

# IN DANGER

## EXPERTS WARN MONDULKIRI'S ELEPHANT-KEEPING CULTURE RISKS EXTINCTION



**STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
ALANNA JORDE**

In Monduliri's burgeoning ecotourism market, elephant trekking is a profitable cash cow. But as the prospect of communing with Earth's largest land mammal lures an increasing number of visitors to the remote eastern province, the ancient elephant-keeping traditions that sustain the popular treks risk becoming as endangered as the majestic animal.

Elephant trekking currently fetches up to \$30 for day treks and \$80 per elephant for overnight trips. A share of the fee goes to the guesthouse that arranges the trek, the trek's guide, the elephant handler or mahout, and the elephant's owner.

The elephants belong to ethnic Bunong clans—hill tribespeople who make up about half of Monduliri's population. The clan receives about \$17 per day for each elephant used on a trek, says Pech Kiri guesthouse manager Chan Dara.

"Elephant trekking is very important to the (Bunong) economy ... (and) very good for our business. It doesn't destroy the environment and it's an easier way to make money than other tourist-related activities," notes Chan Dara. Elephant treks first started in Monduliri 10 years ago and business has picked up considerably in recent years, he adds.

There are no statistics currently available on Cambodia's ecotourist sector but according to Ministry of Tourism figures, the number of international visitors to Monduliri

has jumped exponentially in the last few years from only 395 in 2002 to 1,831 in 2006. Chan Vara estimates that Pech Kiri guesthouse arranges elephant treks for six out of 10 of its guests.

### MONDULKIRI'S MILLENIUM OF ELEPHANT KEEPING

The Bunong likely began capturing wild elephants and training them for domestic use about 1,000 years ago when the "art and science of elephant-keeping" began spreading throughout Asia from northwest India, says Richard Lair.

The author of a book published by the United Nations called "Gone Astry: The Care and Management of the Asian Elephant in Domesticity," Lair is convinced the elephant-keeping culture all over Asia is in danger of extinction.

Unbridled development, deforestation and declining mahoutship standards pose the greatest threat to both elephant-keeping cultures and domesticated elephants across the continent, he says.

Ironically, the slow pace of change in Monduliri, compared to many other places in the region, and the poor state of its roads could account for why the Bunong elephant-keeping culture has remained intact as long as it has.

With the exception of ecotourist activities, today's domesticated elephants are the same beasts of burden doing the same jobs they've been doing for hundreds of years in Monduliri—farming, logging and transporting heavy loads or people long distances.

Although some conservationists and environmentalists are quick to deride elephant trekking, others are more pragmatic about the growing popularity of elephant-related tourist activities.

"If the trek is properly conducted—sound and healthy elephants are selected, they are well-fed and not overworked—then trekking is a good thing. It is certainly easier work for the elephants than the alternative, such as logging," suggests Lair.

The only work elephants are legally permitted to do in Thailand is related to tourists "one way or another," he points out. "Like it or not, it is the way of the future."

If the elephants have already been domesticated "whether they are used to transport tourists or work for the Bunong, I don't believe would make a difference to the long-term occur-

rence of domesticated elephants in Monduliri. In fact using elephants for ecotourism assists these communities in bringing in an income," says Chris Greenwood of the World Wildlife Fund Greater Mekong.

He adds that just this month the international non-governmental organization (NGO) hired an ecotourism coordinator who will be based in Monduliri.

### THE DISAPPEARING DOMESTICATED ELEPHANT

But several factors are working against the long-term sustainability of elephant trekking in Monduliri.

Even though it currently boasts more domesticated elephants than any other province in Cambodia, the number is small and will almost certainly

continue to decline.

A 2001 study by Cambodia's Wildlife Protection Office (WPO) concluded that this is inevitable "mainly due to improved roads, a preference for motorized vehicles, bans on wild elephant cap, and an aging domesticated elephant population."

The Bunong believe it is bad luck if one of their elephant cows has a baby (*see The Bunong Elephants*) and therefore do not permit their domesticated elephants to breed. "With no younger animals coming in and the loss of knowledge of how to capture and train (wild) elephants, the cultural heritage associated with (the elephant keeping) way of life is also in decline. It may be that the domesticated elephant will



Elephant trekkers return from an overnight trip to Kbal Preah waterfall arranged by Pech Kiri guesthouse. About 200 to 300 tourists make the trek every year.

disappear from Cambodian culture, except in memory and art," the WPO report warned.

The absence of a nationwide registration system, reasonably priced veterinary support, specific laws protecting domesticated elephants in Cambodia and enforcement of the regulations that are in place only compounds an already bleak situation.

"In theory, it is illegal to kill or (I assume) capture a wild elephant. In practice there is very little 'on the ground' protection," says Nick Marx, animal husbandry specialist for the international NGO WildAid. The organization has rescued several wild elephants, which have had to be taken into captivity for their own protection. The last of these animals was a baby male elephant from Mondulkiri who was taken to Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center near Phnom Penh, notes Marx.

