

St. Sometimes



TRAVELS THROUGH CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM

Volume 71

July 2007

The Temples of Angkor Wat



Ta Prohm is the location where scenes from the original "Tomb Raider" were shot. Watch the movie again and see if you can find the scene!

Hello from Phnom Penh, Cambodia-my newest home. This issue takes you on a short tour through Cambodia

and Vietnam. I had the privilege of having Mario's company for my arrival in Cambodia. The two of us trekked

Travel Plans

Mario and I had very little as far as plans. He had from July 6th to July 30th to see something new. I am living here now, so we loosely based our travels around his schedule.

It was easy. We decided to relax in PP (Phnom Penh) for a few days. This allowed me

to get in touch with my school. I dropped off our computers and four suitcases in the office. Armed with only a small backpack each, Mario and I headed out to explore. All we had was a map and some cash.

The temples in Central Cambo were the first stop.

like backpackers for about two weeks. This is interesting because Mario is a classy guy! He's like my mom. He'd rather fly somewhere and check into a classy hotel rather than take local busses from one cockroach infested B&B to the next.

There was one main difference between the two of us and the rest of the tourists... we were TRAVELERS rather than TOURISTS. We spent enough time at each destination to settle in, relax, and take in the local scene. (with Dalat, Vietnam as the exception)

Smelly buses, dog meat on a stick, drunken Australians, breath-taking temples, and diving in Vietnam are all stories within. Read on...

Two countries were all we could handle as travelers so we decided to hit parts of Southern, Central, and East coast of Vietnam before heading back to Cambodia.

It was a good plan. Vietnamese travel is not easy!

Special points of interest:

- THE TEMPLE OF TA PROHM IS BREATHTAKING!
- THE REAL GAME OF FROGGER IS DAILY ACTIVITY IN SAIGON AND CAMBODIA
- VIETNAMESE WILL EAT ANYTHING— ANYTHING!
- CAMBODIA IS BETTER LIVING THAN VIETNAM
- PETER SAYS "VIETNAMESE WOMEN DON'T EAT!"

Inside this issue:

- | | |
|---|---|
| THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE TEMPLE, BOOK A ROOM | 2 |
| TA PROHM— THE MOST BEAUTIFUL JUNGLE TEMPLE | 3 |
| BAYON, BEGGARS, AND PETE THE AUSTRALIAN | 3 |
| ANGKOR WAT AND SIM REAP—THE TEMPLES | 4 |
| SAIGON, THE CITY OF MOTOR BIKES! | 4 |
| DIVING IN VIETNAM— POLICE PROBLEM | 5 |
| GOODBYE VIETNAM, GOODBYE MARIO | 6 |



Mr. Kane was our tour guide throughout the morning at Ta Prohm. No, that isn't your garage door opener dad. I would NEVER take that!

GoToAngkor.com is a great website to learn all about the temples of Angkor Wat. There is a lot to learn.



Sopheak was our hired Tuk-Tuk driver out to the temples. He would take us out there, wait for us to look around, take us to another temple,

St.Sometimes

Siem Reap - The Hub of Tourism

There are buses, planes, and even boats that transport all of the tourists/travelers to Siem Reap. SR is the city that has emerged as the hub for visiting the Wats (temples). We took the boat ride up the Tonle Sap river. It cost \$25 US rather than \$6 for the bus. I talked Mario into the river ride so I could sit up top and enjoy the river. The speed boat takes the same 6hours as the bus. It turned out to be a scenic 4 hours on the river and 2hours across

the Tonle Sap Lake. The lake is a bit boring because it is 2hours of brown water as far as you can see in any direction.

The bonus was the floating village. There is a whole village, complete with floating school, floating pool hall (Ron Vair-you would have loved to see that!), and a floating full-sized basketball court!

The floating village is a \$20 trip from Siem Reap if you bus it. What a deal on the

boat. However, be warned...

Sometimes the boats are overcrowded and stall. You risk getting stranded for a few hours while they fix the motor! Hah. Fingers crossed!



Up the Tonle Sap River!

