

ASEAN CROSS-CULTURAL EXTERNSHIP PLACEMENT COUNTRY BACKGROUND

1. Kingdom of Cambodia (or 'Cambodia')



Source: *The World Factbook* 2013-14. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

Geography

Cambodia is situated between Thailand to the northwest, Laos to the northeast, Vietnam to the east and the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest. It occupies a total area of **181,035 sq km** (or 69,898 sq mi), has 433 km (275 mi) of coastline and lies entirely within the tropics.

Cambodia's terrain consists mainly of low, flat plains. Its two dominant geographical features are the Mekong River and a vast lake (the Tonlé Sap) which measures approximately 2,590 sq km (1,000 sq mi) during the dry season and expands to approximately 24,605 sq km (9,500 sq mi) during the rainy season. During the Mekong's annual flooding, richly fertile sediment is deposited. This low lying plain is where the vast majority of Cambodians live in order to fish and farm in harmony with the monsoon.

Much of Cambodia's southwest is covered by mountains; the Cardamom mountains (covering parts of the provinces of Koh Kong, Battambang, Pursat and Pailin Provinces); and the Elephant mountains (situated in the provinces of Kompong Speu, Koh Kong and Kampot.)

Along Cambodia's northern border with Thailand, the plains collide with a sandstone escarpment over 300km long (the Dangrek mountains).

The eastern, and densely forested, provinces of Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri provide a home for many indigenous peoples.

Cambodia's capital is Phnom Penh.

Climate

Cambodia's climate is dominated by the monsoon rains. It has two distinct seasons; the rainy season (from May to October) and the dry season (from November to April).

From November to February the climate is cool and dry. Average midday temperatures are in the mid-20s, sometimes dipping below 20 degrees at night. These months are generally regarded as the best time to visit, with comfortably warm days, clear skies, no rain and a light breeze.

The months of March through to May are hot and dry, the only rain coming in the form of the occasional, short 'mango showers' in the afternoons, which slowly increase in frequency and intensity through these months. Temperatures peak around the high 30s in April and May, before the monsoon begins.

From June to August, the hot season continues but is fairly quickly moderated as the monsoon rains begin, cooling, if only a bit, the hot, humid air. Across most of the country, the monsoon rains are fairly predictable, usually occurring in the afternoon or at night.

In September, temperatures hover in the mid-30s and begin to drop through the following months. The monsoon rains tend to tail off through October and have usually stopped altogether by mid-November.

2. History/Background

Little is known about pre-historic Cambodia, although there is evidence of cave dwellers inhabiting northwestern Cambodia from around 4200BC.

In 802 AD, Jayavarman II declared himself "King" and marked the beginning of the Angkor Empire which flourished for over 600 years, allowing successive kings to dominate much of Southeast Asia. The Indianised kingdom built monumental temples including Angkor Wat, now a World Heritage Site, and facilitated the spread of first Hinduism, then Buddhism to much of Southeast Asia. Most Cambodians consider themselves to be descendants of the Angkor Empire.

The Empire reached its peak between 10th and 13th centuries. Attacks by the Thai and Cham (from present-day Vietnam) eventually weakened the Empire, leading to a long period of decline.

The King placed the country under French protection in 1863, and it became part of French Indochina in 1887. Following



Japanese occupation in World War II, Cambodia gained full independence from France in 1953.

In April 1975, communist Khmer Rouge forces captured Phnom Penh and evacuated all cities and towns. At least 1.5 million people died from execution, forced hardship or starvation during the Pol Pot regime. In December 1978, an invasion by the Vietnamese drove the Khmer Rouge into the countryside, beginning a 10-year Vietnamese occupation and almost 13 years of civil war.

In 1991, the Paris Peace Accords mandated democratic elections and a ceasefire. UN-sponsored elections in 1993 helped to restore some normality under a coalition government. A 1997 coup placed power solely in the hands of Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party, which remains in power as of 2015.

The remaining elements of the Khmer Rouge surrendered in early 1999. Some of the surviving Khmer Rouge leaders have been tried or are awaiting trial for crimes against humanity by a hybrid UN-Cambodian tribunal, with the support of international assistance.¹

For more on the current political situation in Cambodia, see section 6 below.

