focus, the bank’s personal banking offering has also gone from strength to strength over the years. With 15 branches across Cambodia and a sophisticated suite of personal banking products (including an excellent Premier Banking service) BRED has quickly become an influential player in a clearly defined market segment.

“Our proposition suits very specific audiences,” insists Head of Branch Network Vannak Sam. “While we have built a range of services and products for international corporate customers, we also offer the same standard of service to SMEs and individuals. This allows us to provide the personalised, relationship-based support that our customers appreciate.”

With a focus on the higher end of the banking market, BRED Bank Cambodia has developed a strong value proposition that

covers everything from savings to home loans, credit cards to KHQR. “The important thing for us is being able to provide everything each customer really needs,” says Mr. Hollanders.

While face-to-face contact is an integral part of the BRED Bank relationship management and branch banking proposition, the bank has enthusiastically embraced the digital future. “With BRED Business Connect, we provide our business customers with exceptional online banking that allows them to complete a very broad range of transactions at any time,” says Sopha Min. “It’s a powerful system that can run everything from payroll to high-value transfers to trade finance requests.”

Personal banking customers also benefit from BRED Connect, the bank’s handy app and online banking service that allows personal banking customers to manage their money at any time. “While we value personal relationships, we’re right up to date with the digital world,” says Mr. Hollanders. “It’s important to get that balance just right.”

To find out more about BRED Bank Cambodia, visit bredcambodia.com.kh

BRIDGES TO OPPORTUNITY

CAMBODIA'S ECONOMY ENTERS A NEW PHASE IN 2024. GROWTH IS EXPECTED TO BE DRIVEN BY INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES, FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND A REBOUND OF TOURISM

BY STEW POST



With an underwhelming performance during 2023 in the rear-view mirror, Cambodia's economic outlook has experts tempering optimism with caution for 2024. A host of factors are likely to influence the country's financial state, from geopolitical developments and foreign investment to the steady return of international tourism to the Kingdom. The nation's real-estate sector, once a key driver of the national economy, is expected to stay muted, with an eventual turnaround on the horizon.

Topping the annual FDI Standouts Watchlist, "Cambodia is expected to carry the strongest investment momentum into 2024"

At the macro level, the outlook is positive. Cambodia's economic growth rate in 2023 reached a respectable 5.4 percent. According to the World Bank's semiannual economic outlook, it is expected to reach 5.8 percent in 2024 and 6.1 percent the following year. The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) predictions are slightly more optimistic, with key sectors such as tourism and manufacturing expected to push economic growth to 6.0 percent in 2024. The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) analysis is aligned with the ADB estimates, while the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) predicts growth for 2024 to reach 6.6 percent. Apart from this main economic indicator sparking optimism, there are other important trends to be on the lookout for.

Foreign investment

An important source of capital that has driven the economy in recent years, foreign direct investment (FDI) is likely to increase in 2024. According to FDI Intelligence, a research and data analysis firm, Cambodia leads in FDI capital expenditure as well as FDI projects.

Topping the group's annual FDI Standouts Watchlist, "Cambodia is expected to carry the strongest investment momentum into 2024." Compound annual growth rates for these indicators both saw significant improvement, earning the Kingdom an "FDI Momentum Index Score" of 96.11 out of 100.

China continued to dominate the inflows of foreign capital into the Kingdom. Since 2021, the country has been responsible for two-thirds of green-field FDI entering Cambodia with most investment going towards infrastructure and logistics construction.

As the manufacturing sector continues to drift away from the still crucial garment exports, industry and trade is likely to be a growing driver of FDI in the coming years. A number of bilateral free-trade agreements, as well as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with 14 other Indo-Pacific nations, give hope that international commerce will bounce back in 2024. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the United Arab Emirates was also finalised, while progress is being made in negotiations for a free-trade agreement with India.

With these trade agreements offering paths for Cambodian products to reach broader markets, some observers expect renewed interest from foreign businesses looking to capitalise on the expansion of Cambodia's manufacturing sector. Likewise, as large companies pursue China Plus One strategies and the appeal of ASEAN as an alternative manufacturing base continues to grow, Cambodia will likely benefit from inflows of foreign capital to and from the region.

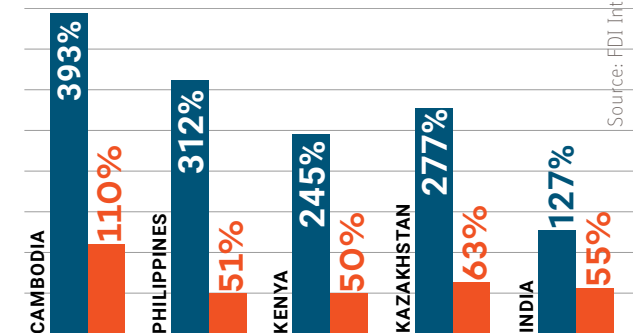
With the removal of Cambodia from the Financial Action Task Force's grey-list for money laundering and terrorism funding in 2023, there are hopes that sources of FDI will become more diversified. The nation's reputation on the global stage as a safe and lucrative investment destination continues to improve.

Tourism and infrastructure

Another key contributor to Cambodia's national economy, tourism is expected to continue its recovery since the sector was ground to a halt by the COVID pandemic in 2020. The country saw international and domestic tourism earn more than 3 billion USD in 2023, with a total of 5.45 million international visitors entering the Kingdom. ▶

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

■ Capex Growth (2021-2023)
■ Growth in Projects (2021-2023)



Source: FDI Intelligence 2023



Exploring Cambodia: Tourism is expected to increase in 2024 from historically low levels in 2023

There was also a notable return of Chinese tourists, a previously significant demographic that all but disappeared following the pandemic. Nearly 550,000 visitors from China entered the Kingdom in 2023. While promising in light of the collapse of the industry in recent years and representing a meaningful increase from 2022, these are still well below the pre-COVID tourism figures.

There are also hopes that some of the recent bilateral trade agreements and the establishment of closer economic ties with target nations will boost tourism to Cambodia.

Though likely to have a delayed impact, ongoing investment in infrastructure across the country will drive economic growth in the long term. Along with the new airport in Siem Reap, Phnom Penh's Techo International Airport is

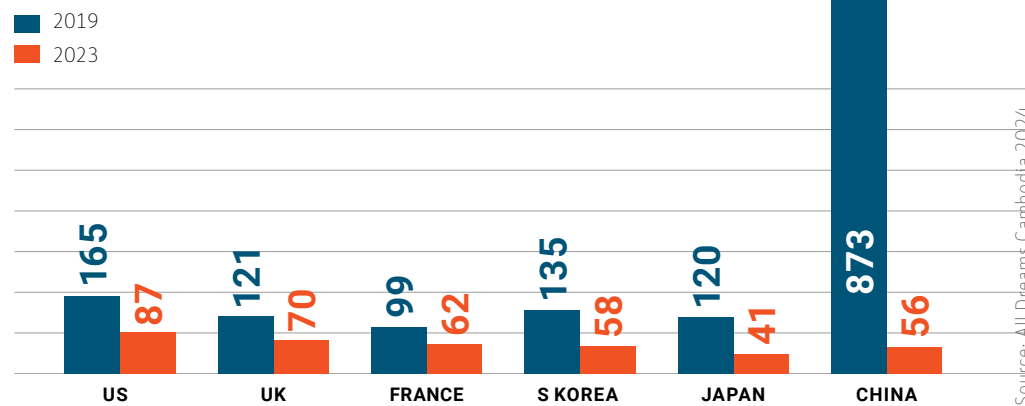
scheduled to be operational by the first half of 2025. It will be a 4F-Class airport that is capable of receiving long-distance international flights.

Additionally, coastal Kampot's 200 million USD tourist seaport was completed in 2022 with a larger, 1.5 billion USD commercial deep-sea port having begun construction the same year.

There have been speedy developments in overland infrastructure, notably the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville expressway. Opened in 2022, the highway cut driving time from the capital to the coast from six hours to two. Fast roads are being developed between Battambang and Sisophon, Kampot and Takeo, and Phnom Penh and Bavet (connecting to Ho Chi Minh City). Within the capital, new bridges rise as the city expands.

Phnom Penh's new Techo International Airport is scheduled to be operational by the first half of 2025. It will be a 4F-Class airport, capable of receiving long-distance international flights

APSARA ANGKOR TICKET SALES
(IN THOUSANDS OF VISITORS)



Real estate

Across the real-estate sector, subdued market sentiment has reeled in the bustling growth of the pre-COVID era.

One key trend influencing the sector has been a rise in interest rates. From June 2022 to October 2023, rates on term loans rose from 8.48 to 10.7 percent as reported by the National Bank. According to Credit Bureau Cambodia, consumer finance debt reached 15 billion USD for the first time, accompanied by a 9.7 percent increase in late payments exceeding 30 days.

This led to the imposition of lending limits by financial institutions and a reduction in the launch of new projects across the sector. Approved investment in construction in the last quarter of 2023 was down 54 percent from 2019. The restrictive lending landscape and ongoing oversupply has tilted the market in favour of the consumer, as developers, property owners and landlords compete for a smaller pool of renters and buyers.

While this slowdown has some in the industry concerned, many experts see it as a natural reaction to overabundance and an opportunity for the market to absorb the existing supply. In 2023 alone, more than 108,000 square metres of office space, 14,300 square metres of retail space, and 17,400 units of unsold condominium inventory were all absorbed into the market, according to commercial property management firm CBRE. Government efforts to kickstart stalled developments in Sihanoukville will likely further drive this trend (see page 22).

In the immediate future, Cambodia's economy will likely see steady but subdued growth, as the real-estate market undergoes a price correction and tourism continues to recover. In the long term, the interaction and synergy between key trends is likely to improve Cambodia's economic trajectory.

Continued investment in infrastructure will improve the Kingdom's attractiveness as a destination for FDI, while inflows of foreign capital – notably into manufacturing and value-added agricultural products – could drive new industries. As Southeast Asia becomes an increasingly popular alternative to China for international businesses, Cambodia is well positioned to leverage its strategic location and reform-oriented governance to ride a rising wave. **F.**

CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

KNIGHT FRANK'S **ROSS WHEBLE** ON CAMBODIA'S TURBULENT PROPERTY MARKET DEVELOPMENT AND THE RECOVERY PERIOD AHEAD

What do you think will be the key trends and driving forces shaping the real estate and construction industry in 2024, and beyond?

It's obviously been a crazy four years, COVID in 2020, then coming out of that, the geopolitical situation with Russia and Ukraine and then rising interest rates in the US as well. So 2023 was a challenging year, not just in Cambodia, but around the world.

For 2024, we are much more optimistic about the market. The National Bank of Cambodia is projecting that GDP growth will be driven by tourism, which has bounced back massively in December and January. Also in manufacturing; Cambodia is diversifying away from garment and textiles, which historically have been the main drivers of the sector. Lots of infrastructure development is happening as well, which drives demand for real estate and real-estate pricing. There's no two ways about that.

The new international airport is open in Siem Reap, the new international airport in Phnom Penh is set to open in 2025, and the highway from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville has been a true game changer.

What do you see as the key challenges and opportunities in the real-estate sector?

There is oversupply across all sectors. That's residential, condos, land, housing, boreys, offices, and hotels as well. More recently, there has been a price correction, especially for land. What we're seeing now is a true reflection of what we believe is market value.

Before, there was a lot of speculation, similar to the situation in Vietnam and other countries in the region. After the pricing correction, there are much more realistic prices. That in itself represents opportunities for people with cash, that have liquidity and are looking for investment opportunities.

So, I'd say 2024 is the year for people being able to buy good-valued properties, particularly around the end of 2024. My personal view is that there

will be a period of stagnation for three to five years as the current oversupply is absorbed into the market. We are seeing some of that now, but it will take a few years more. Then we will see the market rebounding.

Given the uncertainty surrounding China's domestic market, what role do you see the country playing in Cambodia's real-estate landscape in the coming years?

As a whole I don't see Chinese real estate uncertainty as having a huge impact, in that the Chinese real-estate developers here are relatively few in number. Chinese FDI has been much more focused on government-to-government contracts in agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure and not so dependent on the real-estate sector.

The majority of real estate development has been focused around Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville. Are there any parts of the country that you see as having potential in the coming years?

Kampong Speu without a doubt. With the new expressway between Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, Kampong Speu has been the province that has received the most attention. It is a major investment area, particularly for industrial and logistics. Agriculture also has massive potential and we have seen some big groups coming in. There are a lot of opportunities there.

Closer to the capital, across the Mekong River in Arey Ksat where they will be building bridges, there will be huge potential. We call it the "Southern growth corridor," from Hun Sen Boulevard towards the new international airport, and now Chbar Ampov with the new bridge connecting Diamond Island to Koh Norea. Our view is that the key growth areas in the future will be to the south and to the east.

If you had a message for someone entering the market, what would you say?

After the sharp drop in 2023, I think 2024 represents really good value for



Building a kingdom: Many construction projects are on hold as the market takes a break driven by oversupply

investors to come in and acquire assets that are much more aligned with what market value should be, and for Cambodia to become a platform for manufacturing and agriculture reaching the wider Mekong Delta market. For example, there was recently an inauguration at a cold storage facility at the Phnom Penh Port. All of this type of infrastructure will benefit the market and is a key factor in terms of supporting growth in Cambodia. There are many windows of opportunity, but they need to be opened the right way. **F.**



As country head for independent real-estate consultancy Knight Frank Cambodia, **Ross Wheble** oversees the operational business, focusing on investment transactions, valuation, research and corporate advisory. Wheble started his career in the real-estate sector in 2005 and gained extensive experience in London and Kuala Lumpur before taking over the Cambodian business for Knight Frank. He is also Vice Chairman of the EuroCham Cambodia Real Estate and Construction Committee.

“After the pricing correction, there are much more realistic prices. That in itself represents opportunities for people with cash”

QUALITY IS KEY

CAMBODIAN AGRO-PROCESSORS ARE ACHIEVING SUCCESS THROUGH HIGHER STANDARDS AND RESPONSIBLE PRACTICES

BY IAN HOLLINGER



Competitive: Kirirom Food Production aims to compete on a global scale through volume of quality

While economies of scale are critical to bringing down costs and competing in global markets, operating at a larger scale brings new challenges as well. While it is not difficult for a smaller business to source enough organic produce, the quantities available in the market are insufficient for a larger industrial concern. Kirirom has tried to manage this through developing its own 600-hectare plantation to produce certified organic mangoes.

As with HCST, engaging with contract farmers also plays a role. “We are seriously working with small-holder farmers to ensure a sustainable supply of fresh mango,” said Meas.

Cambodian agro-processors are not just expanding their place in existing export markets, but moving into entirely new market segments as well. UNIDO’s CAPfish Capture programme is on the verge of enabling the export of Cambodian fisheries products to the European Union, with an EU audit of the sector expected to be completed in 2024. Despite Cambodia’s abundant fisheries, the lack of a robust regulatory regime governing food safety has long hobbled the country’s access to international markets.

Through its work with small and medium-sized enterprises to improve food safety practices, as well as key regulatory stakeholders to develop the necessary capacities and legal instruments required, Cambodia appears poised to clear the high bar set by the EU for animal product imports. If the nation succeeds, the payoff is potentially huge.

“Once you meet the EU’s requirements, you’ve met the global food safety

requirement,” said T.S. Shetty, Senior Technical Advisor at UNIDO. “The EU certification is like a global passport, because it is the best in the world.”

Acquiring this certification could go a long way to drive investment into the fisheries industry, said Shetty: “Once Cambodia is listed as an eligible country to export to the global market, including the European Union, then we expect that substantial investment will take place in the country.”

To spearhead this entry into European markets, CAPfish has selected a number of companies producing traditional Cambodian goods, like fish sauce and prahok, aiming to use the nation’s heritage as a way to differentiate Cambodian products from the competition.

“When our enterprises visited supermarkets and traders in Paris, they saw a great deal of products marked as ‘Cambodian style,’” said Shetty. “There is a great deal of interest in Cambodia because of the linkage to the country’s cultural heritage and history.”

While some of these companies are doubling down on heritage, others are looking to transform traditional Cambodian products for success in a different cultural environment. Confirel, one of four agro-processing companies selected by CAPfish to enter the European market, has developed an entirely new dried prahok product in a bid to introduce Western audiences to the traditional Cambodian condiment.

“The main disadvantages of prahok [for Western consumers] are its smell and saltiness,” said Hay Ly Eang, CEO and founder of Confirel. “Therefore, we adjusted the disadvantages.”

The goal is for Western consumers to adapt this prahok variant to be used as a seasoning in their own cuisines, the way pepper or chile might be. “Before, we had never thought of using prahok for making pizza,” Eang said, recalling a culinary experiment. “But when we tried it, we got a lot of positive feedback from foreign consumers.”

Introducing a completely new condiment to consumers who may have never even heard of prahok – much like expanding the agro-processing sector as a whole – has been a process of gradual growth from a low base rather than one of dramatic transformation.

“When we can only swim 100 metres, we cannot push ourselves to swim a kilometre,” said Eang. “If we do so, we’ll surely die.” **F.**



“Cambodia is mainly exporting raw commodities, but not making much out of it in terms of added value”

Bryan Fornari
EU Delegation

Cambodia’s agro-processing industry has long existed in the shadow of its bigger, more established neighbours. For decades, the country’s agricultural sector has been relegated to exporting raw agricultural products to Thailand and Vietnam for processing. As late as last year, Cambodia was processing only 5 percent of the cashews it was producing, and many consumers who ate those nuts did so without knowing cashews even grow in Cambodia.

“Cambodia is mainly exporting raw commodities, but not making much out of it in terms of added value for Cambodians,” said Bryan Fornari, Head of Cooperation at the European Delegation.

Structural challenges such as high electricity and logistics costs, low labour productivity and lack of economies of scale, have made it difficult for Cambodian agro-processors to compete on cost alone. To punch above their weight class in global markets, Cambodian companies have turned to quality, social responsibility and green agricultural practices to establish a competitive advantage.

“There’s a consumer base in Europe that really likes high-quality products – where it’s not just the food that you buy, but also the idea that you are doing something good as a consumer, or buying responsibly,” said GIZ Business Scout for Development Christoph Janensch. “That’s Cambodia’s niche.”

For small companies – such as processor Handcrafted Cashew Nuts Stung Treng (HCST) in Stung Treng province – breaking into this market begins with the farmers themselves. Using their contract farmers’ own model cashew farm, they train in farming methods that improve resilience to climate change and crop management techniques. This enables the farmers to reduce their dependence on chemical pesticides and fertilisers. Compliance with company standards is maintained through monitoring and incentivised by access to interest-free loans and above-market-rate purchasing prices for raw cashews.

This community orientation, and the quality organic produce that results from it, helps to justify the high prices that come with small-scale production,



“The EU certification is like a global passport, because it is the best in the world”

T.S. Shetty
UNIDO advisor

said Sothnita Soeun, co-founder of HCST. “We make them feel like they are not just purchasing our products to eat, but they also help contribute to the community as well,” she noted. “And once they realise the quality, they tend to keep coming back for more.”

Small enterprises like this have been the pioneers of the sector. They make the business case for agricultural

processing in Cambodia and raise the country’s international profile among buyers, through regular participation in trade fairs and exhibitions. While the industry overall remains small, an increasing number of successful enterprises could help crowd investment into the sector, said the EU Delegation’s Fornari.

“These are small-scale stories, but they show the potential there can be,” he said. “Once you meet that critical mass of businesses that manage to benefit from their investments, and this is seen by others, it can have a knock-on effect on the industry as a whole.”

For companies able to expand to a larger scale of production, competing on price becomes increasingly viable.

Company growth directed the success of Kirirom Food Production, said Holy Meas, deputy managing director. “Whereas other mango-drying factories in Cambodia can produce only 300 to 400 tonnes a year, we can produce 2,500 tonnes a year,” he said. “This enables us to offer a price competitive with other producers in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.”



Market power: Cambodian cashew nuts can reach more shelves if exporters are able to clear complex quality and certification hurdles



Upscaling: Holy Meas from KFP believes that through its organic mango production and partnership with small-holder farmers, Kirirom has an advantage in its export ambitions



A SEAL FOR PROSPERITY

CAMBODIA IS MOVING FORWARD WITH AN EXPORT QUALIFICATION PROGRAMME TO ESTABLISH A GLOBAL MARKET FOR ITS HOMEGROWN FISHERIES SECTOR

BY STEW POST

Homegrown: Most of Cambodia's fish is bought from outdoor markets and street vendors

Based out of Siem Reap, Sim Sreyroath is one more small producer dedicated to expanding the reach of Cambodian agro-products beyond the Kingdom's borders. As co-founder of Home Taste Food, a small business that began as a produce market targeting health-conscious consumers, processing dried fish has become central to Sreyroath's revenue stream. She recognises how insufficient regulations and quality control continue to hold back the industry, at home and abroad.

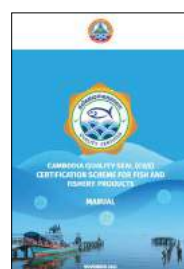
"When people go to the market and buy this product or that product, they don't know whether it's safe or not because they don't have labels," she said. "People don't know how the products were made and processed so they can't know if they are safe to eat."

This lack of oversight inspired Sreyroath to find a way to improve the

competitiveness of her dried fish products and set them apart in the market. Learning about the Cambodia Quality Seal through social media, the programme provided just the opportunity she was looking for.

As the nation's first food-safety certification process for aquatic value chains, the Cambodia Quality Seal (CQS) aims to address regulatory shortcomings, elevate the nation's fisheries, and bring food products and processes into accordance with global standards. The programme, which was launched in 2016, is operated under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and is part of the broader CAPfish project.

Led by Cambodia's Fisheries Administration, the Department of Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology and Quality Control (DFPTQ) is the body responsible for each step in the



Roadmap to success: Cambodia Quality Seal guidelines are available in English and Khmer on the United Nations website or via The Fisheries Administration at Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

CQS accreditation process. To prepare Cambodian fisheries products for broader markets, the framework is benchmarked against internationally recognised standards, in particular the Good Hygiene Practices and Good Manufacturing Practices laid out in the United Nations' Food Code (CODEX) guidelines. The framework is also in line with existing Cambodian food-safety standards as well as those of ASEAN bloc nations, with the goal of gaining "trust from both national and international consumers."

A voluntary programme, there are two levels of support available to applicants. CQS Basic provides technical assistance and equipment and is a limited certification that excludes the use of the Cambodia Quality Seal logo on products. CQS Full offers applicants higher levels of support, requires compliance across a business' entire supply

chain, and allows for the use of the official logo on products.

Enterprises seeking certification begin with an application submitted to authorities. If approved, a contract is signed and an auditor is assigned. The audit consists of meetings and training with management, inspection of the premises, employee interviews, a review of required business documents and checks on the enterprise's internal process for tracing products. A final report is provided and allows for instances of non-compliance to be corrected before certification. With CQS status valid for three years, additional "surveillance audits" take place one year and two years following approval.

In order to ensure the quality and safety of final products, the CQS scheme targets stakeholders across fishery value chains with compliance structures

"When people go to the market and buy this product or that product, they don't know whether it's safe or not because they don't have labels"

Sim Sreyroath, Home Taste Foods

tailored for each step. For fishing vessels to receive CQS status, businesses are required to demonstrate that their boats, waste disposal, storage facilities and personnel prioritise cleanliness and minimise cross-contamination.

Landing and collection sites, where fishery products are offloaded and stored, must be scrutinised by CQS inspectors. Processing facilities must also meet the framework's strict guidelines, particularly important to the government's ongoing efforts to promote value-added agro-products and facilitate entrance into wider markets.

For Sreyroath, the journey to CQS Full status has changed her business in profound ways. The training she received from the CQS teams and eventual certification of her dried fish products were major steps towards her goal of exporting to international markets.

Now, with an Australian buyer locked in and the first four-tonne shipment of Cambodian dried fish set for delivery, Sreyroath and company are eager to take their product to the next level.

"I am so much more confident in my product and I am so proud that it is going to be available in Australia," she said. "Before, our buyers in Australia bought their dried fish from Vietnam, but since we received the CQS certification, they have decided to choose our product."

As Home Taste Foods was already working towards the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification (in order to enter the European market), receiving CQS status was a pivotal moment for the company, demonstrating the value of effective regulatory frameworks in expanding the reach of Cambodian fisheries products. **F**

"We now have more confidence in ourselves and in our product"

As owner of Siem Reap's Home Taste Food, **Sim Sreyroath** credits the Cambodia Quality Seal with the growth and success of her dried fish business. Now realising her ambitions for the international market, Sreyroath is excited for the impacts of the CQS on the health and safety of Cambodian food products – as well as their viability beyond the Kingdom's borders. She encourages others to explore the certification.

What was the CQS training and certification process like?

The CQS teams were so caring and they were very helpful. After applying and approval, a team from the Fisheries Administration came to my business and began auditing to see if we qualified for the CQS standards. They checked food storage, food quality and sanitation and to see that chemicals and supplies were safely stored.

I could not fulfil all of the requirements on the first application but they told me what I needed to do – what to change, what to fix – and in the next four weeks they would return to check if everything was improved. They also interviewed the workers, to make sure that we were being honest about our operations and processes.

For me, I really appreciated the training and support I received from the CQS team. It was really important for me to receive CQS certification because it is the foundation bridging the gap for our business to receive the HACCP in the future. Without this type of training, I don't know if we would be able to receive the HACCP certification, which is the internationally recognised certification.

Beyond setting Home Taste Foods on the path towards accessing international markets, how has the CQS process and certification impacted your business?

There are three main benefits that my team and I have received from the CQS process. First, we now have more confidence in ourselves and in our product. Second, consumers know our products

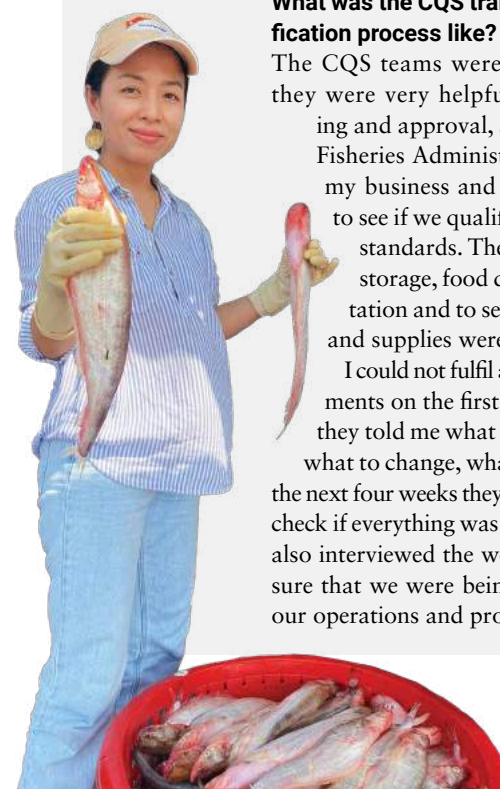
are safe and our sales have increased. When they see the label, they compare it with other products and choose the product with the CQS logo. They trust it.

Finally, with the support from the CQS teams on workflow and management, we now know how to operate our business better. Before, it was just a small family business and we struggled to produce 10 kilos of product each day. But since we received training and our operation has grown, we can produce around 200, 300 or even 500 kilos per day.

Is the CQS programme a worthwhile pursuit for other businesses?

I am happy that Cambodian food producers now have a path to food safety certification and the potential to access international markets. Many Cambodians trust the quality of products imported from other countries over those produced here. Once more Cambodian producers have CQS certification, it can improve the image and brand of their product. And shoppers can compare between products with and without CQS status and choose what they want. It benefits businesses and consumers. For the international market, I would say that CQS is the starting point for people outside Cambodia to recognise Cambodian products. **F**

Photo: Nigel Dickinson (1)



ROAD TO INNOVATION

ADVANCEMENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY CHALLENGES EDUCATORS AND GOVERNMENT ALIKE

BY COBY HOBBS

“It’s hard to hire” is a phrase often thrown about in Cambodia’s digital-technology private sector.

