



Som Leng

Hanuman Tourism Newsletter

September 2007

Welcome...

A very warm welcome to the latest issue of Som Leng for 2007 from all the team at Hanuman Tourism. This has been a very busy year for us, as tourism numbers continue to soar in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The upside of this has been new product, new hotels and new members of our team. The downside is higher prices for some hotels and a real squeeze on room availability during the peak season. However, here at Hanuman we remain committed to bringing you the best experiences at the best possible rates. As we move into the second half of the year, we are looking at developing a new, improved Temple Safari experience and will be restructuring all our existing itineraries to ensure we continue to have the best product available in the Mekong region. We will significantly expand our itineraries in Laos to reflect the success of our office there and will be overhauling Vietnam as we move towards an office opening in 2008.

That's all for now. We look forward to a successful high season for 2007-08 and will continue to provide you with the quality service for which we are renowned. Truly travel with a personal touch.



Kulikar Sotho
Chief Executive

Featured Tour

Beach Safari

Imagine your own private beach on the incredible tropical islands off the coast of Cambodia... On the secluded islands of Cambodia you will feel like a true castaway as you camp on deserted beaches and feast on freshly caught fish cooked over a fire. Cambodia's islands are slated for development, so seize the moment to take a beach safari to one of the remote islands off Sihanoukville or Kep before these paradises disappear forever.



Cambodian Beach Safari 6 days/ 5 nights

Day 1

Journeying south, we make for the colonial-era coastal resort of Kep-sur-Mer, known simply as Kep today. After dining on fresh crab in Kep, journey to Koh Tonsay (Rabbit Island), where we will lead the life of lotus eaters for the night. While our team makes camp, you are free to swim or relax or explore the island, inhabited by a small community of fishermen. Later we have a seafood barbecue for supper and spend the night in a luxury safari tent.

Day 2

We leave the morning free to enjoy the island life and make for Kep for lunch. We continue to Kampot, stopping to explore the cave temple at Phnom Chhnork, dating from the 7th century but perfectly preserved in its underground location. Kampot is a charming riverside town with a rich legacy of French architecture. We enjoy sunset over Bokor Mountain, our destination the following day.

Day 3

We depart Kampot for the abandoned hill station of Bokor, set within the lush surroundings of Bokor National Park. The road snakes upwards through the jungle, arriving at the 1000m plateau, with magnificent views across the coast of Cambodia. We take in the atmosphere of this ghost town with a visit to the empty Bokor Palace Hotel and King Sihanouk's old guest villa. Our team set up camp while we visit the impressive Popokvil Falls where we can have a picnic lunch.

Day 4

We leave Bokor after breakfast, heading down the mountain road to the coast below. We journey west to Cambodia's leading beach destination, Sihanoukville, also sometimes known as Kompong Som. We enjoy lunch in town and leave the afternoon free for you to enjoy the stunning beaches here. We spend the night at a comfortable beachside hotel or resort.

Day 5

This morning, we board a boat to journey to the island of Koh Rong Samleou, one of the most beautiful off Cambodia's coast. On the way, we can stop at selected snorkeling spots for a chance encounter with some marine life. Once at the island, our team set up the camp, while you relax in the crystal clear waters or on the white sand beach that you have all to yourself. At night we have a fresh seafood barbecue.

Day 6

After breakfast, we have most of the morning free for swimming, sunbathing or exploring the island. We return to Sihanoukville by boat where the trip can be extended for a more traditional beach holiday or you can return to Phnom Penh by car.

Cambodia



The Angkor Wat Legend

Enhance your visit to Siem Reap and the breathtaking temples of Angkor with a new show taking place at Angkor Wat. 'The Legend of Angkor Wat - When History Comes To Life' promises to be a truly spectacular show, inspired by history and mythological beliefs that will entertain and educate at the same time. It will be staged regularly between 27 November 2007 and the end of January 2008. The story of Angkor Wat and the legend of the heavenly Apsaras that bedeck its walls will be brought to life by hundreds of Cambodian performers. All this amid an extravagance of lights and sounds with the soaring towers of Angkor Wat as a unique backdrop. Tickets for the show cost \$60, or \$80 with a sumptuous buffet, and are available through Hanuman.