#### IMPROVING MAHOUTSHIP, CARE AND TREATMENT

Few veterinarians survived the violent and turbulent 1970s, which has left a serious shortage of professionals capable of providing good, quality veterinary care for domesticated elephants.

Jack Highwood established a community-based NGO called Elephant Livelihood Initiative Environment (ELIE) in Mondulkiri last year to address that and other gaps.

He says the province lacks even a basic standard of medical care for elephants. Serious injuries and ailments such as wounds, bites and parasitic infections go untreated for long periods of times, which is endangering the lives of Mondulkiri's domestic elephants and threatens the livelihoods of the Bunong.

There is an urgent need for at least two or three trained vets in Mondulkiri, he adds. "I typically see elephants every day of a varied standard of care and condition. There are 28 elephants currently in need of daily medical treatment, 11 of which are severely injured and need hospitalization which cannot be found in Mondulkiri ... One elephant died three weeks ago of suspected poisoning."

ELIE does not have the funds to employ a full-time vet, but the NGO has trained two staff members to provide basic first aid to domesticated elephants and also offers advice and



Bunong mahout, Noy Sothy, gives 50-year-old "Phun" a bath. The Bunong people are commonly referred to as the Phnong, but they prefer to be called the Bunong.

assistance to elephant owners and mahouts.

According to Highwood, some of the worst and the best cared for elephants in Mondulkiri are used in tourist trekking and he estimates from six to 11 elephants are used every day for tourism activities.

The standard of mahoutship in Mondulkiri is another issue that must be addressed.

"My understanding from numerous sources (which included) firsthand accounts is that the quality of mahoutship among the (Bunong) is very poor," says Lair.

Mahoutship standards are "a big concern" to Highwood as well. He points out that most mahouts in Mondulkiri are children, teenagers or old men and "a generation gap is preventing knowledge from being passed down."

ELIE is currently building a domesticated elephant "rest center," where animals will be able to "rest and recuperate" while they take a break from their usual work, says Highwood. The rest center is being constructed at the site of a future ecotourism project that the NGO expects to get underway in 2008.

—With additional reporting by  
Chhut Chheana

#### THE BUNONG ELEPHANTS

- Each Bunong clan is made up of 10 to 35 families and each family in the clan has the right to use any of the clan's elephants. Ownership is passed on from generation to generation which means it is not uncommon for an elephant to belong to three or four generations of a clan at the same time.

- Many of the domesticated elephants in Mondulkiri are extremely old. The Bunong people consider it bad luck if one of their cow elephants gets pregnant so they do not permit their domesticated elephants to breed. If an elephant does get pregnant, the owner of the pregnant elephant often must pay compensation to all the villagers by hosting a feast where at least three buffalo and three pigs are sacrificed and huge quantities of rice wine are consumed. The time and cost associated with the parties tends to discourage elephant owners from breeding domesticated elephants even if they do not believe that it is taboo.

- A 2001 study by the Wildlife Protection Office concluded that there were 91 domesticated elephants in Mondulkiri. Jack Highwood of the local NGO ELIE says there are 63 today.

- The final outcome of Mondulkiri voting in the 1998 election was delayed by a day when a lovesick elephant transporting ballot boxes took off into the forest after a wild elephant.



Source: "The Status, Distribution and Management of the Domesticated Asian Elephant in Cambodia."

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**M**  
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POSTCARD FROM

## THE ANCIENT CITY OF ANGKOR

**Mystical Monuments**

Photos by Alanna Jorde



**By Alanna Jorde**  
*Economics Today*

It ought to be a crime they aren't recognized as one of the official wonders of the world. And let's face it. Photographs don't really do them justice. To truly experience the nationally treasured temples of Angkor, one absolutely must see them up close, preferably several times.

Cruising along the paved roads that wind around the temples today, it's hard to imagine how the carvers of yore managed to conceive let alone craft such perfectly symmetrical masterpieces using only rudimentary tools.

It's equally difficult to conjure up what life was like during the glory days of the Angkorian period, when the area was a bustling metropolis of 1 million people. Bas-reliefs that adorn the walls below the 216 giant grinning faces at Bayon temple offer some clues about everyday life in Cambodia circa the turn of the 13th century. They depict houses, markets and ox-carts that bear a striking similarity to contemporary countryside scenes.

The mystical, more than the mundane, inspired architects of Angkor Wat—the world's

largest religious monument. Vishnu, the Preserver and Protector, is the popular Hindu god to whom it is dedicated.

While Angkor Wat is known for its grandeur, the diminutive rose-hued Banteay Srei is lauded for its elaborate and elegant artistry. It is also the favorite of our tuk tuk driver, who says the temple known as the "Citadel of the Women" is a fitting homage to Khmer women past, present and future.

My personal preference is Kbal Spean, which is well worth the dusty road trip and 1.5-kilometer hike deep through the jungle. The forested canopy gives the "River of a Thousand Lingas" a timeless communing-with-nature flavor. Somehow, it's easier here to transport the mind's eye back to when hermits carved the lingas and Hindu gods and goddess that still grace the riverbed.

