

Travel

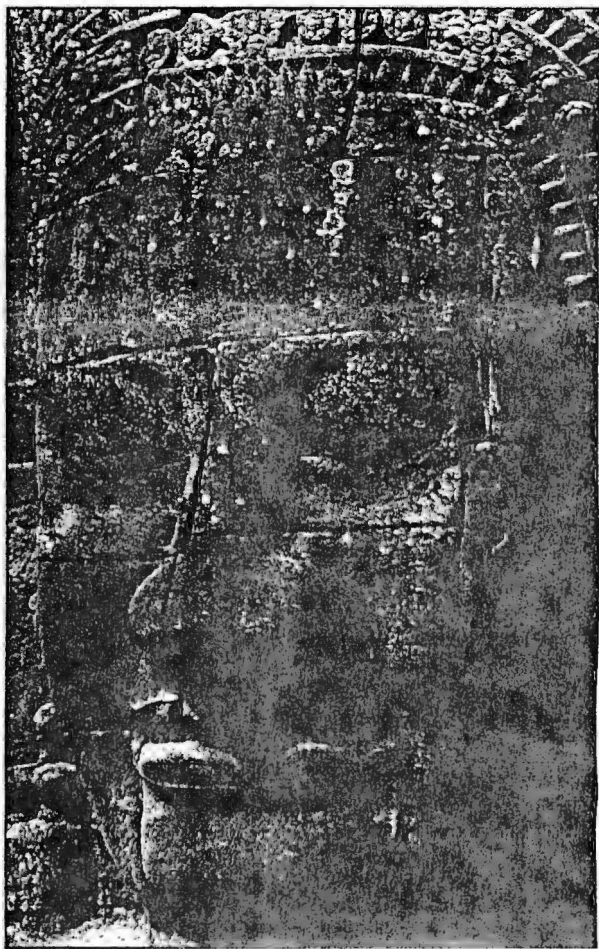
PRESS-TELEGRAM/SUNDAY, MAY 7, 1989



13th-century Bayon Temple is "modern" addition to ancient Angkor Wat.

Bruce Chambers/Press-Telegram

The land of the smiling Buddha



Giant Buddha casts serene smile upon visitors to Bayon Temple

Bruce Chambers/Press-Telegram

*The door to Cambodia
is creaking open, and a
few pioneers are savoring
the thrill of having the
steamy country to
themselves*

By Susan Pack

Staff writer

The benevolent faces of Buddha smile down from above, from beside, from behind, captivating two tourists below.

The guide tries to explain how they got there, how blocks of sandstone were heaved onto rafts and elephants, how ancient craftsmen carved smiles that soothed turbulent souls.

"In this building, they required 1 million workers, 22,000 bamboo rafts and 50,000 elephants," he says.

The tourists are still mesmerized by the colossal faces. The guide skips the rest of the stats.

"It is most extraordinary temple," he says reverently.

Bayon Temple lies near the temple of Angkor Wat. One was built in the 13th century, the other in the 12th. They emerge, battle-scarred but sound, from the jungles of Siem Reap in northwest

CONTINUED/L2, Col. 1

TRAVEL NOTES

Luxurious 4-day journey through Wales by train

From Press-Telegram wire services

As they depart London's Victoria station, passengers — with glasses of champagne in their hands — will say farewell to London and settle into the luxurious surroundings of the Welsh Prince, owned by the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express.

It will be their home for much of the next four days as they journey through Wales, known for its fine scenery as well as its lyrical singers.

Nights are spent in hotels — a 14th-Century manor house is one of the lodgings — while sightseeing takes up the days. Stops include Cardiff, the ancient Caernarfon Castle; and Llandrindod Wells, a Victorian health spa.

A highlight of the trip should be a trip through Snowdonia National Park aboard the 150-year-old Ffestiniog Railway with its Victorian carriages and historic steam engines.

In the evening, entertainment includes a performance by a Welsh male choir, Welsh folk dancers and a Welsh harpist.

Tours leave London on Wednesdays and return Saturday evenings. Departure dates are July 5 and 19 and Aug. 2 and 16.

Cost is \$1,900 a person, double

occupancy. Single supplement is \$220.

For more information, contact a travel agent or Orient-Express Hotels and Reservations Center, (800) 524-2420 or (212) 938-6830.

A star-studded cruise for the pro hockey fan

Attention, pro hockey fans. How about a cruise with some of the players? That's what Norwegian Cruise Lines has in mind June 10-17 on a cruise to the Caribbean aboard the S.S. Norway.

The cruise line says more than a dozen hockey stars will be on board, among them: Grant Fuhr and Esa Tikkanen of the defending Stanley Cup champions, the Edmonton Oilers,

and other current stars, Ray Bourque (Boston Bruins) and Brian Trottier (New York Islanders). Hall-of-Famers on the cruise will be Johnny Bucyk (Boston Bruins), Yvan Cournoyer (Montreal Canadiens) and Brad Park (New York Rangers).

Fans will get a chance to hobnob with the hockey stars with question and answer sessions, autograph and photo sessions, showings of playoff videotapes and on-board Olympics.