The institutional rejoinder is often the call to a “road map” for developing Cambodia’s digital society and economy, and for educating more ICT (information and communications technology) graduates with marketable skills. But any road map designed to further digital-skill development in Cambodia faces myriad roadblocks.

The Kingdom’s ICT education is challenged with everything from a lack of a standardised curriculum to language barriers that hinder enrollment, under-qualified faculty and high dropout rates. In a 2023 article, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport said that of Cambodia’s 123 higher-education institutions, only 53 offer digital-skills programmes, with 36 of those in Phnom Penh. An earlier report said that fewer than 11 percent of students enrolled in digital programmes were women.

To address this issue, various initiatives and projects have been established not just for upgrading the digital skills of college-bound Cambodians and the current workforce, but for development of local businesses and the government. This approach is supported by the new Pentagonal Strategy. Initiatives such as the 2022 Digital Workforce Development Project – with a 15 million USD investment from USAID – are attempting to push Cambodia forward to meet the growing demands of the ICT sector.

This year’s Digital Skills Development Framework/Programme, led by

the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC) with policy advice from the Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology (CADT), is seen as the developmental road map that will plug in Cambodia’s digital society.

Focus Cambodia spoke with CADT’s Pisal Chanty, director of digital and innovation policy, to discuss digital-skills development, advancement in Khmer AI systems, and beyond.

CADT envisions itself as a flagship public-education and research institution, developing digital talent and innovators, driving Cambodia toward a digital society. Could you explain the work being done?

CADT is under the supervision of the MPTC for technical aspects and under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy and Finance when it comes to funding mechanisms.

Our mission is to promote digital technology training in higher education, as well as professional training for civil servants. We are also one of the specialised research institutions in digital technology that focus on applied research, mainly on AI, IoT (“internet of things”) and cyber security.

Khmer natural language processing (NLP) has been our core field of research since 2014, when CADT was formally established as the National Institute of Post Telecom and ICT. In 2021, we transformed to CADT, continuing our enlarged mission but taking on a vision to promote a digital economy and society policy framework in Cambodia.

Digital flagship: The CADT develops the talent and innovators that will drive Cambodia’s digital future



Playful: Students use skills to experience digital connectivity hands on

One aspect of our work is training students in higher education, granting bachelor degrees. As of now, we offer three bachelors and we will launch a masters degree in cybersecurity next year. We offer bachelors in Telecom and Networking, Computer Science and Digital Business. We haven’t started a PhD programme yet, but we train civil servants in four levels of digital skills training, essential to professional and digital transformation.

For our research, we focus on applied research that promotes digital adoption. We also have an Innovation Centre to promote startups and entrepreneurship.

NLP is CADT’s bread and butter as far as leading the research to drive Khmer machine translation. Could you elaborate on the work CADT is doing?

We have a focus area on AI and data science in AI. We have a research team dedicated to Khmer natural language processing and we flag-shipped the first research team that focuses on NLP in the country.

We have developed applications that have been piloted and launched on the Google Play and Apple store. We call it Khmer ASR. It’s an application to convert from voice to text, text to voice in Khmer language, designed for administrative purposes, but also for daily use.

We also have some additional projects under MPTC support to embed Khmer ASR in a reception robot. We are not developing a new robot; we’re just embedding the technology of Khmer ASR so it can have command and response functionality in Khmer. ▶



Translating the future: CADT's Pisal Chanty leads the centre's programmes to facilitate Khmer digital interactions



Collaborative: The "digital citizen" vision is all about upskilling and using the digital tools of today while getting ready for those available in the future



With CADT leading the front on building Khmer NLP-equipped tools, are you also developing full AI chatbots that apply machine and deep learning with Khmer data sets?

We are planning to use the existing (NLP) technology for a kind of Chat GPT but we haven't finalised the concept yet. We also would like to enable the inclusive access of Chat GPT to benefit Cambodian citizens. If you question GPT in English, it will resolve a comprehensive answer or follow-up question – and a creative question because there is a large sum of information. But when commanding in Khmer, the result may be not sufficient or responses may be incorrect. Therefore, we aim to fill in this gap and promote local content as well.

Outside of digital technology innovation and research, what is CADT's role in digital policy research and consultancy?

We are fortunate enough to be a think tank of the MPTC. We work closely

with the ministry to provide consultation in regards to the development of digital economy policy and digital government policy. CADT is also part of the working group in drafting policies directly.

We also provide comments and suggestions to certain draft laws that are being drafted by the ministry, namely, the cybersecurity draft law.

How important is upskilling the labour force with new digital skills to advancing the socio-economic status of Cambodia?

Cambodia has adopted the Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework for 2021 to 2035. The core pillar of this framework is the establishment of a digital citizen, in addition to the pillars of digital business and a digital government. The policy's focus is not just on developing the digital tools and capabilities of "users" (citizens interacting with digital tools) but also on talent – the digital researcher, the talent providing digital services and the digital upskilling of civil servants. The

“What we are trying to do at CADT is to provide a platform – we call it a skill-competency framework – to align everyone to one common language in the digital sector”

Pisal Chanty, CADT

MPTC is also working with UNESCO to develop information and digital literacy.

What obstacles inhibit the advancement of digital society, business and government in Cambodia?

In Cambodia there is no clear pathway for a digital career, for jobs in the digital sector such as data scientists or developers. Cambodian universities have varying definitions of these professions that may not align with the global-tech sector's requirements.

We are measuring this skill mismatch but also the subsequent skill shortage: The expectation from the private sector is not matching the supply produced by universities. At CADT we are trying to provide a platform – we call it a skill-competency framework – to align everyone to one common language in the digital sector.

We are building this framework based on consultation from the private sector, universities, and on the recommendation of ASEAN reports on digital skills. **F**

Shrewsbury International School Phnom Penh is growing up!

Shrewsbury International School Phnom Penh moves to a brand new site this year. The primary school will open in September 2024, in a fantastic riverside location adjacent to the Morgan EnMaison condominium development



The purpose-built new building hosts many specialist teaching spaces



Children learning at the Shrewsbury's Flatiron campus

Shrewsbury School is one of the nine 'great' British independent schools and is 472 years old. Part of the same family, Shrewsbury International School Phnom Penh will grow into an 'all-through' school that includes full boarding provision. Founding Principal Toby Waterson explains what makes the school different and special.

What makes our school different from other international schools in Cambodia?

"First, we are part of the prestigious



Founding Principal Toby Waterson at the location of the new primary school

Shrewsbury Family of Schools which ensures the very highest standards of education, child safeguarding and other aspects of school operation. We are the first school of this kind in Cambodia, offering a truly 'premium British school education' to families who previously would have to consider schools abroad. Our robust and challenging curriculum is respected as 'the gold standard' by universities round the world. Our teachers are qualified and trained to the same high standards as Shrewsbury School in the UK."

What is the school's mission? "Well, quite simply, it is preparation for life; we educate and empower each individual pupil to flourish in life and contribute positively to the world around them. That is our mission and it is the same as that of Shrewsbury School in the UK and our sister schools in Bangkok, Hong Kong & India.

We champion both traditional values and the importance of good manners and but also are dedicated to preparing children for the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century, whether it relates to artificial intelligence or technological solutions for climate change. We genuinely educate the 'whole person' and put the individual

child at the centre of all we do. Our unique and powerful Floreat model ensures the development of excellent character in our pupils."

"We are committed to subject specialism from a young age, such as in the performing arts and STEAM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics). Facilities at the new campus reflect this commitment with dedicated dance, drama and music studios as well as a science laboratory, specialist art and design and technology spaces and a computer science suite. The school has provisions enabling the children to have access to a swimming pool and sports facilities in this modern and purpose-built site.

The location of the new primary school is relatively central and thus convenient for families across most of the Phnom Penh urban area. Principal Waterson anticipates strong demand for the limited number of spaces and is encouraging parents to apply early!



Find us:

UPSKILLING A GENERATION

ENSURING THAT CAMBODIA'S YOUTH HAVE JOBS THAT ALLOW FOR SUSTAINABLE INCOMES IS A KEY GOVERNMENT POLICY. MINISTER OF LABOUR AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING **HENG SOUR** ENSURES IT IS MET WITH RESULTS

INTERVIEW BY **STEW POST**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PHEARUM KHEN**

As a key goal of the new government, how do you plan to increase the competitiveness of the Cambodian workforce?

Skills and productivity improvements are a must to ensure that Cambodia maintains its economic growth. To make our skill development work as a supporting tool for economic growth and answer the needs of the private sector, the government has put forward an ambitious plan to train 1.5 million youth, especially those from poor and at-risk households, in prioritised sectors, and with skills that are highly needed in the labour market.

We will also do periodic surveys among the private sector and potential investors to identify the future needs of the workforce.

What role will your ministry play in this process?

To achieve these ambitions, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) has to pursue active labour market policies, provide sufficient information to the youth so they can choose appropriate skills and jobs, and provide sufficient information to keep training providers up to date with the industries and sectors we will need in the future.

To ensure the success of these active labour market policies, we have to ensure the quality of our training programmes; they must be updated and standardised across the board. Since Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is about know-how, we need to ensure that our manpower can respond to evolving industries and to new technologies or updates in production methodologies.

Training must be flexible as well, because it's not only the youth that are targeted under our programmes. The currently employed

workforce is also targeted, so it must be flexible, with courses in the daytime, nighttime and on the weekends.

There are also issues with the public perception of vocational training that must be addressed. How will you improve attitudes and increase interest in these programmes?

Families dream of sending their children to higher education, but at the same time, they are in need of jobs and income.

TVET is considered the fastest and most effective way to support those who are in need of jobs and income, but the image of TVET is still not attractive enough. It is considered a dead end. We are changing this. If you are entering into TVET, you will be able to continue your education as long as you wish. You get a job, you get income and you are able to continue your studies when you feel you are ready.

At the same time, we must also work with the private sector. Currently it is very hard to convince people to go through training if they don't see any difference between those who have not had any training and those who have. When they begin working, they receive the same pay.

We have to work on the environment and supporting policy to make TVET more attractive and raise awareness among the public. TVET is about lifelong learning and it is not a dead end. Pursuing TVET is a smart path.

Well-educated and trained young people often pursue job opportunities overseas. How does this brain and skill drain impact the economy and what can be done to halt it?

If you look at the phenomenon of migration, it's not only in Cambodia. Even in advanced economies, people are always travelling

"TVET is about lifelong learning and it is not a dead end"

Man with a plan: Minister of Labour and Vocational Training Heng Sour wants to ensure economic growth



That's a wrap: Minister Heng Sour promotes TVET as a pathway to higher-paying jobs. Watch the full video interview, filmed at the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, at Focus-Cambodia.com

around the world looking for better job opportunities and better pay. But I think the phenomenon of migration and the workforce moving around can actually become an opportunity for Cambodia.

We witness that after people work abroad for some time, they return home, not only by themselves, but with the knowledge of new technologies and industries.

In Cambodia's case, when workers return from Korea they bring the knowledge and know-how in agriculture back home. In some provinces, I have seen workers return from overseas with the savings they earned in Korea and set up their own farms using the greenhouse technologies that they learned while they were working abroad.

Many Cambodians, after they go to work in Thailand, return home and become supervisors. Cambodians that studied and worked in Japan return and become heads of sections in some industries.

“If we train workers, they can go to work abroad first and when we have new industries, they can return home”

If you look at Cambodians that work in Japan or in Thailand, once technology-based industries move to Cambodia, they will return. If we train workers, they can go to work abroad first and when we have new industries, they can return home.

When investors see the good performance of our workers, they might consider moving production to Cambodia as well.

Some say it will be difficult for Cambodia to catch up to more industrialised and productive neighbouring countries. Vietnam, for example, is building chip factories and producing for the likes of Samsung and Apple. How can Cambodia remain competitive within this context?

In terms of markets, investing in Cambodia is investing in the whole of ASEAN because we have free trade across the region.

At the same time, we need to understand the divisions in the production chain. Companies don't put every process into a single country.

For example, since Cambodia is between

Vietnam and Thailand, a neighbour of ours might be the main production site for some key components.

But Cambodia can be a production site to supply accessories, to supply spare parts and other supporting products to those main production processes. I don't think Cambodia will be disadvantaged by the relocation of some industries from China or other countries to ASEAN.

In terms of policy, Cambodia is not in stagnation. We are proactive and continue to customise our policy to support investors. For example, lately the government has introduced specialised industrial zones for specific countries, and special economic zones that our trading partners can join and focus on a specific industry. For either of these, the government provides all the necessary support and infrastructure.

Also, our policies are based on labour compliance, green energy and sustainable development, and have been recognised by our trading partners. So, based on government efforts to upgrade skills, our commitment to labour compliance and green energies and to support green jobs, I hope that investors will count on Cambodia.



Plus one: TVET centre graduates provide expertise to investors into Cambodia-based supply chains

THE 1.5 MILLION CHALLENGE

In November 2023, the Cambodian government launched an ambitious upskilling plan

Proponents hope the programme will have wide-ranging ramifications for Cambodia's future. Through increased training, youth will be equipped with valuable skills, improving employment prospects and boosting earning potential.



Qualified: Trained workers and experts earn higher salaries and contribute to economic growth

Addressing skilled labour shortages will attract more investment and contribute to economic development, while improved employment and increased incomes will reduce poverty levels and contribute to a more equitable society.

Strategic skill building

The programme provides training for 38 skills in 10 sectors

- Construction
- Electricity & energy
- Electronics
- Air conditioning & heating
- Manufacturing
- General & automobile mechanics
- Tourism
- Services
- Agriculture & agro-industry
- Business & Information technology

Core support

Free training: The government covers all training costs for vocational programmes.

Financial support: Trainees from poor or at-risk households receive a monthly allowance of 70 USD.

Challenges

Effectively upskilling such a large number of individuals requires efficient logistics, qualified instructors and adequate resources. Authorities need to ensure job market alignment so that graduates can easily transition to successful employment opportunities. Likewise, the quality and sustainability of the programme must be monitored and continuously refined in order to guarantee the longevity and success of the initiative. The first batch of 20,000 trainees began the training programme in January 2024.

Diversification and vision are keys to the Soma Group's success



From farming to higher education, the Cambodian conglomerate has its sights set on future development



Soma Group's MegaFarm operates on 8,000 hectares

Soma Group, one of the main conglomerates in Cambodia, is unique among the region's businesses. A humble agricultural concern as the 21st century began, it has grown to become so much more – a highly diversified group operating in education, trade, infrastructure, energy, property development and media. The University of Puthisastra has elevated Soma's profile as a leader in education and health care, having recently been acknowledged as the nation's #1 private health science university.

An everyday dedication to progress and to Cambodia's ongoing development drives the Soma Group. Day-to-day practices and holistic decision-making reflect corporate values of making a positive impact through sustainable solutions with lasting results. Through 12 subsidiaries in six industries, employing more than 2,000 staff, Soma Group is committed to solving social and economic concerns and providing opportunities for the Kingdom's citizens.

Soma Group at first managed a family hobby focusing on agriculture through Soma Farm's incubator projects. Concentrating on efficient operation and emphasising quality service, Soma Group inserted high-tech production and implemented operational standards across

all its incubator projects, from rice and coconuts to egg production.

From the start, said CEO Lok Chumteav Cham Krasna, the company aspired "to create an ecosystem that maximises the limited resources available." The company evolved by producing agricultural products and providing support services in food security and the labour market. Soma Farm then branched into professional business operations and services, from producing chicken eggs to providing clean water to fruit plantations, as it moved toward a zero-waste model.

A joint venture with the Thailand-based Charoen Pokphand (CP) company created CADI, a MegaFarm project, moving Soma Group one step closer to its objective of establishing a fully integrated agro-industrial ecosystem. Krasna called this "the ultimate goal for leading agriculture players in this sector."

Operating on an economic land concession of more than 8,000 hectares, the MegaFarm's goal is to boost long-term and sustainable agricultural practices. "We hope that the success of the MegaFarm serves as a model and inspiration for other actors in the field to raise the bar of standards and best practices in the industry," Krasna said. "We also hope that

the Ministry of Agriculture will recognise and support our initiatives."

Infrastructure activities support the farms and Cambodia's economic growth. These include technology, construction, water treatment and energy subsidiaries. Soma Energy focuses on renewable energy and innovative solutions. A collaboration with Japan's Kobelco Eco-Solutions, Soma Kobelco Water Supply is a reminder that clean water is essential for farms as well as society in general. The "Clean Village Program" is focused on waste management, including but not restricted to disposal and sorting. Soma Trading Co., Ltd., the sales and marketing arm for Soma Group's agriculture products, has become a distributor for various consumer products.

Soma Property and Development was established in 2018 to enable participation in Cambodia's large-wave property market growth. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Soma Group remains optimistic about economic growth. The pandemic "allowed time to re-strategise (our) involvement in the industry," Krasna said. Now, the Soma Hotel Riverside, a pilot luxury boutique



Cham Krasna: A key player since joining Soma in 2008, Krasna continues to steer the group towards its sustainability goals



MegaFarm is a joint venture with a Thailand-based company



University of Puthisastra students study the health sciences

hotel project, is "on track for completion" by the end of 2024. "We are keen to further explore projects like housing development, commercial building and ecotourism site development," the CEO said.

University of Puthisastra

One common thread connecting Soma Group's diverse activities is what Krasna calls "human capacity" – upskilling individuals' knowledge and capacity to benefit both the business and society. The group's core mission is to be a solutions provider to common issues within Cambodia. "When we had the opportunity to invest in a university, we ventured in, because we believe in addressing the issue from the root," the CEO said.

The University of Puthisastra (UP) joined the portfolio in 2007. Now specialising in Health Science and ICT (information and communications technology), UP is acclaimed as the leading private health university in Cambodia and #13 in the ASEAN region, according to the Applied Higher Education (AppliedHE™) Private University Ranking. UP promotes education in essential "STEM" (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects, continuing to boost the country's industry 4.0 transformation.

"Our original goal was to provide solutions to real social issues," Krasna said. "We strategically transitioned to the health sciences because we believe both health and education are Cambodia's most pressing issues. We can address two issues at the same time."

Professor Ian Findlay, university President and Vice-Chancellor, elaborated. "We are addressing huge challenges

in Cambodia, and we're trying and succeeding in making a difference," he said. "Cambodia has the lowest percentage of doctors and nurses (only 8 per 100,000) in the entire ASEAN region, and amongst lowest in the world." He is out to change that.

UP's emphasis on STEM is making the biggest difference, Ian said. While the UP curriculum includes degrees in information technology (programming, networking and cybersecurity), 90 percent of students study medicine, dentistry, nursing and midwifery, pharmacy and lab technology. To ensure that students acquire English, the universal language of health skills, UP provides four years intensive learning integrated into the curriculum. UP also partners with about 17 universities in Australia and the United Kingdom.

A native Scot who came to Cambodia by way of Australia, Ian is a molecular geneticist by education and training. "I helped develop clinical diagnostic systems," he said. "But I was helping only a few hundred people a year. It's one of the biggest reasons I moved into education. Now, I have an opportunity to improve an entire nation – an incredible legacy."

A new generation

"Cambodia is a very exciting place to be right now," Ian said, addressing a new dynamism in society. The Khmer Rouge tragedy of the late 1970s, he noted, robbed Cambodia of most of its infrastructure and "an entire generation of mentors that other countries have. Good leaders between 50 and 70 are very rare to find in Cambodia."

Fortunately today that gap is being filled by a new generation of university

graduates. Among successful UP alumni is Dr Lim Youhok, who practices at Phnom Penh's Hebron Medical Center.

"As a physician, I am always ready to treat my patients physically, mentally and spiritually," said Youhok. "As a proud part-time lecturer at UP, I apply integrated teaching and learning in medical education. And I am involved in an incredible project with the Ministry of Health to enhance national clinical care and research. Ultimately, the seed was planted at UP to bear its fruits in society."

Youhok understands the trials that Cambodia and Soma Group have faced. "The country started from the bottom and is gradually redeveloping all sectors after gaining peace and stability," he said. "Young people are struggling to access higher education and professional development. Education is still the only way to achieve the dream and help others."

UP, he said, is emerging "in the midst of an exciting transformation" – one to which Krasna is well attuned. "We hope to not only contribute to Cambodia's development but also set a foundation for future generations," she said.

Soma Group's vision meshes with the Cambodian government's new Pentagonal Strategy. Establishing a foundation for 2050 and beyond, the Strategy has five pillars, with "people" – educating and developing their abilities – being first and most important. UP's program contributes mightily to the ambitious goals of the Strategy and thus Cambodia's future. These include fostering economic growth through job creation and training; more private-sector employment; an expanded digital economy; and a sustainable society.



Learning leadership: Harpswell students attend a seminar at their residence in Phnom Penh

FUTURE FOCUS

LEADERSHIP AND CRITICAL THINKING LAY THE EDUCATIONAL GROUNDWORK FOR A CAREER PATH THAT EXTENDS ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON

The story of Cambodia's future may already be unfolding in a pair of secluded college dormitories in Phnom Penh's Boeng Trabaek and Teuk Thla districts. Dozens of young women are intensifying their higher education through four years of residence in these urban leadership centres, learning skills beyond what they might absorb in university classrooms.

The Harpswell Foundation has made this possible since 2006, when American science and humanities professor Alan Lightman, in the wake of his first visit to Southeast Asia, co-founded the nonprofit organisation in support of college-age women. Today Harpswell is regarded as one of the premier women's educational groups on the Asian continent.

"It changed my life in every possible way," said Suon Raksmei, a graduate of the first class launched in 2010 and now the programme and dorm manager.

"My life after high school (in Kampong Thom) was designed by Harpswell."

The number of women in leadership roles in Cambodia – political, economic, social – is a fraction of those held by their male counterparts. Indeed, out of 30 ministers in the new Hun Manet government, only three are women. But that is a reflection of the disparity in education: According to UNESCO statistics in 2021, only three in eight Cambodian women make it as far as upper secondary school.

Conversely, every one of the 75 women in the Harpswell programme attends and ultimately graduates from a university in Phnom Penh. Indeed, they presently take classes on 19 different campuses.

These young women began their journeys in Svay Rieng and Pursat, Kratie and Ratanakiri, in every province of Cambodia but Phnom Penh itself. After proving themselves in their secondary studies, they were tasked with convincing

their parents – not many of whom had opportunities beyond primary education – to support them in committing to a full four-year residence at Harpswell.

For girls accepted to the programme, all lodging, food and medical care are provided free. But it's never easy for a mother and father to send their daughter off to the big city for four years, exclusive of vacation breaks, or maybe longer. That's especially true in a traditional Southeast Asian culture where family ties are tight.

During the application process, the girls must demonstrate academic excellence and proficiency in English, emotional intelligence and vision for the future, both for themselves personally and for the country of Cambodia, said Moul Samneang, Harpswell's country director in Phnom Penh.

Once they are settled at a residence centre, they find themselves immersed in a rigorous in-house curriculum that provides intensive

training in critical thinking, a subject not widely examined in more customary programmes.

Three or four times a week, students gather to research and analyse current national and world events in both English and Khmer. A high percentage of their studies are in the humanities, including international relations and law.

In addition to leadership training, they also have units in physical and emotional health and nutrition, analytical writing and debate, job skills and strategies for civic engagement. Significantly, in large part because of the Cambodian experience, Harpswell includes a "self-knowledge" unit in comparative genocide studies. "It helps them to understand their parents better," said Samneang.

'They're going to need us'

The director was 11 when the Khmer Rouge evicted her family of 10 from their Phnom Penh home in 1975. Three of them survived the ensuing scourge until they could return 17 years later, under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

In the meantime, Samneang had become a teacher without a proper classroom. She persisted. "One day, they're going to need us," she recalls telling her brother, who now works for the UN in New York.

Today, the young Harpswell women of rural Cambodian roots indeed need Samneang and so many others, including their peers. Together, they take leadership roles within their scholastic communities, forming student governments and embracing responsibility for decisions made. They are guided by Harpswell staff and Leadership Residents, recruited from graduate programmes around the world to live, teach and mentor in the Harpswell dorms for periods of three to six months.

One Sunday each month, students gather for leadership seminars moderated by expert guest speakers. Among the guests are government officials, business executives, religious leaders, scientists, architects, professors and even journalists.

As of late 2023, Harpswell had graduated more than 230 students. These women have gone on to become leaders of their generation, advancing into such fields as law and medicine, engineering and finance. Most of them remain in Phnom Penh, where their impact and new confidence are more easily felt on a national level than in the provinces. Often these women extend their residence at Harpswell's alumnae house for new graduates. The strong alumnae association provides a platform to continue the close bonds of support.

In more recent years, Harpswell is taking new steps to expand its footprint beyond Cambodia. Since 2017, the foundation has hosted the Harpswell ASEAN Summit for Women's Leadership in Penang, Malaysia – a two-week summer intensive for 22 young professional women from Cambodia, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal.

"It's smaller in scale (than in Cambodia), but it potentially has a much bigger impact because it nurtures young women from every country of Southeast Asia," Alan Lightman said in a Zoom call from his Boston home. "They're a little bit older, 25 to 30. We give them grants to do social entrepreneurship in their own countries. A number of them have started projects using the critical thinking and leadership that they've learned with our programme."

'Helping the entire country'

One of the founder's most profound memories from his 2003 visit to Cambodia was a visit to a village in Kampong Chhnang. "The people there believed in the power of education, even though they had nothing," Lightman recalled. "They came up to me, the women holding their babies, and said, 'Would you build us a school?'"

"Knowing the story of the genocide in Cambodia, and the fact that these people were

subsistence farmers and had nothing but the clothes on their backs, I was terribly impressed. I came back to the US and raised the money to build a school in that village."

Another life-changing encounter came with lawyer Veasna Chea. "She told me that when she went to law school in the 1990s, there was no lodging for female students, so she had to live underneath the building for four years." "That really inspired me," said Lightman. "She and I came up with the idea to build a dormitory for women attending university. It was the only dormitory in the country for female students."

Being able to attract Cambodia's brightest young women "was a valuable resource, like finding oil in your backyard," Lightman said.

"And I thought, I can do more than just give them free room and board.

I can give them a programme in critical thinking and leadership skills, and thereby get a big leverage effect because each one of them can go out and do good things in the country. Then I'm helping not only these 36 young women, I'm helping the entire country."

Lightman is now the writer and host of a three-part mini-series on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) titled "Searching: Our Quest for Meaning in the Age of Science." He described it as a cutting-edge contemplation "of the philosophical, theological and moral issues that are raised by modern science." F.

"The people there believed in the power of education, even though they had nothing"



Stronger together: Mealtimes at Harpswell are for sharing ideas along with food

TOKNOW

MEET SOME OF THE INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE WHO ARE SHAPING AN ERA OF GROWTH FOR THE MODERN KINGDOM

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON AND STEW POST

KITH MENG

Chairman and CEO, Royal Group

As founder and chairman of what is Cambodia's most influential and diversified conglomerate, it is difficult to separate Kith Meng's presence from the nation's business landscape. With Royal Group's holdings covering everything from telecommunications and media firms to property development, finance and education, signs of the corporation's influence are seen across the Kingdom.

Displaced during the conflicts of the 1970s, Meng received his education in Australia before eventually returning to his home country during the UNTAC period in the early 1990s. After developing a lucrative business through the sale of furniture and equipment to the United Nations and other international institutions, he secured exclusive contracts for Canon and Bell helicopters, laying the foundations for the company's position as the "portal to investing in Cambodia." Meng also secured a deal to distribute Motorola products, and established the Royal Group's presence in the telecommunications sector that continues to this day through the group's Cellcard and Ezecom brands. Other companies within the group include Infinity Insurance, Wing, Northbridge International School Cambodia and the Royal Railways, amongst others.