A trip to the temples of Angkor should be mandatory for visitors and citizens not only because they are the heart and soul of Cambodia. But also because it's easy to feel so overwhelmed by their sheer size, scale and exquisite minutiae that we fail to appreciate what a crowning achievement they were for the ancient Khmer empire.

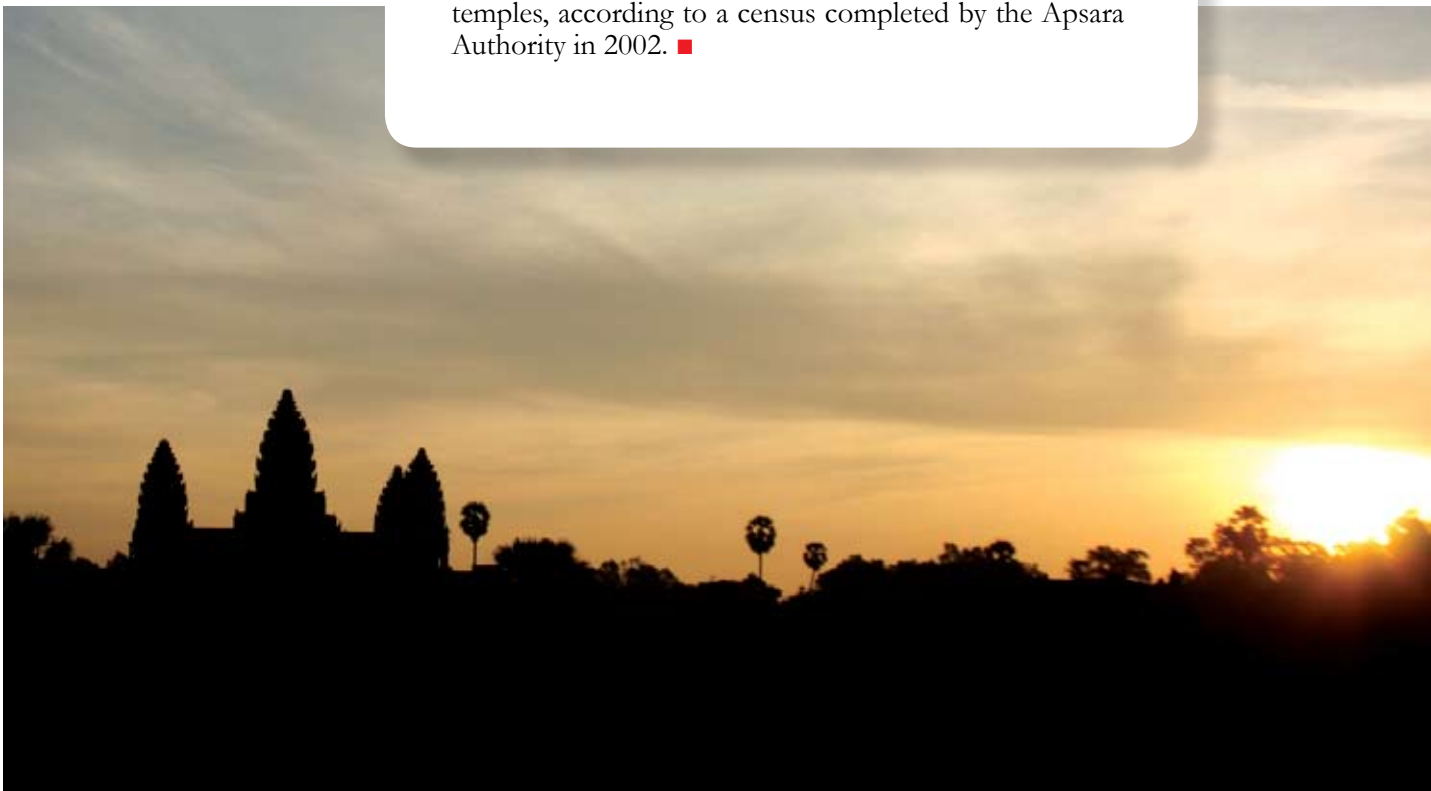


## A FEW FACTS

Revenue generated by tourist visits to the temples of Angkor is critical to Cambodia's economic well-being, which means the ancient city will continue to play a prominent role in Khmer society for years to come.

Visitors to Angkor Wat in January 2008 numbered 121,975, according to the Ministry of Tourism

At least 100,000 people live in the area around the temples, according to a census completed by the Apsara Authority in 2002. ■



# POSTCARD FROM KEP

## Where nature meets the sea



Photos by Alanna Jorde

By Alanna Jorde  
*Economics Today*

Its beach may be nothing to write home about, but no matter. It was nature not sea that I longed for and within minutes of arriving at Kep, I made a beeline for the national park. Well, I tried to anyway. It took a couple of false starts up footpaths that ended hostilely with impenetrable barbed wire before I managed to find the eight-kilometer jungle trek that loops around Kep Mountain with my new best friend in tow.

Paco, a six-month-old puppy from Kep Lodge, must have sensed my wonky inner compass. I was pleasantly surprised to discover he was escorting me on my hike. In some countries, people pay serious cash for companionship that this good-natured mutt is happy to dispense for free, I thought gleefully. He may have wished he hadn't.