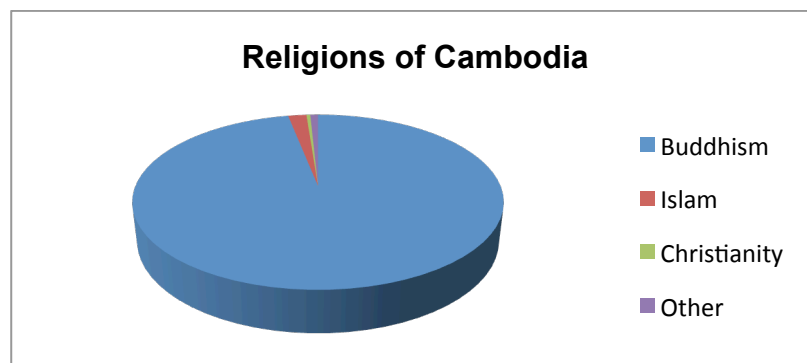
3. Population

A July 2014 estimate² puts Cambodia's population at 15,458,332.

Over 50% of the population is under 25 years old. About 60 % of the population is under 30 years old.

4. Main Religions and Ethnicities

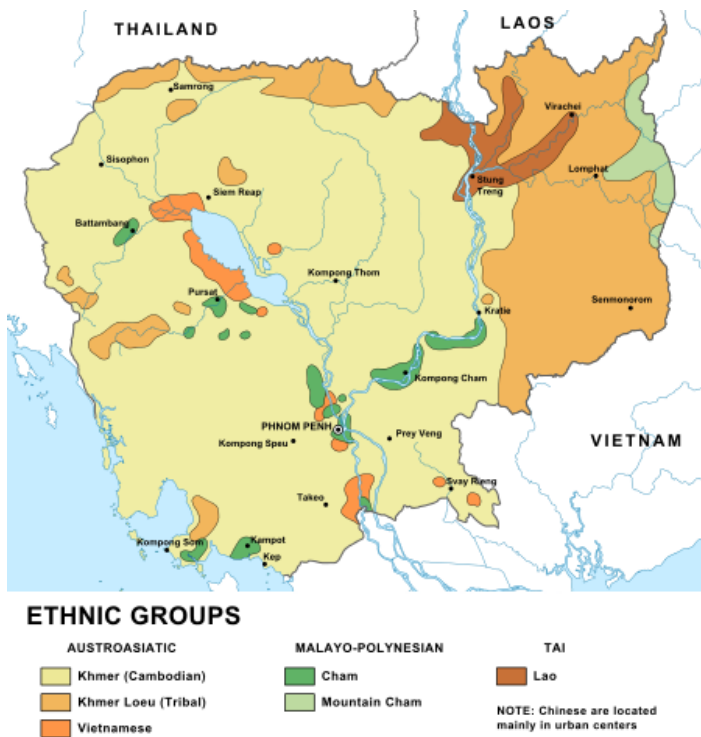
Theravada Buddhism is the official religion of Cambodia, practiced by more than 95 % of the population with an estimated 4,392 monastery temples throughout the country.³ Cambodian Buddhism is pervaded by aspects of Hinduism, Tantrism and native animist beliefs. Islam is followed by about 2% of the population.



¹ Source: *The World Factbook* 2013-14. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

² *Ibid*

³ US State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010* available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148861.htm>



90% of Cambodian's are ethnic Khmer, 5 % are Vietnamese, 1% Chinese and the remaining 4% are made up of other ethnicities.

Cambodia's Cham Muslims officially number around 200,000 although unofficial counts put the number higher. They mainly live in the provinces of Kompong Cham, Kompong Speu and Kompong Chhnang.

The Khmer Leu (highland Khmer) are mainly grouped in the north east of the country, in the provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Stung Treng and Kratie.

5. Main Languages and Dialects

Cambodia's official language is Khmer. A 2013 inter-censal survey found that this is the mother tongue of approximately 95.4% of the population⁴.

There are a number of other minority languages spoken, including Cham (2.2%), Vietnamese (0.8%), Tumpoon (0.4%), Lao and many lesser known Mon-Khmer languages.

As a remnant of the country's colonial past, French is still spoken by many older Cambodians.

