

TRAVEL • CULTURE • STYLE • ADVENTURE • ROMANCE

PASSPORT



ADVENTURE!

NORTH WALES • CAMBODIA • MEXICO CITY • MADRID • DENVER & MORE





SIEM REAP & PHNOM PENH CAMBODIA

by Stuart Haggas

Photo: GuoZhongHua

Bayon Stone Faces of the People, Siem Reap ,Cambodia

The notion of exploring a long-lost city is a thrilling prospect. Deep in the Cambodian jungle, the historical ruins of Angkor are unique and astonishing. Set foot here and you'll feel part of an adventure worthy of Indiana Jones or Lara Croft.

Once the thriving capital of the Khmer Empire, these relics of an ancient civilization were cloaked by dense forest, forgotten by the world until they were rediscovered in the late 19th century. Considering what Cambodia has endured since, you might wonder if this rediscovery unleashed a mighty curse on the country. Bombed by the US during the Vietnam War, then destabilized by a military coup and a communist insurgency, then ravaged by Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge regime, then occupied by Vietnamese troops, then jolted by a coup d'état, Cambodia has been repeatedly brutalized throughout its recent history.

It's unsurprising that few tourists ventured here during all that turmoil. While other ancient wonders such as the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, and the ruins of Machu Picchu attained must-see status, the Angkor temples remained a long way off the tourist trail for a century after their rediscovery.

By the time Lara Croft herself came to raid the temples of Angkor in 2000 (in the shape of Oscar-winning actress Angelina Jolie), things were starting to change, and the fact that key scenes from the film *Tomb Raider* were shot here helped to reinforce confidence in Cambodia as a tourist destination.

As visitor numbers increased, the nearby town of **Siem Reap** blossomed

into a lively resort. In the past few years, it's grown exponentially with stylish new hotels, gourmet dining, and fabulous shopping.

Siem Reap's leading hotels echo the past. Open since 1932, **Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor** is full of romance and drama. Built in an elegant French colonial style, this iconic landmark boasts the largest swimming pool in Cambodia. Surrounded by frangipani trees, its grand design was inspired by the ancient Royal bathing pools of Angkor.

Explore further and you'll unearth plenty of history: the doorman's attire was inspired by uniforms of the Royal Palace guard, the original cage elevator has swept guests to their suites for over 80 years, and the iconic Elephant Bar remains the most prestigious spot in town for cocktails. It's not surprising that Raffles is considered a home away from home for world leaders and prominent figures including US First Lady Michelle Obama, who visited in 2015.

Another exclusive choice is **Amansara**. Built in 1962 as a guest villa of Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk, this 24-suite retreat retains a sleek midcentury vibe. Those staying at this private gated compound have access to a fleet of custom-fitted *remorks* (Cambodian tuk-tuks) for stylish escapes.

New boutique offerings such as **Viroth's Hotel** and **The Aviary** favor a tropical and playful 1950's ambience. Several hotels even offer vintage automobiles for airport transfers and sightseeing tours: for example, guests at Viroth's may choose to travel in the hotel's classic 1969 Mercedes-Benz, chauffeuring you back to a bygone era.

Not all of Siem Reap belongs to the past. Recent improvements to Siem Reap's infrastructure has transformed many dusty tracks into proper tarmac roads, but the chaotic whirligig of tuk-tuks (remorks) and overladen scooters still defy attempts at traffic order, and the needs of pedestrians (like sidewalks and crossings) appear to have been omitted from the master plan. But this only serves to enhance the impression that Siem Reap is resolute to resist becoming overdeveloped and overbearing.