Recent agreements with international partners have further diversified Royal Group's holdings. A 2023 deal with the Singaporean Keppel Energy Pte Ltd will see one gigawatt of renewable energy produced by Royal Group transmitted from Cambodia to the island nation. Marking an expansion into the healthcare sector, a joint venture with two Australian firms has launched Royal Group Plasma Fractionation, a firm dedicated to collecting, bottling and distributing the lifesaving medical product across Asia.

Despite the breadth of Royal Group's business activities, Meng makes time to put his knowledge and experience to work beyond the company's direct purview. As President of the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce (CCC) and representative of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council for Cambodia, Meng often accompanies the prime minister on missions abroad.

▶ **"When looking at sustainable investment in Cambodia, the Royal Group is your key partner for success in the Kingdom of growth"**

Neak Okhna Kith Meng



LAURA MAM

Co-Founder and CEO of Baramey Production

A Cambodian-American artist, songwriter, music producer and businesswoman, Laura Tevary Mam is a leader in the Cambodian Original Music Movement. With her mother, Thida Buth, she co-founded Baramey Production, an artist management and music production company committed to bringing original Cambodian music to the international stage. Today, as CEO, she represents a team of full-time artists including VannDa, Vanthan, Sophia Kao, Polaris and Khmer1Jivit.

Mam burst onto the Cambodian scene in 2013 with her band, Laura Mam and the Like Me's. In the decade since, she said, "We went from zero to hero. At that time, the market for karaoke-style covers and pirated music was huge. I was honoured to be a part of the wave to push the original music movement and to be able to witness our music scene flourish and become its own ecosystem."

In the Khmer language, Baramey means "sacred power." Mam felt that as she put her own artistic career on hold to promote the greater Cambodian music industry. Her achievements include nationwide concert tours and a distribution deal with the Warner Music Group and TikTok. Her long-range goal is to upgrade the publishing and royalty infrastructure in the industry, enabling revenue-generating social media platform tools to become available. "Once this is achieved, nothing will hold us back," she said.



▶ **"We went from zero to hero. I was honoured to be a part of the wave to push the original music movement"**

Laura Mam

▶ **A firm believer in giving back, he is committed to cultivating the next generation of leaders**

Thierry Tea



THIERRY TEA

Entrepreneur; Vice President, OCIC Group

Born in Paris of Chinese Cambodian parents, Thierry Tea is prominent in his role as vice president of the OCIC Group. In that position, he is in charge of company ventures at Phnom Penh's new Techo International Airport, currently scheduled for completion in 2025. OCIC is also developing the satellite city of Koh Pich (Diamond Island), a business and residential community of nearly 100 hectares, and the Chroy Changvar satellite city of 387 hectares.

Tea started his corporate career in Asia in 2004 as a regional sales manager in the aviation industry. By 2007 he was President and CEO of Airbus Helicopters in the Philippines; in 2009, he took on the global role of Airbus Group Country Manager. Today, in addition to his role with OCIC, he runs 10 successful startups in Cambodia, Singapore and the Philippines. His diverse portfolio includes agriculture, retail, distribution and trading, real estate, fintech and aviation. PhilJets, an aviation startup that Tea launched in 2013, employs 80 staff in Manila. He also owns Sphere Aero, a Singapore-based aircraft trading firm. Dara Ventures, a retail and distribution firm, operates 10 retail stores in Cambodia.

Negocia Capital, a venture capital company he launched in 2017 in Singapore, focuses on technology startups. These include Bongloy Payments, a Cambodian fintech infrastructure startup, and Ascendance Flight Technologies, a French hybrid jet whose electric and hydrogen engine enables it to take off vertically, improving versatility and reducing carbon emissions.

Tea serves as a faculty advisor and visiting lecturer of entrepreneurship at Cambodia University of Science and Technology. A firm believer in giving back, he is committed to mentoring and cultivating the next generation of leaders. He studied business and international finance in Paris, Singapore, Beijing and Boston.

JEF MOONS

Founder of Knai Bang Chatt, Developer of Kep West

Businessman Jef Moons came to Cambodia from his native Belgium in 2003, and shortly after bought three historic colonial seaside villas, renovated them and established Knai Bang Chatt. That original development has today grown into Kep West, an 18-room resort and culinary beach destination with five restaurants on 210 metres of prime beachfront.

Moons also continues to invest into making Kep province a destination for culture and recreation. The Royal Cambodian Yacht Club, based at Kep West, promotes sailing courses and water sports such as kite surfing and jet skiing. There is an annual international sailing regatta and a mountain-biking festival. The resort offers flying lessons and seaplane tours over the region's national parks. As for culture, Art for Kep is a public art project featuring Cambodian artists who are raising money through crowd-funding. Plans are underway for a music festival.

But wait: There's more! "The master plan of Kep is to attract international visitors," Moons said. "All the macro-economics are there. We have a master plan, the coastal connection, law enforcement, perfect roads, and we're working on waste treatment. The final key is the coastal connection, which will incorporate not only the Cambodian coast, islands and urban Sihanoukville, but also the Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc."

"Can you imagine how much tourism can come to Kep?" he posited. "Phu Quoc has 6 million tourists a year, and 20 percent of them are international. Mid-term, we will need at least 2,000 rooms in Kep alone, not even including Kampot. When the new Phnom Penh airport is finished, it will take just 1¼ hours to drive to Kep – and Kep West is the nearest beach resort."



▶ **"Allowing opportunities for a new generation to showcase talent is how they can grow"**

C-H Chevet



CHARLES-HENRI CHEVET

Area General Manager, Phokeethra Hotels

It seems that the name Charles-Henri Chevet is synonymous with the hospitality industry in Cambodia, and particularly with the Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra. He moved to the capital as the property opened in July 2011, after nearly two years at the group's Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort in Siem Reap. The discreet manager who sees presidents, prime ministers and royals go through his door is renowned for not letting a word out on his famous guests.

Co-workers at the five-star property praise his family-style management approach and his desire to learn about his employees' lives, to determine how they best fit into the hotel team. "Allowing opportunities for a new generation to showcase their talent is how they can grow," Chevet said in a recent interview.

One of Chevet's goals in the post-Covid era has been enticing Phnom Penh's domestic market. "Stay-cations," which promise couples luxury overnight packages with dinner and breakfast included, are a part of that strategy. So, too, are fine-dining opportunities – the Sofitel Phokeethra has excellent French, Italian, Japanese and Chinese restaurants.

Chevet works hard and expects the same of his staff. "I usually work long hours," he said. "Ensuring the time we spend is productive and enjoyable is very important. Somehow, we find time to have fun, too."

Time management and handling deadlines is essential for success in the hospitality industry. "Deadlines make for a more efficient workplace," Chevet told his interviewer. "If you don't, the project will carry on longer than necessary."

A graduate of France's acclaimed ESSCA business school, Chevet is a native of Rennes, France. He has been with Sofitel since 1995 and in Asia since 2002. First in Hanoi for four years, he was in Beijing and Shanghai for two and a half years before moving to Siem Reap.

▶ **"When the new Phnom Penh airport is finished, it will take just 1¼ hours to drive to Kep – and Kep West is the nearest beach resort"**

Jef Moons



◀ **Dahomé plays a pivotal role in building teams and establishing partnerships to identify areas where change is needed**

Cécile Dahomé

CÉCILE DAHOMÉ

Chairwoman and Executive Director, Sevea

Dahomé founded the environmental consulting firm of Sevea in 2011. As a leader in energy efficiency, focused on circular economy and net-zero strategies, Sevea helps both established and startup businesses bring investors into clean-energy projects to achieve financial goals. The company is a specialist in sustainability in the WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) sectors, along with climate-smart agriculture and access to green financing for farmers. It plays a key role in bridging the gap between the government and the private and public sectors.

A highly visible component of the Sevea philosophy is the Cambodia Energy Efficiency Competition, or “CEE Comp.” The innovative multi-year project “aims at enhancing energy efficiency in buildings through behaviour change and gamification,” Dahomé said. “The competition fosters collaborations, creativity and awareness while providing accessible and cost-efficient solutions.”

Sevea’s success lies in its ability to provide detailed insights into markets, consumers and lifestyles. The multicultural team effectively tackles complex challenges, collaborating with stakeholders from various sectors, including key ministries, international development agencies, financial institutions and international NGOs. Mobilising civic engagement and driving inclusive growth, Sevea promotes a holistic approach to addressing challenges and creating sustainable solutions.

As the head of Sevea, Dahomé plays a pivotal role in building teams and establishing partnerships to identify areas where change is needed and develop strategies to bring about that change. She also serves as vice president of the French Foreign Trade Advisors and vice chairwoman of EuroCham’s GreenBiz Committee. Previously, she addressed climate change and rural development across Southeast Asia and in the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean. She studied engineering sciences in France and Brazil.

CBC breaks down financial access barriers

Credit bureau makes it easier for Cambodians to borrow, at home and abroad

Since its inception in 2012, Credit Bureau Cambodia Co., Ltd. (CBC) has been at the forefront of breaking down barriers to financial services. Most citizens still don’t have access to credit services, according to the National Bank of Cambodia, but CBC helps reduce barriers to lending by providing financial institutions with reliable credit profiles. The banks can now make informed lending decisions without resorting purely to subjective measures or relying solely upon collateral, helping reduce the risks of customer over-indebtedness, debt cycling and default. Thus the lending environment is increasingly responsible and transparent for both borrowers and lenders.

Last year, the bureau took another leap forward in reducing barriers to financial access for Cambodians as it launched a pioneering initiative with Credit Bureau Singapore (CBS). This allowed the cross-border sharing of credit reporting data, enabling Cambodians living in the city-state to use their track record of repayment in Cambodia to secure access to credit services in Singapore and vice versa. The initiative, first of its kind in the region, marks the initial step towards a future in which Cambodians, wherever they go, will carry the data necessary to fully access financial services.

How has Credit Bureau Cambodia improved access to credit for ordinary Cambodians? What impacts have you seen on the daily lives of Cambodians?

To make progress in financial inclusion, we are upgrading the credit profile of consumers and members of the general public, then making this improved profile available to banks and microfinance institutions. The World Bank reports that Cambodia has already significantly improved access to finance through the presence of a credit reporting system following the establishment of CBC. A second improvement we’ve seen is that having a credit bureau has helped to sharpen the behaviour of the general

public in the use of loans, for example, when it comes to paying back loans.

How has CBC changed the landscape of the Cambodian banking sector over the 12 years it’s been in operation?

If you look at the challenges facing the banking sector, one of the biggest ones is information asymmetry, where the lender does not have all the relevant information about the borrower and the borrower fails to fully disclose this information. CBC entered this space in order to bridge that information asymmetry by empowering the banking sector to know more about the consumer and then encourage them to lend responsibly to their end consumer. We’ve already seen a reduction in this information asymmetry issue in the overall financial ecosystem due to our efforts.

What are the challenges in producing reliable consumer credit scores in the Cambodian context? How do you secure reliable information on consumers who are unbanked or consumers who may have taken on loans from outside the formal financial sector?

Two main issues arise – the availability of data and the quality of that data. Credit Bureau Cambodia collects information from all financial institutions, then processes and analyses those data and offers the information to financial institutions in the form of credit reports, credit scoring or analytics reports. The extent to which we can provide these services is based on the availability of information. Some consumers do not have a rich historical credit profile and are thus harder to provide scores for.

When it comes to accessing quality data, there are a few areas of key importance. First and foremost is the financial sector, consisting of banks, microfinance, leasing, and some rural institutions licensed by the central bank.

Outside this sector, two other sectors are important sources of credit for Cambodians. The first is pawn shops,



which serve a function in the lending sphere similar to the niche filled by microfinance institutions. The second consists of housing developers who allow the end user to pay for their house in instalments, serving as an alternative to mortgages for many Cambodians.

For lenders outside the financial sector, such as pawnshops and housing developers, we still need to establish an effective methodology for plugging their data into credit reports.

Could you speak to the relationship between CBC and Credit Bureau Singapore?

We launched a strategic cross-border initiative last year. If you look at the challenges of credit bureau operation, cross-border accredited reporting and data sharing are areas where significant work needs to be done, not only for Cambodia but across the globe. The number one challenge is that, when citizens have established a good credit profile within their own country, if they migrate to another country they cannot take their credit report with them. We saw the challenges and decided to work closely with Credit Bureau Singapore to design a mechanism to facilitate cross-border credit report sharing while protecting data privacy.

TIC, TOC

IN A FIRST FOR THE KINGDOM, A PASSIONATE HOROLOGY FAN WITH THE MEANS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE CREATED CAMBODIA'S FIRST HOROLOGY SCHOOL. FOCUS CAMBODIA VISITS THE PRINCE HOROLOGY FOUNDATION, WHICH IS RUNNING LIKE CLOCKWORK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK MALIPAN
WORDS BY CRISTYN LLOYD

In the Kingdom of Wonder, knowledge is passed down through generations like a treasured timepiece. In the heritage capital of Siem Reap, conservationists work tirelessly to repair ancient artworks etched into temple walls, gifts left by their ancestors. The same sacred Hindu epics that decorate the 12th-century Angkor Wat temple are today still being fashioned out of leather, ready to be danced into existence through the magic of shadow and light.

Across the country, old masters do their best to keep alive legacies of the once-mighty Khmer Empire, delicate artforms almost lost to time and war. In Phnom Penh, where heritage meets a dizzying whirlwind of a modernising city, a new academy is giving students the chance to learn skills from another piece of history, a

tradition that even today still sets the benchmark for mechanical knowhow and sophisticated, high-end craftsmanship. Cambodia's culture of creation has made the country a welcome home for watchmaking, an artform that bridges fine art and the dexterous, exacting skills of a surgeon.

As Cambodia's first Swiss watchmaking academy, the Prince Horology Vocational Training Centre represents the beginning of a future where these two worlds combine, a vision of the Kingdom as a home for highly skilled watchmakers in the region and a hub for world-class watchmaking education.

Offering full scholarships for local students, led by veteran instructors, and stocked with brand new, top-of-the-line industry equipment imported from Switzerland, the school has set out to prove that high-end watchmaking can be done anywhere.



Technical: Building automatic watches starts with a drawing that outlines the vision for the chronograph





Cambodia's culture of creation has made the country a welcome home for watchmaking, an art form that bridges fine art and the dexterous, exacting skills of a surgeon

High precision: To master the art of watchmaking, students must hone the fine motor skills needed for delicate, high-precision work. "What I've learned from my Cambodian students - they don't get stressed about things," says technical advisor Jessica Thakur



Skillfully demanding: Graduate Sem Theara turns a winding stem on a watchmaker's 8mm lathe, a process that involves cutting material from a rotating workpiece to achieve the desired dimensions. Hand turning is used to fashion complex and skillfully demanding components of a watch

The school has set out to prove that high-end watchmaking can be done anywhere





Made in Cambodia: The precision components of the Kingdom's first watch, left, are fashioned in a modern workplace, right



Just in time: The first automatic watch "Made in Cambodia" is ready for the ASEAN leadership meeting in late 2022 in Phnom Penh



Milestone: Cambodia's first cohort of watchmakers celebrate their graduation. The classroom, a three-year home to the ambitious group, awaits students for a new training period



Proud promoter: ASEAN heads of state were presented Made in Cambodia watches by then-PM Hun Sen during the 2022 leadership meeting in Phnom Penh. At left, Laos PM Phankham Viphavanh receives his watch. Photos: Agence France- Presse

HEALTH CARE BREAKS GROUND

Key to government goals of building a sustainable society and improving quality of life for millions of Cambodians, the national healthcare system continues to make progress. A growing number of quality care providers, and increased international support through strategic partnerships, provide the population with improved access to broader treatment options.

In the past few years, a number of new hospitals and upgrades have swept the sector. In October 2023, the nation's largest healthcare centre, the Techo Santhepeap National Hospital, was inaugurated in Phnom Penh. Comprising 11 buildings, the hospital has nearly 9,500 beds, more than 7,000 square metres of emergency-room floor space, and a helipad for med-evac services.

Calmette Hospital, the capital's original flagship medical centre built in 1950, also received a major upgrade. The new Calmette Polytechnic Centre Building, dubbed the "Techo Aphivadh" Building, opened in May 2023 and is equipped with "state of the art" medical equipment and 426 beds. The 70 million USD addition has an expected capacity of 250,000



Operational excellence: Cambodia's healthcare sector is improving in quality and growing in size

patients annually, according to government statements. An hour south of the capital, the 10 million USD Techo Sen Koh Thom Hospital in Kandal province was inaugurated in March 2024 and holds 179 beds.

To address a lack of skilled medical professionals, an oft-cited shortcoming of the sector, the Ministry of Health announced plans to build a National Teaching Hospital in the capital with

a tentatively scheduled 2025 completion date. Drawing upon a partnership with the Korean government and funding through a 66 million USD loan, the project will be the first of its kind in the country. It is intended to support the human resource improvements necessary for Cambodia's social and economic maturation.

Japan also extended financial support to the Kingdom's health sector in the form of a 154 million

USD concessional loan. Commemorated at a signing ceremony in March 2024, the agreement allows for significant upgrades of healthcare facilities, personnel and infrastructure in the coming years.

Though challenges remain, notably limited access in rural areas and insufficient oversight of the sector, ongoing investment in Cambodia's healthcare system will benefit the population while supporting sustainable development goals.

INSURANCE PROVIDERS CONTINUE DIGITAL SERVICE EXPANSION

Essential to fully realising the benefits of an expanding healthcare system, the private insurance sector in Cambodia is becoming more robust. Cross-sector collaboration and technology are being put to use in broadening the reach of these offerings.

Prudential, a global leader in life insurance, has operated in Cambodia since 2013 and manages more than 250 million USD in assets across the country. A February 2024 partnership with Wing Bank saw the launch

of a new "bancassurance venture" allowing Prudential to sell products through Wing's sprawling network. Leveraging the financial institution's massive presence across the country, Prudential customers will be able to purchase insurance products directly from approved Wing locations and will be eligible to receive promotional rewards from both the bank and on Prudential policies. Special interest rates and free road safety packages are examples of these incentives.

Another big player, AIA Life Insurance, continues to expand its footprint in the sector. AIA Somrab Sokhaphheap is a new health insurance rider that offers all-inclusive, whole-life protections to Cambodians looking for greater coverage. Building on the success of its corporate insurance rider, AIA MedCare, Somrab Sokhaphheap is renewable for life, provides policy holders with rewards for "staying healthy" and provides options for treatment with consultants domestically and abroad.

Launched in May 2023, Somrab Sokhaphheap allows its customers to access an online portal where they can digitally explore claim submissions and policy benefits and use cashless payments at local and international partner hospitals. AIA customers can also take advantage of the widely used messaging app Telegram to review their policy details, pay premiums, obtain proof of insurance, and locate approved partner hospitals at home and outside the country.

EV DEMAND SPEEDS UP



Electric vehicles may be the wave of the future in Cambodia.

The Kingdom has set a goal of 40 percent electric cars and 70 percent electric motorbikes by 2050, according to the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT). Recent momentum in sales suggests this may be a realistic objective.

Registrations have rapidly increased since 2021, when import duties on EVs were reduced to about half of those charged on vehicles with traditional internal-combustion engines. Electric engines reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality, as well as being more cost-effective than gasoline-powered vehicles.

According to the MPWT, 1,489 electric vehicles were registered in Cambodia as of December 2023. They were served by charging stations at 18 locations, primarily in greater Phnom Penh but also including Battambang, Siem Reap, Sihanoukville and Mondulkiri. Currently, users are charged 1,600 riel per kilowatt hour (kWh), according to the MPWT.

ENERGY TRANSITION GETS GREEN MONEY BOOST



Powerful: The renewable energy transition speeds up

The looming risks posed by a warming planet threaten every nation and the global population. Cambodia is particularly vulnerable to climate change, with floods, drought, and extreme heat posing the greatest threats. This exposure is made more challenging due to the nation's large rural population and reliance on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and fisheries. Risking decades of social and economic progress, experts warn that climate change could increase poverty and cost the nation up to 9 percent of total GDP in the long run.



GREEN CLIMATE FUND

To tackle such a challenge, a multifaceted response is necessary. Capacity building in green technologies and sustainable energy strategies across the public and private sectors is essential. Likewise, the use of concessional funding to build confidence in the economic and ecological potential of climate projects is seen as a leading strategy. To these ends, the Cambodian Climate Financing Facility (CCFF) will support capacity building to overcome barriers and coordinate dialogues for ongoing strategy and policy refinement. The fund has also made available 109 million USD

to support the development and deployment of green projects across the country. Co-funded by the South Korea-based Green Climate Fund and administered by Cambodia's Agricultural and Rural Development Bank, the project will ensure funding for businesses in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and forestry, water infrastructure and eco-transportation sectors. The fund is hoped to drive the nation's transition to a green economy.

Cambodia is one of the first Asian countries to develop a framework to finance projects with funding delivered through the Green Climate Fund.

STOCK MARKET GAINS STEAM



Looking up: Kim Sophanita lauds successful online trading platform

Since its 2011 launch, 23 companies have listed on the exchange. Eleven firms issued equity shares while 12 listed corporate bonds. In October 2023, CSX partnered with securities firms to launch the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Startups Go Public Programme. The initiative aims to accelerate development of the market, boost investor confidence and attract foreign investment.

A recent agreement between CSX and the Securities and Exchange Regulator of Cambodia (SERC) saw the development of an online application allowing users to register, open accounts and begin trading immediately. According to CSX Director Kim Sophanita, the interface is largely responsible for the 12,000 new trading accounts opened since the end of 2022

Though still in its growth stage, the Cambodian Securities Exchange (CSX) continues to gather steam. Recent developments expand the assets available to investors as regulators and industry experts work to increase public awareness of the exchange and the benefits it can provide to businesses.

and a corollary surge in market capitalisation.

Other efforts to raise awareness of the exchange have included the Earning Forum 2024. At the March gathering, aimed at broadening the public's understanding of Cambodia's capital market, CSX CEO Hong Sok Hour emphasised the need for outreach. "We need to educate citizens about financial matters, as understanding fosters trust, which in turn encourages investment," he said.

With the exchange's first collective investment scheme – the BAMC Asia Equity Fund – launched at the end of 2023, and with five more companies expected to list bonds on the CSX in 2024, both observers and experts are bullish on the continued growth of Cambodia's securities market.



CITY OF FOOD

A THRIVING CULTURAL SCENE AND UNIQUE CUISINE HAVE MADE **BATTAMBANG** CAMBODIA'S CAPITAL OF DIVERSITY

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON

On World Cities Day in October 2023 the UNESCO Creative Cities Network made Battambang the first Cambodian municipality to be recognised for incorporating culture and ingenuity in its urban development plans. The inclusion of Battambang as a UNESCO Creative City in Gastronomy not only showcases exceptional food but also leverages cuisine to enhance development and global cultural exchange.

“Battambang’s food is a delightful blend of diversity and uniqueness,” said Ros “Chef Nak” Rotanak, one of Cambodia’s best known chefs, and an author and television personality. Battambang’s cuisine, she said, is built around locally gathered ingredients, including fresh vegetables and fish from Tonlé Sap lake and its tributary rivers. Fields nurture a variety of rice, vegetables and fruits – papayas, pomelos, oranges and sandek, or legumes (beans, peas, lentils and peanuts).

But ingredients themselves, fresh and delicious though they may be, are merely stand-alone parts before assembly; thus, the importance of culinary training cannot be overestimated, Nak said.

“Culinary training is essential for several reasons,” she emphasised. “Firstly, it serves as a guardian of traditional cuisine, ensuring that the culinary heritage of the nation endures and is passed down through generations.”

Nak added that such training broadens the horizons of professional chefs and culinary workers, giving them skills and the knowledge that will help to elevate Cambodian gastronomy to new heights.

“That helps promote Cambodia through its unique food culture,” she concluded. “The country’s healthy and delicious culinary offerings not only tantalise the taste buds but also contribute to overall well-being and contentment.”

In Battambang and its region, fermented fish paste (prahok), various fish sauces (tek paem and sangvak), curry pastes (bok bo proek) and dipping sauces (teuk kroeuung) may also be used to boost such iconic dishes as bor bor phek (rice porridge), chhar mi kantang (white noodles fried with beef and cabbage), num banh chok (rice noodle soup with herbs, popular at breakfast), and mee kola (vegetarian noodles with green papaya).

Other enormously popular Battambang dishes include nem trie (a spicy raw fish snack), krolan (sticky rice in bamboo tubes), num poun (coconut rice-flour waffles), dong khteh (creamy coconut meat) and the delicious milky mango.

An example of Battambang’s culinary creativity is amok (or hor mok), probably the most famous of Khmer dishes.

“People make the most of available ingredients and follow their cravings,” Nak said. “When it comes to hor mok, the choices can be quite versatile, ranging from fish to snails, chicken or eel. On some occasions, people in Battambang serve it in a bowl instead of steaming it in banana leaves, which is also found in Siem Reap.”

Chhay Matinal, deputy governor of Battambang province, expressed his congratulations to the city for its international honour. He proposed that a culinary event be organised to showcase the cuisine.

The prominent designation of Battambang by the international body “will enable the promotion of Khmer cuisine on a global stage, and more importantly, attract more visitors to experience the diverse flavours of Cambodian gastronomy,” Matinal said. **F.**

Foodies: Citizens' deep knowledge of natural food ingredients and their various preparations have earned Battambang the Creative City title



Photos: Thomas Cristoffoletti for Discover Cambodia; AFP

“People make the most of available ingredients and follow their cravings”
- Chef Nak



EXPERIENCE AN AWARD-WINNING HOSPITALITY AT NAGAWORLD



Step into the realm of NagaWorld, the leading world-class integrated resort in Cambodia that delivers a truly dazzling experience for those seeking something more than just a regular hotel stay. From the moment of your arrival, experience the elegance and warm hospitality of the resort, comprising all the facilities a traveller needs under one roof, ensuring an amazing stay.

Located along the iconic Mekong River, NagaWorld occupies one of the most strategic locations in the bustling Phnom Penh city. This integrated lifestyle destination invitingly beckons to leisure and business travellers alike with its fusion of modern aesthetics and old-world charm, offering the best in accommodation, dining, duty-free shopping, wellness, entertainment, and convention conveniently under one roof.

LAVISH AND COMFORTABLE STAYS

Spanning across two hotel complexes is a collection of 1,658 well-appointed rooms and suites. These accommodations are thoughtfully designed and furnished with ample space, sizeable windows for every guest's comfort, and spectacular views of the Mekong River or cityscape.

TANTALISING FEASTS & INDULGENCE

Partake in a chorus of delights at 20 restaurants, of which 4 are award-winning, serving diverse mouth-watering cuisines. The award-winning buffet restaurant, 2Pangea, offers an epic buffet spread with different cuisine themes for each night. While Hall of Golden Chimes serves up Cantonese cuisine featuring live and premium seafood, the weekend dim-sum all-you-can-eat has always been a highlight. For authentic Italian and French cuisine indulgence, head over to Bistro Romano and Le Gourmet for epicurean menus that satisfy the most discerning palates. Rest and chill out at Amret Palace Pool Bar, featuring one of the most extensive collections of Rums in the Kingdom with creative cocktails by home-grown mixologist.

DUTY-FREE SHOPPING SPREE

A marvellous duty-free shopping experience awaits at NagaCity Walk, Cambodia's first magnificent underground retail gallery and home to the esteemed China Duty-Free Group. Shop to your heart's content with over 200 premium international brands to choose from.