6. Political System Important Information



The Kingdom of Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy, operated as a parliamentary democracy.⁵

⁴ Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey 2013, available at <http://www.nis.gov.kh/nada/index.php/catalog/21/datafile/F1/V15>

⁵ Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Articles 1 and 51, available at <http://www.opendevelopmentcambodia.net/laws-regulations/>

The current King of Cambodia is Norodom Sihamoni, who was crowned in 2004 after the abdication of his father Norodom Sihanouk. The King is Head of State, but has no substantive political power.⁶



The Council of Ministers is the head of the executive branch of government and is led by the Prime Minister, who is chosen through a vote of confidence by the National Assembly from among the newly elected members of the winning party.⁷

Legislative powers are shared by the executive and the bicameral Parliament, which consists of a lower house (the National Assembly) and an upper house (the Senate).

Members of the 123-seat National Assembly are elected through a system of proportional representation and serve for a maximum term of five years.⁸

The Senate has 61 seats. Two members are appointed by the King, two by the National Assembly and the rest are elected by the commune councilors from Cambodia's 24 provinces. Senators serve six-year terms.⁹

The Cambodian People's Party ('CPP') is the major ruling party in Cambodia and has been in power since 1979. The CPP controls both the National Assembly (68 seats) and the Senate (46 seats). The opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party ('CNRP') is the second largest party in Cambodia, with 55 seats in the National Assembly, but has yet to compete in any Senate elections. The Sam Rainsy Party ('SRP') has 11 seats in the Senate.

Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge member who defected and was subsequently installed by Vietnam, has held the office of Prime Minister since 1985 and has been a controversial figure in Cambodian politics. In 1997, fearing the growing power of his co-Prime Minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Hun Sen launched a coup, using the army to purge Ranariddh and his supporters. Ranariddh was ousted and fled to Paris while units under Hun Sen's command are said to have committed over 100 extra-judicial killings. Most of them are senior members of Prince's Party¹⁰



Cambodia became engulfed in something of a human rights crisis after National Assembly elections on July 28, 2013. Final results announced by the National Election Committee (NEC), a body controlled by the ruling CPP, returned the CPP to a majority. The assembly then chose Hun Sen as Prime Minister. The biggest ever demonstrations ensued amidst allegations that electoral irregularities and CPP control over election bodies affected the final outcome.¹¹ Security forces repeatedly used excessive force to

⁶ *Ibid*, Article 7

⁷ *Ibid* Articles 118 and 119

⁸ *Ibid* Articles 76 and 78

⁹ *Ibid* Articles 100 and 102

¹⁰ Brad Adams (31 May 2012), "Adams, Brad, "10,000 Days of Hun Sen", International Herald Tribune, reprinted by Human Rights Watch.org" available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/31/10000-days-hun-sen>. Retrieved 17 May 2015.

¹¹ Prak Chan Thul. "Thousands protest in Cambodia as opposition rejects poll result." *Reuters*. August 6, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com>

suppress post-election protests and social unrest, resulting in five deaths and many injuries.¹²

The political impasse was ended nearly a year later, with the opposition CNRP agreeing to enter Parliament in exchange for ruling party commitments to electoral and legislative reform.

7. General Legal System and Laws of Everyday Importance

Overview

Before French colonization in 1863 Cambodia was governed by customary rules based on consensus. From 1863 to 1953, the Cambodian legal and judicial systems were based almost entirely on the French system. From April 1975 to December 1978, the Khmer Rouge eradicated the entire legal system, existing laws, the judiciary and government institutions. Judges, lawyers and other legal professionals were the target of execution. During the period of Vietnamese occupation/invasion, the legal system that emerged was heavily influenced by the Vietnamese system. During the period of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia ('UNTAC') from 1991 to 1993, a number of laws, including a criminal law, a judicial law and a law relating to the press were enacted.



The current legal system is therefore a hybrid legal system, which is an amalgamation of Cambodian customs, the French based legal system and the common law system, which is an influence arising from foreign aid assistance to legal and judicial reform in Cambodia.¹³

Constitution

Cambodia's Constitution was adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on September 21, 1993. It is the supreme law of the Kingdom of Cambodia and organizes Cambodia's government and institutions. All laws and regulations derive from the Constitution's provisions and must conform to it.¹⁴ The Constitution addresses questions of sovereignty, the role and status of the King, the fundamental rights of the Khmer citizens, the economy, education, culture and social affairs, the functioning of the National Assembly, the Senate, congress and the government, the functioning of the judiciary, Constitutional Council and the administration.