A couple of hours later, when the trail suddenly metamorphosed into a two-lane dirt road, I figured we'd taken a wrong turn and headed us in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, it was the entirely wrong direction.

The inadvertent backtracking came with at least one reward, though, an unplanned stop at Vipassana Temple, which has stunning views of the Gulf of Thailand and



friendly nuns. A few kilometers later, as the sun was starting to set, a motodup offered a ride. I gratefully plopped side-saddle onto his bike, clutching petrified Paco for dear life.

The pooch made it clear with his wriggling that he didn't approve of our new mode of transportation and both my arms were required to keep a grip on him during our harrowing, high-speed trip. Paco collapsed in an exhausted heap when we arrived back safely to the bungalows, thankfully, it seemed, with our newly formed friendship still intact.

The next day, I toured the palmfringed coastline by mountain bike. At the crab market, busy hands rolled up tiny fish in palm leaves while several women heaved heavy crustacean-filled bamboo traps from the sea. But the highlight of the market was convincing an amiable souvenir hawker to serenade me with a conch. With that sort of salesmanship, she and her young protégés didn't need to do much to coax me into emptying my wallet of its riels in exchange for a fine assortment of key chains, bracelets and necklaces.

I pedaled past the weekend beach picnickers and stopped to get a better view of two of Kep's iconic statues—the blindingly white Khmer sea goddess and the giant crab—before taking a gander at the Rabbit Island boat dock. I did a U-turn and cruised past rice paddies, grazing cattle and the occasional oxen cart to the White Horse Monument.

With that, I had ridden out a fabulous getaway to Kep. With so much more to explore—Bokor Hill Station, the Angkul secret beach and nearby limestone caves—I'm already planning my return. But next visit, I'll be sure to carry a compass. ■



# POSTCARD FROM PHNOM TAMAO WILDLIFE RESCUE CENTER

## AN ARMCHAIR ZOOLOGIST'S DELIGHT



*The wildlife center is a sanctuary for animals such as “Chhouk,” an infant elephant who was rescued by Wildlife Alliance after he stepped in a poacher’s snare in Monduliri. The injury left the young Asian elephant severely disfigured and unable to survive in the wild.*

**By Alanna Jorde**  
*Economics Today*

Angling for a banana, an overzealous deer nudges me rather vigorously and then, apparently mistaking my wrist for one of the sweet fruit, sinks his teeth into me. Fortunately, he doesn't have canines like the gibbons and leopard I meet later or the encounter probably would have scarred me for life. Still, it takes considerable effort to wrestle free from the buck's viselike mandibles.

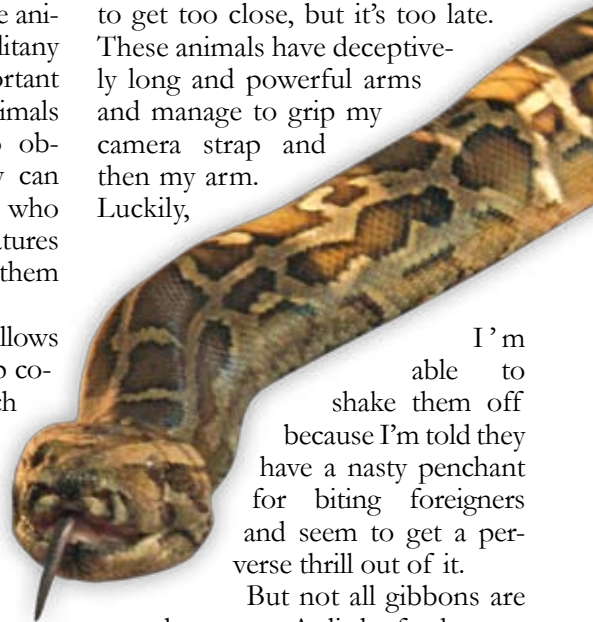
Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center is unlike any wildlife sanctuary I've visited in the past, where moats, acrylic glass, wire mesh and metal bars were as ubiquitous as the prominently displayed “do not feed the animals” signs. While the litany of rules serves an important end—keeping the animals and the humans who observe them safe—they can be frustrating for those who yearn to interact with the creatures rather than simply gawking at them from afar.

A trio of teenagers happily follows me through the park, holding up coconuts forlornly in front of each omnivore and herbivore we pass. “Ohh, they look so hungry. Can I give him one?” they ask before cracking one open and tossing it into the animal's enclosure. The boys say they use the money they earn selling coconuts at the wildlife park on their school fees.

If that is so, they should consider careers as zookeepers when they graduate. They describe, with uncanny detail, the idiosyncrasies and temperaments of most of the animals we meet, convincing me to sidle up to those who are gentle around humans and warning me to avoid those

who aren't as kind natured.

Three mischievous gibbons prove why the lissome ape is credited with being the fastest and most agile of all tree-dwelling, non-flying mammals. My guides warn me not to get too close, but it's too late. These animals have deceptively long and powerful arms and manage to grip my camera strap and then my arm. Luckily,



I'm able to shake them off because I'm told they have a nasty penchant for biting foreigners and seem to get a perverse thrill out of it.