Book A Room Online, Ahead of Time

Since we didn't know the terrain, a lot of our travels were trial and error. We arrived in Siem Reap (after fighting with the Tuk Tuk driver about the price-it was supposedly included-guess not) and we had to find a place to stay. We had our trusty Lonely Planet book to direct us, but our first three picks were all booked by online travelers.

Ugh! It is a real pain to walk around town with backpacks looking for a place to stay. Luckily, we found a modest place right across from the Irish Pub -Molly Malones. The pub was booked. We stayed at the Heart of Angkor Hotel. What a rat hole!

There are a LOT of hotels to stay at but a lot of them are rat holes. Mom, you will be

happy to know there are some classy 5 Star Hotels around, and I mean by world standards. The bigger ones are right along the outskirts of the temples!

No matter what, I suggest you book ahead online. That's the way to go. Mario and I were going with the wind and we ended up with the rats (with cable and air).

The Early Birds Get the Temples

The most important issue with the temples is choosing a tuk-tuk that won't rip you off. The going rate is \$10 US/day. We had to shop around and argue quite a bit. Finally, I talked with a few NGO women that gave me their regular driver's cell number. Sopheak turned out to be a great driver. He picked us up

each day at 5:30 and took us the short 20 minute ride to the temples. (It costs \$60 for a three day pass to the temples) Then he would listen to his iPod and sleep in his tuk-tuk while Mario and I walked around the ruins.

As soon as we were done with a temple, Sopheak

would drive us to the next temple and wait again. It was a pretty good deal for Sopheak because Mario and I only lasted until 9-10 am before we were templed out. It isn't easy climbing around temples in the heat and humidity of the Cambodian Jungle. The joy of early is few people get there early.

Ta Prohm

We started Day 1 at the incredible Ta Prohm temple. I could have spent a lot more time there if it hadn't started to get so hot. Mario and I started literally crawling around inside of the temple and taking a thousand pictures. Everywhere you turn is another picture like the one to the right. It is quite amazing!

This is one of the few places in the world that I have seen how nature has reacquired

the space mankind has invaded. The roots are woven right into the structures!

Getting there in the morning meant it was cooler and all the tourists were somewhere else. The only person Mario and I ran into was a park ranger- Mr. Kane. Kane was just picking up trash around the area but he slowly started to explain things to us.

He was so cool about the

approach that Mario and I started to follow him around and listen to his spiel. Kane has lead a lot of foreigners around the temple. There is no way we would have gotten even half of our photos without his help.

After about an hour and a half, the sun started to rise above the treetops and we ran into more people. Mario and I followed Kane back to his family's shop for a beer and a few souvenirs.



These are unbelievable root systems. The jungle has taken over a large percentage of this particular temple.

Bayon - The Temple of Faces

Need to see a few faces? Still on Day 1, we headed for the Bayon temple. Bayon is just one temple within the system of temples known as Angkor Thom. The Bayon temple dates back to the late 12th or early 13th centuries. The face you see to the right is just one of over two hundred such faces at Bayon.

Everywhere you turn in this temple is another face. Next

thing you know, your data card is full or both of your batteries are less than a bar or blinking "low power".

The most difficult aspect of the temples is figuring out if they are Buddhist or Hindu temples. Well, at least it was for me. I didn't feel like carrying around a Lonely Planet book with me. The temples have gone through a history of ruling religions and as far

as I have learned, some were built to honor the idea of co-existing religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Islam. Still, why did they decide to build 54 towers with faces on them. 200 faces of Lokesvara? We may never truly know. Day 1 ended after Bayon around 10am.

We ended up back in Siem Reap just in time for a hearty breakfast at Mollys.

"THERE ARE OVER 200 FACES LIKE THE ONE BELOW.

...NEXT THING YOU KNOW, YOUR DATA CARD IS FULL...

Beggars, Hawkers, and more Beggars

"Good Price! You buy something!" It is impossible to see the temples without forking over a little bit of money. The hawkers are camped out in the parking areas, all along the entrances, and some are even within the temple grounds.

At a few of the temples, the

kids (and some adult Khmers) will just follow you around and start spouting information. In the end they will expect a few US dollars for their effort.