The Legislative Process

The National Assembly and the Senate share legislative power.¹⁵ Senators, members of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister have the right to initiate legislation by

¹² Human Rights Watch World Report 2014, Cambodia available at <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/cambodia>

¹³ Kong Phallack, "Overview of the Cambodian Legal and Judicial System and Recent Efforts at Legal and Judicial Reform" in "Introduction to Cambodian Legal System" Hor Peng, Kong Phallack, Jörg Menzel (Eds.) (2012) Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Cambodia ISBN: 978-99950-982-1-6.

¹⁴ Constitution, Article 150.

¹⁵ Constitution, Articles 90 and 99

making draft laws or proposed laws. Laws are enacted after an absolute majority (50% +1) of the National Assembly votes to adopt them.¹⁶

The UN Human Rights Committee ('HRC') has expressed concern over the lack of transparency in Cambodia's legislative process. On 2 April 2015, after reviewing Cambodia's periodic report, and in its Concluding Observations, the HRC urged Cambodia to "consider making public all draft legislation to facilitate public debate and dialogue by citizens with their representatives."¹⁷ The HRC monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Cambodia is a state party. Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees the right of every citizen "to take part in the conduct of public affairs."

Judiciary

The Cambodian judicial system is composed of courts of first instance, appeal courts and a Supreme Court. The Constitution leaves the functioning of the judiciary to be determined in a separate law.

In July 2014, three fundamental laws on the judiciary were enacted after a decade-long drafting process. These laws, passed by a single-party National Assembly without any public consultation or credible debate, legitimized the government's control over all aspects of the judiciary, including the promotion of judges as well as the assignment of judges and cases.¹⁸

In its Concluding Observations of 2 April 2015, the UN HRC noted as follows: "*The Committee is concerned about the lack of an independent and impartial judiciary and regrets the numerous allegations of corruption within the judiciary. It notes with concern that the Laws on the Organization of the Courts, the Status of Judges and Prosecutors, and the Organization and Functioning of the Supreme Council of Magistracy (SCM), adopted in 2014, do not establish sufficient safeguards for judicial independence (art. 14).*"¹⁹

8. Cultural Do's and Don'ts

It is generally accept that foreigners have different customs and traditions, and their behavior will not be judged too harshly. There are, however, a number of useful points to remember:

Dress code

- Cambodian's dress relatively conservatively, especially at religious sites. Women should avoid exposing bare shoulders or wearing anything that could be considered revealing.
- When visiting a temple it is especially important to make sure that one's shoulders and legs are covered and that shoes and hats are removed.

¹⁶ Constitution, Article 90

¹⁷ UN HRC "Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Cambodia", paragraph 25 available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/KHM/CO/2&Lang=En

¹⁸ See Joint Statement by Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights ('LICADHO') of 11 May 2015 available at <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/pressrelease.php?perm=382>

¹⁹ UN HRC "Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Cambodia", paragraph 20.

Gifts and contributions

- Since most temples are maintained through donations, do make a contribution when visiting.
- When visiting a Khmer home, a small gift as a token of gratitude will always be appreciated.

Greetings

- Do use the traditional greeting (the *sompiah*) which involves pressing the hands together as if in prayer and bowing

Monks

- Women should be careful to avoid touching or getting too close to monks. If a woman wishes to pass something to a monk, it should be placed in his receiving cloth/bowl.

Business cards

- Exchanging business cards is an important part of Khmer culture, even for the smallest transaction or contact. Always present these cards with two hands.

Signs of respect and behavior towards elders

- Don't touch a Khmer person's head as it is considered offensive.
- It is considered offensive to show the soles of your feet. This is particularly important when visiting temples.
- Status in Cambodia is generally related to age and elders are well respected. Greet people with the traditional
- At formal occasions or when in company of elders, do not cross your legs when sitting down unless told you may sit comfortably.
- Always remove your shoes and hat before entering a room/house, especially a temple; it is considered extremely disrespectful to wear footwear indoors.
- When presenting a gift, money, a package or a document, it is polite to offer it with both hands. This symbolizes that the present is an extension of your person.