IMMERSIVE THERAPEUTIC WELLNESS

Further elevating NagaWorld's appeal are award-winning spas residing in each wing. Amidst soothing ambiances and attended by fully trained professionals, let your body and mind feel the ultimate in relaxation at The Spa at NagaWorld and The Elixir of Life Spa. The latter is also fitted with a salon offering hair and nail services for women and men in need of a quick glow and groom.

ALL-NIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Thrill your senses with uniquely concocted drinks from vibrant cocktail bars, a live music lounge featuring international bands, dance club, KTVs, and more. Enjoy non-stop entertainment even when the city sleeps.

LEADING MICE VENUE

As the centrestage of choice for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions, NagaWorld offers comprehensive MICE facilities and immense spaces, including an auditorium, meeting rooms, ballrooms, and a 3D mapping theatre capable of accommodating 2,000 people.

Together, these encapsulate the core dedication that represents NagaWorld, committed and in pursuit of excellence to meet every discerning need of guests and businesses.

For more information on NagaWorld, please visit www.nagaworld.com or contact enquiry@nagaworld.com



Dining a la Mexicano

It's always fiesta time at Cambodia's leading Latin restaurant

Phnom Penh's premier Mexican restaurant has been a presence in the Cambodian capital for nearly a decade.

So now it's time to take a slight turn to the left.

Fans of Mexicano needn't worry. Neither the riverside restaurant on Sisowath Quay, nor its original sister near the Russian Market, are going anywhere. But owners Mario Galán Ibarra and Jovany Antonio want to introduce their distinctive Latino cuisine to a wider range of Cambodian diners than they can do at the larger establishments.

Thus: COMPAS was born.

In the Spanish language of Mexico, "Compas" means "The Friends" or "The Companions." The new-concept restaurant brings affordable Mexican food to the local Khmer market, with taco prices capping at about \$6.

The first Compas, on Bassac Street, opened in late November. A second will soon begin welcoming diners in the Treillion Park area of Koh Pich (Diamond Island). More outlets will follow.

"It is our goal to approach this as a business model," said Jovany, who represents the business side of the culinary partnership. "Compas will serve smaller meals and we will operate from a common kitchen."

Mario, 55, is a native of Puerto Vallarta, capital of the state of Jalisco on Mexico's



Pacific coast. He began his career as a chef at the age of 17, worked in kitchens across Mexico, and found his way to Southeast Asia in his 30s.

After nine years in Singapore and a few more in Ho Chi Minh City, he landed in Phnom Penh in 2014. He opened his first small Mexicano restaurant in BKK1, catering mostly to expatriates, and subsequently moved to a new location in Toul Tum Pong.

Jovany, 44, is a Salvadoran-American businessman and real estate broker who was born and raised in Hollywood, California. He met Galán in 2014 after he had arrived in Cambodia and gone in search of Latin cuisine. He counseled his new friend on the wisdom of opening a riverside location, and when the space became available, the pair partnered in September 2022.

"We are the first and only authentic Mexican restaurant in Cambodia," Mario boasts,

and Jovany concurs: "This is as authentic as I've found," he says.

The secrets to success? "Passion. Timing," Jovany says, enthusiastically. "Following the recipe," Mario says, candidly.

"He understands how the ingredients and flavours need to be," Jovany says of his partner. "Mario's presentation is what sets it apart. In Cambodia, you must often pivot to find an alternative to the ingredients you need. Mario always goes out to meet the suppliers and get as close as possible."

Homemade corn and flour tortillas are the foundation of the menu. Tacos are the mainstay, served in more than a dozen varieties, including slow-cooked pork carnitas, tacos al lengua (traditional beef tongue), and marinated tacos al pastor with dried chilies and pineapple juice. They're always a bargain — especially on Taco Tuesdays, when they're priced at just \$1.50 a plate.

The menu also features crab and chicken enchiladas, burritos, chimichangas, quesadillas, Azteca soup, seafood ceviche and a delicious queso fundido for dipping. There are several options for vegetarian diners. And the last day of the work week is celebrated as Fajita Friday.

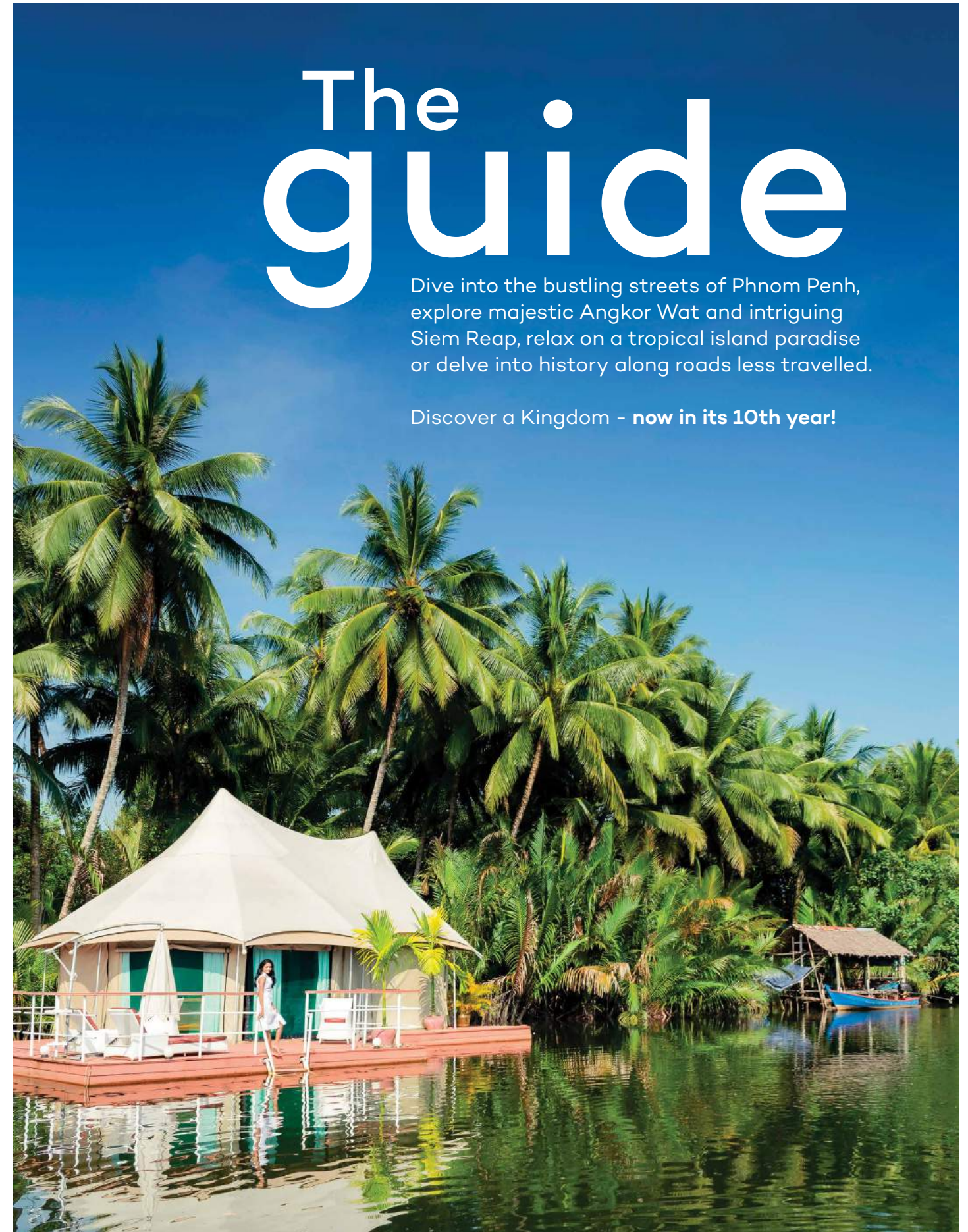
Décor is bright and whimsical in the Riverside restaurant, with *lucha libre* designs (think Mexican wrestlers) incorporated into the faces of animals — a cat, a dog, a panda, even an elephant — and a large Day of the Dead skull. And a mirrored passageway that winds around the kitchen to the restrooms adds an extra touch of festive quirkiness. It seems to suit a restaurant that is halfway around the world from its roots.



The guide

Dive into the bustling streets of Phnom Penh, explore majestic Angkor Wat and intriguing Siem Reap, relax on a tropical island paradise or delve into history along roads less travelled.

Discover a Kingdom - now in its 10th year!



Must-see sights



< PHNOM CHISOR

The hilltop location of this Angkorian temple complex, 50 km south of Phnom Penh, combines ancient history and natural beauty within an easy day's travel from the capital. Marking the southern frontier of Suryavarman I's 11th-century kingdom, it was dedicated to the Hindu gods Shiva and Vishnu. Arrive in the morning, avoiding the midday sun, to climb 412 steps for magnificent views; then extend your excursion to tranquil Tonlé Bati lake, where you can enjoy Khmer lunch delivered from handmade canoes.

^ ROYAL PALACE

The architectural highlight of Phnom Penh is the official residence of King Sihamoni. Built in 1866, it is most impressive just before sunset when the golden rays glint off the pagoda roofs, ornate stupas and pointed spires that stretch skyward. Visitors are welcome in the towering Throne Hall, still used for coronations and official ceremonies, and the adjacent Silver Pagoda (Wat Preah Keo), showcasing Cambodia's priceless Emerald Buddha along with imperial treasures, from jewel-encrusted snuff boxes to ancient swords.



< ANGKOR WAT

The single largest religious monument on earth stands at the heart of a city that was once among the greatest in the world. Wat means "temple," and Angkor Wat was the most sacred of the many marvels of the Khmer Empire, which dominated Southeast Asia from the 9th to 15th centuries. Now millions of visitors are lured here each year, especially for the spectacle of dawn breaking over the lotus-shaped spires. Nearly a million people once lived here. Today, Angkor is a symbol of the nation's heritage, as depicted on the Cambodian flag.

> KILLING FIELDS

Nearly half a century has passed since the unimaginable horror of the Khmer Rouge era, when nearly a quarter of all Cambodians – 2 million in all – were killed in a mass, politically motivated genocide. That tragic era still rests heavily in the nation's collective memory. Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, a school-turned-prison in the heart of Phnom Penh, and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields, an execution site on the urban fringe, make for grim viewing. But visitors hoping to understand the tragedy would be remiss if they left Cambodia without seeing them.



< THE ISLANDS

Constantly evolving, the gloriously pristine tropical islands off Cambodia's southwest coast have something for every kind of traveller, from backpackers to luxury lovers. Just a one-hour ferry from the coastal city of Sihanoukville, visitors can find secluded beach bungalows, extravagant spas, exuberant nightlife and renowned diving resorts where the "fresh catch" often means something plucked from the opalescent waters that very morning. Most popular are Koh Rong and its sister island of Koh Rong Sanloem.

Once dubbed the Pearl of Asia, Phnom Penh has been reborn as a thriving commercial and cultural hub at the meeting of three major rivers in the heart of Cambodia.

Luxury restaurants and bars line streets resplendent with colonial and Buddhist architecture, from the golden spires of the Royal Palace to the modern magnificence of Vattanac Tower. Here, we break down the best of the best of what this flourishing capital has to offer.



Phnom Penh

SLEEP.



< Penh House & Jungle Addition

Charming and modestly priced, these sister boutique properties in the heart of a historic colonial neighbourhood have welcomed guests since 2018. The classic spires of temples and pagodas add to the stunning view from the pool and restaurant on the fifth-storey Penh House rooftop, while a spa and fitness centre contribute a contemporary flavour to the modernist Khmer architecture. Nearby, the Jungle Addition is like a village of its own, lush foliage embracing a shaded central courtyard area.

pennhouse.asia

Hôtel KVL

Of all the centrally located urban hotels in the capital, perhaps none is as alluring as the KVL, which opened its doors in August 2022. The four-star business hotel — owned by the Vattanac Group, whose glamorous Rosewood Phnom Penh is one of the city's premier properties — overlooks Sisowath Quay just steps from the Royal Palace. During the annual Water Festival, there is no better place to watch the colourful parade of boats on the Tonlé Sap river than this hotel's rooftop bar and restaurant, Up by KVL, with an extensive menu of authentic Spanish tapas.

hotelkvl.com

> The Plantation Urban Resort & Spa

Any time of day, the central swimming pool at this restored French heritage property bustles with exuberant energy. The surrounding tropical gardens leave no clue that The Plantation is at the heart of one of old Phnom Penh's busiest districts. Built in the 1930s, restored in 2011 and fully renovated in 2024, the colonial-era structure has spacious rooms, many of them poolside, along with a spa, gym and art gallery locally famed for its rotating exhibits. A highlight of the reimagined entry is newly expanded La Pergola restaurant, where renowned French executive chef Nicolas Malherbe works his wonders.

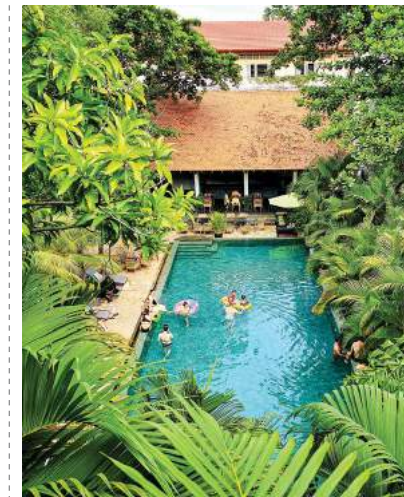
theplantation.asia



^ Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra

Anyone who has ever craved the experience of traditional French luxury, liberally sprinkled with modern amenities, will not be disappointed by this magnificent urban oasis. The Sofitel group's Phnom Penh location (the Phokeethra label honours the Hindu god Brahma, whose shrine is on the expansive grounds) features every imaginable indulgence, from tennis courts and swimming pools to a full range of spa treatments, five exquisite international restaurants and a renowned art gallery. A collection of 1930s photographs is a highlight of the towering lobby.

sofitel-phnompenh-phokeethra.com



v The Balé

If a riverfront retreat is what you seek, The Balé may be what you've been looking for. A member of the Bali-based Lifestyle Retreats group, this modernist boutique hideaway — in the residential Bak Khaeng neighbourhood 30 minutes' drive north of central Phnom Penh — offers a lazy idyll away from the urban bustle. Guests can relax by the pool watching boats pass on the Mekong, indulge in the spa, or meditate in a courtyard dominated by a sacred Bodhi tree. Theato Restaurant serves a wide range of meals, many of Khmer influence.

thebalephnompenh.com



Some of the most frustrating travel experiences occur during confusing taxi rides. Here are some solutions for Phnom Penh and other cities. Download Grab, PassApp or another ride-hail app that allows you to enter your destination, so the driver knows exactly where to go. Drivers know the location of temples and markets, so if you hail a tuk tuk without using an app, tell the driver to take you to one near where you're going — and ask someone for the proper pronunciation of the place first.

EAT.



< Riverside

This stretch of Sisowath Quay, extending about nine streets from the Royal Palace to the Night Market, turns its best face to the broad promenade along the Tonlé Sap river. Food options range from hamburger and pizza joints to elegant dining. La Croisette, founded in 1997, offers three meals a day, from fresh seafood and European schnitzels to locally inspired Khmer dishes. Oskar Bistro is a stylish lounge well-known for its steaks and late-night music scene; Mexicano has excellent Latin food; selections at Kanazawa include sushi and tempura. North of the Night Market, Hummus House, a Lebanese eatery, offers shwarmas, kebabs and a variety of Middle Eastern vegetarian plates, of course including its name-sake hummus.

Langka Lane

A dead-end backstreet of abandoned Chinese shophouses has become one of the most surprising culinary destinations in the city. More than 20 businesses cluster off Street 51 (Pasteur Street) near the corner of Street 288 in BKK1 (Boeng Keng Kang). Discerning renewal has given new life to such fine sister restaurants as Le Langka (French cuisine) and Boma (Mediterranean), along with the Patio Hotel and Elephant Sky Bar. Among the numerous Japanese restaurants are Katanashi (small bites), Kaki-O (oysters) and SaKaNa (seafood). Try Sak Pub for original craft beers or enjoy a cocktail at Battbong – quirky, stylish, and entered through a door in a Coca-Cola vending machine.

Villa 5

Serving up a tantalising blend of Khmer and Italian cuisine, Villa 5's modern-colonial architecture makes for the perfect setting to enjoy culinary fusion. Black ink spaghetti with prawn tartare and home-made tuffe tagliolini offer a taste of a ward-winning Chef Sopheak's creative takes on familiar classics. Unique pizzas are also menu standouts – the Khmer-influenced char kdao pizza is a must-try. Pair your meal with a glass from the wine selection or choose the set menu to celebrate a special occasion. Whether enjoying the luxurious dining room or relaxing outside in the garden, expect quality and flavour at Villa 5. villa5cuisine.com



The capital has no shortage of upscale bars, yet you would be remiss to not head up to the riverside to grab a famous 50 cent beer – kept ice-cold in cooler boxes – from one of the many local vendors along the scenic promenade following the Tonlé Sap. Grab a cold one, enjoy the walk and soak in the views.

Zhan Liang

Arguably the finest Chinese restaurant in a city peppered with more than its share is Zhan Liang, at the Rosewood Hotel in the Vattanac Capital Tower. An exquisite menu highlighting Cantonese, Sichuan and Mandarin cuisines is typified by its signature soup, "Monk Jumps Over the Wall," featuring fish maw, abalone, sea cucumber, dried scallops and flower mushrooms; the potage is served on an enormous lazy susan in a private dining room. In Zhan Liang's Tea Library, a tea sommelier stands by to make personal recommendations from among 60 international selections. rosewoodhotels.com

> Bassac Street

No longer restricted to a single narrow alley, the three blocks of Street 308 east of Norodom Boulevard have spread into adjacent lanes and shed their former "Bassac Lane" label. A customer base ranging from backpackers to affluent expats supports the enclave of tiny bars and restaurants. The street has a United Nations of dining choices. Mama Wong's is locally famed for its homemade noodles and dumplings. Namaste India is one of the city's best for South Asian cuisine, and Elia Greek Kitchen is the place to go for souvlaki and baklava. Abode, Piccola Italia and the Thai Kitchen offer more choices on Street 308; cocktail lovers are drawn to Harry's, Koh Bar, White Rabbit, Pixel, The Library and the Welsh Embassy, to name but a few.



EAT.



^ Malevich

New in 2024, this stylish Russian-Ukrainian restaurant offers proof that fine food can bridge political chasms. With a full wall of windows on the bustling Sothea's Boulevard facing Wat Botum Park, Malevich has been greeted with praise from the expat set. You can start with a Nordic fish chowder or a classic beetroot soup (borscht), then dive into beef stroganoff or lamb dumplings. Or sip champagne at the bar with caviar as you listen to the chef and management banter in Russian. It's open daily from noon to midnight.



^ Kinin

This isn't so much one restaurant as it is a "collective" of several, sharing a renovated French colonial house and a leafy garden courtyard in the heart of the Toul Tom Pong district. Look to Nesat for Kep crab with Kampot peppers, Kumbhaka for meats slow-cooked in the traditional Khmer style, Yemaya for tropical cocktails. The menu ranges from delicate vegetarian to hearty Western fare. Service is always friendly and attentive. facebook.com/kininthe-collective

Pepe Bistro

Only a few steps from the National Museum is this moderately priced French treasure, opened in 2018 by Paris-born Aude Moulard. Gaulic visitors regularly praise its charming atmosphere, attentive service and high-quality cuisine, along with a value-conscious set lunch menu. Popular dishes include duck foie gras, sauteed squid with chorizo and cream, bone marrow pôt au feu, and crab ravioli with Malay laksa sauce. facebook.com/pepe-bistro.pp

TRIBE



Modern travellers. We made this hotel for you.

TRIBE is made for an international cast of frequent travellers who want something more, for less. Tech savvy, smart, luxury lovers with an appreciation of affordability. Gone are outdated and unwanted services, inefficient check-in and check-outs, overpriced mini bars, restaurants and stuffy spas. TRIBE's designer driven, highly functional rooms are luxurious and unique. Cutting edge technology, entertainment and office facilities are standard, and, if you choose, so is our sociable atmosphere.



Located at the roof deck of TRIBE Phnom Penh, Hemisphere offers a hip, happening space with bespoke cocktails, premium wine & liquor, flavorful dishes, and an amazing view of the city



Contact us now at: 023 965 500, 081 888 135 (Telegram) <http://m.me/100859315644694>

DRINK.

> Hops Craft Beer Garden

Cambodia's nearest thing to a Munich beer hall, this expansive drinking-and-dining compound north of Independence Monument is not only German-owned; it also has a menu that features schnitzels, sausages and other hearty Central European fare. The primary Hops venue has a half-dozen seating areas, including a street-level beer garden; in all, there are four Phnom Penh locations. In each of them, the star attraction is the freshly brewed beer, including the top-fermented Amber Witch and the complex, higher-alcohol Red Fury. hops-brewery.com



^ Sora Skybar

The jewel of the sky-bar scene soars 37 stories above the city, attracting a prosperous and fashionable crowd. Jutting out of Vattanac Capital Tower, home of the Rosewood hotel, the terrace is most popular at sunset, when the views across Phnom Penh are spectacular. Skilled bartenders can make any cocktail or recommend local beers and imported wines. Also on this level is the Iza robotayaki restaurant, serving Japanese tapas, and the ultra-stylish, Hemingway-inspired Whiskey Library. One floor higher is Cuts, a steak-and-seafood grill named "best restaurant in Cambodia" by Travel + Leisure magazine. rosewoodhotels.com



Phnom Penh has a growing LGBTQ scene and gay-friendly venues are flourishing. Nomadicboys.com calls Cambodia "one of the most gay-friendly places in Asia," in both Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. Several bars, such as Blue Chili and Heart of Darkness, cater to those looking for late-night fun.

Bar Odin

This classic speakeasy, hidden behind an unmarked door on a side street in the Phum Phnom Thom neighbourhood, harkens to the discreet izakaya of Tokyo and Osaka. Guests cluster at a single long bar or in an upper-storey VIP room to enjoy perhaps the best whisky selection in Cambodia, attended by a skilled bartender. A short menu of comfort foods assures that no one goes hungry. facebook.com/barodinpp

v Voodoo Blvd

Relocated from Kampot to the Wat Botum park area in 2022, Voodoo Blvd has quickly become one of Phnom Penh's most popular cocktail lounges. From great drinks (the Purple Haze blends Khmer pepper vodka with fruit juices and homemade vanilla syrup) to Japanese fusion-style tapas (think okonomiyaki pork skewers), the Boulevard matches eclectic décor with frequent live music performances and genuinely friendly service. facebook.com/VoodooBoulevard



DRINK.



^ Elephant Bar

It's no accident that Cambodia's most famous watering hole is in the Raffles Hotel Le Royal. The first Singapore Sling cocktail was concocted at the original Raffles in Singapore in 1915. The Phnom Penh property, which opened in 1929, came up with its own signature drink for US First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in 1967: The Femme Fatale is a mix of champagne, cognac and crème à la fraise des bois ("wild strawberry cream"). Among the 50 different labels of gin served here today is the hotel's own Elephant Bar Gin. Tapas and light meals are served all day beneath frescoes that depict elephants in lush jungle scenes. rafflesphnompenh.com

v Le Manolis

Come here to enjoy French heritage wines in a lovingly renovated colonial building: Could there be anything more like Paris in Phnom Penh? Located at Post Office Square, this old-school bistro has a warm, comfortable, vintage vibe, its wood furnishing framing a spacious central bar accented by a broad outdoor terrace. Several wines are served by the glass, including cabernet, beaujolais and chardonnay. Dozens more are served by the bottle. The bistro menu features cheeses, charcuterie and bavette steak frites. facebook.com/lemanolis.pp





rambutan
hotel+resorts cambodia



Your Urban Oasis
in
Siem Reap & Phnom Penh

rambutancambodia.com



EXPLORE.



v Silk Island

Only 18 km upstream from Phnom Penh in the middle of the Mekong, the island known to locals as Koh Dach offers a slice of traditional Cambodian life within the greater urban area. Take a tuk tuk over the Cambodia-Japan Friendship Bridge to a small ferry, cross the channel, and head directly for the weavers' community of wooden houses, raised on stilts. Artists plump up silkworms by feeding them mulberry leaves, harvest the cocoons produced by their larvae, spin their delicate yarn on handmade wooden looms, and dye the fabric in time-honoured patterns. Colourful Khmer scarves, known as krama, and hand-knit sarongs, or sampot, are popular purchases.



▲ Oudong

Before King Norodom moved Cambodia's capital 40 km south-east to Phnom Penh in 1866, the Kingdom's centre of power for nearly 250 years was Oudong, then a city of 12,000 people. Crumbling pagoda spires and stupas still shoot dramatically skyward from its namesake mountain, twin-summitted Phnom Oudong, reached by a 500-step climb above rice paddies. Even before the capital was established here, the mountain was regarded as sacred by the Khmer people. Thai invasions, American bombs and Khmer Rouge destruction took their toll on the tombs of former kings, but the partial ruins of an eight-metre Buddha image is worth the hike, as is a stupa built in 2002 by King Norodom Sihanouk. The site contains 16 stupas of medieval Theravada Buddhist kings and the royal families of the Oudong period, with three of those sites at the foot of the mountain. Oudong can be easily visited by bus, tuk tuk or taxi; weekday mornings are usually best.

v Central Market

Built in Art Deco style by the French in 1937, the pale-yellow Psar Thmei (literally "new market") has survived war and genocide and is unique in all of Asia. Four wings and as many huge corridors radiate from its central dome, beneath which hide a gold ceiling and an aged clock that still keeps proper time. (The market is open daily from 7am to 6pm.) Electronics goods, watches and other jewellery dominate vendor stalls in the heart of the market; further corridors are packed with pretty much anything you'd want to buy, from food and produce, clothing and toiletries, to kitchen equipment, luggage, kitschy arts and other touristy souvenirs. Be prepared to bargain.



Like many large cities, petty theft happens in Phnom Penh. Beware of bag snatchers on motorbikes looking for an easy target. Whether you're out for a walk or in a tuk tuk, always keep your smart phone in your front pocket, and remember that it's better to wear a backpack than an over-shoulder bag. In a nation where ATM machines dispense \$100 bills in US dollars, a common shop scam involves exchanging bogus bills for real ones; be cautious when making payments in salons or public markets.

Photo: Sam Jarm for Discover (1)



▲ National Museum

Built beside the Royal Palace between 1917 and 1920, the National Museum of Cambodia set the standard for "traditional Khmer" architectural design of the 20th century with its ornate spires and soaring rooflines. It holds the Kingdom's largest collection of historical artefacts — stone sculptures and pottery dating back more than a millennium, along with sacred statues returned from the West after being looted from ancient Angkorian temples decades ago. History lovers who want a greater understanding of the bond between Cambodian economics and heritage should also plan a visit to the SOSORO Museum in downtown Phnom Penh (page 124).

cambodiamuseum.info



▲ Boat Cruises

Phnom Penh looks very different from the water. Any number of budget-priced sunset and light-dinner cruises depart from the banks of the Tonlé Sap, on Sisowath Quay near the Night Market. Choose to depart around 5pm to watch the sun drop behind the city's highrises. Or wait until about 7pm, when the golden lights of the Royal Palace reflect off the river's glassy waters, already shimmering with the cruise vessels' own distinctive colored lights. It's a beautiful moment and one easily shared with passengers of all walks of life, from fellow travellers to saffron-robed monks on an evening out.