But not all gibbons are the same. A little further up the trail, I meet an adorable, sweet-tempered female gibbon, who hangs serenely and patiently by one arm as she bows her head towards us so we can stroke it for several minutes.

The laissez-faire nature of the wildlife center lends itself to some decidedly “Animal Planet” moments that one wouldn't see in traditional Western-style zoos.



*A Lesser Adjutant stork, which appears to have a broken wing, surveys the scene from atop a tree.*

A small rust-colored deer tenderly licks what looks to be the remains of her recently born fawn as if she magically can will the baby back to life. A few meters past her, a large smoky brown antelope laps a bright red hole in his thigh, a wound he sustained after being gored by a wild boar, say the boys who guide me through the park. Further along the path of the wildlife center, which is situated on 2,300 hectares of protected forest, we see a stork with a broken wing perched peacefully high atop a canopy of trees.

## FAST FACTS

Situated about 40 kilometers from Phnom Penh, Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center houses around 90 species of wildlife, many of which are considered to be globally threatened. The number of animals requiring care has risen significantly in recent years and continues to grow as more animals are rescued from the illegal wildlife trade. The center receives about 200,000 visitors a year, the majority of whom are Cambodians.

*Source: Wildlife Alliance*

The park is home to three of the so-called “big cats”—the tiger, lion and leopard. We find one of the latter resting near his enclosure’s chain-link fence. He roars his displeasure for interrupting his repose. But given that leopards have a reputation for fiercely defending their need to be left alone, he is surprisingly tolerant of the intrusion and after a few snarls, backs up a few paces before simply plopping back down.

It’s a thrilling moment that surpasses any of the experiences I’ve had in other zoos. At the very least, unencumbered access to the animals at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Center gives armchair zoologists the privilege of sharing space with some unique wild creatures. At best, it has the feel of a cross-species communion. ■



*A Malay Sun bear stands to greet appreciative visitors.*



*A friendly Pileated gibbon accepts a drink of coconut water from a guide.*



*Leopards are one of three “big cats” at the sanctuary. There are also lions and tigers.*



# Postcard from the Royal Palace

## An ostentatious oasis of tranquility

By **Alanna Jorde**  
*Economics Today*

I could have picked a better day to give the Royal Palace a gander. Caught without raincoat or umbrella, I was ill-prepared for the deluge. I certainly didn't expect the residence of successive families of royal Khmers formerly known as Preah Borom Reach Veang Chatomuk Mongkul because of its location near the intersection of four rivers—the upper Mekong, the Tonle Sap, the lower Mekong and the Tonle Basac—to be such a huge draw on a blustery Thursday afternoon.

Once inside I was immediately struck by the compound's serenity, meticulously manicured gardens and overall cleanliness. The high wall that surrounds the complex, with its intricate Seima-shaped adornments fit for a king, is a remarkably effective buffer against the incessant roar of traffic on the surrounding streets of the bustling capital.

It was so quiet that the rhythmic, almost hypnotic clang of a few diminutive metal bells atop the Temple of the Emerald Buddha made me feel as if I'd been transported to a whole other world.

Tourists are fond of referring to the temple as the Silver Pagoda because of the 5,329 silver tiles covering its floor. But I was disappointed to find their view obstructed by a fussy-patterned red rug.

The temple is jampacked with a dizzying assortment of 1,650 gold, silver and bronze artifacts, many of which are inlaid with diamonds, sapphires, rubies and other precious gems.

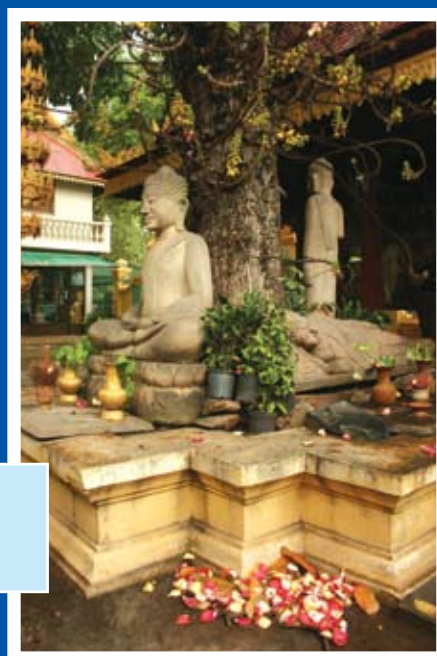
A gold statue of the future Buddha, Preah Srei Arya Metreya, standing behind glass greets visitors at the entrance to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. It is adorned with thousands of diamonds—the largest on the Buddha's crown weighing 25 carats. But I wonder what the Siddartha Gautama, who renounced



*The Pavilion of Napoleon III was erected in Egypt in 1869 for the French Empress Eugenie during the inauguration of the Suez Canal. It was reassembled at the Royal Palace in 1876 after it was presented to King Norodom. It houses a collection of oil paintings and photographs. But it wasn't open to the public on this visit.*