Mario and I bought a coffee and a coke from a little guy at Angkor Wat. That's all he needed as an "in" to be our

guide until Mario told him kindly to get lost. We lightly agreed to buy breakfast on the way out, but that never materialized.

One couple I met came up with the idea of taking a bag of candy along. Give the kids some candy and they leave you alone.



This is perhaps the most well known style of picture you will see when people refer to the temples of Angkor. The face reliefs are found at the Bayon Temple.



Breathtaking scenery!

Sitting down for a beer with Peter was a real laugh. Every time a bus pulled up, Peter would say "Here come the Koreans!" He sure was right about that.



Looting has taken its toll on the ruins!

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Pete - "BUSY... no... OPEN"

Meeting Pete was a true highlight for Mario and I. It is always good to meet up with another beer lover. Pete was no slouch. This six foot five Giant would finish a beer in three gulps while Mario sipped, failing to keep up.

One night, Mario and I treated Pete out to a nice dinner. His taxi driver was tugging at his coat tails for dinner (along with a friend) and offered to take us to see a bit of nightlife in Siem Reap. It certainly wasn't a disco! The driver took us to a

three story brothel. You go into this place and there is a disco first floor. We helped Peter (bad knees) up to the top floor balcony for a beer. On the way up, we saw the two top floors were rooms with signs on them. Most said "BUSY". Peter thought it would be funny to turn around the signs to "OPEN". We thought it was hilarious. The manager (pimp) didn't agree. Hah!

Needless to say, this was not the "nightlife" we were

looking for. We went elsewhere.

Every once in a while you meet someone worth keeping in touch with. Peter is one of those characters! Cheers!



Thanks for the laughs, Pete. We will definitely come to visit you!

Angkor Wat - the most Famous of the Wats

Day 2 of our three day pass started bright and early at the great temple, Angkor Wat. By 5:20 there was already a crowd of two hundred people armed with cameras, ready to snap a few prize winning photos of the Angkor Wat Sunrise.

I'm not sure how to beat the crowds. I certainly wasn't as impressed as the early morn-

ing at Ta Phram. Yet, Angkor is a sight to behold. Massive! We wandered around for about an hour and a half before the sun was high enough to blanket the ruins in a sweltering heat.

We climbed to the very top of the steep stairs, but I wouldn't recommend it for anyone that is unfit. Get on that stair master before you

head out to Angkor Wat. Otherwise you won't get to the top.

The last bit of the temples we visited was on a hilltop overlooking Angkor Wat and the rice fields. Mario and I walked up the elephant trail to get the overview. On the way down, we hunted for large insects and spiders. We got some nice photos.

Sim Reap to Phnom Penh to Saigon

Two days of temple exploration was enough. We did not go for the third day. Instead, we recharged our batteries and made the return bus trip to Phnom Penh.

We checked back into our same hotel, The Hope & Anchor, for a few more nights. We hung out for a day or

two to arrange our \$25US Vietnamese Visas, paid our exorbitant \$8 US bus fares to Saigon, and took off bright and early for "Nam".

Mario and I slept a lot of the 6 hour trip, but the conversations we did have were sprinkled with quotes from Apocalypse Now. The bus was

relatively boring. I spent most of the time looking out the window and comparing Cambodia/Vietnam to Honduras. Both of us see a lot of similarities between the countries - both in poverty and geography/weather. Who would ever think I'd be traveling to Ho Chi Minh City or any city in Vietnam? Not me.

Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City or MotoCity?



talking about. It turned out to be even worse than Cambodia with Motor scooters! The picture to the left shows just a glimpse of one intersection in Saigon. Ugh. This is a true game of FROGGER. For the

Maps, today, call the city HCMC— Ho Chi Minh City, but most of the travelers and locals still call it Saigon. No matter, you know where I am

most part, the traffic goes around walkers. Just keep your head up, look in every direction, and commit to the direction you are trying to

cross to. If you hesitate or change direction in midstride you will get hit. Believe me! Mario was hit by a motorbike and another motorbike crashed into that one. Luckily, the traffic goes relatively slow-flow. Mario got out of the accident with a minor bruise— mainly to his ego, but it was certainly enough for Mario to blame me for not protecting him. Sure, the big white guy has to act as a blocker for the little lady! It wasn't my fault the moto driver cut between us!