FLAVOURS OF THE VINE



MORNING TILL LATE NIGHT

📍 NO. 84E0 ST 244 , PHNOM PENH

☎ 070 427 557

✉ THEVINEPHNOMPENH@GMAIL.COM

📱 THE VINE PHNOM PENH 📷 THE VINE PHNOM PENH



With some of the Kingdom's finest hotels, brightest culinary stars and most enchanting countryside excursions, it's no surprise that Siem Reap is the country's top tourist destination. No trip to this city of contrasts is complete without a visit to the ancient splendour of Angkor

Siem Reap

SLEEP.

> Phum Baitang

In the Khmer language, Phum Baitang means "green village." Indeed, this stunning luxury resort is modelled upon a traditional Cambodian community. Wooden walkways weave past its 45 terrace and pool villas, their antique furnishings on wooden floors beneath thatch and tile roofs. They share 20-acre grounds with groves of sugar palms, lemongrass meadows and rice paddies harvested three times a year. Beside the 50-metre saltwater pool, Bai Phsar restaurant is locally famed for its Khmer cuisine made with garden-fresh ingredients. Phum Baitang also features a spa with seven individual treatment bungalows, a yoga pavilion, a gym and free use of resort bicycles. zannierhotels.com/phumbaitang



^ Jaya House Riverpark

Meshing mid-20th-century Cambodian modernism with the grand style of ancient Angkor, the luxurious boutique Jaya House wins praise for its focus on community and environmental initiatives. Its Refill Not Landfill campaign, pioneered in 2015, made it Cambodia's first plastic-free hotel, doing away with single-use plastics by encouraging reusable drinking bottles and free refill stations. Dozens of paintings by underprivileged students from Siem Reap's

Small Art School demonstrate a similar commitment to Khmer culture – as does the creative Khmer and international fare served at the Trorkuon restaurant. The hotel's 36 rooms overlook a tropical garden. Other special touches include a rooftop sky bar and two swimming pools. The Riverpark also has a new sister hotel, the Jaya House Angkor Park. jayahouseriverparksiemreap.com



While popular ride-hailing apps like PassApp and Grab have now made their way to Siem Reap – meaning that getting around is easier than ever – the best way to explore the city as well as its famed temples is by bicycle or e-bike. They're easy to rent and perfect for gentle sightseeing at your own pace. When in the Angkor park, get off the typical tourist trail and explore the many ancient wonders not taken up by the crowds. Just head where the wind takes you: The possibilities are endless.

Photos: Sam Jam for Discover (2)

SLEEP.



▲ Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor

Nowhere else in Siem Reap has the historical cachet of the Raffles Grand. Since opening in 1932, this colonial landmark on the road to Angkor Wat has hosted a who's who of famous faces, from Charlie Chaplin and Somerset Maugham to Bill and Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama. Closed for renovation for six months in 2019, it has lost none of its grandeur. Nods to history are everywhere, and the weekly classical dance performances may be the best in Siem Reap. Service and attention to detail – look out for the original wrought-iron cage elevator and fully functional rotary phones – are exquisite. Restaurant 1932 is a fine place to sample royal Khmer cuisine, while the Café d'Angkor is a more casual option. Traditional afternoon tea is served in The Conservatory, overlooking the spacious pool and the Royal Garden, and the atmospheric Elephant Bar offers cocktails and an extensive wine list.

raffles.com/siem-reap

▼ Treeline Urban Resort

Designed by artists for art lovers, this centrally located boutique hotel is the creation of architect Hok Kang. Inspired by Cambodian heritage and the Kingdom's natural beauty, Kang developed a property with a minimalist aesthetic that carries to its 48 guest rooms. Wood and stone design details predominate. Music filters through the open-air courtyard gallery that features a private collection of works by contemporary Cambodian artists. The eponymous "treeline" is best seen from the rooftop, with its infinity pool and forest-like views of the foliage lining the adjacent Siem Reap river.

treelinehotels.com



▲ Viroth's Hotel

Imbued with a '50-'60s ambience, Viroth's is a step back in time to a peaceful period of Cambodian history. A chauffeur-driven vintage Mercedes or Rolls Royce collects guests at the Siem Reap airport and scoots them to the leafy Wat Bo area in the heart of the city, just across the river from the Old Market. Here, 35 rooms and suites – embraced by gardens and vertical greenery – offer elegant simplicity accentuated by cutting-edge technology. Famed for its service, the hotel has a 20-metre swimming pool and spa for guests' exclusive use. A casual restaurant serves both Khmer and continental cuisine.

viroth-hotel.com



▲ Rambutan Hotel & Resort

Is it a hotel or a resort? In the case of Rambutan, the first gay-friendly boutique lodging in Siem Reap, it's both – adjacent communities on a quiet lane across the river from the Old Market. Hotel and resort are modelled upon traditional Khmer villages with saltwater pools, tropical gardens, spa, restaurant and bar. Room interiors are decked out in modern trappings, including contemporary artwork, with nods to Khmer culture in the locally made furniture and silk textiles. Each room in the resort has its own private terrace, outdoor bath and splash shower; the hotel's balcony units spill over two levels.

rambutansiemreap.com



THE CORNER
Bassac Lane

Eat. Drink. Party.

The Corner of street 29 & 308, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

+855 (0)10 353 288 [the cornerbassaclane](https://www.facebook.com/thecornerbassaclane)

thecorner.bassaclane@gmail.com

EAT.



< Lum Orng

Billed as Cambodia's first "farm-to-table" restaurant, Lum Orng is the pet project of noted chef Seng Sothea. A native of rural Kampong Cham province, Sothea worked in luxury hotel kitchens in Dubai and the Caribbean before returning to Cambodia to open his own restaurants, including Mahob (mahobkmer.com) in 2014. Mahob aims at modernising Khmer food while preserving its culinary heritage. Lum Orng, surrounded by an organic garden in suburban Thiok Ondong village, is more experimental: Sothea's "New Mekong" cuisine includes elements of the long-ago Khmer empire as well as the Mekong Delta and neighbouring Laos and Thailand. Diners can order a la carte or from an ever-changing tasting menu, whose selections might include river lobster in a blanket of rice tapioca, fried frog legs with lotus nuts, and braised pork-rib wontons. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

lumornrestaurant.com

Pinak Pou

Green duck curry with num banh-chok rice noodles. Padi crab smashed in coconut broth. Kulen Mountain pork sausage with peanuts and mung beans. Savoury red ants and a grilled beehive salad. Chef Mork Mengly has captured the hearts and palates of tourists and locals alike, coupling creativity and time-tested family recipes with ambience reflective of Cambodian nature. He even has a cooking school in this casual fine-dining oasis on Wat Bo Road, a short tuk tuk ride from the urban centre.

pinakpou.com

Brother Bong Cafe

This relaxed and friendly breakfast-and-lunch spot, on a side street near Wat Bo, is open from 7 am to 5 pm every day. For java lovers, the coffee is some of the best in Siem Reap. Morning meals range from full English breakfasts to fruit-and-muesli bowls, and even a breakfast burger topped with a fried egg. Popular lunches include healthy salads and sandwiches. The Western menu is nicely complemented by a variety of Khmer dishes. Portions are generous, prices are modest and service top-notch.

facebook.com/brotherbongcafe



NGO and training school Egbok has made a name for itself by offering quality education to the Kingdom's under-served youth. A meal beneath the bamboo roof of SPOONS Café and Restaurant supports these students in gaining hands-on experience in the real world of dining, without compromising on the quality of the food.



^ Embassy Khmer Gastronomy

Chef Kimsan Pol presides over an all-female kitchen at a restaurant that celebrates home-cooking wonder women, the foundation of Cambodia's culinary heritage. A five-course set dinner menu, changing monthly, showcases the best of Khmer flavours and fresh seasonal ingredients – from lotus root and galangal to Sihanoukville baby scallop, marinated duck breast with Kampot pepper sauce to black sticky rice with roasted cashew-nut ice cream. Each course is paired with wines or champagnes. Spacious and elegant, Embassy is located in Siem Reap's Mondul 1 Village.

embassy-restaurant.com



> Jomno Modern Khmer Cuisine

Known for his fusion cuisine with Japanese stylings, honed by a French culinary education but rooted in Khmer flavours and ingredients, chef Seiha Chomnab prides himself on his creativity. He takes inspiration from his mother's recipes in dishes like a classic fish amok or Battambang sausage. The extensive plant-based menu in this casual, friendly restaurant features jackfruit curry. Floor-to-ceiling windows and a lighted upstairs terrace give this place in Wat Damnak Village an inviting, homey atmosphere for lunch or dinner.

facebook.com/jomnostreetfood

DRINK.

> Wild

There's no space more perfectly suited to laid back dining under the stars than Wild. Stretch out your legs on patio-style furniture in their homey garden and share bite-sized delights between friends. Wild specialises in spring rolls – with a choice of fresh, fried or sweet – that complement signature cocktails inspired by the tropical flavours of Cambodia. A favourite cocktail is Grandma Was a Hippie, made from hibiscus-infused rum with raspberry jam. For an even more intimate encounter, head up to the treehouse, where there's only space for two. Wild is also in Phnom Penh.

wild-siemreap.com

Bar Code

Siem Reap's premier LGBTQ+ venue is whatever you want it to be, from a classy cocktail lounge suited for a quiet evening drink, to a raucous club celebrating all the glitz and glamour the town has to offer. The in-house DJ spins house, techno, jazz and more, while nightly cabaret shows from a rotating troupe of performers show off the best of Siem Reap's thriving alternative community.

barcode-siemreap.com



< Miss Wong

This staple of the Siem Reap bar scene is decked out in 1930s Shanghai chic, its glowing Chinese lanterns setting the tone for expertly crafted home infusions. Taking its name from a post-war portrait by the South African artist Vladimir Tretchikoff, Miss Wong loves to mix things up by using rare, small-batch gins and vodkas, and giving classic cocktails a signature Asian twist. Our favourite cocktail is the China White, jasmine tea syrup and lychees set with Tanqueray gin and Cinzano Bianco.

misswong.net

Pomme Brewhouse

Fans of craft beers are never disappointed at Pomme, which brews a variety of lagers and ales (including IPAs) in-house. Other draughts are also on tap. A menu of Thai food, including curries and salads, is served in a lovely indoor-outdoor garden near Wat Damnak, steps from the city centre. Pomme is especially popular for Sunday open mic night and a Thursday "think and drink" pub quiz.

facebook.com/pommesiemreap



Down Siem Reap's Alley West is the Gelato and Coffee Lab, a tiny spot that turns out some of the most authentic Italian gelato in the country. (Its owner, a true aficionado, would likely bristle at the term "ice cream.") Its 20 all-natural flavours are an ideal way to cool down in the heat of the day, or well worth saving a bit of space to enjoy after dinner.

EXPLORE.



< Phare, The Cambodian Circus

The cheeky characters behind Siem Reap's not-to-be-missed circus extravaganza are graduates of Phare Ponleu Selpak, a not-for-profit art school and training centre in nearby Battambang. Enter the big top to witness charismatic acrobats performing a spectacular combination of flips, tumbles, contortions and amazing feats of balance – as well as juggling tricks, slapstick clowning, and dance set to an infectious medley of songs played on traditional instruments. Stories are uniquely Cambodian. Recent shows include "White Gold," a celebration of the nourishing magic of rice, and "Khmer Metal," which explores the edgier side of Cambodian urban youth life.

pharecircus.org

Satcha Handicraft Centre

Young apprentices are trained in traditional crafts from stone carving to silk painting, silverwork to ceramics and lacquerware. Tourists can visit the production workshop or join a countryside tour to witness the impeccable talent of Siem Reap's youth reviving ancient traditions. One-of-a-kind creations, with a growing focus on contemporary designs, are sold at shops in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. This is a social enterprise designed to provide artisans and their communities with regular revenues.

satcha-handicraft.com

Angkor National Museum

If you're planning multiple days in the archaeological park, as you should, this impressive museum is a great place to visit before or after your first round of climbing ancient steps. It will give you a much fuller understanding of what you saw and what you have yet to discover on your second and third days. Plan several hours here: Start in the Gallery of 1,000 Buddha images, then explore seven additional galleries whose interactive exhibits illustrate the origins and history of the 9th-to-15th-century Angkor civilisation – its religions, art and culture.

angkornationalmuseum.com

< Apopo Visitor Centre

With an estimated 4 million landmines still hiding beneath the earth across Cambodia, teams of unsung heroes continue to meticulously scour the countryside to clear damage remaining from decades of war. APOPO gets a lot of help from furry friends: Since 2015, the Belgian NGO has trained African giant rats and "hero dogs" to sniff out mines and other unexpected ordnance. At their Siem Reap visitor centre, you can see these expert scent detectors in action and explore the tragic legacy of some of the nation's darkest days.

apopo.org



Don't be surprised when certain tourist attractions charge a greater entrance fee for foreigners. This is a common practice across the country, with ancient sites like those inside the Angkor complex free for Cambodian nationals. While visiting the temples and other religious sites, make sure to keep your shoulders and knees covered to avoid being turned away at the entrance.



^ Phnom Kulen

In the early 9th century, atop one of Cambodia's most sacred mountains, Jayavarman II declared himself the deva-raj, the god-king, and first ruler of what would become the great Khmer Empire. Today Phnom Kulen is a popular spot for locals who make the pilgrimage to Wat Preah Ang Thom, home to an enormous reclining Buddha, on weekends and for religious festivals. This forested historical site, about 30 km from Angkor Wat, is also famous for waterfalls in the monsoon season and for the lingas (phallic symbols of the Hindu god Shiva) carved into the riverbank at the mountain's base. The quarries at Phnom Kulen provided the stones for Angkor Wat and other temples.



^ Floating villages

The monsoon season, stretching from around May to October, transforms the Tonlé Sap into the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. The wooden stilt villages (made up of houses, shops, restaurants, schools and even hospitals) that line the river are home to thousands of fishermen and women who support their families from the water's rich depths. There are several such communities near Siem Reap; we recommend Kompong Phluc and Kompong Khleang, where local boat drivers lead you to the open waters of the grand Tonlé Sap to watch a perfect sunset.

Photos: Sam Jam (2)



La Croisette

SINCE 1997

PHNOM PENH'S ICONIC BISTRO & RESTAURANT ON THE RIVERSIDE

241 SISOWATH QUAY | PHNOM PENH

+855 (0)23 220 554

Open daily from 8AM - 1AM

The South

Cambodia's 443-km coastline is the place to go to slow down after fast-paced adventures in the capital and temple-hopping in the northwest. The islands are home to the Kingdom's finest beaches. Kep boasts luxurious hillside resorts and Kampot is the ideal riverside sanctuary to spend lazy days in the sun



Photos: Sam Jam for Discover (2)

SLEEP.

> Veranda Natural Resort

This mountaintop retreat offers unrivalled panoramic views of Kep's coastline and the rocky cliffs that soar above it. Nestled within the lush jungle of Kep National Park, the family-friendly resort showcases Cambodia's bountiful landscape, boasting peaceful gardens, trees dripping with fruit and rustic wooden furnishings. Take a dip in the infinity pool, or head over to the spa for an afternoon of unabashed pampering. The Secret Bar and Restaurant serves a mixture of dishes from throughout Asia and the West.

veranda-resort.asia



< Samanea Beach Resort

Inspired by the ruins of a seaside cottage that stood in what is now a private botanical park in Kep, Samanea Beach Resort is an oasis of peace and pleasure. Fusing rustic charm with contemporary luxury, 12 Khmer-style villas with exposed stonework are scattered among the gardens. A wooden boardwalk, leading from a saltwater infinity pool into a mangrove forest, emphasises the resort's environmental awareness. Dinner may be served on the panoramic rooftop terrace of the Chankiri restaurant or on a private beach.

samanea-resort.com

Hotel Old Cinema

An Art Deco-era icon dating from the 1930s, this quaint eight-bedroom hotel in Kampot was once among four theatres that served a thriving creative community in the late '60s and early '70s. The aftermath of the Khmer Rouge time left the heritage jewel in desperate need of the careful restoration recently provided by French owners. Once again bright and beautiful, the midtown hotel is now decked out with retro-cool furnishings, even if it no longer plays the Hong Kong kung fu films for which it was once known. Its restaurant has garnered a reputation for its wines, cheeses and gourmet tapas.

facebook.com/oldcinemahotel

Phoumrumduol Bungalow

Charming, budget-priced and adjacent to the Kampot railway station, with service to Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, these individual bungalows are spaced throughout a lush garden beside a lovely swimming pool. An open-air restaurant and lounge serves Western or Asian breakfasts daily and other meals by arrangement. Rooms are clean, quiet, comfortable and great value for money. Guests have access to bicycle rentals and free WiFi.

facebook.com/phoumrumduol



The coastal town of Sihanoukville has in recent years become better known for its casinos than its beaches, so head straight to one of Cambodia's pristine islands for a true taste of luxury living. Look on page 112 for our recommendations of where to stay.



^ Amber Kampot

A luxurious riverside resort, Amber promises peaceful relaxation despite its location directly opposite the town centre. Each premium one- and two-bedroom villa, spacious and tastefully decorated, has a private pool. The Arvi Restaurant serves international fusion cuisines along with creative Khmer fare, and the Amber Spa offers a menu of world-class therapies. The resort also has a fitness center, a hot tub and free bicycles for guest to use as they explore the Kampot area.

amber-kampot.com

EAT & DRINK.



The three main beaches in Sihanoukville are Serendipity, Otres 1 and Otres 2. The former is the go-to coastal spot for partying, while Otres 2 is home to a more upmarket vibe and plenty of smart resorts. On Otres 2, the Secret Garden hotel and restaurant offer tiger prawns and steamed snapper straight from the sea.

▲ Tertúlia

A lively slice of Portuguese charm opening onto the streets of Kampot, Tertúlia takes its name from the rich bodega culture that spread from the Iberian peninsula across Latin America. It follows through on a promise of good food and even better conversation. A succulent range of marine offerings includes Portugal's famous seafood cataplana, and there are plenty of moderately priced red meats on the menu as well, to be enjoyed with a choice of Iberian wines and pulsing Latin music.

facebook.com/kampottertulia

Artisans Kampot

Formerly Atelier, this quaint gourmet bistro and boutique on Kampot's languid riverside occupies an original French colonial-era shophouse that retains an Old World charm despite its renovated chic interiors. Serving elegant cuisine inspired by the piquant flavours of the iconic Kampot pepper, Artisan blends the vibrant tastes of Cambodia with the fusion creations of collaborating regional chefs who make such delicious dishes as crab cannelloni and a Khmer lok lak burger.

atelierkampot.com

Rikitikitavi

Perched on a riverside balcony above a terrace restaurant, the popular bar is well known for its selection of single malt Scottish whiskies. Beer, wine, cocktails and fresh fruit shakes are also part of the fare. The restaurant specialises in creative Khmer cuisine.

rikikititavi-kampot.com



Bistro Twenty Three

Twenty Three's French-trained South African chef focuses on top-quality European cuisine made with locally sourced, seasonal produce. The single-sheet menu changes regularly and includes vegan specials, such as the twice-baked cheddar soufflé. Other favourites are the slow-cooked pork belly with butternut purée and roasted sea bass with a clam and white wine sauce. Ambience is low-key, prices are reasonable, and the friendly staff will be glad to recommend Twenty Three's own craft beer on draught.

facebook.com/23kampot

> Kep West

The Kep West development has branded itself a "culinary beach destination" with five dining options. They are headed by the high-end Crab & Co., a surf-and-turf venue where seafood platters are served alongside steaks and chops. The Strand is at the Knai Bang Chatt resort. Café Grande has Asian small bites, cocktails and music. The Wave features more casual fare. The Old Sailing Club, a longtime favourite open on weekends, offers an Asia-themed menu of 10 dishes priced under \$9.

kepwest.com

EXPLORE.



▲ Pepper Plantations

Kampot's rich pepper-growing heritage is partially a legacy of the French colonial period, when the spice was shipped westward to grace the plates of French chefs. Similar to champagne, Kampot's "black gold" now enjoys a "geographical indicator" status, and many pepper plantations dot the town's countryside. Sothy's Pepper Farm and La Plantation offer tours for those wanting to catch a glimpse of the production process, or buy directly from the source.

mykampotpepper.asia



▲ Caves of Wonder

Off the road to Kep, about 12km outside of Kampot, a number of caves and caverns have been carved over millennia into limestone cliffs. The Phnom Chhngok cave is home to a unique subterranean Buddhist temple. Others boast massive stalactites and strange rock formations, a testament to the geological processes that shaped the environment. Climbodia, based out of Kampot, offers a variety of rock climbing, caving and adventure tours, suitable for all ages and skill levels.

climbodia.com

Kepp Crab Market

If the enormous blue crab statue rearing from the surf doesn't give it away, seaside Kep is famous for its crustaceans. The cramped chaos of the crab market is an unmissable experience. The community is well-known for its prawns, squid, octopus and snails, but far more for its crab, which is hauled from the ocean in wooden crates.



compas
MEXICAN
BAR & GRILL



compas
MEXICAN FOOD & DRINKS

AUTHENTIC FLAVORS CRAFTED BY MEXICAN HANDS

TRADITIONAL POPULAR MEXICAN DISHES AND CONTEMPORARY RECIPES TO ENJOY IN PHNOM PENH. DINE-IN AT ONE OF OUR LOCATIONS OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR FAST TAKE-AWAY OR DELIVERY SERVICES.

BASSAC LANE AREA / DIAMOND ISLAND

COMPASRESTAURANT



FIND US



Elsewhere

Stray from the beaten track through Cambodia's inexhaustible splendour, from the tangled alleys of Battambang to the untamed wilderness of Koh Kong and Ratanakiri

SLEEP.

▼ Le Relais de Chhlong

More than a century of history awaits discovery at Le Relais de Chhlong, a period mansion in a Mekong River town in Kratie province. Surrounded by forest land, Chhlong was once a commercial hub for timber, thanks in part to an affluent Khmer-Chinese family, the Koys, who built this private residence in 1916. The grand colonial style was preferred by the social elite of the day. It was acquired in 2008 by its current owners, who took pains to restore the fading landmark to its original Baroque majesty. They opened it as an off-the-beaten-track countryside retreat in early 2017. lerelaisdechhlong.com



▲ Koh Andet Eco Resort

A dozen traditional yet luxurious wooden villas in the heart of Southeast Asia's largest remaining rainforest comprise this serene resort community. The houses rest upon the gently flowing waters of the Tatai River in the remote province of Koh Kong, amid the lush vegetation of the Cardamom Mountains. Guests may explore Andet island by kayak; paddle upriver to nearby waterfalls or take a launch to the cascading Tatai Falls; go bird-watching in a coastal mangrove forest, or go on a short trek through the adjacent jungle. facebook.com/thansurtatai

Terres Rouges

Located in the abundant wilderness of Ratanakiri in Cambodia's northeast, Terres Rouges (French for "red earth") is a lavish oasis amid the dusty landscape in the provincial capital of Banlung. A splendid blend of traditional wooden architecture and French elegance, Teres Rouges is a welcome respite for wanderers weary of trekking through the elephant-inhabited hills. Sip on a cocktail beside the shaded pool or retreat to the spa for a full body scrub in the Khmer sponge style. ratanakiri-lodge.com

EAT.



▲ Lonely Tree Café

A blend of Mediterranean and Khmer cuisine awaits at this cosy Battambang café, a social enterprise that supports vulnerable youth and people with disabilities. Enjoy a Spanish omelette or a chilled bowl of signature gazpacho soup, then visit the Lonely Tree shop to peruse a selection of locally made handicrafts, many of them created by victims of polio or of the landmines that still lay and menace much of the border between Cambodia and Thailand. Pick up a colourful krama scarf or hand-carved wooden sculpture as a souvenir. thelonelytreecafe.com



▲ Coconut LyLy

A cooking school and restaurant in Battambang, this intimate eatery offers a short menu of traditional and authentic Khmer dishes, including fish amok, beef lok lak, chicken curry, fried spring rolls, tom yum soup and green mango salad. Diners can learn to make these dishes themselves, along with the delicious and eponymously named Coconut LyLy dessert. All meat dishes may also be prepared in vegetarian style – the amok, for instance, as a savoury mushroom amok. facebook.com/coconutlyrestaurant

DRINK.

The Riverside Balcony

Five minutes by tuk tuk from the centre of Battambang, this riverside treehouse offers an unbeatable view of the city's softly flowing Sangkae River. Raise your voice above the strident cries of the resident geckoes and start your evening with a burger or a slice of pizza. But this go-to spot for tourists, locals and expats alike is more lounge than restaurant: Order a classic cocktail, then settle into the friendly vibe and unwind. facebook.com/thebalconyloungebar

Pete's Pizza Pasta Cafe

Set right on the Kratie riverfront, this casual café acts as the base for Sorya Kayaking Adventures tour operators – whose guides delight in taking visitors for a Mekong River paddle to spot some of Cambodia's elusive pink Irrawaddy dolphins. As easygoing as the town that surrounds it, Australian-owned Pete's specialises in omelettes and toasted sandwiches by day, its namesake pizza and pasta (and salads) by night. It also has an excellent selection of imported wines by the glass. petescafekratie.com

EXPLORE.

▼ Pursat Preah Vihear

The most impressive views from any of Cambodia's heritage treasures is this UNESCO World Heritage Site, rising above a sheer 500-metre cliff face that overlooks the Thai border. The 11th-century Hindu temple of Pursat Preah Vihear is a three-hour drive from Siem Reap, so it is removed from Angkor's crowds. If you prefer stillness and tranquility at spiritual sites, you'll find it here. Be prepared for the steep ascent up the ancient stone stairways of the sacred grounds, once trodden by the god-kings of the mighty Khmer empire.

▼ Yeak Laom

Considered to be among the world's most beautiful crater lakes, Yeak Laom is at once in the middle of the Ratanakiri wilderness and at the heart of the Tampuan hill-tribe culture. The almost perfectly circular lake, 800m in diameter and 48m deep, has spawned many tribal legends. Formed by the eruption of Cambodia's only volcano about 4,000 years ago, it is located 5km from the provincial capital of Banlung. A 3km trail circles the lake, which has a small museum and shops where the Tampuan people sell souvenirs and local foods.



Photos: Sam Jam for Discover (1)



Looking for an authentic Chinese Restaurant in Phnom Penh?

Indulge in Cantonese delicacies and various set menu selections at Fu Lu Zu, conveniently located in the heart of the city. Experience the pleasant and relaxing ambiance in our main dining area or private rooms for additional privacy.



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION



SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA
26 OLD AUGUST SITE - 50THEAROS BOULEVARD - 12301
PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA
023 999 200 - H6526@SOFITEL.COM
WWW.SOFITEL-PHNOMPENH-PHOKEETHRA.COM



fantasyislands

MORE THAN 60 ISLANDS ADORN THE CAMBODIAN COAST. OUR SELECTION OF SOME OF THE KINGDOM'S **MOST MEMORABLE RETREATS** MAKES THE CHOICE EASY

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON

Cambodia's islands shine like gemstones in a cerulean sea. For travellers seeking blue skies, gentle waves, and the warm hospitality of the Khmer people, the string of isles west and south of Sihanoukville have as many treasures as a chest buried in the sand. Koh Rong, the largest in this chain, is a longtime favourite of Southeast Asia backpackers. But as it welcomes more mid-priced lodgings, some budget-conscious travellers have cast their collective eyes south toward smaller Koh Rong Sanloem. The

islands have kept their charm and authenticity along with their popularity. Here, you'll find coral reefs and clear shoals, quiet beaches just around the bend from even the most hopping party hostels.

Following are some of our favourite resorts on the islands. Each is easily accessed by speedboat or ferry from the tourist pier of Sihanoukville, just a short taxi or tuk tuk ride from the city's airport and bus depots. Pack your swimsuit and plenty of sunscreen: We're going island hopping.