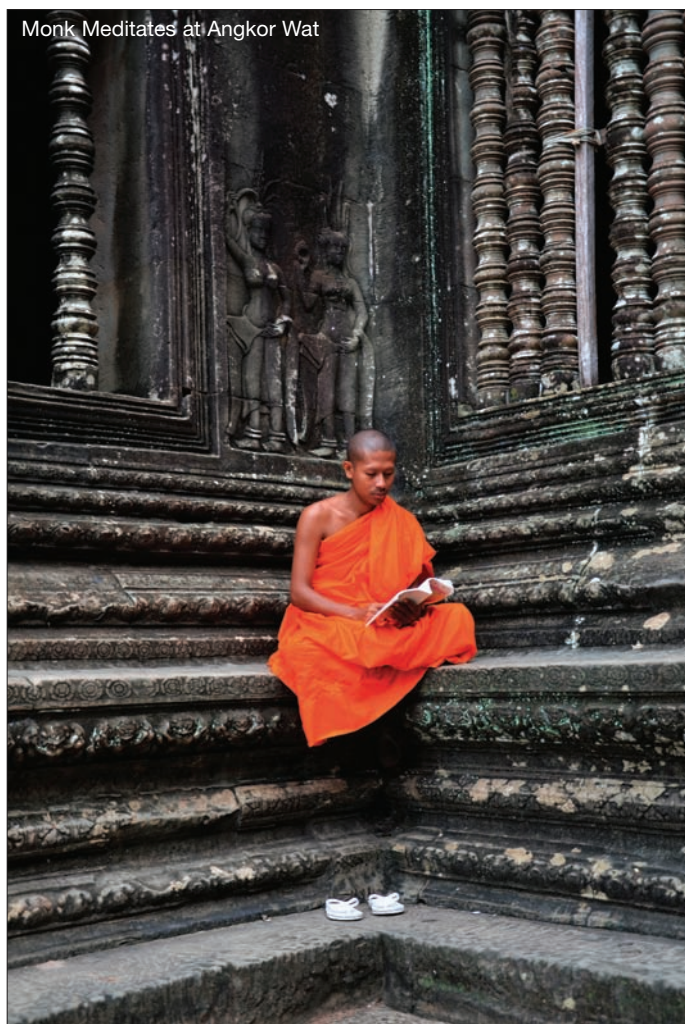
In spite of its historic, nostalgic, and relaxed appeal, the typical tourist spends just two or three nights here. Many choose to briefly visit Siem Reap and Angkor as part of a broader tour of neighbouring countries, especially Thailand and Vietnam. Which is a shame, because Cambodia is so fascinating and welcoming that it warrants a more dedicated exploration.

It's also very gay-friendly, which is remarkable considering the word 'gay' doesn't exist in Khmer. In recent years, Siem Reap has given rise to a flourishing gay scene, with hotels, bars, restaurants, day spas, boutiques, and tourist attractions being established by local and foreign LGBT entrepreneurs, so it's now a place where people of different nationalities and sexualities can fulfil their dreams.

One of the most notable of these entrepreneurs is Soann Kann. Despite having no formal education, he went from humble beginnings as a waiter at Raffles in 1997, working his way up the hospitality ladder before setting up **Sokkhak Spa** in 2012. A tranquil haven amid the heat and noise of Siem Reap (in fact Sokkhak is the Sanskrit word for tranquillity), it remains one of the town's top-rated day spas. A favorite with gay and straight visitors alike, around 20% of the therapists are male.

In 2013, he opened the restaurant **Chanrey Tree**. Located beside the Siem Reap River, the focus is on authentic Khmer cuisine with each plate exquisitely prepared and presented. Delicious local delicacies include fish amok, a traditional Khmer curry of steamed river fish, and prahok tiess, fermented fish and pork delicately braised with coconut cream. With its lush tropical gardens, this contemporary Cambodian restaurant is consistently named one of Siem Reap's best, attracting famous patrons includ-

Monk Meditates at Angkor Wat



Photos: Tang Yan Song



Photo: Serge Bertasius Photography

Siem Reap has given rise to a flourishing gay scene, with hotels, bars, restaurants, day spas, boutiques, and tourist attractions being established by local and foreign LGBT entrepreneurs.

ing David Beckham who dined here in the Summer 2015.

The continuing success of both enterprises led to the opening of fusion-restaurant **Sokkhak River**, and the serene and stylish **Sokkhak Boutique Resort**. Open since 2014, this secluded hotel with 12 rooms is set within private tropical gardens on the edge of Siem Reap.

The inspiring epilogue is that many of those who work in the spa, restaurants, and resort come from the same village as Soann and his family. Conscious of where he came from, he endeavours to give something back to help others to succeed.

Over on the east side of the Siem Reap River, in the emerging Wat Bo Road neighbourhood, Viroth Kol and his French partner Fabien Martial opened **Viroth's Restaurant** ten years ago. The couple had previously operated a restaurant overlooking the famous Angkor Wat historical site, and their intention was to create a similar ambience in Siem Reap, with an open dining space surrounded by lush greenery that served Khmer cuisine.

Their next project involved renovating a dilapidated villa that had most recently housed French soldiers. Originally built in the 1960s in a native modernist style known as New Khmer Architecture, they worked with local firm Asma Architects to transform it into an intimate boutique bolthole. Open since 2007, **Viroth's Villa** has seven guestrooms with cool concrete tile floors, midcentury furniture, and Cambodian

objects d'art. There's also a small saltwater pool that beckons after a hot day of temple exertions, plus a rooftop café bar, and a spa treatment room (with massages and other treatments fulfilled by Sokkhak Spa).