*Orchids grow in vases on the immaculate grounds in front of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.*



*Statues of Buddha standing, sitting and reclining are everywhere at the palace.*

*A lovely art gallery attendant insisted on snapping a photo after plopping a headdress on me.*



*Tourists pose for a photo in front of Preah Tineang Tevea Vinichhay, also known as throne hall. Security guards strictly enforce the prohibition on photos inside the hall. One visitor almost had his camera confiscated after snapping a photo through one of the windows of the hall. The palace's buildings are yellow, representing Buddhism, and white, which represents Brahmanism—the two religions followed by ancient Khmer society.*

the wealth and privilege of his own royal family in favor of living an ascetic life, would make of such an gradiose replica.

Those who aren't blinded by the glare of gold will also spot the temple's namesake sitting cross-legged inside a small glass case. The Venerable Loui Em, who resided at Lanka pagoda in Phnom Penh, brought the sacred relic from Sri Lanka in 1956.

The next case apparently contains gold statues depicting the life of the Buddha from birth to nirvana. But I didn't realize that until after my visit when I read it in the guidebook that I was given with my admission ticket. I must confess the sheer volume of artifacts in the temple makes it rather a challenge to see the forest for the trees.

While the Royal jewels and majestic Khmer architecture were impressive, I was more interested in observing the expressions of fascination, wonder and even joy on

the faces of Cambodians—young and old alike—as they soaked in their history.

A father and several of his children sprinkled themselves with water from a fountain at the foot of a small hill that symbolizes Kailassa Mountain, where Buddha made his footprints in stone.

In one smooth, reverent motion a few older women, all decked out in white lace blouses and skirts of the finest Khmer silk, caressed some wooden statues of reclining Buddha and then swept their hands over their face and neck. It seemed an auspicious gesture so I immediately imitated them.

Perhaps it helped me tap into my Buddha nature for at the end of my tour I met a delightful young woman in an art gallery perched on wooden stilts. She insisted on snapping some photos of me in an elaborate Khmer headdress before bidding me adieu with a hug and a peck on both cheeks. ■

*On the walls of the galleries surrounding the Temple of the Emerald Buddha are murals illustrating the Khmer epic "Reamker." Restoration efforts are underway to restore sections of the paintings that have been destroyed by erosion.*



Postcard from

# Wat Vihear Sour

## The turtle from the temple



Photos by By Alanna Jorde

By Alanna Jorde  
*Economics Today*

A boy unceremoniously plucks an infant turtle out of his pocket and rather irreverently waves it in front of my face—hardly the way to treat Asia’s icon of longevity, happiness and wisdom.

Even though it is so tiny it easily fits into the palm of my hand, this turtle doesn’t seem to mind being manhandled. It isn’t quick to cower and instead of retracting its head into its protective domed shell as expected, it strains its neck out as far as it possibly can as if it fears it’ll miss the action.

It was a quest to find and release a turtle that led us to Wat Vihear Sour in Kandal province, a revered place of worship for Cambodian Buddhists who believe the temple grounds are especially sacred.

The common notion among many Asian Buddhists is the act of liberating the slow-moving reptiles will earn them merits and good luck, Chhut Chheana, my companion on the trip explained.

The tradition in Cambodia is to make an inscription on the bottom of the turtle’s shell, which is sort of akin to a life warrant because it is considered bad luck to harm a turtle that has been marked in this way, he adds.

We dole out about 10,000 riels for custody of the fearless little turtle bent on setting it free to live with the fish and other turtles in the picturesque pond adjacent to Wat Vihear Sour.

Instead, we find ourselves in a difficult dilemma. Upon closer inspection, we discover the creature’s bottom shell is soft—too soft. To carve upon it would risk harming the turtle, precisely what we had hoped to avoid. On the other hand, if we release the animal without any markings and one day it ventures out of the pond’s protected environment it may be caught and eaten.

The only solution, it seems to me, is to take the turtle home, where it can continue to grow up in safety until its shell hardens. It is not exactly how I expected this outing to end, but I suppose there are worse things than cohabitating with a turtle. ■



Photos: To get to Wat Vihear Sour in Kandal province, we took the Prek Kdam ferry. A bridge, currently under construction downstream from the ferry route, eventually will provide motorists with an uninterrupted path to Wat Vihear Sour (top right).

We christened the turtle “somanang”—the Khmer word for lucky. Children also clamor to sell lotus flowers, incense and candles (top left).

Down the road from Prek Kdam ferry, villagers climb aboard a considerably lower tech “ferry” that has been fashioned out of wood to cross a tributary of the Mekong River to Thbong Dam Rey commune. The ferryman uses a piece of rope that has been tied off on either side to pull the contraption and its passengers across the river (right).



