

SihanoukVille: The Beaches of Cambodia

Si-a-what-Ville?

From Lonely Planet to Trip Advisor, this cozy little beach town in Cambodia will be mentioned as a must see. Yet, I did not know a single Super teacher that had made the trip. I wondered if this meant that the beaches could not compare to those that Thailand herself boasts. However, after seeing city after city, temple after temple, I needed an escape, and the ocean was calling my name.



How to Get Here Even if you Can't Say it

SihanoukVille is a port city that is actually surrounded on three sides by the Bay of Thailand. Geographically speaking, it is on the southwestern side of Cambodia, and population wise, is the third largest city in Cambodia. This means little in terms of development, because there is still much begging to be seen, and until three or four months ago, the main road to the beach was unpaved. However, no matter the things you hear about the government, and Cambodians are not afraid to tell you that the government is corrupt and that they are not fans, strides are being made.

To get here, you can fly, but this happens a whopping three times a week from only one destination-- Siem Reap. Sounds a bit like Surat, hm? Another option is catching a bus from the capitol city of Phnom Penh, which you are sure to visit if you have already made the trek to Cambodia. From here, the bus takes three and a half to five hours, depending upon the number of stops made. Buses leave all day every day.

The other place you are likely to visit while in Cambodia is Siem Reap. Is getting to Sihanoukville from here a possibility? But of course, this is the way in which I chose,

because Siem Reap is easily accessible by bus from Thailand, and Phnom Penh was easiest to fly out of, so Sihanoukville sat in the middle of the triangle teasing me. The bus ride is not short, taking close to twelve hours with a quick stop in Phnom Penh. However, an over night bus can be taken, which saves times and money that would have been spent on accommodation.

Popular Guesthouses

Cambodia is amazingly cheap. You can find a private room for two for as cheap as six dollars a night—maybe cheaper if you are feeling ambitious. However, most teachers are traveling on a budget, and prefer to stay in dorm style rooms. The three most popular places to do this in Si-ha-what-Ville are: The Monkey Republic, The Big Easy, and Utopia. Utopia tops the list boasting a swimming pool as well as dorm beds starting at the low price of \$1. Who says a dollar can't buy you anything? Even if a dorm room isn't your thing, these three places offer private rooms at equally low prices, and the beach is within a five-minute walk. On top of that, The Big Easy and Monkey Republic offer bars with good tunes and a chill vibe. If you stay there, you can just open up a tab and worry about paying when you check out. Watch out though, this can be dangerous! Utopia, however, offers a more hopping bar with travelers jumping into the pool and tunes sometimes not ending until six AM.

Beach Life

If you walk straight down the recently paved road, you find a beach lined with restaurants, chairs, and umbrellas. This is Oceteaul Beach. It is not very different from many places in Thailand, but there are a few key differences. One, there are waves! Thailand has no waves, and I don't know what is up with that, but Cambodia does not have this in common with her neighbor. Though the waves weren't the biggest or best I have ever seen, it was a joy to be in water deeper and livelier than certain spots in Thailand. Furthermore, if you order anything from one of the restaurants along the beach, you can sit in their chairs, which vary from comfortable to uncomfortable, ability to lay down or not, umbrella inclusive or not.

The beach is hopping with Cambodian women and children selling bracelets, sunglasses, manicures, massages, threading—you name it, they've got it. Though I found these "vendors" more endearing than others in Cambodia, it can be hard to see that kind of poverty in paradise, especially when no is rarely an option. Annie, my best friend or sales lady, was very keen on threading my entire legs any time I felt safe and looked away for a moment. Not only is this painful, but I did not want to pay for it. (Boys, threading is when you take a thread, double it over, and yank out hairs. Ouch!) However, we forged an understanding and bond, and she was not overly pushy. If you go farther down the beach, it becomes more isolated with less food and drink options, and less locals trying to sell to you as you bask in the sun.

The biggest benefit besides getting a pedicure while staring at the beautiful ocean is that some women walk around selling freshly caught and cooked crabs and lobsters. Becky and I doubted the likeliness that they would taste good or not make us ill, but we were pleasantly surprised. You can get decent sized crabs and lobsters varying in number from four to eight for anywhere from four to eight dollars. Though this isn't the cheapest, it is fresh; it is good; and it is a luxury.



Nightlife & Day Excursions

This town is small. Yes, I know I said it is the third largest in Cambodia, but as far as nightlife goes, there isn't a long list. As I mentioned before, three guesthouses offer bars that are popular stops for foreigners. Utopia has also recently opened an indoor bar on the other side of the pool which boasts air conditioning, laser lights, a massive sound system, lounge areas, and so fourth. But, many people visiting the beach want to have a drink *on* the beach; the places to do this are either JJ Bar or Dolphin Bar. The crowds during May were not overwhelming, but this speaks of how untraveled Cambodia is as well as May being the off-season due to summer beating heat down on Southern Asia.

As far as the daytime goes, if beach lounging isn't your thing, or you are feeling restless, you can pay to go on various boat trips to islands around this beach. This can cost anywhere from \$15 to \$20 a day, and typically includes snorkel gear, lunch, and drinks (not of the alcoholic kind, sorry guys). Most are full day and are packed full of hidden little gems off the coast of Cambodia. If you are feeling super adventurous, the diving in Cambodia is even cheaper than in Thailand, with two dives costing an overwhelmingly low amount of \$50 or 1,500 baht. Furthermore, many trips to surrounding islands offer an overnight stay in a place yet discovered by the masses.



“So you Said it’s Cheap, but...”

You can stay for a dollar a night. That is thirty baht. You can go on an all day excursion with food, snacks, and hopefully fun for \$15 or 450 baht. Lobster might run you 120 baht, as will a pedicure, but a meal at one of the guesthouses can be as cheap as \$1 or 30 baht; this food isn’t half bad either, especially considering the price attached to it. The long trip from Siem Reap only costs \$7. That is 210 baht— unheard of in Thailand.

So, if you are pinching pennies (or baht), than this place has a lot to offer. Furthering this is the fact that Cambodia has a wealth of unfortunate history, and since this history is recent, much of it is unexplored. One day we will look back and be able to say that we explored Sihanoukville before it became a Koh Phagnan or Samui.