Two years ago saw the grand opening of their most ambitious venture yet: **Viroth's Hotel**, a newly constructed 1950's inspired property with lots of fresh and hip design details. The 35 guestrooms and suites each have a large private terrace shaded by a vertical garden, some with views of the alluring swimming pool. The open-air bar and restaurant includes an air-conditioned glazed 'bubble' so you can keep your cool if the evening gets too sultry.

Having run the first gay-friendly guesthouse in Siem Reap, Dutchman Dirk de Graaff now has two boutique properties here catering primarily for LGBT guests: the three-star **Rambutan Hotel**, and the more upscale **Rambutan Resort**. Both are built in a Khmer style, with simple yet stylish rooms using local, natural products complemented by modern Asian art, including comical canvas prints of paintings by Chinese artist Yue Minjun. For the ultimate personal oasis, some rooms have large outdoor terraces with terrazzo soaking tubs. Dirk has recently opened a Rambutan in the capital Phnom Penh, with polished concrete and contemporary design details.

There are also exclusive men-only options. Set in tropical gardens, **3 Monkeys Villa** was Siem Reap's first *Maison d'Hôtes* exclusively for

Angkor Thom



Photo: Pler Giorgio Carloni

gay men, add to this their **Men's Resort**, whose 14 contemporary rooms have vivid rainbow-colored accents.

Madagascar-born Eric Raisina also struck gold in Siem Reap. Having trained in Paris, working for prestigious fashion houses Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Lacroix, he became smitten after a trip to Angkor's temples in 1996. Moving here in 2001, he began by working on a silk farm to hone his knowledge of Cambodian silk, including the fine and rare golden silk. Experimenting with methods of production and weaving, he created innovative and tactile silks including his signature crochet-like 'raffia' silk and downy soft silk 'fur.' These innovations led him to open **Eric Raisina Haute Texture**, an atelier and couture house on the road between Siem Reap and Angkor.

With a range that extends from silk purses and scarves to bespoke wedding gowns (as well as a select menswear range), in fashion circles his atelier has become a destination as legendary as the temples themselves. A tall and suave figure, you may also spot him on the gay scene in Siem Reap or Phnom Penh.

Nocturnal activities for most visitors are focused on and around **Pub Street**, a lively hub of bars and restaurants in Siem Reap's colorful Old French Quarter. The adjacent alleyways are home to a handful of gay venues.

Hailing from the United States, Martin Dishman established Siem Reap's original gay venue **Linga Bar** in 2004; its name a cheeky reference to a Sanskrit term for phallus. This pioneering gay bar was honored by a visit from pop superstar Ricky Martin in 2008, two years before he openly declared his homosexuality. It was also home to Siem

Reap's first ladyboy revue. In 2014, due to a lease non-renewal, Linga relocated to the lobby of nearby Hotel Be, a bijou three-room hotel that Martin also owns. Furnished with eclectic midcentury pieces, it remains a popular albeit smaller spot. Should you hanker for a ladyboy performance, nearby **The Station Wine Bar** has regular cabaret shows, which some locals teasingly describe as 'farmers in frocks.'

New Zealander Dean Williams opened **Miss Wong** in 2008. Named after a portrait of a beautiful Chinese girl by cult 1950's artist Vladimir Tretchikoff, this cherry-red re-imagining of vintage Shanghai is a favorite choice for sophisticated cocktails. New to the scene is **Barcode Siem Reap**, a fun and swish choice opened by Frenchman Pascal Delais.

One drawback of these venues is that they predominantly cater to foreign tourists. Although prices may seem low for Americans and Europeans, they're expensive for young Cambodians. Some gay locals told me they favor popular straight venues such as Temple Bar on Pub Street, where a draft Angkor beer can be as little as 50¢.

Beyond the gay scene (although with distinct gay appeal), one evening diversion I'd highly recommend is **Phare, The Cambodian Circus**. Rather than a big top of performing animals, Phare focuses on the physical prowess of its predominantly male troupe, fused with elements of theatre, music, comedy, and dance. Although pleasing on the eye, each show is much more than acrobatic eye-candy: the narrative is often dark and poignant, tackling everything from Cambodia's brutal history to gay rights and tolerance.