Postcard from

# Railay Beach

## Chilling in the sun and sand of southern Thailand

By Alanna Jorde  
*Economics Today*

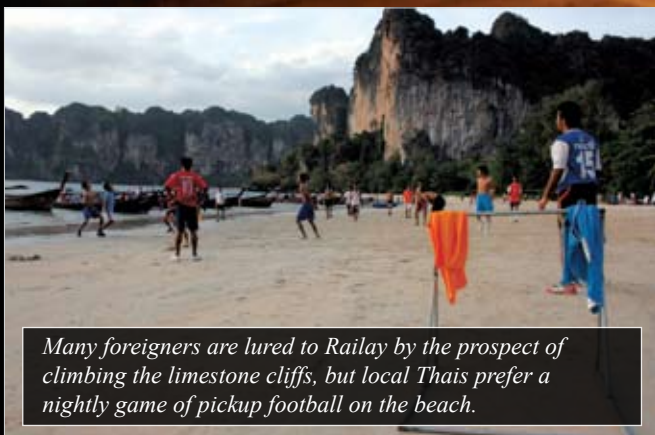
It's a tad too touristy for me, at least during the high season. Bamboo Island off the coast of Sihanoukville is definitely more my speed. But the chance to chill on one of Southeast Asia's most breathtakingly beautiful beaches made it worth sharing space with the (predominantly) white-skinned masses on Railay beach.

Railay is actually part of Thailand's mainland, but it has the feel of an island because it is only accessible by boat. I made the voyage on one of the ubiquitous Thai wooden long-tail boats, which may be a challenge to embark and disembark gracefully but they definitely beat the alternative—swimming with luggage.

Despite being rather isolated and difficult to access, several resorts have managed to cram onto the peninsula, which is sandwiched between towering limestone pillars and the Andaman Sea.

The limestone is part of the world's largest coral reef that stretches from China down to Papua New Guinea. The oddly shaped crags and outcrops make the peninsula a rockclimber's mecca and courses are available on Railay for beginners and experts alike who are eager to scale the cliffs to soak in the stunning ocean views.

There are also plenty of other activities to do besides scrambling up rock faces and lazing on the beach—kayaking, scuba diving, snorkeling and day trips around the picturesque province of Krabi, to name a few.



*Many foreigners are lured to Railay by the prospect of climbing the limestone cliffs, but local Thais prefer a nightly game of pickup football on the beach.*



*It's not a party until someone starts tossing fire, which performers are happy to do a couple of times a week at a popular Railay restaurant.*



Photos by Alanna Jorde



*My traveling companion incites a feeding frenzy during our snorkeling trip with an unusual bait—banana. The fish ate everything but the skin.*

My traveling companion from Canada and I enjoyed splashing around with tropical marine life on a sunset snorkeling cruise in spite of encountering several freakishly large jellyfish on one dive that was cut short. Although the creatures looked as innocuous as giant marshmallows, I know very well from previous painful experience they're anything but.

We anchored for dinner at a secluded sandbar, where nature put on an audacious and awe-inspiring show—the sun turning several spectacular shades before retiring for the day. On our return to Railay, we plunged into the vast darkness for one last dip amid bioluminescent plankton. Unfortunately, the poor visibility made it difficult to evade the limbs of the other divers who were thrashing wildly about and a couple of swift kicks to my head sullied the spectacle of phosphorescence. I returned to shore nursing a terrible headache.

The next day, we toured around Krabi, immersing ourselves in a natural hot springs we were told is rich in healing properties and later cooling off in a brilliant emerald green swimming hole. We learned how to tap rubber from a tree and climbed steep narrow stairs to a long shallow cave, where tigers were said to have once lived in one of southern Thailand's most famous mediation sites known as Tiger Cave temple.

But the best was saved for last; the day ended on the head of my favorite pachyderm. I even got to play mahout for several precious minutes thanks to my very kind guide, who insisted I take his spot perched atop an even kinder 60-year-old female elephant. ■



*A couple of children soak in the medicinal properties of a hot springs in Krabi province.*



Photo by Ingrid Paulsen

*A day trip to Krabi ended perfectly, as mahout atop Earth's largest land mammal.*

# Loading up on Cambodian cuisine

By Alanna Jorde  
*Economics Today*

Strong flavor, fresh ingredients: That's Cambodian cuisine in a nutshell (betel, presumably), according to Sok Chhong, head chef of Friends International's popular Cambodian restaurant Romdeng.

A new booklet, "Cambodia on a Plate," offers a slightly more verbose explanation of Khmer cuisine, describing it as a "combination of complex, vibrant flavors and a very delicate balance between saltiness, sweetness, sourness and bitterness, with a keen appreciation for textures."

At the launch of the booklet, Sok Chhong shared his secret to preparing perfect prahok—the distinctively Khmer fermented fish paste that Cambodians consume ravenously. "Marinate the fish in salt water for three to five days, then drain and store in a sealed container for 15 days," the co-author of the English-language Cambodian cookbook "From Spiders to Water Lilies" said from behind a rapidly depleting buffet.

In addition to three varieties of prahok, attendees of the launch at Meta House Gallery loaded up their dinner plates with grilled beef with lemon grass, sweet potato and pumpkin spring rolls, grilled pork fillets stuffed with toasted fresh coconut, spicy mushroom dip, vegetables and crusty bread.