▲ ROYAL SANDS KOH RONG

True to the name, you'll feel like royalty as you settle into this island villa experience. The largest of Cambodia's islands accessed from Sihanoukville, Koh Rong isn't a private island like some others on this list. That said, much of Koh Rong is minimally developed, home only to rustic fishing villages and coconut palms – so this resort provides an experience as private as they come. Spacious rooms and clean, sweeping beaches create a getaway for relaxing in style. And if the turquoise sea isn't to your liking, you can unwind in the resort's grand pool. Some of the 67 luxurious villas have private pools for secluded dips. Indoor-outdoor rain showers, open-air lounge areas and tropical décor enhance the exquisite living experience.

A daily itinerary can be as active or as sedentary as one chooses. Guests can snorkel, SCUBA dive, paddle board, mountain bike, trek, even kayak through a mangrove forest. At night, swim among bioluminescent plankton to view an extraordinary marvel of nature. An outdoor yoga space offers views of Koh Rong's central hills. The Senses Spa offers private and outdoor facilities for a range of therapies.

Elaborate breakfasts and Mediterranean dinners are served at the upscale Ocean Restaurant, Asian dishes at the Chill Beach Bar. For those who can't wait another minute, a private helipad enables guests to fly directly to the resort from Phnom Penh.

royalsandskohrong.com

Photos: Sam Jam for Discover



▲ SONG SAA PRIVATE ISLAND KOH BONG AND KOH OUEN

The twin islands forming Song Saa ("sweet-heart") are renowned in luxury island living. Koh Bong's 27 villas, many of them built over water and each with a private infinity pool, highlight an intimate paradise of white sands and green foliage. A carefully preserved coral reef invites snorkellers and scuba divers, while kayakers enjoy paddling over these remote sanctuaries. Winding boardwalks show off glorious marine vistas and lead to its adjacent jungle twin isle, Koh Ouen. Vista Bar and Restaurant serves organic Khmer cuisine based on locally sourced ingredients alongside gourmet Western creations, and there's also a wellness spa.

Rory and Melita Hunter bought these idyllic but neglected isles in 2006 and spent six years rehabilitating them before opening in 2012 as a five-star retreat.

Each element of the eco-friendly resort was built in careful balance with the island environment, and the resort's design and architecture underscore the Hunters' all-immersive commitment to sustainability. Reclaimed timber, thatched roofs, driftwood tables, decks and floors of wood salvaged from derelict fishing boats – all infused with works of Khmer art – speak to a deep affection for the marine environment and for the culture of the Cambodian people who live here.

songsaa.com

> SIX SENSES KOH KRABEY

The perfect place to feast your senses on the richness of island life, this private oasis takes only 15 minutes to reach by speedboat from Ream. Its undisputed highlight is the acclaimed Six Senses spa and wellness retreat (see page 138), which attends to any and all holistic bodily needs. But there are many more reasons why you may choose to stay longer than planned. You'll find all the amenities of luxury here, from a sky observatory for nighttime gazing to an outdoor cinema. Six Senses is an international brand set apart by its attention to detail along the lines of – you guessed it – the six senses.

The sprawling 40-villa resort is pleasantly shaded under a jungle canopy. Each villa has a private infinity pool, an indoor soaking tub, a lush master bedroom and an outdoor socialising area with a fire pit. The natural environs soothe your senses, with only the occasional golf cart or friendly staff to disturb the idyll. The property has an impressive roster of ways to relax, exercise and fuel up – such as the intimate Tree restaurant, nestled into the greenery, and the all-day Aha restaurant. Other highlights include a cool sunset bar, a beautiful oceanfront boardwalk, a lap pool, an outdoor fitness circuit and even an ice-cream parlour.

sixsenses.com



▲ LA PASSION BY ACHARIYAK KOH RONG SANLOEM

The Achariyak Hospitality group has taken its first step into the Cambodian hotel business with this sustainability-driven resort at Saracen Bay, on the east-facing shore of Koh Rong's companion island. Extending up the slope of an expansive nature preserve on Koh Rong Sanloem, La Passion was inspired by the parent company's ambition for sharing Khmer culture, hospitality and service.

Fifty-eight deluxe rooms and suites, surrounded by a lush rainforest garden, blend elegance with a homey ambience. The Fishermen Restaurant sources directly from local anglers, while the Jongkran restaurant focuses on gourmet Khmer fare prepared and served in French style. The seaside infinity pool doubles as a classroom for aspiring SCUBA divers to get certified. They then apply their knowledge in the adjacent underwater world.

Solar power, an organic farm, sustainable laundry and sewerage, the replanting of trees that had to be removed and a wide range of energy-efficiency measures have been implemented in every stage of La Passion's development and operation.

lapassionresort.com



Photos: Sam Jarm for Discover Cambodia (1)

Sunken relics, diving dreams

SHIPWRECKS BOOST INTEREST IN WHAT'S BENEATH THE WAVES ALONG CAMBODIA'S COASTS

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON

Finding shipwrecks, or even lost treasure, is a dream for generations of marine explorers. Some just get lucky.

In 2006, a crew of Vietnamese fishermen discovered the wreckage of a 15th-century Chinese trading ship laden with ancient pottery and other artefacts near Koh Sdach, off the coast of Koh Kong. Twelve years later, Cambodian navy divers discovered a 70-metre-long shipwreck about a mile from Koh Chhlam. It was covered in coral, providing a rich habitat for fish and other marine life.

The wreck of the *Burma Maru*, a steam-powered Japanese merchant ship, was found in February 2017 by a six-member team from The Dive Shop Cambodia, led by managing director Dennis Funke. The ship, 117m long, was sunk on 12 June 1942 by the American submarine USS *Swordfish*, 110km from Koh Rong. It required a deep-water dive to a depth of 67m, Funke said.

Sunken ships are attractions not only from a historical perspective but also because they have become habitats for undersea life, from tiny anemones to whale sharks. Funke himself has suggested converting a sunken ship to create an artificial reef for marine life.

"Things are changing in Cambodia," said Funke. "Cambodians have more interest in diving, which inspires interest in conservation and the beauty of the natural world. We have had many more Khmer students in the past couple of years than ever before."

Those who dive deeply pursue a sport known as SCUBA – an acronym for "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus." Unlike other nations of Southeast Asia, diving is not widely associated with



Into the deep: Divers explore the underwater world of the Gulf of Thailand off the coast of Koh Rong

Cambodia. But it is now a prime attraction for foreign travelers visiting the Kingdom, one that a growing number of young Khmer men and women are discovering and enjoying.

Within Cambodia's serrated southern coastline, which extends for 443 km along the Gulf of Thailand, 60 islands nestle among stark headlands and mangrove swamps. The most popular islands for visitors are on the central coast, 22 of them in Sihanoukville province. Another 23 are in Koh Kong, closer to the border of Thailand. The remaining 15 are in Kampot and Kep, a stone's throw from Vietnam's Phu Quoc island.

These are some of Cambodia's leading centres for SCUBA diving and snorkelling:

The Dive Shop Cambodia:
diveshopcambodia.com
Khmer Dive Group:
facebook.com/underwaterlives
Scuba Nation Diving Centre:
divecambodia.com

Koh Rong may be the best-known. A 40-minute ferry run from Sihanoukville, it is home to the Khmer Dive Group. A short voyage south on Koh Rong Sanloem, Scuba Nation (established in 2002) was the first formal PADI-certified dive centre in Cambodia; it is a fixture on Saracen Bay at La Passion by Achariyak resort. The Dive Shop Cambodia, founded in 2007, is Cambodia's only PADI centre operating from a private beach.

These are tropical oases with far more natural beauty than modern amenities. But their isolation won't last forever. Luxury

resort development is just around the corner. One-third of the land on Koh Ta Kiev, near the Ream naval base, is now being developed into a resort that will include a theme park and golf course.

Koh Ta Kiev is also being eyed for what the Sihanoukville provincial government is calling a "seabed war museum," where World War II artefacts might be viewed by diligent divers.

"Establishing this museum at the bottom of the sea is very important," said Long Dimanche, deputy governor of Preah Sihanouk province.

But there's no record of war planes or tanks on Koh Ta Kiev, save perhaps any that might have strayed from the nearby Ream base. The nearest battle action took place in May 1975 at Koh Tang, 61km to the west, said Pier Reak Kann, founding partner of the Khmer Dive Group. "We know the location," Kann said, "but the bodies and the helicopters were taken by divers from Vietnam. There are no remaining artefacts."

The slim stretch of Gulf of Thailand between Koh Ta Kiev and Koh Russei (Bamboo Island) does cradle at least one significant shipwreck. "In 2019, we found a 21-metre-long trade ship, 300 to 500 years old, from a time of commercial trade between China, Cambodia and Thailand," Kann said. "We found thousands of items: pots, jars, ceramics and other trading materials of the time."

Conservation, especially of coral reefs, is the leading factor in developing sustainable dive tourism, including a healthy national marine park. **F.**

Morning mood:
A golfer ponders
a long putt during
a round at the
Angkor Golf
Resort

Golf in Cambodia has evolved at a steady pace over the past two decades. Few would argue against Angkor Golf Resort setting the standard since opening in 2008. The award-winning course, designed by Sir Nick Faldo, was built on former rice paddies in the cultural capital of Siem Reap. Located just 10 km from the Angkor Archaeological Park, the 7,279-yard, par-72 layout is as visually stunning as it is challenging. Lush landscapes, vast water hazards and strategic bunkering certainly make for a fun round for golfers of varied abilities. Visitors can expect a warm welcome as they experience the wonderful Khmer hospitality. The 18-hole course is complemented by a contemporary clubhouse, a pro shop and extensive practise facilities. It is equally popular with local players and international visitors. Many of the players as well as tourists return each year purely for golf vacations and tournaments.

Environmental sustainability

It's what Angkor Golf does every day behind the scenes that makes it so special. General Manager David Baron, himself a PGA professional, said from the time the resort opened that it has always had a clear vision and sense of responsibility to ensure that the playing experience does not compromise the stunning natural environment.



"There must always be a strategic synergy between the playability of the golf course and conserving its natural surroundings," Baron said. "The golf course and surrounding flora and fauna cover over 100 hectares, and it's

imperative that we allow these habitats to flourish." Baron continued: "Sustainable agronomy practices contribute to good quality playing surfaces that can reduce the consumption of natural resources such as water, reduce the usage of fertiliser and pesticides, and increase the biodiversity value."

Environmentally friendly measures are employed to maintain the golf course. The resort strives to:

- Enhance biodiversity and conserve natural habitats
- Protect species and encourage diversity, in particular turtles and bird life; the course is home to more than 60 avian species
- Provide biodiverse connectivity throughout the landscape to link green spaces via natural corridors and tranquil areas
- Work with nature conservation bodies such as the Angkor Centre for Conservation of Biodiversity and the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programme
- Utilise 100 percent captured irrigation water
- Use a wastewater filtration programme
- Use a composting programme for organic waste

Angkor Golf Resort international tournaments:

- The Angkor Fourball Championship, 5–7 April 2024
- The Angkor Amateur Open, 2–4 August 2024

To arrange anything from a tee time to an all-inclusive golf package, please contact: info@angkor-golf.com

Photo: Thomas Cristofolletti for Discover Cambodia

CAMBODIA'S GOLF RESORTS: WHERE TO BRING YOUR CLUBS

When choosing where to play in Cambodia, consider your skill level, your budget and your desired location. Many courses offer stay-and-play packages, which can be a great way to save money and enjoy a complete golf experience.



PHNOM PENH

Vattanac Golf Resort: Designed by Masters Champion and golf great Nick Faldo, this resort boasts two 18-hole courses, east and west, both offering stunning scenery and demanding play. vattanacgolfresort.com

Garden City Golf Club: This modern course offers a challenging yet enjoyable experience with its rolling fairways, its water hazards and its strategic bunkering. gardencityclub.com

Grand Phnom Penh Golf Club: Designed by legend of the sport Jack Nicklaus, this course is known for its pristine conditions, demanding layout and beautiful views of the surrounding countryside. grand.grandroyalgolf.com

SIEM REAP

Phokeethra Country Club: This engaging course is known for its rolling hills, its water hazards and its carefully placed bunkers. phokeethraangkor.com

Booyoung Country Club: This modern course offers a variety of challenging holes and unforgettable views of the countryside not far from the temples of Angkor. siemreapbooyoung.com

THE SOUTH

Dara Sakor Golf Resort: On the serene coast near Sihanoukville, this resort features three 18-hole layouts designed by champion golfer and renowned course architect Greg Norman. darasakorgolf.com

keeping it
green

GOLFERS FIND PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITY ON AWARD-WINNING COURSES DESIGNED BY THE SPORT'S GREATEST

PEACE BY PIECE

THE RETURN OF CAMBODIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE, LOOTED AND DESTROYED OVER DECADES, IS CELEBRATED AT HOME. MANY OF ITS **LOST TREASURES** MUST BE RESTORED IN A PAINFULLY SLOW PROCESS

WORDS BY **LEILA GOLDSTEIN**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANTON L. DELGADO**

Hundreds of headless deities sit in rows in a warehouse in Siem Reap, lit by buzzing fluorescent lights and a rim of small windows.

The largest statue, nearly five metres tall, looks down at the rest. Or, rather, it would look down if it still had its head. Five heads, in this case.

Stone restorers and archaeologists have spent more than a decade piecing back together the monumental statue of the Hindu god Shiva from the Koh Ker temple complex in northern Cambodia, added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in September 2023. The seven-tonne, 10th-century work depicts a 10-armed Shiva in a dancing pose. But over long years of turmoil during the country's civil conflict in the 1980s and '90s, looters gradually smashed the stone deity into more than 10,000 pieces.

Some larger fragments, including two of the heads, had been preserved in Phnom Penh before the 1970s. A third head was shattered before vandals got to it, and the final two looted faces have yet to be found.

Starting in 2020, the world has shone a spotlight on the return of looted relics to Cambodia, with federal indictments in the US preceding returns from the Denver Art Museum and wealthy private collectors such as Netscape founder Jim Clark. The arrivals in the country met a joyous response, though much of the fanfare stopped at the point of repatriation.

Even intact objects require deep historical research to fully understand their place in Khmer history. The quiet restoration of the dancing Shiva by a team of French and Cambodian experts demonstrates the often tedious, highly difficult process of piecing the country's looted history back together.

The shattered statue now stands behind the gates of Angkor Conservation, an office of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts in the temple tourism hub of Siem Reap. The facility houses thousands of ancient statues in various stages of repair. Its compound is closed to the public and flanked by "No Photography" signs. ▶

Returning to life: The fractured head of a dancing statue, one of five that once crowned the ancient artwork at the Koh Ker World Heritage Site, is undergoing restoration at Angkor Conservation in Siem Reap





Puzzle pieces: Archaeologists sort through more than 10,000 labelled fragments of a dancing Shiva statue, now being carefully restored. Below, the Thom Temple is the keystone structure at the 10th-century Koh Ker complex, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in September 2023



Proud preservationist: Chhan Chamroem, who works in conservation with the Ministry of Culture, explains the painstaking process of restoring the dancing Shiva statue at the headquarters of Angkor Conservation in Siem Reap province

Hang Chansophea, head of the collection at Angkor Conservation, works on inventory and documentation on the project. She labels and maintains digital records of the various fragments, creating what she likens to a person's ID card for each piece.

On a hot day in April, she sifted through a styrofoam tray of pieces, some mere millimetres wide, trying to find connections. Eye drops, she said, helped her get through eight-hour days of staring at minuscule fragments.

"Sometimes I'm angry with looters," she said. "Why do they try to break [the statues]? Because this is the heritage of the nation, the heritage for all."

By the end of the Angkorian period in the 14th century, the statue had also fallen, breaking into a few large fragments.

The toppled statue was in relatively good condition until the 20th century, said Éric Bourdonneau, an archaeologist and historian from the French School of the Far East. He's leading the restoration project in collaboration with Cambodian authorities.

"Ninety percent of the fragments were still inside the [Kraham Temple] tower," Bourdonneau said. "Still, you have some hands, some fragments that were moved at different periods of history outside the tower because of some villager or some child playing with

it. It's not surprising that you have some fragments moving."

Between the 1920s and 1960s, French archaeologists moved some large pieces of the dancing Shiva, such as hands and heads, to the National Museum in Phnom Penh. Bourdonneau described the movement of many pieces during the colonial period as problematic, with historians and archaeologists from France and elsewhere believing they were "the best people to tell the history of other people."

It's unlikely that statues from Koh Ker were taken during the Khmer Rouge's reign from 1975-79. But in the late 1960s and early '70s, then again in the '80s and '90s, looters descended on the temples of Koh Ker. Their forays were fueled by the demands of wealthy Western art dealers and curators, capitalising on the chaos in Cambodia at the time.

In a shift from earlier times, looters of the late 20th century sought to evade the law by cutting the link between the objects and their origins.

Antiquities dealers such as the late Douglas Latchford – a prolific collector of Cambodian relics who before his death was criminally charged with smuggling looted artefacts – made use of this tactic of misdirection. Latchford had claimed a massive, three-tonne Ganesha statue he sold was not the original but merely a replica.

The dancing Shiva was one of the last statues in Koh Ker to be looted. While vandals absconded with other nearby pieces, the Shiva remained, possibly because of its large size and because its remaining two faces were worn and in bad condition. But in the early 1990s, looters finally lopped off those faces. In order to break off the heads intact, researchers believe the looters drove chisels lower down on the statue's body, shattering the torso in the process.

Finally, some years after this mortal blow, throngs of local and foreign tourists were weaving through the archaeological site, likely stepping on stone fragments and broken pieces of history. The steady crumbling of the dancing Shiva dragged on until restoration work began in 2012.

The project is more complex than almost any other restoration project in the world, Bourdonneau said.

"It's extremely unusual," he said. "Of course it's not rare that you have many examples where you have to work with some dozens of fragments or even hundreds. But here, we have collected ... more than 10,000 fragments."

The restoration is made even more challenging because about 80 percent of the surface of the figure is smooth, with no designs to help the team. ▶



Keeping ahead: Above, one of two preserved dancing Shiva faces currently in restoration. Below, Hang Chansophea works in a warehouse of headless deities in Siem Reap



After the excavation and a study of the found pieces were complete, the team spent 2019 connecting the largest pieces of the torso.

“At the beginning, when we put all the pieces on the table and looked around, it was hard for us to start. From what way? From what point?” said Chhan Chamroeun, deputy director of safeguarding and conservation of ancient monuments with the Ministry of Culture.

In their first phase, the team used digital scanning of the project to create a 3D model. Students at Heidelberg University in Germany even used this to develop an interactive puzzle.

But the monumental task of connecting the pieces has been done almost entirely by hand. Bourdonneau said technology, including artificial intelligence, is not advanced enough to assist in putting the pieces back together as there aren’t enough regularities in how the fragments were broken off.

“I won’t say that maybe in the future it won’t be possible, but for now, there’s nothing better than the human brain,” he said.

Some pieces remain missing but a basic shape has taken form along an internal scaffolding. This skeleton for the dancing Shiva may help put it back on its feet as it was in the 10th century

“As it is broken in so many parts and as it is so huge and so heavy, one real challenge of this kind of restoration is to design the metallic structure to make it possible to have the statue standing up,” Bourdonneau said.

The group plans to complete the majority of the restoration by the beginning of 2025 and hopes to eventually display the statue in Koh Ker in a new pavilion north of its original site. Bourdonneau hopes to keep the local community connected to the statue and has invited residents throughout the restoration to see its progress.

Despite the enormity of their task, the stone restorers and archaeologists working on the project seem somewhat unfazed by what can appear to an outsider as a gruelling process. They see their work, largely unseen by the public, as part of a larger mission for Cambodia.

Asked about his reaction to recently finding the right location of an important missing piece, Chamroeun said he felt happier than if he had been gifted “a box of beer.”

But amidst his muted responses was an earnest commitment to the job at hand.

“If we just have the experience or we have the knowledge we learn from different fields to restore this object – it’s not enough if we don’t have our heart,” he said. “It’s not just for us in this generation, this is for our country and for our next generation.”

THE GODS ARE COMING HOME

Returned loot receives a royal welcome in Phnom Penh

The statue of Ganesha, the elephant-headed Hindu deity, arrived in March 2023 via special freight in a 20-year old crate, possibly never having been taken out of the box.

Stencilled letters at the top of the wooden box spelled out the name LATCHFORD. Torn shipping and storage labels on the wooden exterior told the story of its decades-long trajectory, at one point on loan to Berlin’s Indian Museum of Art and eventually sold to US billionaire Jim Clark, the founder of Netscape.

The 10th-century statue, weighing around three tonnes, is believed to have been looted from the Angkorian Bat Temple at Koh Ker in 2003. It was one of 13 Cambodian relics returned to the country from the US in March of 2023.

Among the historical artefacts were a 7th or 8th-century sandstone statue of the sun god Surya and a bronze bell from the 1st century BC. Many pieces were stolen from the country and linked to the notorious art dealer Douglas Latchford, who was indicted for trafficking looted Cambodian artefacts in 2019 and died the next year.

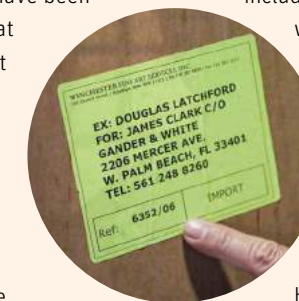


Welcome back: Then minister of Civil Service Hun Many (right) joins a salute to the returned artefacts

This new batch of returns included some pieces that came from private collectors, including Clark, who voluntarily parted with the artefacts. The Denver

Art Museum gave up four pieces in 2021 as requested by the US Department of Justice. Western museums and art collectors now face increasing pressure to give foreign antiquities back to their home countries.

“Finally, our gods come back to our home country, this is our ancestors, our spirit,” said Hab Touch, secretary of state of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. “We consider all sculptures not only sculpture, not only stone, not only bronze, but our gods, our ancestors.”



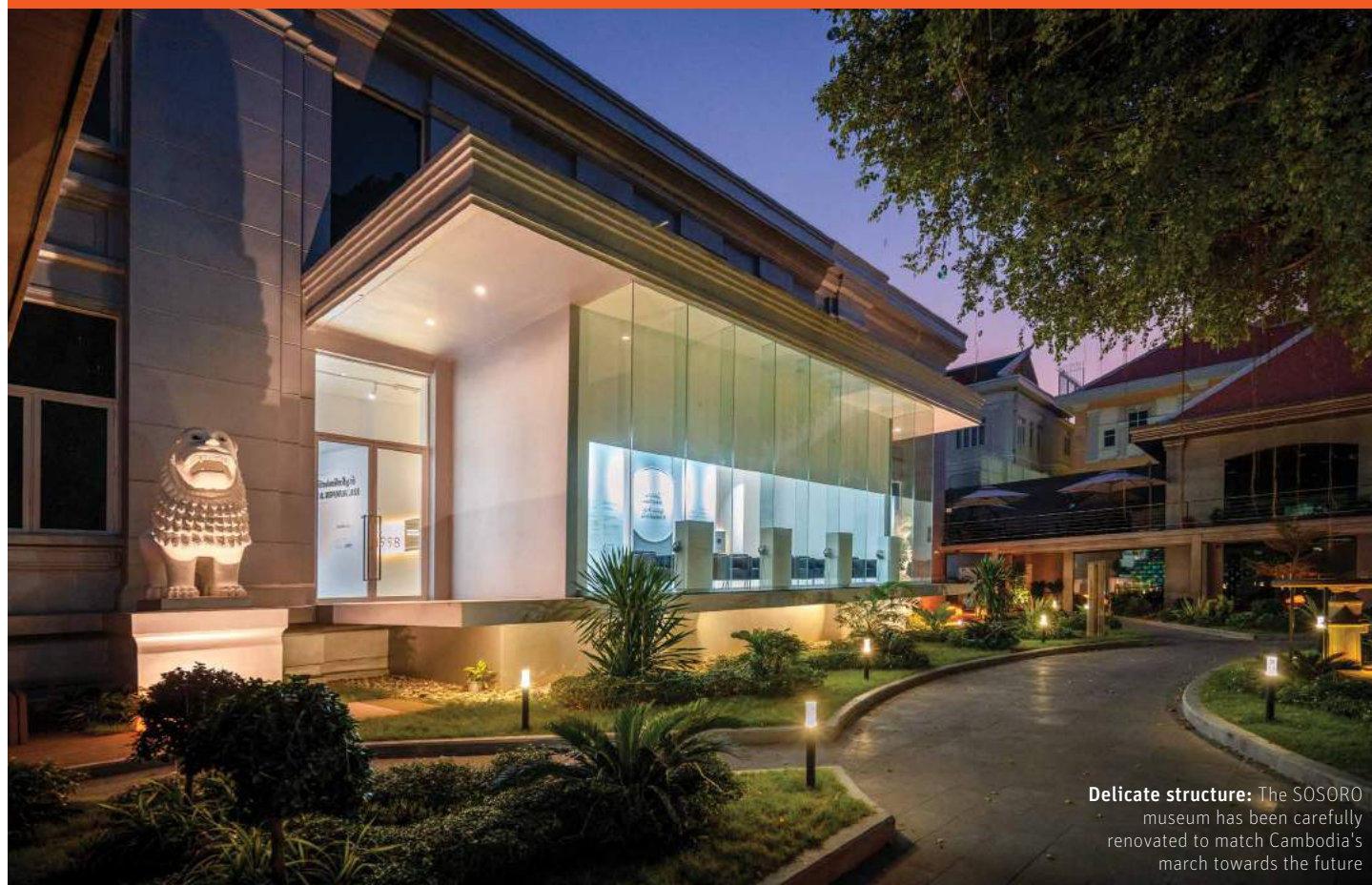
“We consider all sculptures not only sculpture, not only stone, not only bronze, but our gods, our ancestors”



Moments – Ganesha displayed in Phnom Penh at a ceremony celebrating the return of Khmer relics at Phnom Penh’s Peace Palace (left) Crates are unloaded from an aircraft (right)



Curious: Cambodian students examine one of the museum's exhibits to learn about their Kingdom's unique monetary history



Delicate structure: The SOSORO museum has been carefully renovated to match Cambodia's march towards the future

Opened in 2019 and now again welcoming visitors after COVID-era shut-downs, it's a fascinating place for anyone with an interest in the culture and heritage of this Southeast Asian land.

SOSORO is formally known as the Preah Srey Içanavarman Museum of Economy and Money. The National Bank of Cambodia funded and continues to own and manage the building, an elegant French colonial-era structure in the heart of the capital's historical center.

A seminal moment in the young museum's history came in 2012, Blaise Kilian, the co-director of the museum, said. SOSORO was in an early planning stage when a young archaeologist visiting a souvenir shop in Phnom Penh's Russian Market spotted a decidedly unusual coin.

"He was lucky enough to see it, smart enough to purchase it and to then submit it to experts at the national bank," Kilian said. "They fast realised this was actually an authentic and very rare coin," minted in gold and issued by Içanavarman, king of Chenla at the start of the 7th century.

"It's amazing, it's fascinating, and it helps us to better understand history. It changes somehow the perception of the understanding of the economic and monetary history of Cambodia. So it's quite extraordinary in itself. And this coin is now exhibited here, and it's the only one of its kind so far."

Equally remarkable in its own way is the probability that the great Angkor civilisation, by far the largest in Southeast Asia between the 8th and 13th centuries, did not have any medium of exchange – unlike regional empires that preceded it.

"All evidence suggests that this massive, powerful and very well administered empire had no currency and relied on a barter economy both for its domestic and its international trade," Kilian marvelled.

Did the nature of the economy contribute to the fall of Angkor? "It's a very interesting question," Kilian said. Oft-cited causes are repeated attacks from neighbouring Siam, climate changes, irrigation drought or floods. "But indeed the absence of currency may have been a reason," he said, "because when you don't have a currency, you have to constantly create and consume

"We are in a country where the monetary history has been very peculiar, and closely related to political changes throughout time"

Blaise Kilian, co-director, SOSORO Museum

Watch the co-director share his thoughts on the role and impact of SOSORO Museum at Focus-Cambodia.com



your wealth. You cannot really store. You have to be dependent on agriculture; you have to let your soldiers go to harvest before you send them back to their work."