To appreciate the significance of the storytelling, it's worth knowing that the performers are graduates of the **Phare Ponleu Selpak Circus School** in Battambang, northwest Cambodia. The school was founded

in 1994 by nine young men who'd benefited from art therapy courses at a refugee camp following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, a regime that abolished all forms of art and culture, and murdered vast segments of the population including artists. Returning home, these young men wanted to share what they'd learned with the disenchanted youth of war-ravaged Battambang. What started as drawing classes has evolved into a school with more than 1,200 pupils studying a host of subjects.

With the school flourishing in Battambang, in 2013 they decided to pitch a circus tent in Siem Reap, raising funds via ticket sales to help the school become self-sustainable. To further secure the school's future, in January 2016 Phare moved into a new permanent home on the outskirts of Siem Reap. The extended space provides an onsite café for enjoying a pre-show dinner, as well as a boutique selling artworks and gift items made by students.

The evolving creative scene is also evident in **Kandal Village**, a community of quirky independent shops in the heart of old Siem Reap. Recommendations include **Louise Loubatieres**, a lifestyle store with pretty handcrafted pieces including lacquered coconut-shell bowls and silk pillows trimmed with antique Cambodian ikats. Much of the stock is designed by its owner, who studied textiles and fashion in London. For something more alternative, try **trunkh**, whose eclectic mix of art, fashion, one-off vintage pieces, and up-cycled objects were found by American owner Doug Gordon on provincial roadtrips across Cambodia. Afterward, visit **The Little Red Fox Espresso**, considered the best caffeine fix in town.

Siem Reap's **Old Market** and **Night Market** are popular with bargain hunters, but for guaranteed provenance and quality, head for the pop-up **Made in Cambodia Market**. Held alongside the Shinta Mani Resort, this community market and street fair focuses on Cambodian-made artisanal

products including vibrant lacquered elephants and Krama scarves, a traditional chequered scarf. Foodies should also bulk-buy Kampot Pepper, the Champagne of peppercorns renowned for its aroma and intense flavor.

Shopping here can also support worthy causes. Founded in Cambodia in 1994, Friends International works with marginalized urban children and youth across the world. This social enterprise produce gifts such as bags and jewelry made from recycled newspapers, food packaging, and worn car tires, which are sold via their **Friends 'N' Stuff** shops. They also operate restaurants including **Marum** in Siem Reap (plus an excellent Friends café and shop in the capital, Phnom Penh), providing young locals with training and employment opportunities. Similar socially focused enterprises can be found throughout Cambodia.

The region's main attraction remains the **Angkor UNESCO World Heritage Site** to the north of Siem Reap, which receives over two million foreign tourists annually. Visiting these incredible ruins is a breeze. Some may prefer exploring Angkor from the comfort of an air-conditioned car, but it's most exciting by tuk-tuk.

If you don't want to take pot-luck by hailing one on the street, hotels can organize a tuk-tuk for you, and some enterprising young drivers even offer temple tours via Grindr! To hire a tuk-tuk and driver for a temples tour costs around \$15 for the 'Small Circuit' to around \$25 for the 'Grand Circuit.' Additional charges apply should you wish to commence before dawn to see the sunrise, or visit remote temples such as Banteay Srei.

Before passing through the gate into the Angkor Archaeological Park you must have a ticket. From February 2017, a one-day temple pass costs \$37 per person (almost double the previous price), but a portion will be



Ta Prohm Temple in Angkor

Photo: Perfect Lazybones



Miss Wong

Photo: samjamphoto.com



Tuk-tuk to Angkor

Photo: Stuart Haggas

donated to Swiss-run **Kantha Bopha Foundation** whose five children's hospitals provide free medical treatment to 500,000 Cambodian children per year, so those extra tourist dollars will be put to good use.

First time visitors can simply stick to what's known as the 'Small Circuit' which covers the core sites including the breathtaking **Angkor Wat** temple complex, and the great city of **Angkor Thom** with landmarks including the Terrace of Elephants, Terrace of the Leper King, the pyramid-shaped Phimeanakas palace, and Bayon with its haunting multi-faced carvings of an enigmatic god king.

Your tuk-tuk driver will simply deposit you at each entrance, leaving you free to explore at will, safe in the knowledge that he'll be waiting at a designated pick-up point to take you to the next amazing site. Licensed tour guides can also be requested, and there are numerous options within the park when it's time for lunch.