They are just a few of the Cambodian dishes that Kate Lloyd-Williams hopes "Cambodia on a Plate" will inspire visitors and local businesses to explore and enjoy.



Sok Chhong, Romdeng head chef.

She is tourism manager for the International Finance Corporation's Mekong Private Sector Development Facility (IFC MPDF). The new booklet is part of Stay Another Day, an IFC MPDF initiative to promote sustainable tourism in Cambodia.

"Too many people think that Cambo-

## World Music Day in Cambodia

# 16<sup>th</sup> Edition

By Sok Sithika  
*Economics Today*

First launched in Cambodia in 1993, the "Fête de la Musique" or World Music Day will be celebrated in Phnom Penh for the 16th time June 16-21.

The "Fête de la Musique" invites both amateur and professional musicians to perform anywhere, indoors or outdoors, and at any time. In return for the freedom to make noise at all times of the day, organizers en-

courage all performances to be free for the public.

Cambodian and French musicians will carry on the tradition this month with an eclectic mix of genres, including classical, popular, electronic and even French accordion.

"All music events are free of charge during the "Fête de la Musique" week," said Alain Arnaudet of the French Cultural Centre (CCF) in Cambodia. "Music programs will be performed every evening at the CCF except the last day, when a concert

will be held at the National Cultural Centre in front of the National Assembly," he added.

One of Cambodia's rising stars, Meas Soksophear, will headline the finale. "This week will be very special, but also very short," she said at a CCF press conference, "so do not miss the chance to join in this cheerful celebration of music."

The annual festival began in France by Jack Lang, then Minister of Culture, who started it in 1982.





dian food is just a poor cousin to Thai and Vietnamese cuisines ... but there are considerable differences,” said Kate Lloyd-Williams. “Cambodia has a wealth of unique dishes and much to recommend it. In addition to being delicious, it uses little fat and lots of fresh vegetables, fruits and seafood. This makes it one of the world’s healthiest, most balanced and interesting cuisines. By promoting Cambodian cuisine, we hope to encourage greater local benefit from tourism through the purchase and use of locally-grown ingredients.”

The 23-page booklet features interviews with chefs such as Sok Chhong, photographs of mouth-watering “must-try dishes” while in Cambodia, recipes to try at home and interesting tidbits about some of the fruits, vegetable, herbs and spices that are commonly used in Cambodian cuisine. The booklet also includes a list of Cambodian cookbooks and cooking classes available in the country as well as some of the restaurants that serve up Khmer food.

Sok Chhong says his mother and grandmother passed the art of

Khmer style cooking onto him and now he is teaching a new generation about authentic Cambodian cuisine as a chef trainer for Friends International. He dreams of one day opening a restaurant overseas and introducing people abroad to Khmer food. ■

### Pick up a copy of “Cambodia on a Plate”

Copies of Cambodia on a Plate are available at the Stay Another Day exhibition, which continues until June 20 at Meta House, #6 Street 264, in Phnom Penh.



### Week Schedule

<b>June 16:</b>	Demonstration of six traditional Khmer instruments by the musicians of Sovanna Phum. 6:30pm at the CCF theatre.
<b>June 17:</b>	Western classical music performed by Cambodian musicians. 6:30pm at the CCF theatre.
<b>June 18:</b>	Original outdoor screening of Charlie Chaplin’s “The Kid,” with accompaniment by musicians from the Royal University of Fine Arts. 6:30pm at the CCF theatre.
<b>June 19:</b>	Concert of Arak sacred music, conducted by Yun Khean, professor at the Royal University of Fine Arts. 6:30pm at the CCF theatre and repeated on the streets of Siem Reap on June 21.
<b>June 20:</b>	Original musical performance by two French accordionists and Cambodian musicians. 6:30pm at the CCF’s cinema theatre.  Followed by late night concerts and parties in Phnom Penh’s bars and pubs, including Equinox (Open stage – Contact Marco at 092 791 958), Chaktomuk Restaurant, FCC, Metahouse, Factory Lounge, Tonle Sap Restaurant, La Croisette, Café Central, and Memphis Pub.
<b>June 21:</b>	Cambodian rising stars will perform in a concert, followed by X-Makeena, a renowned French electronic music group, which will conclude this “Electro Night” From 6:00pm at the National Cultural Centre (in front of the Buddhism Institute). X-Makeena will also perform in Sihanoukville on June 19, at the club Poco Loco. Contact: Jérôme at 092 440 106.

### Contact & map



- 1 | CCF (218 St. 184)
- 2 | Central Café (Sever 130)
- 3 | Chaktomuk Restaurant (Siem Reap Quay)
- 4 | Tonle Sap Restaurant (Siem Reap Quay)
- 5 | La Croisette (#241 Siem Reap Quay)
- 6 | FCC (#363 Siem Reap Quay)
- 7 | Centre Cultural National (In front of Buddhism Institute)
- 8 | Meta House (#6 St. 264)
- 9 | Factory lounge (#83 St. 240)
- 10 | Equinox (#3A St. 278)
- 11 | Memphis Pub (#3A St. 278)