Banteay Chhmar Community-Based Tourism

Agir Pour Le Cambodge have created a tour centred around the remarkable 12th century temple of Banteay Chhmar, in the northwest of Cambodia. It is aimed at providing some of the poorest communities in Cambodia with income and 40% of the costs will be channelled back into local development projects. The tour will include a visit to the temple, one of Cambodia's very best with its gorgeous carvings and gigantic faces, an overnight homestay in a traditional wooden house, ox-cart and bicycle trips to meet villagers and to discover the rural way of life in this often-overlooked corner of Cambodia. Visit www.agirpourlecambridge.org for more information or book through our sales team.





Birding Ecotourism with The Sam Veasna Centre

Working in partnership with The Wildlife Conservation Society, the Sam Veasna Centre runs trips to see some of Cambodia's rarest and most critically endangered birds. Trips start from one day to one week to more remote locations.

Large groups of Sarus Crane (pictured) are found in Ang Trapeng Thmor in Banteay Meanchey during the dry season. This tall bird has a vivid crimson head and is depicted on bas-reliefs at the Bayon. The site also provides a habitat for about 200 other birds, including 18 endangered species.

The Giant Ibis has attained near-mythical status for birdwatchers thanks to its rarity. It is found in the Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary near Tmatboey village. This location is also famous as the only nesting site in Asia for the White-shouldered Ibis.

The Florican Grasslands of the Tonle Sap floodplain provides a habitat for the rare Bengal Florican, as well as the Manchurian Reed Warbler. It is also possible to see three species of rare vulture at the 'vulture restaurant' in Chhep.

The Sam Veasna Center was created to honour a pioneering Cambodian conservationist who tragically lost his life at the age of 33 and is the focal point for conservation initiatives in northwestern Cambodia. It acts as an information, resource and visitor center that caters both to Cambodians and to visiting tourists. Find out more at www.samveasna.org.

Queues at Angkor

Guests visiting Angkor have been experiencing queues in recent months, as the authorities now insist that all guests arrive in person to take a digital snapshot for the entry pass. In previous years, guests could supply a photo, but the regulations have now changed which can create queues at certain times of day. Our Siem Reap staff are monitoring the situation and are helping guests to avoid the queues.

Vann Nath Exhibition

With his graphic depictions of life in the infamous S-21 Tuol Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh, artist and genocide survivor, Vann Nath has become a household name across the globe. An exhibition entitled 'Transfer' features brand new paintings showing the period from his arrest to his incarceration in 1978. The collection is on display until 12 October at the Bophana Audio-visual Resource Center in Phnom Penh and has earned the 63 year old artist rave reviews for its powerful content. The Bophana Center opened in December 2006 and houses invaluable films, audio recordings and photographs of Cambodia's history. www.bophana.org.

Meet the Hanuman Cambodia Tour Guides

At Hanuman, we pride ourselves on the expertise and professionalism of our tour guides, who are, in essence, the public face of our company. We have four guides who work exclusively for Hanuman and a stable of another twenty freelance guides who regularly lead tours for us. In this issue of Som Leng, we'll introduce our permanent team of guides here in Cambodia:



Kong Eak is our main Hanuman tour guide in Phnom Penh. He's just turned 26 years old, is single and was born in the capital. Like most Cambodians, he loves the beaches of Sihanoukville, while Banteay Srei is his top temple choice. He began as a tour guide in 2003. Working as a permanent guide with Hanuman for the last two and half years, his favourite tippie is Angkor beer, he enjoys football and golf and for food, he prefers fish amok and samlor karko soup. He's a fan of Sinn Sisamouth and the present-day heart-throb, Preap Sovath. For his choice of foreign destination, Singapore gets his vote because it's so clean.

Tuon Sopheaktra is one of our best known tour guides. He's worked exclusively with Hanuman for the last five years, looking after museum groups, VIPs, and film and documentary teams. In fact, he was singled out for particular praise in a press article on Angkor by The Sunday Times of London last October, who said; "If I had my time again...I'd sign up Tra like a shot." Tra was the first guide to lead Temple Safari trips into the remote northern jungles of Cambodia and probably knows the 'lost temples' of Cambodia as well as anyone in Cambodia. He's 32 and was born in the Baray district of Kompong Thom, is married with one child and studied at the Royal University of Fine Arts before becoming a guide ten years ago. The Bayon gets his vote as his Angkor preference, whilst Egypt is top of his visiting wish-list. Sinn Sisamouth, Cambodia's greatest ever singer is his artist of choice, whilst green curry, Angkor beer and football are his other stated favourites.