9. Work Place Culture Do's and Don'ts

Khmer Time: Things often start late and with little notice-always be prepared for a meeting, an outing, or anything to happen within the next five minutes. Also, don't be surprised if you arrive somewhere only to wait for 20-30 minutes for it to start. Things can also run late and somewhat less efficiently due to power outages, computer failures, and the arrival of unexpected guests. Scheduled meetings don't necessarily take place, they're more like unconfirmed times and dates, and can only be confirmed at the last minute. It helps to give constant reminders about upcoming meetings and to try to round everyone up a few minutes beforehand if you have to.

10. Dress Codes Do's and Don'ts

Khmer people tend to dress relatively conservatively. Women should avoid exposing bare shoulders or wearing anything that could be considered revealing.

When visiting a temple it is especially important to make sure that one's shoulders and legs are covered.

11. Cross Gender Do's and Don'ts

- Men should not shake hands with Khmer women unless they offer their hand.
- Men should not hug, kiss, or touch the body of a Khmer woman while greeting her. (She will lose respect and feel embarrassed.)

12. Common Communication Challenges and Do's and Don'ts

- Do use the traditional greeting (the *sompiah*) which involves pressing the hands together as if in prayer and bowing
- When presenting a gift, money, a package or a document, it is polite to offer it with both hands. This symbolizes that the present is an extension of your person.

13. Types of Food (Delicious Foods and Foods to Watch Out For)

Cambodia has an array of national dishes, some of which are similar to that of neighboring Thailand and Laos and others of which are closely akin to Chinese and Vietnamese cooking.

The national dish of Cambodia is *amok* (baked fish with a lemongrass-based paste, coconut and chilli served in a banana leaf). *Lok lak* is a popular beef dish.

Probably the most popular dine out dish, *kyteow*, is a pork broth rice noodle soup with fried garlic, **scallions**, green onions that may also contain various toppings such as beef balls, shrimp, pork liver or lettuce.

Similarly, *bobor* (rice porridge) can be found at street stalls and restaurants at all times of the day.

Prahok (fermented fish paste) is a popular condiment but it is not to everyone's taste.

One notable street snack in Cambodia is the unborn duck foetus (*pong tier kaun*). The white duck eggs contain a duckling, complete with feathers. Snails coated in garlic and chilli are also popular.



14. Eating Etiquette (Customs)

- *Do* wait for your host to sit first
- *Don't* turn down food placed in your bowl
- *Don't* leave your chopsticks in the bowl when you have finished as it is a symbol of death
- *Do* tip in restaurants (5%-10%)
- *Do* drink if someone offers a toast
- *Do* use communal spoons to serve yourself rather than dipping your own chopsticks into the food.

15. Money/Shopping/Item Buying Customs

The local currency is called Riels, but US dollars are used widely. There are roughly 4000 riels to US\$1, and you will have to get used to using both currencies simultaneously. Traveller's cheques are accepted in most tourist areas, but exchange rates vary so shop around for the best deal. Always carry small currency in riels as most people do not have change for big notes. Near any market there are small booths where you can change \$20, \$50 and \$100 bills into smaller bills, be sure to always count your change properly.

The main ATMs that take international cards (Visa, MasterCard, Plus, etc.) are ANZ and, ACLECDA Banks. You will find them all over Phnom Penh, including the riverfront, Lucky Market, and on Sihanouk Blvd near Independence Monument.

Only carry around the cash that you need, as although Phnom Penh is generally safe, as with all cities robbery and theft can occur so it is best to take sensible precautions.

16. Visa Information

Citizens of most ASEAN member countries do not require a visa to visit Cambodia.

Visitors from other countries will require a one-month tourist 'T-class' Visa, which costs \$30 if obtained on arrival. A T-class visa can be extended for only one extra month. Most nationalities are eligible to receive this on arrival at Phnom Penh although an electronic visa (e-Visa) facility is available via the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation.²⁰

An E-class business visa costs US \$35 for 1 month and can be renewed indefinitely.

17. Country Information Websites

[CIA World Factbook - Cambodia](#)

[BBC Country Profile - Cambodia](#)

[Encyclopaedia Britannica - Cambodia](#)

Civil Society and NGO

[Equitable Cambodia](#)

²⁰ <https://www.evisa.gov.kh/>

[Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association \(ADHOC\)](#)

[Cambodian Center for Human Rights \(CCHR\)](#)

[Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights \(LICADHO\)](#)