Those wanting a second day of adventure may take the 'Grand Circuit,' visiting some outlying sites and temples including the atmospheric **Ta Prohm**. French archaeologists purposely chose to limit restoration work here. Much of it therefore remains clawed by the roots of giant banyan trees, just as it was when first discovered by 19th-century explorers. Its wild, unruly nature made Ta Prohm the perfect location for *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, so practice your best action-hero stance for that selfie.

I should highlight that visitors are required to wear appropriate attire when visiting temples. Following a recent spate of nude selfies, including three young Frenchmen who were arrested for posing naked at Banteay Kdei Temple in 2015, a strict new dress code introduced in August 2016 compels visitors to cover their knees and shoulders. Remember that Angkor Wat is the world's largest religious monument, and wearing revealing clothes disrespects the site's sanctity, hence Lara Croft's super-short hotpants and tanktop would be outlawed today.



The Royal Palace in Phnom Penh

Photo: Ralf Siemieniec

PHNOM PENH

There's plenty to see in the bustling capital **Phnom Penh**, an easy bus or plane ride away from Siem Reap. During rainy season, it's possible to travel by boat. Once known as the Pearl of the Orient, there are stucco-fronted villas and Parisian-style cafés dating from the period of French rule, which lasted 1863-1953. More exotic and Oriental in style is the 19th-century **Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda**. The official residence of Cambodia's reigning monarch, the Royal Palace dazzles with its sweeping roofs framed by golden serpents. Named for its floor, which comprises over 5,000 solid silver tiles, the adjoining Silver Pagoda houses the highly revered statue of the Emerald Buddha, which itself is made of Baccarat crystal.

Far more sombre is **Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum**. Also known as S-21, in the 1970s this former school became a torture factory of the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot's regime was so paranoid that Cambodia was overrun with spies, conspirators, and operatives from the CIA and KGB, that they subjected up to 20,000 men, women, and children, people from all walks of life including students, doctors and humble peasants, to torture at S-21.

Life here was so inhumane that prisoners could be coerced into making all kinds of confessions. Evidence documents how the handful of Western prisoners, most of whom were yachtsmen seized after unwittingly sailing into Cambodian waters, were so brutalised that they'd admit to being CIA spies, naming in their forced confessions the likes of Mr. Magoo and Colonel Sanders as commanding officers. Cambodians would similarly name friends, family, and co-workers, unwittingly sealing the fate of those they named, as well as their own. Once a satisfactory confession had been obtained, prisoners would be taken to the nearby **Killing Fields of Choeung Ek**. When liberated in

1979, only seven prisoners were found still alive at S-21. Now a museum, it chillingly chronicles the horror that occurred within these walls.

After the tarnish of genocide, Phnom Penh is now regaining its pearly luster. Hip new neighbourhoods include **Street 240**, just behind the Royal Palace, which is lined with cafés and boutiques such as **The 240**, a lifestyle store with desirable fashion, furniture, and homewares, plus a café-bar serving tasty and stylish food. A tiny alleyway winding from here, **Street 240½** has another cluster of quirky bars and shops such as **ARTillery Café**, which is great for a healthy brunch or lunch, and speakeasy style **Bar.sito**, home to Cambodia's cocktail cognoscenti.

For sophisticated formal dining, head to nearby **La Résidence**, one of Phnom Penh's most exclusive restaurants, set in a villa amid tropical gardens. Its Michelin-starred Japanese chef, Takeshi Kamo, prepares fine French cuisine such as pressed vegetable terrine, conger eel brûlé, parmentier of duck confit, and risotto with shellfish and mango. The three-course weekday Express Lunch menu at \$17 is remarkable value.

Just south of the Independence Monument, **Street 308** harbors more hip venues such as **Red Bar**, a funky, no-frills watering hole popular with young expats and local creatives. Throughout 2014 and 2015, two brothers from New Zealand (the same guys behind Bar.sito on Street 240½) transformed a once inconspicuous alley off Street 308 called **Bassac Lane** into a hive of micro-bars, each boasting its own unique identity. Utilizing concrete and steel, diminutive **Hangar 44** is part bar and part showroom for a local custom-built motorcycle business, while **Buzzing Cicada** specializes in herb-infused gins. Others include burger and beer joint **Meat & Drink**, and book-filled cocktail bar **The Library**.



Rambutan Resort Phnom Penh

Retail options on this hipster laneway include **Paper Dolls & Paper-boy**, a gay-owned boutique that specializes in Cambodian fashion brands and one-offs. Hip neighborhoods often boast their own micro-brewery, but in Phnom Penh they go one better: the nearby **Samai Distillery** opens every Thursday as a super-cool pop-up bar, with delectable cocktails made using handcrafted Samai Premium Rum.