Srei Omnoth qualified as a tour guide some fourteen years ago and has been a permanent Hanuman guide for the last four years, working with all our leading partners, as well as operating as a fixer on film and documentary shoots throughout Cambodia. Om is one of our most popular guides thanks to his lively personality and great sense of humour. Born in Kandal province 43 years ago, he's married with four children and worked in the hotel trade before becoming a guide. He too is a Sinn Sisamouth devotee, enjoys a game of volleyball and would love the opportunity to visit Nepal. Prahoc (Cambodian cheese aka fermented fish paste) and beer are his meal-time choices whilst The Bayon is his favourite Angkor temple as it retains all of its old-world charm.

Meas Dara Polrith is known to everyone as Paul, and he worked in the hotel trade before qualifying as a tour guide in 1995, joining Hanuman three years ago. He's very knowledgeable on the subject of Cambodian history and culture and also has a keen interest in flora and fauna, with a wealth of detail on medicinal uses of plants and flowers around Angkor. He's also a regular on the safari and cycling tours and with his keen sense of humour, he's one of the most popular members of our team. Paul will be 33 in November and is married with two children. Angkor Wat is his preferred Angkor temple, whilst the United States would be his choice as a foreign destination. Prahoc and beer get his vote too, as does football as his preferred sport and the ever-popular duo of Sinn Sisamouth and Ros Sereysothea are his musical choices.



New Hotels in Cambodia

The **Anise Hotel** (www.anisehotel.com.kh) is the newest mid-range hotel to open in Phnom Penh and is located just a short distance from Independence Monument. It has twenty rooms all stylishly decorated and including satellite TV, minibar and private balcony. Facilities include a lively terrace bar and a well-regarded restaurant run by local celebrity chef Luu Meng.

With just ten rooms, the **Reef Resort** (www.reefresort.com.kh) is an exclusive boutique hotel in Sihanoukville, with each of the hand-crafted rooms boasting a swimming pool view. All rooms are well-appointed, featuring satellite TV, a minibar and local decorative touches. The location is close to popular Serendipity Beach.

The recently removed **Independence Hotel** (pictured) is just a brief walk from the beach of the same name and was one of the chicest hotels in Cambodia when it originally opened in 1964. Abandoned during the war, it sits on a spectacular bluff overlooking the beach and is a seven-story piece of quirky art-deco history. Some of its 52 rooms have been maintained with their original decoration and the unique oval shaped dining hall has also been retained.



Laos

New Boutique Accommodation in Southern Laos

Southern Laos has just become more accessible thanks to the opening of two small boutique resorts in the Si Phan Done (Four Thousand Islands) region.

La Folie Lodge (www.lafolie-laos.com) has a beautiful setting on the island of Dong Daeng. This may not be a familiar name to those more used to Dong Khong and Don Khone to the south. However, this island has a lovely location with views over the sacred mountain of Lingparvata, home to the Angkor-era temple of Wat Phu. The new lodge (pictured) offers 24 rooms set in 12 traditional bungalows and amenities include a tempting swimming pool and a good restaurant.



The **Senesothxeun Hotel** may not be as easy to pronounce, but it's easier to remember by its shorthand name, the **SSX Hotel** (www.ssxhotel.com). Located on the popular island of Don Khong in the heart of Si Phan Done, this hotel brings a new level of style and comfort to this area. Rooms are lovingly decorated and feature satellite TV, minibar and wi-fi Internet access.

Hotels in Luang Prabang

As many of you have noted during our recent meetings, it is becoming harder and harder to secure rooms in Luang Prabang during the high season. We share your frustration with the current situation and are doing our best to secure rooms in the most popular properties where available. To demonstrate our commitment, we have taken the initiative with popular properties like La Residence Phou Vao and taken an allocation this year to guarantee a certain number of rooms. Please rest assured, we will continue to do all we can to secure your first choice room, but please do try and book ahead as far in advance as possible.