Siamese and Annamese (Vietnamese) money subsequently circulated in Cambodia. In the mid-19th century, visionary King Ang Duong briefly minted his own currency to declare his authority.

"When you circulate your own money, it means that you are expressing your sovereignty," Kilian pointed out. But it was only under the French protectorate that a full-fledged monetary system was introduced. The piastre was used for all of French Indochina: Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

The overall goal at SOSORO, the co-director expressed, is to demonstrate "the very close interconnection that exists between political changes, social changes, geopolitics, economy and monetary evolutions."

The riel was introduced as the national currency in 1955, and again in 1980 after its abolition by the Khmer Rouge regime. It has had a "very stable" value for 25 years, Kilian said, but until today

is used alongside the US dollar, which still dominates higher value transactions.

"Ultimately, we would like people to trust the riel more and more," he added.

The "dollarization" of the Cambodian economy is hardly new. In 1992, when the United Nations established a transitional authority in Cambodia, it paid civil servants and its staff in US dollars – foreigners as well as locals. An unexpected legacy was that trust in the Cambodian economy was built among foreign investors, paired with financial stability but paid for with dependence on a foreign, if global, currency.

"Now we are in a phase where, as the economy expands and the country matures, it is important in terms of sovereignty and in terms of the efficiency of monetary policy to grow the importance of the riel in local exchanges," Kilian said.

"We are in a country where the monetary history has been very peculiar, and closely related to political changes throughout time. We want visitors to understand the importance of having your own currency, to understand the role of the central bank and what monetary policy means." F.



Priceless souvenir: A gold coin from the ancient kingdom of Chenla, issued by King Içanavarman at the start of the 7th century, was discovered at Phnom Penh's Russian Market in 2012

Photos: Panha Pov for Focus Cambodia

Contemporary Cambodian Art

KHMER CREATIVITY KNOWS NO LIMITS WHEN IT COMES TO PAINTING, SCULPTURE AND CRAFTS. HERE ARE A FEW OF THE FINE GALLERIES IN PHNOM PENH AND SIEM REAP

BY JOHN GOTTBORG ANDERSON



< META HOUSE PHNOM PENH

This European cultural centre is one of Cambodia's oldest independent art hubs, a creative space opened in 2007 by German filmmaker Nico Mesterharm. Showcasing visual and performing arts and education, the two-storey building includes a small but exquisite gallery (at left) curated by Dr Carlo Santoro. Meta House also has a restaurant; an outdoor stage that hosts workshops, talks and film screenings; a multimedia library, and a German language school. Community-based projects and artist exchange programmes promote Cambodian contemporary art.

meta-house.com



ON ART AND AESTHETICS

Dr Carlo Santoro, who guided Focus Cambodia in its choice of galleries, is a professor of art, architecture and urban design at the American University in Phnom Penh. He researches participatory and collaborative aesthetics in his tiny "MiMu by Metas" gallery at the Meta House, a first step in creating a Museum of Contemporary Art. Santoro asks visitors to engage in conversation on the meaning and significance of art and culture in society.



< FT GALLERY PHNOM PENH

An integral part of the Factory's ArtSpace, Cambodia's largest creative centre, the ever-evolving FT Gallery features a fusion of original Cambodian and international talents. These are headed by co-owners FonKi Yav, a Canadian-Cambodian muralist whose art is pictured at left, and Théo Vallier, a French painter whose work is inspired by Khmer mythology. ArtSpace is also home to AiR Gallery, Sculpt Gallery, Artisan Studio, Art Market and the Arts Café.

factoryphnompenh.com/artspace

> THEAM'S GALLERY SIEM REAP

Theam's Gallery is the home and studio of master artist Lim Muy Theam, who exhibits his own captivating paintings – meshing past and present – beside other high-quality arts and crafts. Pottery and historical artefacts are displayed in a cool, shady garden setting, along with a selection of traditional musical instruments. An admission charge for foreign visitors supports the training of young artists who learn to replicate Khmer arts.

theamsgallery.com



MIRAGE CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE SIEM REAP

A collective of artists, designers and other creative professionals, Mirage operates on the premise that inspiration often comes from experimenting, brainstorming and collaborating. This space welcomes established and emerging artists from Southeast Asia and beyond to share art and dialogue at its gallery. As the website declares: "A mirage is a naturally occurring optical phenomenon, to be interpreted by the individual mind."

mirage-collective.com

INSTITUT FRANÇAIS PHNOM PENH

Originally known as the Centre Culturel Français, the French Institute opened in 1992 as Cambodia's first art centre after decades of cultural stagnancy. Within the spacious grounds are gardens and a sprawling minimalist-style building. The institute holds regular exhibitions, workshops and classes, along with live entertainment, film screenings and mini festivals. A dedicated gallery can be configured to display installation art.

institutfrancais-cambodge.com

TRIBE CAMBODIA SIEM REAP

A passion for urban and contemporary art drives Tribe, which relocated back to Siem Reap in early 2024 after three years in Phnom Penh. Combining a coffee shop and cocktail bar, Tribe supports and nurtures local Khmer talent and the Cambodian art scene, both emerging and established, through fundraising, skill development and free advice. Art scholarships, promoted nationwide, are an important part of its legacy.

facebook.com/TRIBEcambodia



< DINART GALLERY PHNOM PENH

Before he turned his attention to canvases, Teang Borin was an architect. But for over a decade, the self-taught Kampot artist known as Din has acquired an international reputation as an abstract painter. His main subjects are Apsara, the celestial maidens of traditional Khmer mythology. Using vibrant colours and bold brush strokes, Din has a signature style that conveys a depth of movement and emotion.

facebook.com/dinart

"I AM VANNDA"

A CHILD OF THE COASTAL CITY OF SIHANOUKVILLE, CAMBODIA'S HIP HOP SUPERSTAR SHOOK UP THE KINGDOM'S MUSIC INDUSTRY. **FOCUS CAMBODIA** TALKS TO THE ARTIST WHO CONTINUES TO ROCK THE SCENE

BY DANIEL MARCHETTE



Can you tell us how you came to the decision to leave home and pursue your dream? How has your upbringing influenced your work?

I love music. I have lived with music since I was young. To me, music is inspirational. Becoming a musician is a path I chose, a path I love. Like most traditional Khmer families, my parents wanted me to become a lawyer or a doctor, but that's not me. After high school, I left my hometown for Phnom Penh to explore my passion, to find my voice. It was an adventure, a journey to find myself that was full of hardships – being broke almost all the time, close to homelessness, bouncing from house to house without a team or any guidance. Even my family didn't think I would last long here, but I kept going. I didn't want to go home because I told them that I would go back on the day I succeed. If there are only bones left in me, then just take my bones home. ▶

Shining star: VannDa has shaped himself into Cambodia's most successful contemporary music artist

“When I first started singing, I thought I had to sing love songs to break into the music industry”



What music do you listen to?

1. Bossanova
2. Jazz
3. Hip hop
4. Movie soundtracks
5. Khmer oldies

Who are your top five rappers, dead or alive?

1. Kanye West
2. Twista
3. J. Cole
4. Nas
5. Lil Wayne



Global studies: VannDa and his crew travel and never stop learning about international trends and styles

I got my start in music while in high school in my hometown, Sihanoukville, but I have been writing songs since 2009. I started listening to music at a young age and always carried a small MP3 player with me. I want to shout out to my big brother, who was the first person to introduce me to hip-hop music. When I was free from helping my parents at their coconut-shaving shop, I spent the rest of my time with music, mostly at internet cafes. There, I started to experiment with music through a cracked version of Fruity Loops.

At the time, I spent a lot of time listening to music, watching production tutorials on YouTube, experimenting, and developing my taste in music. That was probably where my roots in different music ranges came from. Life experiences then inspired me to write songs. I dreamt of making more elevated music, so I came to Phnom Penh with only 400,000 riel in my pocket to chase after that dream. I learned and met many kinds of people who taught me so much more about life. I can say that what I have today is because I dared to dream, face obstacles, overcome problems, and always move forward.

Your earlier music would be considered more pop than hip hop. How did you make the transition into hip hop and rap?

When I first started singing, I thought I had to sing love songs to break into the music industry. They were popular at the time and resonated with people. However, as I matured, I became more open to new ideas and inspiration. Over time, my songs transitioned through themes of love, my own passion, my passion for my country and people, my pride as a Cambodian and my journey to follow my dreams as an artist. I experimented with new beats and genres, discovering that hip hop provided the perfect medium for my storytelling and passion.

Most would agree that your breakout came with the release of “Time to Rise.” Since then you’ve arguably been the biggest celebrity in Cambodia. Can you tell us about that experience? How did the song “Time to Rise” come about? What is the inspiration behind it? How did the meteoric rise to celebrity change your life?

“Time to Rise” is a lyrical celebration of Khmer heritage, from its ancient temples to the venerated knowledge and wisdom of elders like Master Kong Nay. It is an honour to have his presence on this song. If you don’t know about him, he is a Khmer music legend, a master of the Chapey Dong Veng (a stringed instrument). One of a few great masters to have survived the Khmer Rouge era, he has created many memorable records for our people to enjoy and for the Cambodian youth generation to inherit. Much respect and thanks to him and his family for helping to create this collaboration.

The song was a vision and work of a whole dedicated team. Shout out to my spicy CEO, Laura Mam, who asked Master Kong Nay to be on the song; my CMO, Andrew Mam, who built the Time to Rise Campaign; and my brilliant fellow Baramey artists, Vanthan and Songha, alongside whom I wrote the song. Also, I was proud to be joined in the music video by my fellow artists at Baramey. “Time to Rise” blends Khmer instrumentation with hip hop and drill sounds to encourage the younger Cambodian audiences to pay more attention to traditional culture and arts. It came straight from my heart, a call for a renewed pride in Cambodian cultural heritage.

With the release of *\$KULL THE ALBUM* in 2020, I garnered a following, but I didn’t expect “Time to Rise” to blow up like that, becoming my and Cambodia’s very first music video to reach one million YouTube views in

24 hours. I was super excited, stunned almost, but overall very happy with its reception. The support and appreciation from local Cambodians and a number of countries across the region, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Myanmar, left me with much optimism for Cambodian music on the international stage. Thanks to Baramey and our artist management team, we capitalised on international interests and won many collaborations. I’m proud to be Cambodia’s international representative in the global scene.

Your music often incorporates and blends traditional Khmer music and sounds into modern beats and songs. What role do you think artists have in honouring music traditions versus forging ahead with modern culture?

Baramey and I have always had a vision to blend traditional and modern forms, to spread more understanding and awareness about Cambodian culture, and to encourage the younger Cambodian audiences to pay more attention to traditional culture and arts, while also easing the transition between the forms for all listeners. We had a goal of increasing awareness and appreciation for traditional instruments with the younger generation of Cambodia, to preserve our heritage while also producing contemporary arts.

With guidance from Baramey and amazing colleagues like Vanthan who have vast knowledge of modern and traditional instruments, we were able to proudly incorporate our rich cultural heritage with modern culture and bring out unique sounds that the world hasn’t heard before. My CEO has said, “Innovation is a requirement for preservation.”

This is our mindset at Baramey. We are imprinting a mark on the globe for sure, and I am honoured to be an artist involved in pushing this forward.

Making music is a trip of constant learning and evolution. Do you experiment with different styles, instruments, producers?

Definitely. I have been experimenting with different styles of music and instruments since the very start of my musical career, and I never stop. This is what fuels my passion, my music’s flavours and colours, and my music’s evolution through the years. You can never stop learning. In terms of producers, I mainly create my own sounds and occasionally collaborate. It’s all about the vibes that work and blend seamlessly to produce unique flavours and sounds. ▶



“We all play a role and contribute to better our country. Mine just happens to be through music. So I just do what I do best and pour all my heart and soul into it”



Crowded house: VannDa concerts are booked out. His performances are crafted by a team of supporters and friends

You’ve made hit songs with Thai artists and gone viral rapping alongside Vietnamese hip hoppers. How do you see yourself growing outside of the Cambodian market?

The music scene here is growing rapidly, especially the hip-hop industry. We may have started off later and slower than everyone else, but our most recent growth brought us to a point where we are not that far behind other peer nations. Our people have started listening and learning about rap music, and have given us immense support, and I’m really proud of it.

As an artist representing Cambodia on the international stage, I want to do my best and put on the coolest performances for everyone. I pour my heart and soul into my music and I perform it with the utmost pride. I’m honoured to be one of the first Cambodian artists to go beyond the borders with my music, and it will not stop here. Cambodia has a sound that is unique and the culture in itself has many elements such as our rich cultural sounds in Ayai, Smot, and traditional instruments not found anywhere else, just to name a few that allow Cambodian rappers to create colours and flavours that have never been done before. With so many young and rising talents with the grit and strength to go to the global stage, we will be producing a phenomenal music scene for sure. We’ve only just begun and the world is our oyster.

You’ve expressed your love for your country in songs like “Khmer Blood.” Beyond your music as entertainment, do you see yourself as a role model in Cambodian society?

I think my music speaks for itself. Cambodians are a resilient people, authentic, humble. We have so much to offer. We have been through a lot. And because we suffered, we have a capacity to share wisdom with the world. Everyone can positively influence society. You see people saving lives, like doctors and nurses; people protecting the country, like police officers, soldiers; teachers, educating generations of people; people serving the country, from leaders, heads of companies to construction workers to trash collectors. We all play a role to better our country. Mine just happens to be through music.

So I just do what I do best and pour all my heart and soul into it. If it inspires one person, great, if it inspires a whole generation, I have nothing else to say but to be grateful and feel motivated to do more. I hope my pride and passion for music and my country continue to spark inspiration.


Where do your interests lie beyond music? Are there any causes that you work on or support?

I love nature. When I’m not in my studio vibing with music, I find myself drawn to the outdoors. I love camping, being immersed in nature, and

listening to the sounds of birds chirping. I think many people take nature for granted, the lush greenery, the clean fresh air, and the clear, unpolluted bodies of water.

I’ve collaborated on several eco-awareness and environmental campaigns, including a campaign with Wildlife Alliance on my “Khmer Blood” music video to raise awareness of the dangers of poaching in the Cardamom Mountains.

The 1River Music Festival and animation project supported an anti-plastic campaign in collaboration with UNDP, the Ministry of Environment, the Swedish Embassy and Mitsubishi Corporation. The film from this project was officially selected by multiple film festivals around the world in 2023, including the Shenzhen Youth Film Festival, Cambodia International Festival, Indonesia CRAFT Animefest, Tbilisi International Animation Festival, and Taipei Asian Films Festival.

Most recently, I participated in the Bon Phum On The Move Eco-Awareness concert in Kratie Province on World Children’s Day. This event was supported by UNICEF and the Ministry of Environment and focused on eco-programmes protecting Irrawaddy dolphins, raising awareness of the threat of their extinction, promoting anti-plastic campaigns and reforestation, and highlighting the value of local performance arts, bringing back a long tradition of celebrating arts and culture in the local temple. 

Chew & Bash

Phnom Penh Island Club

Perched atop the green Coconut Park building, Chew & Bash offers unparalleled views of Phnom Penh’s modern cityscape and the Mekong river.

Fine cuisine and a global drink selection are paired with entertainment and international DJs, creating a restaurant, lounge and club with an atmosphere unmatched in the Kingdom’s capital.

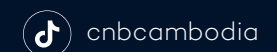
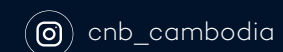
Join us and have a bash at the Phnom Penh Island Club!



RESTAURANT | LOUNGE | BAR

Coconut Park Building Rooftop, Koh Pich, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

For corporate and business event bookings, contact +855 (0)93 999 874





into the wild

FROM THE CARDAMOMS TO MONDULKIRI, THESE WILDERNESS RESORTS WILL STIR THE IMAGINATIONS OF ADVENTUROUS AND AFFLUENT TRAVELLERS

BY COBY HOBBS

Kingdom's garden: Koh Kong province and Chi Phat offer eco-diversions amid stunning nature in Southeast Asia's largest rainforest

Cambodia's most memorable destinations are not always in the places where you might expect them. Indeed, there's much more to the Kingdom of Wonder than stunning Angkor, metropolitan Phnom Penh and the islands of the coast. Far from the major cities and resort developments, a growing

number of remote lodges are welcoming travellers who truly seek to "get away from it all" – but not without many of the modern comforts of home. Their philosophies are deeply rooted in protecting their local environments. Indeed, these accommodations represent the new face of ecotourism in Southeast Asia.

Following are some of our favourites. They're not all easy to get to, but that's a part of their charm. Whether you find joy in mountains or rivers, trekking or paddling, wildlife or waterfalls, there's a good chance you'll find what you're looking for in this selection.



< CHI PHAT: KOH KONG

Getting to Chi Phat is part of the adventure. A bus or motorbike journey to Koh Kong from Cambodia's major cities – along with a handful of hours to gaze at the passing verdant rural landscape – brings you to this community-based ecotourism project, nestled in the Cardamom Mountains in Southeast Asia's largest rainforest.

Established in collaboration with the Wildlife Alliance, Chi Phat offers a unique and thrilling adventure in pristine wilderness. Guides, once local poachers, lead you on jungle treks to waterfalls, grasslands and mountains that they have come to know for

sustenance and beauty. You can choose your adventure level, from light to hard, with activities such as jungle treks, bird-watching, kayaking, and even exploring bat caves and ancient burial sites. Those of a more chill temperament can take a tranquil plunge near waterfalls, fish for lobsters at night, or learn to cook traditional Khmer food.

Despite limited electricity and no hot water, Chi Phat offers comfortable lodging in homestays, guesthouses, simple bungalows and forest camps. Aside from the amenities, visitors find satisfaction in contributing to the preservation of this ecological gem.

chi-phet.org



Nature's escape: An isolated luxury retreat, Shinta Mani was the outgrowth of seven years of careful planning

v NATURE LODGE: MONDULKIRI

Established in 2007, this eco-lodge was the first of its kind, a retreat operating under the principles of environmentalism and social enterprise. Today the Nature Lodge continues to offer an array of bungalows and family cottages in the Mondulkiri highlands, making it a perfect stay for those craving a bucolic getaway.

The lodge sits atop a serene hillside park in Sen Monorom, 2km from the centre of the provincial capital. The accommodation options encourage a comfortably rustic and communal stay: Large grass areas, picnic tables and fire pits are among the features of the eco-homes. When hunger calls, the Tree Tops Café & Restaurant serves a fusion of western, Khmer and Thai cuisines.

Away from the lodge, the cool rolling hills of Mondulkiri invite a dynamic list of activities. You can visit sanctuaries and rehabilitation centres for the native elephants. Trekkers and hikers look to get off the beaten path, hunting for swimming spots amid untouched waterfalls in the forest. Or take time to learn about the indigenous Bunong hill tribes as you support programmes that help maintain their communities.

naturelodgecambodia.com



v SHINTA MANI WILD: KIROROM

Canopies of grandeur, fixed gracefully above a powerful river, might suffice a couple's idea of an isolated luxury retreat. But Shinta Mani Wild is much more than that. A transformative blend of world-class design, all-inclusive hospitality, and conservation – in the heart of southern Cambodia's lush wilderness – this unique resort is the offspring of seven years of careful planning. Here, beside the rapids of the Thmor Rung River, 15 large private tents, quirky yet sophisticated, offer unrivalled comfort with breathtaking views and a deep connection to the natural surroundings.

Everything is all-inclusive, from meals to spa treatments and adventurous excursions, with luxury never far from mind. Personal "adventure butlers" are experts at unveiling the magnificently green landscape through a wide range of outdoor activities – including wildlife treks and Cambodia's longest zipline. Every meal is carefully curated by in-house chefs using the freshest seasonal ingredients, some of them foraged by the team in the surrounding forest. The Khmer Tonics Spa, snuggled deep in the forest, promises pampering treatments that challenge the senses.

shintamani.com/wild



^ THE BEIGE: SIEM REAP

Angkor's lush landscapes embrace a luxurious tented retreat that seamlessly marries opulence with a commitment to sustainability. Spanning 10 hectares, The Beige offers seven tented guest quarters, each a haven of comfort with private terraces, air-conditioning and antique furnishings. Crafted from organic materials, the tents invite gentle breezes as they foster harmony with the serene, sun-dappled surroundings.

The sense of intimacy continues at The Beige restaurant, where original Khmer regional dishes are prepared with organic ingredients, many from the resort's own farm. Wellness takes centre stage at the resort's Spa in Angkor Thom, a tranquil retreat surrounded with designated spaces for yoga. The suspended infinity pool offers a magical swimming experience with panoramic forest views.

Situated just 10 minutes from Angkor Thom, The Beige is convenient to all of Siem Reap's world heritage sites. Guests are treated as cherished family members, creating an experience designed to transcend a one-time stay.

the-beige.com



Photos: Sam Jam for Discover

For your *senses*

FROM ENERGISING YOGA WORKOUTS TO BEAUTIFYING SPA TREATMENTS, HERE ARE OUR TIPS FOR RELAXING, RECHARGING AND DE-STRESSING



SIX SENSES KRABEY ISLAND

A 15-minute ride by speedboat off Cambodia's south coast lands you on the idyllic private island of Krabey, home to the unique Six Senses resort. Unspoiled luxury nestled under the jungle canopy awaits wellness enthusiasts who can choose packages focusing on fitness, yoga, weight management and a classic detox. Experts use smart technology to monitor sleep patterns, health and overall movement to tailor experiences and nutritional plans for individual needs, all in the name of restoring balance, energy and calm. If you don't want to commit to a full package, head for a massage or try out an indoor aerial yoga class.

sixsenses.com



BLUE INDIGO YOGA RETREAT PHNOM PENH

A sanctuary dedicated to restoring mind and body, Blue Indigo is nestled on the Mekong River one hour from bustling Phnom Penh.

The centre focuses on growth, harmony and enlightenment through the timeless spiritual art of yoga, and provides training and techniques for introspection and self-discovery including meditation and breathing exercises. Its guests are provided with tools enabling them to bring this knowledge to their daily lives and achieve a peaceful and balanced state of mind and body.

Offered are retreats, teacher training workshops and drop-in yoga classes combined with fine local vegetarian cuisine, all beside a lovely swimming pool. The retreats are a complete immersion in healing practises including daily meditation sessions and holistic activities. Guests can personalise the length of their retreat from one to 30 days. Blue Indigo is certified by Yoga Alliance International, ensuring highest standards of quality.

The variety of yoga classes are suitable for all levels from beginner to advanced. A calm, quiet river terrace offering stunning sunrise and sunset views across the Mekong supports your journey.

blueindigoyogacambodia.com



Photos: Thomas Cristofolletti for Discover (1)

SOKKHAK BOUTIQUE RESORT & SPA SIEM REAP

The word "sokkhak" means tranquil in Khmer, and serenity is part of the promise of this luxurious and well-known boutique spa in downtown Siem Reap. Its signature Khmer-style healing massage, a tradition that originated in the ancient Angkorian empire, combines gentle stretching with deep pressure along chakra lines to relax and balance tense muscles. Native flora, including essential oils and balms from a farm in the jungles of Koh Kong province, are used in all therapies, including an herbal compress and aromatherapy massage that improves circulation and stimulates the senses. Sokkhak has 10 separate treatment rooms that provide such specialised treatments as facials and foot reflexology. Especially popular are exfoliating body scrubs and wraps – one with fresh avocado and palm sugar, another featuring pumpkin pulp and black sticky rice.

sokkhak-boutiqueresort.com



NAVUTU DREAMS SIEM REAP

As a full-service and plastic-free wellness retreat, Navutu Dreams has no rival in Cambodia. After days of exploring the jungle temple ruins of Angkor from dawn to high noon, Navutu's pools and colourful gardens provide the perfect "eco-chic" counterbalance. The family-owned resort has 28 luxurious rooms and suites, each with private gardens; the gourmet Niam Niam restaurant; and three outdoor swimming pools – freshwater for lap swimming, saltwater, and a family-friendly lagoon-style pool. Yoga and wellness packages include daily classes from restorative to intense, and such holistic treatments as shiatsu, reiki and acupuncture. The Honeycomb Spa offers traditional massage treatments, scrubs and facials. Popular "adventures" are meditation at an Angkor temple or "forest bathing" on a therapeutic stroll in the jungle.

navuturesorts.com



SÂMATA PHNOM PENH

Sâmata Medical, Spa & Wellness was established in 2012 as one of the first holistic wellness centres in the Cambodian capital. Services include physiotherapy, acupuncture, chiropractic and hypnotherapy, besides the classic well-being treatments, from aromatherapy and pilates to reiki. Sâmata focuses on the individualised care of each client, and offers its own line of wellness and body-care products from massage oils to bath salts, room and linen sprays. The renowned wellness centre hosts a range of European experts who lead the individual programmes. It also maintains a branch spa at the Phnom Penh International Airport.

samata-cambodia.com



Eco-conscious sustainability propels hotel biz

WITH SAMUEL DIXON, THE SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA PUTS AN EXPERIENCED MANAGER IN CHARGE OF ITS ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

BY STEW POST



Going green: The luxurious Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra is a leader for sustainable practices in Cambodia's hospitality sector

Why is the role of sustainability manager so important to the hospitality industry? What impact do hotels like Sofitel

have on the environment and communities?

It is our duty to really change mindsets in how we conduct our business, to offset any impacts we have on the local environment and society. A sustainability manager in the hospitality industry is essential as we try to guide hotels to implement more environmental policies to mitigate that. My role, I find, is a lot more about seeing how much we can reduce the impact we have by limiting the resources we bring in, limiting the waste we are expelling, and guiding the hotel in each of its different operations towards a more sustainable ecosystem.

I think hotels and hospitality in general are a very beautiful way to encourage travel and encourage our guests to experience the best of our location. In particular, for Sofitel, to be very deeply rooted in the local community and culture is one of the core pillars for the brand and one of the things that we like to passionately show our guests. So, any impacts that we have on our local communities, we try to be as positive as we can. From limiting our food waste that we are sending out into the environment, by promoting local businesses, by importing as much as we can from Phnom Penh or from Cambodia in general, working with local farmers and producers. Trying to enhance and encourage and celebrate the destination is something that I really love about Sofitel.



SAMUEL DIXON

A broader understanding of the ways in which economic activity drives climate change has led to concerted efforts among industries to mitigate impacts and reduce ecological damage. The hospitality industry too is turning to environmentally friendly protocols and green business strategies. At the Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra hotel, Cluster Sustainability Manager Samuel Dixon establishes and implements a model for the luxury property. With a Master's Degree in marine environmental management, Dixon served six years as resident marine biologist in the Maldives for Accor Group, Sofitel's parent company. Watch the video interview, filmed on location at Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra, at [Focus-Cambodia.com](https://focus-cambodia.com).

Are there certain benchmarks or metrics you and your team use to assess and evaluate the hotel's sustainability? How would they be applied?

In a hotel, the primary benchmarks you would use to assess a sustainability portfolio would be: looking at the energy consumption the hotel is generating, looking at all utilities consumption, measuring the amount of waste that is being reduced, and also looking at and assessing how much the hotel is actually engaging with local communities, what impact it is really having there.

So, for me and my team, we completed one of the most well-known and prestigious sustainability audits, the Green Globe Certification. That provided me with fantastic benchmarks in order to take more initiatives forward in 2024. We looked at how much we consume, how much waste in different areas we produce, and now that we have that baseline, we can integrate more policies to reduce impacts.

Does Cambodia present any unique challenges to hotels or businesses in achieving sustainability targets?