Restaurant options hereabouts include **Malis**, serving high-end Cambodian cuisine in a lush courtyard garden. One of Siem Reap's best Italian restaurants, open a sleek **Il Forno** in Phnom Penh in 2015, bringing its menu of authentic Italian favorites to the Cambodian capital. An upscale option is **Topaz**, renowned as one of the top fine dining French restaurants in the Asia Pacific region.

Another lively quarter is the **Phnom Penh Riverfront**, where the Tonlé Sap River flows into the Mekong. A bustling promenade with street food vendors, balloon sellers, streetside cafés, bars, and shops, Sisowath Quay road is ideal for an early-evening stroll. Along here is the **Foreign Correspondents Club**, an elegantly faded colonial-style venue that rose to fame as the place where foreign journalists and aid workers would meet, drink and deliberate when on assignment here in the 1990s. It remains an iconic spot for a sundowner cocktail.

The city's best hotel, **Raffles Le Royal** is every bit as grand and historical as its Siem Reap sibling. Dating from 1929, well-heeled guests have included former US First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. In



Arthur&Paul

her honor, the hotel's signature cocktail is the *Femme Fatale*, a mix of champagne, cognac, and Crème de Fraise Sauvage first concocted for Jackie O when she stayed here in 1967. During recent renovations, they discovered a glass said to be the actual one she drank from (and still bearing her lipstick), which is now displayed in the lobby alongside other precious memorabilia.

Like Siem Reap, Phnom Penh boasts a thriving gay scene. The original gay-owned hotel, **Manor House** has thirteen comfortable rooms around a saltwater pool, set in a peaceful tropical garden.

With increasing numbers of gay and lesbian visitors, two new hotels have recently joined the fray, and they're coincidentally right next to each other. Having decided it was time his two Rambutan resorts in Siem Reap had a cosmopolitan city cousin, owner Dirk de Graaff considered purchasing a 1930's building on Street 71 for renovation, but French couple Michel and Thibaud acquired that for their own gay hotel project, while Dirk acquired the neighboring plot of land and began working with architects on a new construction.

When they first discovered each others plans, both parties understandably had concerns, but ultimately the two hotels complement each other by appealing to a slightly different clientele. **Rambutan Resort Phnom Penh** is an urban oasis attracting a mixed gay crowd with its cool-as-polished-concrete aesthetic. **Arthur&Paul (A&P)** is a sexy men-only resort with bold monochrome décor, including erotic murals on bedroom walls inspired by French artist Jean Cocteau. Taking its name from Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, the ten spacious guestrooms are named after other well-known gay couples including Pierre et Gilles, and Stefano Dolce & Domenico Gabbana. Single travelers needn't feel alienated by all this coupledness, because A&P facilities include a clothing-optional swimming pool and a sleek gay spa/sauna open to non-residents, so interaction with locals and fellow tourists is all part of the plan.

The city's gay bar scene is equally vibrant. **Blue Chilli** is a lively spot with weekend drag shows. **Pride Of Phnom Penh** has live bands and ladyboy shows. One unique multiuse venue is **Space Hair**, a popular hair salon by day, it transforms into a buzzing gay bar at night. Its Khmer owner Sopheak Chuk has also combined his talents to produce a calendar featuring photographs of 15 stunning Khmer men for you to take home. In April 2016, the owners of Manor House opened Phnom Penh's newest LGBT bar **Vapor** on stylish Street 240. A mainstay of Phnom Penh's after-hours scene, the infamous **Heart of Darkness** dance club becomes less heterosexual and more hedonistic as the hour gets later.

Although it's possible to walk between these venues, most prefer to take a quick and cheap tuk-tuk. Phnom Penh has a growing middle class and a thriving expat community, so unlike Siem Reap where tourists mostly frequent the restaurants, stores and gay bars, here in the capital they attract a much broader mix.

One evolving event for the diary is **Pride Cambodia**, held annually in May. From 2015, the owners of Rambutan and A&P have teamed up with local LGBT NGO's and Meta House German Cambodian Cultural Center to develop it into an extensive calendar of workshops, film screenings, tuk-tuk races, pool parties, and club nights.