Dalat - A "not-so-quiet" city in Central Vietnam

First of all, the bus we took out of HCMC to Dalat was one of the slowest buses I have ever experienced. We sat right behind the driver and I never saw him go over 40Kmh! Well, once going downhill. The 10hour trip would have taken 2 hours in the states and 6 hours in a Vietnamese mini-bus. We didn't know. The bus arrived in Dalat at night. By that time, we had no energy to

find a place to stay. We stayed overnight in the roach infested hotel linked to the bus company. (What a racket they run!) Dalat was a terrible place to be. It was full of Korean tourists - busloads arriving every hour— and the traffic was annoying. This was not a quiet town in the central countryside of Vietnam like the Lonely Crap Planet book claimed it was. Mario stayed in his room for

most of the stay and I hoofed it around the city for an afternoon looking for the golf course.

I offered to treat both of us to a round of Golf, but Mario just wanted to leave. I settled for buying a hat for each of us at the golf course and sitting in their 19th hole all alone sipping on a beer.

We hopped a bus to the beach town of Nah Trang!

Nah Trang, Vietnam—Diving!



I treated myself to a private dive boat. My own instructor to show me around, two drivers to help with gear, and transport us to a remote dive

area. Was it worth it? Yes. Mainly because 10 minutes into the first dive, my dive buddy signaled to ascend. We were run off by a local police cruiser because they claimed the area was not open to diving! I think they wanted cash, but my captain refused to pay them off. So

we cruised over to a neighboring island to finish the dives. The visibility was poor, but the invertebrate life was both plentiful and colorful. It was one last day of diving for the summer. It was a good decision but too expensive. Mario and I spent four days tanning on the beach instead of diving.



My First Vietnamese Meal. Yummy. This is the first fast food in Two months.

Sitting down for a beer with Peter was a real laugh. Every time a bus pulled up, Peter would say "Here come the Koreans!" He sure was right about that.



Socialism is a reality here. The Socialist People's Party has billboards all over the place!

See more pictures of the trip at <http://itre.us/sts somewhere> !

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St.Sometimes is written solely by Greg Lemoine as he travels the world Teaching in International Schools. The free-writing style is geared toward the Greg's friends and family in the United States and Abroad, with a specific goal in mind: to document Greg's exciting life. Friends and family can log onto the website when they want to. This newsletter acts both as a communication tool and personally, as a diary. Issues of *St.Sometimes* date back to 2001 when Greg first traveled abroad as an international teacher. The issues are intended to be posted monthly, but there will be gaps along the way. - Greg Lemoine (Phnom Penh, Cambodia - 2007)



Fresh lobster? She carries this mobile restaurant up and down the beach all day.



One reason I didn't go diving more than once. Mario and I loved the view on the beach.



Nah Trang hosts one of the most beautiful beaches I have seen. (in the morning)

Goodbye Vietnam, Goodbye Mario!

Mario and I spent the summer traveling through Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. I couldn't ask for a better traveling companion (except that blonde in the picture above)!! This is certainly the last time Mario travels with a backpack and stays in roach infested, low cost, rip-off hotels. Kathleen and I are both confused and amazed that he did this trip at all? Mario is known for taste and class. This trip lacked both!

(I'd like to thank Mario, publicly, for going on the S.E. Asia tour with me. We will have other trips in other parts of the world, but next time we will do it with both class and taste. We are getting too old to hang with the grunge backpacker crowd.)

Mario and Kathleen are now teaching in Akra, Ghana. It was a good run together in Kuwait, as well as Honduras a few years back. Mario is the clinical psychologist and Kathleen is teaching ESL. Their school is a US Embassy school, very similar in structure and quality to my school here in Phnom Penh. Cambodia is the first school, since I started teaching internationally, that I don't know anyone at all. It's sort of exciting. I should be lucky enough to make some strong friendships with others like Mario and Kathleen, Mooney, Hirsch, Ron and Lila, and the host of others I have met overseas. The world is a very small place, especially for international teachers.

Be safe and keep in touch. That's the code.

Cheers everyone.

I hope you enjoyed this issue.

- Greg

