

Sightseeing around Santepheap in Siem Reap – and beyond!

There are so many great things for you to see during your weekends. Whilst you travel out to these places from Siem Reap be sure to look around you so that you can see how most Cambodians live. You will gain great insight if you visit the villages immediately around Angkor Wat, for example. Angkor Wat is so incredible and has so many visitors that you will be amazed and horrified to see how local people have to live. These are the children and adults who try to sell you small things as you visit the temples – such as postcards.

Government qualified tourist guides are available through hotels and agencies. These guides speak good English and will drive you to the sites, often showing you other things along the way and then providing excellent explanations whilst you are at the main sites.

One such guide who has been used by our volunteers is Mr Dara Rann. He very good and his rates are cheaper than at the agencies.

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You can of course also just take a tuk tuk but for long distances this is very uncomfortable and their air conditioned cars are very nice! Also, if you go alone, you will not have all the information about what you are seeing. Expect to pay \$8+ for a tuk tuk all day at the temples. The driver is unlikely to also take you to Bantay Srei for that price as it is much further out. So to visit that you may need to go on another day and pay \$20 entrance fee again.

List of places you could visit apart from exploring Siem Reap itself:

Angkor Wat and its temples

Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Ta Phrom, Bantay Srei are the principle ones and if you start in the very early morning you will be able to get round all these in one day and not need to pay \$20 for a ticket to return another day. A tuk tuk driver will take you for \$8 for the whole day. He will also accompany you all round it. Check out his English before you go as often they will say they speak it, but don't really.

Kbal Spean

You do not need to pay the \$20 ticket if you visit this on another day. Although it's near Bantay Srei, you won't have time to visit it on your 'Temples Day'.

To get to the site, you park the car and walk uphill through the forest/jungle to the river and waterfall. There are carvings of lingam and Hindu gods as well as animals in and around the river. You can swim there too.

Kulen Mountain

An amazing site at the top of a mountain. Lovely shrines and a large reclining Buddha Rupa (statue) with beautiful views out and down across the forests below. It is much better than the guide books make it sound and really lovely.

For the more adventurous, there is an amazing motorbike ride for 7kms across the top of the mountain to see amazing, larger than life statues which are carved in the rock of the mountain. There is an elephant, lions, a bull and a frog. These are all in a prayer flag decorated glade in the jungle. It is so amazing to see this and think that these were all carved in about the year 800.

The motorbike (moto) drivers do this trip with tourists all the time, so it's not risky even though you will be riding over rough terrain. I did this trip and I'm 63! It was my favourite sightseeing of all that I did.

Kompong Khleang

This is a more authentic experience of visiting the famous 'floating villages' of Tonle Sap lake. The others such as Chong Khneas are very touristy and actually the people living there are not Cambodians. They are

Vietnamese. When visiting Chong Khneas, tourists are often involved in tourist scams by their guides. Kompong Khleang is a large, less visited, authentic experience where you also go out on a boat along the tributary and onto the lake itself to see life happening all around you, fishermen standing in the river up to their necks, farmers on the banks, floating traders, floating schools and water purification plants etc etc. The boat is well worth the \$30 and takes about 2 hours. Along the road on the way to and from the boat you can see the houses on stilts due to flooding in the rainy season, pagodas and home industries of fish drying and smoking etc.

Also on **Tonle Sap lake, nearer to Siem Reap, is Prek Toal** a nature and bird reserve where it is possible to see many species of bird. Tonle Sap is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Beng Melea is another temple and unique in that it is completely unrestored and like Ta Phrom but on a bigger and 'more swallowed by the jungle' scale. It's possible to combine this with Kompong Khleang and the entrance fee is only about \$5.

Choob

This small 'town' is on Route 6 (west) is a stone carving centre where you can enjoy seeing stone masons completing the very intricate carvings.

Phnom Sarok

Just off Route 6 (west), Phnom Sarok is a sericulture centre – one of the very few left in Cambodia. You will be able to see the whole process from start to finish as the local people are engaged in it. These two places are combinable.

Battambang and the Bamboo Train

It's possible to do this in a day if you leave early in the morning and according how often you stop to look at things en route determines what time you arrive back at your hotel. There's plenty to see! If you don't fancy the Bamboo Train – take the ordinary passenger train for a couple of stops and back to experience life with Cambodian people as they travel.

Further afield, you can visit:

Phnom Penh

Except in the dry season you can travel by boat from Siem Reap. Alternatively, you can travel by Express Coach, share bus (slightly faster!), local buses (takes a long time) or private car. The principle sites to see are the river front, Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda, Wat Phnom, the National Museum, Wat Ounalom, the Russian Market and the Genocide Museum – if you think you can stand it. It will be deeply upsetting as will the war museum in Siem Reap, but it will show you the horrific time Cambodians have been through, why they are so poor, why their health is fragile and why so many are disabled. This is in addition to the carpet bombing inflicted by the USA on 2/5 of Cambodia where unexploded bombs still maim and kill in the countryside.

There are beautiful beaches and unspoiled Khmer villages with traditional architecture in and around **Sihanoukville**.

It's possible to visit all these 'further afield' places over weekends although S/ville may need an extra day. If you intend to take days out of volunteering during the week, we would be grateful if you would give us notice so that we can adjust our planning accordingly.