

Chios Carmody
A Trip to Cambodia

While any country in Southeast Asia is an exotic destination for Canadians, a most tantalizing prospect for the off-beat aficionado is the possibility of going to Cambodia, a small country sandwiched between Vietnam and Thailand. Four day tours departing from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam to Cambodia are now available every Tuesday and Saturday.

The easiest way for Canadians to visit Cambodia is to make arrangements to tour Vietnam. Once in Vietnam a visa application for Cambodia can be made either at the Cambodian Embassy in Hanoi or at the Cambodian Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City. Visa processing takes two days (you will need three passport-size photos) and is free of charge. If you want to go to Cambodia you will also have to remember to extend your Vietnamese visa. This is because entry and exit from Cambodia are via Vietnam and you may be required to spend a few extra days in Ho Chi Minh City en route in order to catch the proper connecting flight.

The return flight fare between Ho Chi Minh City and Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital, is \$92. A room at Phnom Penh's Monorom Hotel runs about \$30 per night per person based on double occupancy all meals included. The use of a car and the services of a driver and guide will add another \$25 per day to your bill. All prices are in American dollars and are subjected to change. Inquiries about prices and tour information are available from the Cambodian Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City, 41 Phung Khac Khoan, Quan 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The prospective tourist to Cambodia might want to know what there is for a visitor to do in this country. The itinerary of a Vietnam-Cambodia tour formerly run by Bangkok's Diethlem Travel will

give some idea. It included visits to the mass graves at Choeung Ek and the Museum of Genocidal Crime at Tuol Sleng outside Phnom Penh, both of which are linked to the period between 1975 and 1978 when Cambodia endured the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime. It was this era that later provided the background for the award-winning film 'The Killing Fields'. There were also visits to a typical Cambodian village, to the former Royal Palace of Prince Sihanouk and to the National Museum - both located in Phnom Penh. Dinners were highlighted by performances of the reconstituted National Cambodian Ballet, at one time one of the most famous dance troupes in Asia.

But any tour of Cambodia has to culminate in a visit to the world-famous temple complex at Angkor Wat. The temples were built between the 9th and 12th centuries and later became the capital of the Khmer Empire, an empire which dominated Southeast Asia until the mid-14th century. Angkor Wat was rediscovered in 1860 by the French explorer Henri Mohout, who did much to restore and preserve the various temples. The site played host to millions of tourists until 1975 when the deteriorating Cambodian political situation made visits impossible. Since 1981 it has again been possible to visit Angkor Wat but the number of tourist visits to the complex has been negligible due to continuing political uncertainty in the region.

Despite ongoing political and economic difficulties in Cambodia, things appear to be getting better for Canadians considering going there as tourists. This was confirmed by reports of hundreds of Japanese tourists visiting the country this year. Last September a group of 50 Japanese even organized a day excursion by air from Ho Chi Minh City to Angkor Wat which proves, if nothing else, that tourism in

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Cambodia is indeed a going concern. So, if you are looking for real adventure, this might be the country to visit.

Finally, a country on which tourist information is exceptionally difficult to come by is Laos. Although supposedly closed to tourists, this landlocked Southeast Asian nation has recently been visited by several groups of Japanese tourists. Lao Aviation and Thai Airways each fly weekly from Bangkok to the Laotian capital, Vientiane. While border crossings into Laos are frequently made from Tha Bo in northern Thailand. For more information on tours to Laos, contact the Embassy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic at 2222 S Street, NW, Washington D.C., 20008.