

The next Angkor Wat?

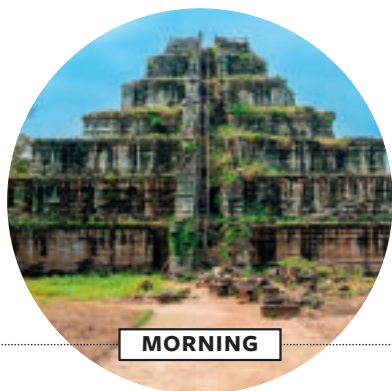
While most tourists in Cambodia still make a beeline for Angkor Wat, more discerning travellers might want to consider Sambor Prei Kuk instead. Located 200km from Phnom Penh, the complex (which translates to “temple in the richness of the forest” in Khmer) received UNESCO World Heritage status this July.

Believed to have flourished in the late sixth and early seventh centuries as the capital of the Chenla Kingdom, the site pre-dates Angkor Wat and is notable for the craftsmanship employed in its 100-odd temples. According to UNESCO, “the art and architecture developed here became models for other parts of the region and lay the ground for the unique Khmer style of the Angkor period”.

Open daily, Sambor Prei Kuk can be reached via a short detour from Highway 6, which connects Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. samborpreikuk.com

ANOTHER SIDE TO SIEM REAP

Venture beyond the temples of Angkor with this one-day itinerary



MORNING

Koh Ker

Located three hours from Siem Reap, the 10th-century temple complex of Koh Ker is where King Jayavarman IV held court from 928 to 944 AD. It is home to nearly 200 different archaeological sites; among these is Prasat Thom, which is most notable for its seven-tiered, 36m-high *prang* (pyramid).



AFTERNOON

Beng Mealea

One hour from Koh Ker is Beng Mealea, built in the 12th century. Its floor plan suggests it may have served as a prototype for Angkor Wat, but its true appeal is the setting. Jungle and temple are firmly intertwined, making for some dramatic vistas and Indiana Jones moments as you clamber amid the ruins.



EVENING

Apsara Theatre

Head back to town and round off your cultural immersion with a Khmer dance performance at the Angkor Village Apsara Theatre (Wat Bo Rd). The apsara dancers – who look like they could have stepped out of a temple relief – perform formal and folk dances that date back to the 12th century.

Words by MARK ANDREWS (Siem Reap); Photos by MARK ANDREWS (Siem Reap); GETTY IMAGES (Sambor Prei Kuk)