Vietnam

Hotel Price Rises in Vietnam

There has been a recent spike in room rates in Vietnam, particularly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). A lot of hotels are no longer respecting contract rates and are declining new contracts with agents as they are filling rooms at higher walk-in rates. Insiders tell us that rates will continue to rise in the next couple of years, possibly by as much as 25% per year. Hanuman will do its best to limit the impact of these dramatic increases and will continue to promote other destinations beyond the main cities. Figures released for the first seven months of the year indicate that tourism numbers increased by 16.2% to 2.46 million. The number of available rooms simply can't keep up with the rapid rise in visitor numbers.

Border Updates

At last there is some great news to report on land borders in the region, with two much anticipated crossings opening in the last few months.

The **Dien Bien Phu-Moung Khoua** border linking northwest Vietnam and northeast Laos has finally opened. This offers wonderful potential for combining Sapa and Dien Bien Phu with Phongsali, Luang Namtha and Luang Prabang. Hanuman plans to develop some tribal tours that offer the best of both destinations in a twin-centre adventure tour.

At the other end of the Indochina region, the **Prek Chak-Xa Xia** border has opened which links Kep and Kampot in Cambodia with Ha Tien in Vietnam. This makes it much easier to combine Cambodia's stunning south coast with Vietnam's Mekong Delta without backtracking to Phnom Penh. It also opens up the possibility of combining southern Cambodia with the tropical beach paradise of Phu Quoc, formerly the Cambodian island of Koh Tral. Discussions are currently underway to set up bus and boat links between the two countries.

Airlines

United Airlines is offering more services between the US and Vietnam with a new daily service from Los Angeles to Ho Chi Minh City via Hong Kong. In 2004, United became the first carrier to link Vietnam and the US since 1975.

Bangkok Airways is operating a twice weekly service between Bangkok (dep 11.25am) and Pakse (dep 16.05pm) on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Siem Reap Airways is now linking Pakse and Siem Reap on the same service, departing Pakse at 13.25pm and returning from Siem Reap at 14.45pm. Bangkok Airways is also launching a new high season flight connecting Chiang Rai and Siem Reap, eliminating the need for a transit in Bangkok. This flight will depart Thursdays and Saturdays, leaving Chiang Mai at 16.10pm. There are currently no flights planned from Siem Reap to Chiang Mai.

Cambodian airline **Royal Khmer Airlines** will inaugurate a new route from Phnom Penh to Guangzhou on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. There are also plans to introduce a Siem Reap to Hanoi service.

Lao Airlines is now the only airline connecting Siem Reap and Luang Prabang, as Siem Reap Airways has again suspended its service. This flight operates on Monday, Thursday and Saturday via Pakse.

More Successful Shoots for Hanuman Films

Hanuman Films has unrivalled experience of working in partnership with productions large and small. In August, Hanuman Films worked in collaboration with a United States television documentary team for a programme called *The Human Weapon*. The program pitches Cambodian kick-boxing champions like Oth Phouthang (pictured) against American opponents and will be shown on the History Channel.



For any Hanuman clients who are keen to see live kick-boxing, CTN has live action every Saturday and Sunday between 2-5pm, whilst TV-5 promotes shows on Fridays and Sundays.

We also worked with Al Jazeera television for a one-hour special titled 'I Knew Pol Pot' involved arranging interviews with senior Khmer Rouge figures and survivors, including Brother Number 2 Nuon Chea and former head of state Kieu Samphan. Both programmes are scheduled to be aired before the end of the year.

For more information on Hanuman Films go to our website at www.hanumanfilms.com.

What People Say...about Hanuman Tourism

Julia Turkington (UK) April 2007

I liked the variety of the trips and the guide's interesting and thoughtful information about each place. His knowledge, enthusiasm and sensitivity were excellent. We loved our time in Phnom Penh. We'll come back. Everyone is so courteous and friendly, We were very impressed with Cambodia.

Jane Moon (UK) July 2007

The whole tour was very good. A nice diverse experience throughout. Sok Chamroeun was very good and very informative. Highly recommended.

What People Say...about HanumanAlaya Boutique Hotel

Jos & Chac! (Australia) August 2007

This is a beautiful, peaceful place to stay and we had a fantastic time. Good food and hospitality, highly recommended!

Paul & Elaine (UK) August 2007

This is quite simply the best hotel we have ever stayed in. Lovely people, lovely food and fantastic facilities.