

AN INTRODUCTION TO KHMER CULTURE & LANGUAGE

The following extracts have been taken with permission from “Responsible Travel Guide, Cambodia” created by Friendship with Cambodia (info@friendshipwithcambodia.org).

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

Cambodian culture is still strongly influenced by the Angkor period. Music and classical royal dance from the ancient empire are still performed. There are remnants of French influence in colonial architecture, parks and food.

Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the World. It is still recovering from the Khmer Rouge genocide when a quarter of the population (including the most educated people such as doctors and teachers) were killed. There is still a shortage of schools and hospitals, and many families lack access to clean drinking water and toilets.

Understanding local customs will not only enhance your travel experience but will give you the cultural sensitivity to act respectfully. Observing the Cambodians around you will suggest what is culturally acceptable behaviour. Notice when they take off their shoes, how modestly they dress, how they greet each other, how they sit, how they touch each other (or don't), how they serve and eat their food, and the tone of their voice when speaking. They will think highly of you if you follow their example.

LANGUAGE

Cambodians in general are very friendly, gentle and laid-back, and greetings are important. Here are some basics:

Hello (informal)	Sua s'dai
Hello (formal)	Chum reap sua (said with palms pressed together - <i>sompiah</i>)
How are you?	Sok sabai
I'm fine	Knhum sok sabai chea tay
Please	Som
Thank you	Ar-koon (thank you very much = ar-koon <u>chran</u>)
Goodbye	Leah hie
Goodbye (formal)	Chum reap le-ar (said with palms pressed together - <i>sompiah</i>)
See you tomorrow	Saek chuob knea
Yes	Baat (for man) Cha (for woman)
No	Otay
Sorry	Sohm toh
Do you speak English	Teu nak niyeay phea sar anglei tay

What is your name	Chhmua ei
My name is ...	Knum chhmua
How old are you	niak ar yuh ponn mamn
I'm .. years old	kh'nyohm ar yuh ... chhnamm
I understand	Khnum yol
I don't understand	Khnum ot yol
Where is	Noev ey na
Please take me to...	Sohn york knhum toev...
How much for this	Teu nis thlay pun mann
Expensive	Thlaiy
1	Muoy
2	Pee
3	Bey
4	Buon
5	Pram
6	Pram-muoy
7	Pram-pee
10	Dorp
11	Dorp muoy