

Cambodia

Facts and Statistics

Location: Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, between Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos

Capital: Phnom Penh

Population: 13,607,069

Ethnic Groups: Khmer 90%, Vietnamese 5%, Chinese 1%, other 4%

Religions: Theravada Buddhist 95%, other 5%

Language in Cambodia

Khmer is the official language of Cambodia and is used in most social contexts including government administration, education at all levels, and in the mass media. It is spoken by some 7 million people living there, roughly 90% of the population.

Regional differences are slight and normally mutually intelligible. Based on the dialect of the capital city of Phnom Penh, Modern Khmer is used throughout the nation and widely understood by its inhabitants. Much Khmer vocabulary used in literature, the military, and administration is borrowed from Sanskrit, or Pali. Due to years of French colonial rule, numerous French words have been incorporated into the language as well.

Cambodian Society & Culture

Religion

- . The majority of Cambodians follow Theravada Buddhism.
- . Originating in India, the religion teaches that life and death in this world are intertwined through the concept of reincarnation.
- . Every person lives a life as a worldly being and depending on their behavior will come back in their next life as a higher or lower being.
- . "Karma" is the term used to describe this - i.e. if you do good you will have good karma. A rough translation of this is, "you reap what you sow."

Theravada Buddhism has the following principles:

- Have the right thoughts.
- Have the right goals.
- Speak the right words.
- Perform the right deeds.
- Earn a living in the right way.
- Make the right effort.
- Be intellectually alert.
- Meditate.

Hierarchy

- . Buddhism also reinforces a sense of hierarchy within society.
- . Interpersonal communication is built on the relationship between those involved.
- . Common hierarchical guidelines are that parents are superior to children, teachers to students and managers to subordinates.
- . Monks will even walk in rank order, highest in front and most junior at the rear.

. As a foreigner you may find that people ask personal questions - this is a means to identify your 'rank' rather than being nosy. They may change the way they communicate depending on your status.

Collectivism

. Cambodia is a collective society - individuals take second place to the group whether this is the family, neighborhood or company.

. In such societies, etiquette and protocol guidelines are used to maintain a sense of common harmony - for example subtle communication styles are employed in order to minimize the chances of causing offense to others.

. The concept of face also ties in with this collective outlook.

. Protecting both one's own and other's face is extremely important.

. Face can roughly be translated as a combination of honor, dignity and public reputation that is attributed to a person.

. Face can be lost, given and accrued.

. Foreigners in Cambodia need to be aware of the mechanics of face to ensure they do not cause anyone to lose face as a result of unintentional actions.

. Face is lost when someone is criticized, embarrassed or exposed in public.

. It can be given by complimenting someone publicly, i.e. for their business acumen or hospitality.