With so much to offer, it surely won't be long before the treasures of Siem Reap are heavily plundered, and former 'Pearl of the Orient' Phnom Penh becomes as every day as imitation pearls. My advice is to visit Cambodia while the thrill of grit and commotion still exists. ■

SIEM REAP HOTELS

3 Monkeys Villa, Phum Pnhea Chey, Siem Reap. Set in tropical gardens, this was Siem Reap's first exclusively men-only resort. Rates from \$59. www.3monkeysvilla.com

Amansara, Vithei Charles de Gaulle, Siem Reap. A former royal villa built in 1962, it's now an exclusive gated compound with 24 midcentury style suites. Rates from \$1,290. www.aman.com/resorts/amansara

Men's Resort, Wat Po Lanka, Siem Reap. A newly-constructed men-only resort, its 14 rooms have vivid rainbow-colored accents. Rates from \$71. www.mens-resort.com

Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor, 1 Vithei Charles de Gaulle, Siem Reap. A luxury grand hotel dating from 1932, its facilities include a large swimming pool and spa, plus the iconic Elephant Bar. Rates from \$280. www.affles.com/siem-reap

Rambutan Resort, Rambutan Lane, Siem Reap. These two gay-owned and managed properties are built in a traditional Khmer style, and are popular with LGBT guests. Rates from \$63. www.rambutans.info

Viroth's Hotel, Street 24, Siem Reap. A fashionable gay-owned hotel, designed by renowned local firm Asma Architects in a fresh 1950s style. Rates from \$102. www.viroth-hotel.com

Viroth's Villa, Street 23, Siem Reap. This converted modernist villa dating from the 1960s is now a chic gay-owned bolthole with 7 guestrooms. Rates from \$67. www.viroth-villa.com

GAY VENUES

barcode Siem Reap, New Street A, Krong Siem Reap. This fun and stylish new gay venue has cabaret shows featuring ladyboys and handsome male dancers. www.barcodesiemreap.com

Linga Bar, The Passage, Krong Siem Reap. Siem Reap's first gay bar, it's been making history since it was founded in 2004. www.lingabar.com

Miss Wong, The Lane, Krong Siem Reap. A glamorous gay-owned cocktail lounge, its striking décor was inspired by vintage Shanghai. www.misswong.net

The Station Wine Bar, Street 7, Krong Siem Reap. Simple and unpretentious gay bar, known for its regular ladyboy cabaret shows. www.stationwinebar.com

RESTAURANTS

Chanrey Tree, Pokambor Avenue, Krong Siem Reap. This gay-owned restaurant serving delicious Khmer cuisine is one of the most stylish and top-rated choices in Siem Reap. www.chanreytree.com

Marum, No. 8A, B Phum Slokram, Krong Siem Reap. This traditional Khmer restaurant is operated as a social enterprise by Friends International, giving marginalized urban youth training and employment. www.friends-international.org

The Little Red Fox Espresso, Hap Guan Street, Krong Siem Reap. Located within the emerging Kandal Village quarter, it serves the best coffee in Siem Reap. www.thelittleredfoxespresso.com

Sokkhak River, Pokambor Avenue, Krong Siem Reap. Next door to Chanrey Tree, its new sibling serves French fusion food in a stylish environment. www.sokkhakriver.com

Viroth's Restaurant, Wat Bo Road, Krong Siem Reap. This fashionable gay-owned restaurant has been a popular choice for tasty Khmer cuisine for over 10 years. www.viroth-restaurant.com

SHOPPING

Eric Raisina Haute Texture Vithei Charles de Gaulle, Siem Reap. This atelier and couture house carries an exclusive range created by Eric Raisina, a talented designer who trained in Paris with the likes of Yves Saint Laurent. www.ericraisina.com

Friends 'N' Stuff. Part of a social enterprise supporting marginalized children, it sells unusual gifts handmade from recycled waste products like old newspapers and beverage cans. www.friends-international.org

Louise Loubatieres, 7 Hap Guan Street, Krong Siem Reap. Located in the emerging Kandal Village quarter, this lifestyle store sells beautiful and unique homewares. www.louiseloubatieres.com

Made in Cambodia Market. This artisanal market is held beside the Shinta Mani Resort every Saturday and Sunday 4pm-9pm. www.shintamani.com

Trunkh, 11A Hap Guan Street, Krong Siem Reap. An eclectic shop full of unusual finds from across Cambodia, including art, fashion and upcycled junk. www.trunkh.com

ATTRACTIONS

Angkor Archaeological Park. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the incredible temples and ruins of Angkor attract over two million international visitors each year. www.tourismcambodia.com/attractions/angkor.htm

