

Tourism for Economic Development in Cambodia – Media Global

Tourism for economic development in Cambodia

By Nicola Winter

Most of the world's least developed countries (LDCs) are avoided or overlooked by tourists. However, tourism can make valuable contributions to the economic growth of a country, and many LDCs have amazing things to offer their visitors. For those who wish to help make a difference in the world, there are great options for adventure and relaxation all while helping a developing country's economy grow in a sustainable and eco-friendly fashion.

This Week: Cambodia



*Royal Arms of the Kingdom of Cambodia
(Photo by Sodacan)*

(the other is Nepal).

Impact on economic development

During the late 1990s, Cambodia's economy suffered a regional economic crisis, and was subjugated to political instability and civil unrest. As a result, Cambodia's economy, foreign investment, and tourism all fell dramatically. 1999 marked the first real year of peace in three decades, and since then, the economy's growth has been on the rise at a rate of around 5 percent per year. According to the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), this growth "has been largely driven by expansion in the clothing sector and tourism." In 2004, Cambodia was approved to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), making it only the second least developed country to become a WTO member since the organization's transition from the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs in 1995

The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that tourism will make up 17.5 percent (US\$2,053 million) of Cambodia's GDP in 2009, and account for 13.7 percent of total employment. Export earnings from international visitors is expected to contribute 23.6 percent (US\$1,572.9 million) of total exports, and real GDP growth from travel and tourism is anticipated to average 5.7 percent over the next ten years. Though in a ranking of 11 Southeast Asian countries, Cambodia came in seventh in terms of absolute size of its tourism industry, the country ranked first in the relative contribution tourism makes to the economy. By 2019 capital investment resulting from travel and tourism is estimated to grow 6.8 percent. Finally, a report by the United Nations World Tourism Organization lists Cambodia as one of the few countries that are developing, or that already have a national strategy or plan for eco-tourism development.

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Why you should go

Jungles, beaches, ancient architecture, and culture are four very good reasons to visit. Cambodia has some of the best ancient architecture in the world, the most well known is the temple at Angkor Wat. Built in the 12th century, it has become a symbol of Cambodia and is the most visited place in the country. Prasat Preah Vihear is another Angkorian structure, perched on a cliff overlooking the mountains. Though it is quite a trek to reach this ancient pilgrimage site, the view and splendor of the surroundings makes it well worth it.

The capital city Phnom Penh has been called “one of Asia’s undiscovered gems.” With great museums, a vibrant mix of old a new culture, and the location of the Silver Pagoda in the Royal Palace, which has over 5,000 silver floor tiles, there is no doubt why the city was once known as “the pearl of Asia.”

Pristine beaches and diverse rainforests are also a great reason to visit. The Koh Kong Conservation Area had been very well preserved due to its remote location, and is the second largest virgin rainforest in Southeast Asia. This area is home to the famous mangrove forest Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary, and many other nature preserves, which make for amazing wildlife viewing opportunities.

Cambodia’s beaches are some of the best in the world. On Koh Kong Island and Sihanoukville tourists will find white sand, snorkeling, and all the other features of paradise. While Sihanoukville has become more popular with tourists over the past few years, Koh Kong Khoa is a short boat ride from the main land, has many unspoiled and sparsely populated beaches. Finally, the province of Ratanakiri boasts magnificent waterfalls, a wildlife sanctuary, mountains, clear volcanic lakes you can swim in, and a large, diverse local population with its own culture, language, and customs.



Angkor Wat Temple

Recommendations

Being a responsible traveler is key to aiding development. Here are a few recommendations on travel companies, hotels, guide groups, and other travel aids that focus on sustainable tourism through being eco-friendly, and operating in sync with local communities to raise living standards while preserving local culture.