I think celebrating Cambodia's youth is important. About 49 percent of the country's population is less than 25 years old. This kind of youthful energy can spark a huge potential when it comes to businesses as they expand and grow. So, for us, we are passionately engaging, supporting and lifting educational institutions to really foster the

professional growth and development of the next generation.

To see them grow and develop into the future business leaders of tomorrow is something that we are very proud of.

We have partnered with a variety of schools and universities providing internship opportunities, hosting workshops, and carrying out fundraising events so that we can solidify a brighter future together. This is a really fun part of our sustainability strategy.

What advice would you give other businesses in Cambodia that are trying to create more sustainable practices?

I would recommend – it's the most simple thing – use the internet, ask questions. No question is a stupid question. Try to educate yourself. Visit places that are very sustainable and know that it doesn't matter how big or small your changes are, if you're making a change you are on the right path. You don't need to panic or think you need to invest in a thousand solar panels so that you can be carbon neutral from the beginning.

It's a journey. You take these small steps and you grow your business and develop and integrate these policies over time. Don't get me wrong: As much as you can do, as much as your resources allow you to do, do. But if you're unsure or if you're limited, ask questions and make small policy changes to start with. I guarantee it, you will see the benefit in the long term.

Are there any goals or sustainability targets you have in your sights? How does your team plan to achieve them and how can they contribute to broader sustainability in Cambodia?

We recently received the Green Globe Certification. I loved this audit because it allowed me to assess each and every part of the hotel's operations and work with every single department and see where we're at and where we're going. One target for us was to eliminate single-use plastic by the end of 2023. We achieved that goal. I also obtained a baseline on our food waste and a baseline on our energy and utilities consumption for the year, with the goal in the long term to work towards a reduction of our energy consumption by 25 percent by the end of 2025 and a reduction of our food waste by 30 percent by the end of 2025 as well.

With Sofitel and Accor in general, we make a huge push to create a positive contribution to society, from our local economies to our local environments. And that is about putting people at the core of our sustainability strategies. The emphasis on people – again, we have a unique situation as a country with a huge and vibrant, young population – and fostering their growth and development by providing opportunities through internships and workshop events while guiding them to be leaders of tomorrow, shows great promise for Cambodia when it comes to sustainability. This is not just in hospitality, but in society in general. **F**



Do Forni
Ristorante Italiano

Step out of the office and impress your clients! Chef prepares a monthly set and weekly suggestions for a short voyage to Italy including water and coffee.

Easy access to Do Forni by our indoor parking



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION

SOFITEL / **All**
PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA ACCOR - LIVE LIMITLESS

SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA
26 OLD AUGUST SITE - SOTHEAROS BOULEVARD - 12301
PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA
023 999 200 - H6526@SOFITEL.COM

[WWW.SOFITEL-PHNOMPENH-PHOKEETHRA.COM](https://www.sofitel-phnompenh-phokeethra.com)





meet & greet

FROM PHNOM PENH TO SIEM REAP AND THE COAST, THESE HOTELS AND RESORTS CATER TO THE MEETINGS, INCENTIVES, CONFERENCES AND EXHIBITIONS (MICE) FAVOURED BY CORPORATE EXECUTIVES AND BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

▼ **COURTYARD SIEM REAP**

An easy drive to Angkor Wat, Courtyard Siem Reap is perfect for anyone looking to pair business with pleasure in the official seat of Cambodia's cultural heritage. The "Grand Room and Studio" provides ample space for larger corporate events such as product launches and industry conferences. The "Boardroom," a smaller space, is perfect for VIP events and

team-building exercises. Five additional rooms, all equipped with professional-grade video, audio and teleconference technology, complete the 9,600 square metres of meeting rooms on site. With luxurious suites, culinary delights and dedicated event planners serving guests, Courtyard Siem Reap is the clear choice for corporate clients looking to bring business to Temple Town.



► **SMILING GECKO**

Operated by the eponymous international aid organisation, Smiling Gecko's Farmhouse Resort & Spa offers an idyllic backdrop for corporate retreats and team building events. An hour north of Phnom Penh, the resort is located on a tranquil 150-hectare campus. Along with restaurants specialising in farm-to-table cuisine and a variety of private rooms and suites available, the resort offers services tailored to corporate clients. A 20-person "Executive Lounge" and a conference room suitable for up to 40 people are both fully equipped with air-conditioning and impressive audio and visual systems perfect for multimedia presentations and video conferencing. Smiling Gecko's "Meeting Shala" is an open-air space bathed in natural light, capable of hosting



80 people and boasting sound and video equipment, making it ideal for larger corporate gatherings, employee retreats and company parties. An NGO operating a school, craft workshops and hospitality training, Smiling Gecko is a great option for businesses with CSR in mind.

◀ **KNAI BANG CHATT BY KEP WEST**

For a more serene locale for a conference, event or business meeting, look no further than this seaside retreat in Kep. Knai Bang Chatt offers clients access to a plethora of event spaces, restaurants and activities, all metres from the ocean. A large open-air conference space allows guests to enjoy the sea breeze while a smaller room is perfect for more intimate gatherings – or for groups who prefer the cool of aircon. "The Wave" is a beachfront option with professional-grade audio and visual equipment that can accommodate up to 1,000 people. With delicious cuisine and corporate-retreat packages offered, Knai Bang Chatt gives guests the unique chance to take corporate events to the beach.



▲ **SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA**

Strategically located in the heart of the capital, Sofitel is a stone's throw from the embassies, corporate offices and government buildings that make the Kingdom tick. Known for luxury in hospitality, Sofitel offers corporate clients bespoke options for retreats, events and business meetings, including a 1,600-person ballroom (above). Seven more event spaces, ranging from intimate VIP rooms to skyview conference spaces, come equipped with state-of-the-art audio and video equipment. Along with 5-star food, guests can also make use of event-planning teams and a variety of luxurious rooms and executive suites for overnight stays.

▼ **HYATT REGENCY**

A short walk from Phnom Penh's bustling riverside, Hyatt Regency brings a global reputation for excellence to Cambodia's business community. Boasting 1,400 square metres of event space, Hyatt is one of the capital's leading choices for corporate meetings and conferences. For exhibitions and other high-capacity events, the ballroom is an obvious choice and with the city's largest LED screen, exciting visual aids can accompany live presentations and interactive speeches. Nine smaller spaces – all equipped with state-of-the-art audio and visual technology – provide flexible meeting options for every occasion. With private rooms and suites and a variety of restaurants available, Hyatt Regency is perfect for sealing deals in the capital.



SOFITEL
SPA

Experience a journey of tranquillity at Sofitel Spa, as our certified specialists provide a holistic wellness experience through innovative aromatherapy and massage techniques inspired by the elements. Indulge in Decléor facial treatments for a radiant skincare escape.



SCAN FOR
MORE INFORMATION

SOFITEL / All
PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA ACCOR · LIVE LIMITLESS

SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA
26 OLD AUGUST SITE - SOTHEAOS BOULEVARD - 12301
PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA
023 999 200 - H6526@SOFITEL.COM

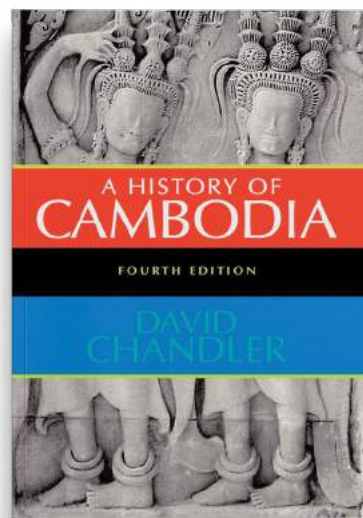
WWW.SOFITEL-PHNOMPENH-PHOKEETHRA.COM





LITERARY ESCAPES

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CAMBODIAN READ



A HISTORY OF CAMBODIA

BY **DAVID CHANDLER**

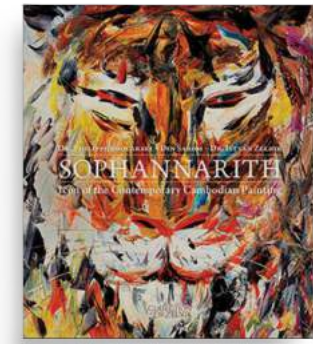
Perhaps no historian knows Cambodia better than David Chandler. In this updated fourth edition, released in 2023, the US-born professor and former diplomat expands upon a book that has been praised by the Journal of Asian Studies as “an original contribution, superior to any other existing work.” While returning to the earliest foundations of Khmer civilisation, the new revision carries readers through the turbulent 19th and 20th centuries and the decades of Hun Sen’s leadership. It includes an analysis of Cambodian politics and sociology and a discussion of the growing challenges of becoming a key player in the modern Asian world.



ESSENTIAL CAMBODIA: A GUIDE FOR FOREIGN ENTREPRENEURS, INVESTORS & MANAGERS

BY **ALLEN DODGSON TAN**

Rather than fighting the system, aspiring expatriate entrepreneurs must explore and accept the nuances of the Cambodian business environment before starting their venture. That’s the message brought by Allen Tan, former president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia. *Essential Cambodia* emphasises the importance for new residents to consider cultural differences before leaping into the business world. That understanding may be more important than the finer legal aspects of operating a business, says Tan, who bases his advice on personal experience and interviews with Cambodian and foreign industry leaders.



SOPHANNARITH: ICON OF THE CONTEMPORARY CAMBODIAN PAINTING

BY **DR PHILIPPE SMOLARSKI, DIN SARON, DR ISTVÁN ZELNIK**

Sophannarith Thu (born 1960) is among the best-known of contemporary Cambodian painters, having trained at the Royal Academy of Art before adapting his Impressionist style to traditional Khmer subjects and the natural environment. His distinctive style is notable for its use of quick strokes of a palette knife upon a thick layer of paint. This Belgian volume illustrates the most important assemblage of Sophannarith’s work, drawn from the famed Southeast Asian art collection of Dr Istvan Zelnik, with commentary by Asian art experts Dr Philippe Smolarski and Din Saron.



THE CULINARY ART OF CAMBODIA: A CAMBODIAN PRINCESS' CUISINE GUIDE

BY **H.R.H. NORODOM RASMI SOBBHANA**

Princess Rasmi Sobbhana (1898-1971) never married. The great-aunt of H.M. King Sihamoni dedicated her life to service, education and empowering young women. Credited with creating the modern Apsara dance form, she also published *L'Art de la Cuisine Cambodgienne* with about 300 recipes in 1960. That book was expanded and republished in 2021 by Siem Reap’s Angkor Database and Templantation Angkor Resort, with photographs of her life and influence on contemporary Khmer culture. Book sales proceeds support the Samdech Rasmi Sobbhana Women’s Foundation, established in 1995 as a crafts training centre for war orphans and refugee children.



A NEW SUN RISES OVER THE OLD LAND: A NOVEL OF SIHANOUK'S CAMBODIA

BY **SUON SORIN** TRANSLATED BY **ROGER NELSON**

Published in Khmer in 1962, *A New Sun* is considered an iconic work of modern Cambodian literature. Reflecting upon the nation’s struggle during the transition from French colonialism to self-rule, it tells the story of Sam and Soy, refugees from Battambang who must compromise their altruistic principles as they fall into poverty in Phnom Penh. It is the only known work of Suon Sorin, thought to have perished under the Khmer Rouge. The book was only published in an English edition in 2019 after its translation by Nelson, curator of Singapore’s National Gallery, and won a major prize from the Association of Asian Studies in 2022.

INVESTMENT GUIDE



Located at the heart of the Greater Mekong Subregion, Cambodia remains one of Southeast Asia's fastest growing economies. Business-friendly policies and favourable conditions continue to attract investors and residents to the Kingdom

BASICS

Currency

The official currency is the Cambodian riel, though the Kingdom is a partially dollarized economy with the majority of deposits and credits in the country's banks held in US dollars. There has been a massive increase in digital payments in recent years, and QR codes are now available for nearly every purchase, even in wet markets and from small vendors such as street sellers or tuk tuk drivers.

1 USD ≈ 4,150 KHR (04/2024)

Demographics

Population: 16.94 million (2023)
Median age: 27.3 (2023)
Phnom Penh Population: 2.35 million (2024)

Key Economic Indicators

Labour force: 9.05 million (2022)
GDP: \$29.5 billion (2022)
GDP per capita: \$1,625.24 (2023)
GDP growth: 5.3% (2023)
GNI per capita: \$1,690 (2022)
Economic status: lower-middle income
Inflation: 3% (2023)

Source: ADB, IMF, World Bank, UN Population Data

FOREIGN EXCHANGE CONTROL

Commercial transactions up to \$10,000 may be made freely between residents and nonresidents, provided they are made through an authorised bank. Transfers exceeding \$10,000 must be declared to the National Bank of Cambodia prior to the transfer.

INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

Foreign entities can own 100% of a local business or commercial enterprise. The Cambodian government:

- Does not discriminate against non-Cambodian investors
- Does not undertake a nationalisation policy
- Does not impose price controls on products or services
- Does not impose controls on foreign currency
- Does not impose trade restrictions
- Protects intellectual property
- Allows for the free repatriation of profits and free remittance of royalty, interest, loan repayments, dividends and capital
- Allows foreigners to lease land for up to 50 years (the Law on Investment restricts foreigners from owning land in Cambodia)



LAW ON INVESTMENT (2021)

Since 2021, an updated Law on Investment (LOI) has been implemented to establish "an open, transparent and predictable legal framework to attract and promote quality, effective and efficient investments by Cambodian nationals or foreigners in the Kingdom of Cambodia."

Under the new LOI there are a number of incentives offered to operations that receive Qualified Investment Projects (QIP) from the Council for the Development of Cambodia or a Municipal/Provincial Investment SubCommittee.

Industries entitled to QIP status

Along with agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and adjacent supporting industries, the new LOI is working to promote sectors in line with the government's development goals.

- High-tech industries involving innovation or research and development
- Digital industries
- Environmental management and protection, and biodiversity conservation and the circular economy
- Green energy and technology contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation

Tax incentives for QIPs:

Option 1:

- Tax exemption for 3 to 9 years, depending on the sector and investment activities
- After the exemption period has expired, the QIP is entitled to paying income tax at a rate proportional to the total tax due: 25% for the first 2 years, 50% for the next 2 years, and 75% for the last 2 years
- Additional incentives as outlined in the LOI



Mutual benefit: Investment in skill development and vocational training can yield a deduction of 150% of the tax base

Option 2:

- Deduction of capital expenditure through special depreciation
- Eligibility of deducting up to 200% of specific expenses incurred for up to 9 years, depending on the sector and investment activities
- Additional incentives as outlined in the LOI.

Additional incentives:

Value-added tax exemption for the purchase of locally made Production Inputs.

Deduction of 150% from the tax base for any of the following activities:

- Research, development and innovation
- Human resource development through the provision of vocational training and skills to Cambodian workers/employees
- Construction of accommodation, food courts or affordable canteens where reasonably priced foods are sold, nurseries and other facilities for workers/employees
- Upgrade of machinery to serve the production line
- Provision of welfare for Cambodian workers/employees

TIP: The Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) has made upgrades to its website and launched a digital portal for QIP registration. This new QIP Online system streamlines the application process and increases confidence and transparency, while reducing costs for those looking to do business in the Kingdom.

PREFERENTIAL MARKET ACCESS

Trade and Commerce with the European Union:

Exports to the EU have remained strong despite the partial withdrawal of **Everything But Arms (EBA)** trade preferences in 2020. The withdrawal impacted select garment and footwear products and sugar exports, amounting to one fifth of Cambodia's annual exports to the EU.

With Cambodia expected to graduate from **Least Developed Country (LDC)** status by 2027, the remaining trade preferences previously enjoyed under the EU's EBA agreement will no longer be available. However, the upgraded status opens the door to a host of new tariff concessions under the EU's sustainability-minded **GSP+** programme. To qualify, Cambodia must demonstrate compliance with human rights standards, "Rules of Origin" requirements and other trade and export rules.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN):

A member since 1999, Cambodia benefits from a number of regional trade agreements, incentives and schemes that have been established through ASEAN initiatives.

- ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area
- ASEAN-China Free Trade Area
- ASEAN-India Free Trade Area
- ASEAN-Republic of Korea Free Trade Area
- ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership

BILATERAL TRADE WITH CAMBODIA

- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- SOUTH KOREA
- RCEP NATIONS



Source: Ministry of Commerce and General Dept. Customs & Excise, 2023 data

Other Free Trade Agreements:

Cambodia has entered into a growing number of bilateral and multilateral agreements that provide support internationally and across the region.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):

Entered into force in 2022, RCEP brings together the Asia-Pacific nations of Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. By member nation GDP, it is the largest FTA in the world.

Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA):

Cambodia's largest trading partner is China and the CCFTA has helped improve the competitiveness of Cambodian products, notably agricultural and aquacultural exports.

Cambodia-Korea Free Trade Agreement (CKFTA):

Ratified in 2022, the CKFTA eliminates duties on 93.8% of South Korean goods imported to Cambodia and removes tariffs on 95.6% of Cambodian products sent to South Korea.

Cambodia-United Arab Emirates Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CAM-UAE CEPA):

Going beyond a traditional FTA, the CAM-UAE CEPA covers everything from investment, e-commerce, rules of commodity origins, trade facilitation, and intellectual property rights, to economic and technical cooperation and laws and institutions.



VISAS

All visas require at least two free pages in a passport with at least 6 months validity.

Visa Exempt countries: Nationals from ASEAN members (minus Myanmar) as well as visitors from the Seychelles do not require visas for 30-day stays.

Tourist Visa: Available on arrival, tourist visas are single entry, valid for 30 days and cannot be renewed. An E-Visa, available via the government's online webportal, has the same stipulations and requirements of the Tourist Visa but is a more convenient option for many travellers.

Ordinary Visa: The E-Class Visa, commonly referred to as an E-Visa but not to be confused with the online tourist visa, is single entry and valid for 30 days. This category can be extended for 1, 3, 6 or 12 months and must be acquired in order to convert to the other more long-term visa types listed below.

Business Visa: Officially an EB-Extension, this category is available for 1, 3, 6 and 12 month periods; however, only the 6 and 12 month extensions are multiple entry.

EB-Extension's require a letter of employment and work permit and provide stipulations for spouses, children and dependents.

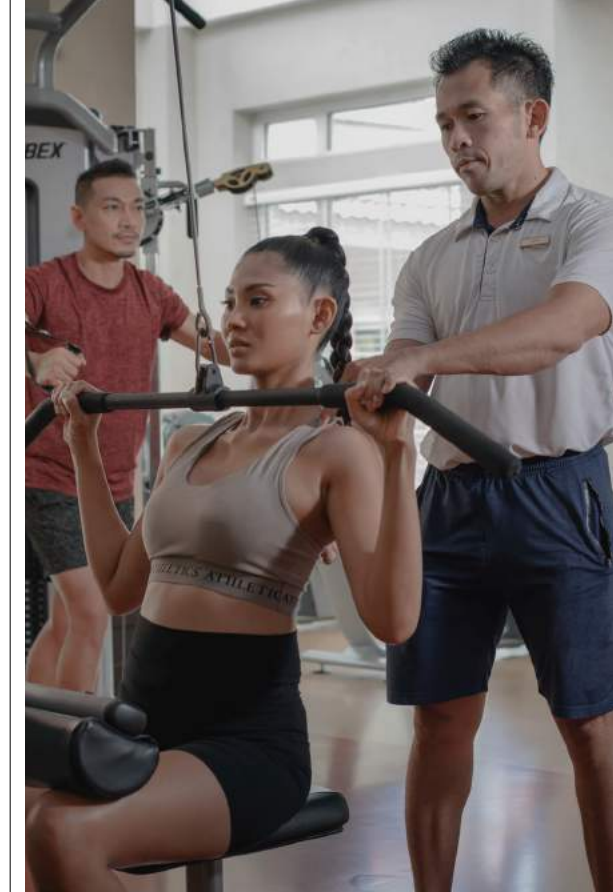
Searching-for-Work Visa: The EG-Extension is valid for 1, 3 or 6 months and is intended for those entering the country who are planning on finding work.

Retirement Visa: Valid for 1,3,6 or 12 months, ER-Extension are for foreigners over 55 years old. Supporting financial documents such as bank accounts or proof of Social Security are required and working on an ER-Extension is not permitted.

Other Visa Categories:

For NGO workers, C-Class Visas are available; B-Class Visas are for employees of organisations that have received invitations by the Cambodian government, such as the United Nations or World Health Organisation.

TIP
Prices for different visa categories vary. For additional processing and convenience fees, tourist agencies can facilitate visa extensions, conversions and renewals.



Unleash Your Fitness Potential and Family Fun at Phokeethra Sports Club

- Squash and Tennis Courts
- State-of-the-art Gym
- Pétanque
- Swimming Pool
- Kids Club
- Food Truck



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION



SOFITEL PHNOM PENH PHOKEETHRA
26 OLD AUGUST SITE - SOTHEAROS BOULEVARD - 12301
PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA
023 999 200 - H6526@SOFITEL.COM

WWW.SOFITEL-PHNOMPENH-PHOKEETHRA.COM





HOME OWNERSHIP

Foreigners can buy residential property in Cambodia, but can only own properties situated on the first floor or higher (not the ground floor). However, if a foreigner partners with a Cambodian legal entity, they can purchase up to 49% of any class of private property. A valid passport, visa and associated documentation are required.

HEALTH

A growing number of hospitals and clinics offer world-class care in Cambodia, most situated in the capital. Pharmacies are numerous and sell most medications at reasonable prices.

Raffles Medical Phnom Penh <https://rafflesmedical.com.kh>
Sunrise Japan Hospital Phnom Penh <http://www.sunrise-hs.com>
Royal Phnom Penh Hospital <https://royalphenompenhhospital.com>

HIGH-YIELD DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS

Many of Cambodia's microfinance institutions offer interest rates far higher than what can be expected in most other markets due to their own money-lending requirements. Over the course of a 36 month term deposit, investment returns of up to 8.5% annually are available, making them an interesting option for short-term personal investments or deposits of excess liquidity. Check with the leading banks below for the highest rate at the time of your arrival.

MICROFINANCE DEPOSIT INTEREST RATES

(INVESTMENTS IN USD OVER 36 MONTHS)

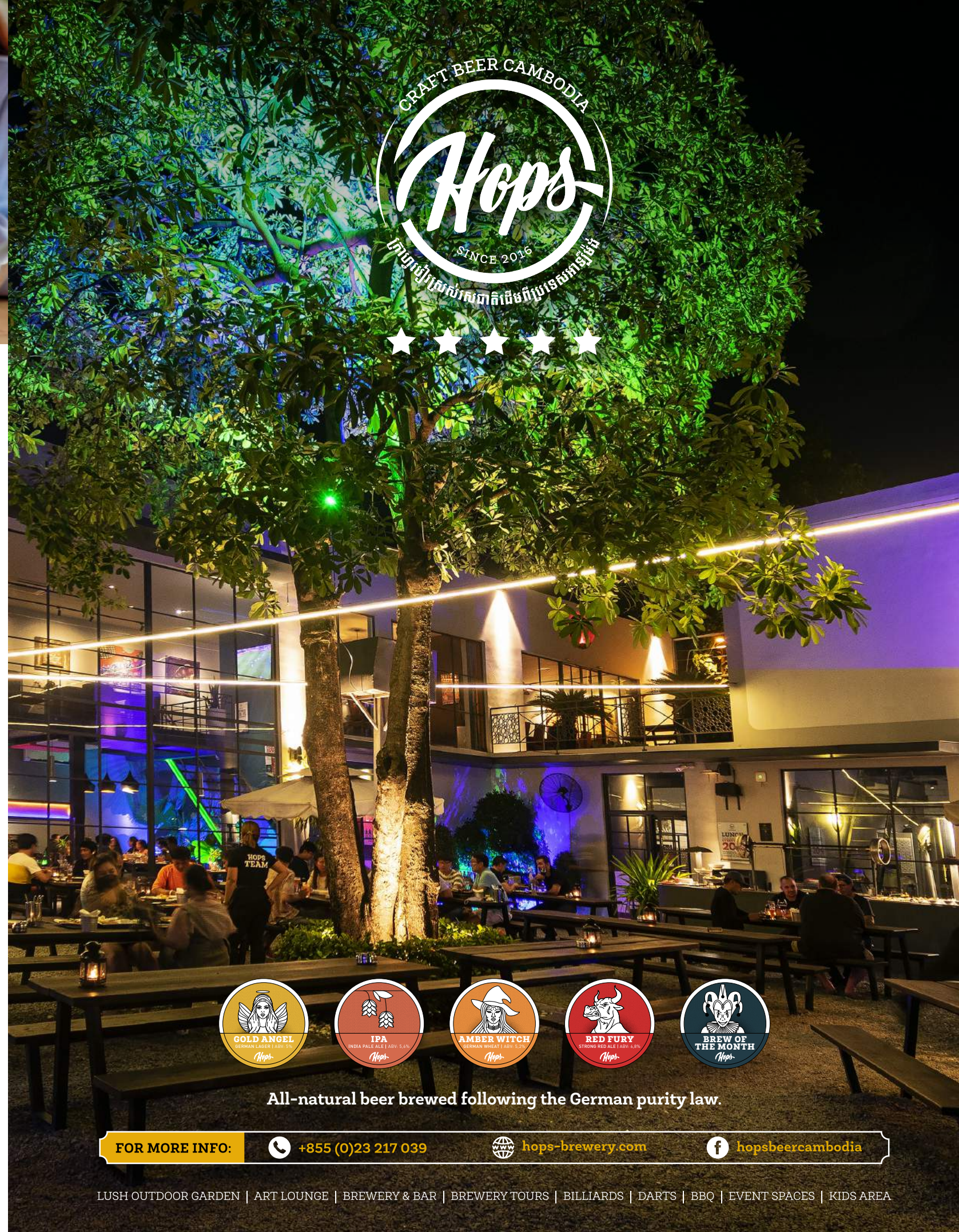
LOLC CAMBODIA PLC	8%
AMRET	6.9%
KB PRASAC BANK	7.25%
SATHAPANA	6%
WOORI BANK	8.5%

STARTING A BUSINESS

There are nine key steps to starting a business in Cambodia:

1. Conduct an initial check for uniqueness of the company name and obtain company name approval at the Business Registration Department – seven days **\$10**
2. Incorporate the company with the Business Registration Department at the Ministry of Commerce – **30 days, \$420**
3. Make a company seal – **one day, \$15**
4. Open a bank account, deposit the legally required initial capital (**\$1,000**) and obtain deposit evidence – one day no charge
5. Have registration documents stamped and approved, register for TIN, Patent tax and VAT tax – **30 days \$100**
6. Notify the Ministry of Labour of the start of operations and hiring of employees – **30 days, \$212.50 (8-100 employees)**
7. Submit company original statutes and capital deposit evidence at the Business Registry – **one day no charge**
8. Receive inspection from Labour Inspector – **one day included in procedure six**
9. Register at the National Social Security Fund – **14 days (simultaneous with previous procedure) no charge**

Source: World Bank, Doing Business



All-natural beer brewed following the German purity law.

FOR MORE INFO:



+855 (0)23 217 039



hops-brewery.com



hopsbeercambodia



**'My business is quite complicated.
I need a bank I can trust.'**

Find out why our clients have been trusting our group around the world for the past 100 years.

To succeed in business, you need to work closely with a banking partner that you can really trust. BRED Bank Cambodia is an experienced and flexible business bank, operating to the highest international standards and offering smarter banking to successful businesses. Why not make the smart move and speak to one of our Relationship Managers about our full range of business banking products and services today?

For details visit bredcambodia.com.kh or call free **1800 20 1234**

BRED
BANK

CAMBODIA

**The smarter
way to bank.**