Phare, The Cambodian Circus. This impressive circus is a mix of theatre, music, comedy and dance – with the talented troupe of young acrobats and musicians often telling dark and poignant stories. www.pharecircus.org

PHNOM PENH HOTELS

Arthur&Paul, No. 27, Street 71, Phnom Penh. This sexy men-only resort is also a gay spa and sauna open to non-residents, making it an ideal place for meeting local Khmer guys. Rates from \$101. www.arthurandpaul.com

Manor House, No. 21, Street 262, Phnom Penh. The capital's first gay hotel has 13 rooms and a swimming pool set in a peaceful tropical garden. Rates from \$44. www.manorhousecambodia.com

Raffles Le Royal, 92 Rukhak Vithei Daun Penh, Phnom Penh. A 1929 landmark, the capital's grandest hotel boasts two swimming pools and numerous restaurants and bars including the iconic Elephant Bar. Rates from \$197. www.affles.com/phnom-penh

Rambutan Resort, No. 29, Street 71, Phnom Penh. This gay-owned resort is a stylish urban oasis with polished concrete and modern designer furnishings. Rates from \$59. www.rambutans.info

GAY VENUES

Blue Chill, No. 36, Street 178, Phnom Penh. Open since 2006, Phnom Penh's longest-running gay bar is buzzing and lively, with popular weekend drag shows. www.bluechillcambodia.com

Heart Of Darkness, No. 38, Street 51, Phnom Penh. Open since 1993, this infamous and well-established dance club gets less heterosexual as the hour gets later. www.heartofdarknessclub.com.kh

Pride Of Phnom Penh, No. 60, Street 15, Phnom

Penh. Also known as POPP, this gay venue has live bands, sexy boy shows and fun ladyboy shows. www.prideofphnompenh.com

Space Hair, No. 66, Street 136, Phnom Penh. This unique venue is a busy hair salon by day, transforming into a popular gay bar at night. www.spacehairpp.com

Vapor, No. 45, Street 240, Phnom Penh. Open since April 2016, Phnom Penh's newest gay bar comes from the owners of Manor House gay hotel, and is located on fashionable Street 240. www.facebook.com/Vaporcambodia/

BARS & RESTAURANTS

Artillery Café, Street 240½, Phnom Penh. A casual café and arts space serving fresh and healthy brunch, lunch and light dinners including vegetarian, vegan, raw food, and gluten-free options. www.artillerycafe.com

Foreign Correspondents Club, 363 Sisowath Quay, Phnom Penh. A colonial-style bar overlooking the river, it proved popular with foreign journalists and aid workers who gathered here to drink and swap tales in the 1990s, and remains an iconic venue today. www.fcccambodia.com

Friends The Restaurant, House 215, Street 13, Phnom Penh. Part of Friends International, a social enterprise that gives marginalized urban youth training and employment, this excellent café/restaurant serves delicious food as well as championing a worthy cause. www.friends-international.org

Il Forno, No. 11, Street 302, Phnom Penh. This popular Italian eatery originated in Siem Reap, and now has a second branch in the Cambodian Capital offering a menu of authentic Italian food in a sleek city setting. It's also a hotel with 9 chic white guestrooms. www.ilforno.restaurant

Malis, 136 Norodom Boulevard, Phnom Penh. This fashionable restaurant serves high-end Cambodian cuisine. Diners may choose to be seated in the lush courtyard garden, or can opt for the air-conditioned interior. There's also a chic new branch in Siem Reap. www.malis-restaurant.com

La Résidence, No. 22-24, Street 214. Phnom Penh. An elegant French fine dining restaurant with a Michelin-starred chef. There's an indulgent à la carte menu plus an excellent value weekday set lunch menu. www.la-residence-restaurant.com

Samai Distillery, No. 9, Street 830, Phnom Penh. The makers of Samai Premium Rum open up their distillery every Thursday evening as a pop-up bar serving delicious rum-based cocktails. www.samaidistillery.com

Topaz, 162 Preah Norodom Boulevard, Phnom Penh. Part of the same hospitality group as Malis, this upscale choice is renowned as one of the top fine dining French restaurants in the Asia Pacific region. www.topaz-restaurant.com

ATTRACTIONS

Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda, Samdach Sot-hearos Boulevard, Phnom Penh. This complex includes the opulent official residence of Cambodia's reigning monarch, plus an important temple full of religious treasures. www.tourismcambodia.com

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Street 113, Phnom Penh. A visit to this former school that became a brutal torture centre in the 1970s is a harrowing but essential experience. www.tuolslenggenocidemuseum.com