The cruise departs Miami with stops in St. Maarten, St. John, St. Thomas and Great Stirrup Cay, NCL's private out island in the Bahamas.

Rates range from \$1,195 to \$3,000 a person, double occupancy. The rate includes air from 150 cities.

For more information, contact a

travel agent or Norwegian Cruise Line, (800) 327-7030.

Seminar: canal boating in England's heartlands

Exploring the heartlands of England by canal narrowboat will be the topic of a seminar on May 22 at 7:30 p.m. at the Los Alamitos Plaza, 10900 Los Alamitos Blvd., Suite 115, Los Alamitos.

Experienced boatwomen Helen Brown and Paulette Barton, who have traveled throughout England, will lead the discussion.

They will also coordinate a 14-day tour of canals in England beginning Sept. 7. Participants will navi-

CONTINUED/L3, Col. 1

Land of smiling Buddha

By the end of the year, peace settlement may have been signed, making Cambodia a realistic destination for the traveler to Asia

FROM L1
Cambodia.

It isn't easy to get there. Now called the People's Republic of Kampuchea, the country is an international outcast. It's hard to get visas, hard to get plane reservations, hard to negotiate "tips" with your government "guide."

But the door to Cambodia is creaking open, and a few pioneers are savoring the thrill of having the steamy country to themselves. By the end of the year, a peace settlement may have been signed, making Cambodia a realistic destination on your Asian itinerary.

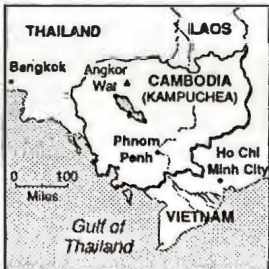
Visitors are being sought by government-owned Phnom Penh Tourism, which already has lured Russian and Vietnamese tour groups to the city's 10 hotels. Within a year, there should be three more, including a modern 200-room addition to Motel Cambodiana, which now has 11 duplex pagodas.

Hotel rooms, which range from \$14 to \$22, are air-conditioned, clean and comfortable. They are not luxurious.

Chirping lizards skitter across walls. Open showers flood bathroom floors. Sometimes the water runs hot, and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the toilet flushes, and sometimes it doesn't.

Virtually every elevator in town is broken.

But there is room service of



Dan Aguayo/Press-Telegram

sorts. When I asked the Motel Cambodiana manager if he had any ice, he dispatched a boy on a bicycle to the local ice shop to buy a chunk. He smashed it into pieces and delivered it to my room in a bucket.

At local cafes, ice cubes are frequently replenished in drinks, which come from cans or bottles smoldering on shelves. At the beginning of the meal, every wilted diner is handed a cold washcloth.

Meals are cheap. At Cafe Cambodiana, two large bowls of noodle soup and tea cost \$1. At Banyon Court Restaurant, the owner served up two plates of rice with beef, pork and cucumbers plus a pot of tea for what-could-have-been-a-mistake 30 cents.

Some of the government-required sightseeing trips are grim. You will be taken to Choeng Ek Genocidal Center, a killing field where 8,985 skulls stare at you from a gruesome shrine. You will be taken to Tuol Sleng prison, where the floor is still stained with the blood of the men, women and children who

were tortured and executed there.

You will be devastated by this legacy of the Khmer Rouge. But it really must be seen to make your visit complete.

You may also visit a relic of a less tragic period. Prince Norodom Sihanouk's grandfather built the Royal Palace, an imposing collection of mansions with margarine-colored walls and green and gold peaked roofs. The impassive face of Rama presides from a temple spire.

Inside the palace, dazzling Buddhas preside. One gold Buddha wears 10,000 diamonds on his bodice and belt. A pale green emerald Buddha emits an otherworldly glow.

At some point, your guide may set you relatively free to wander down wide boulevards lined with French colonial estates, down dirty back streets sullied by cows and pigs.

It isn't dangerous to strike out on your own. There is no fighting in Phnom Penh. The biggest challenge is language. Try French.

Pedicabs — called cyclos (CEE-clos) — are the best way to get around. For as little as 30 cents, you can be pedaled to the Tourl Tom Pong Market, a bustling den of capitalism where you can buy everything from traditional Cambodian kerchiefs known as kramas to "Charlie" perfume.

But don't bother to take credit cards. Most Cambodians have never seen one.

You may also want to leave home without your traveler's checks. For a fee, there is a bank that will change them into riel, the local currency. But most businesses prefer American dollars, and the Communist government — which operates hotels, airlines and Angkor Wat — refuses to accept its own currency.

"This money is not recognized by Western countries," explains Chivorn Noun, a government guide. "It is not very valuable."

A tourist in Cambodia must be persistent. I was initially denied permission to visit Angkor Wat.

"The airport is being repaired," said Saroeun Prok, director of the consulate. "It is closed for one month."

It wasn't true. Other visitors had flown in earlier that week and had reservations to fly there again in two days. But it wasn't until I protested to several government officials that the airport suddenly "reopened" for Friday and Saturday flights.

If you book early, you can spend the night at the once-Grand Hotel in Siem Reap, the village next to Angkor Wat. But I had to catch the 45-minute flight from Phnom Penh in the

morning and return that afternoon. It cost a staggering \$220 for the flight, bus ride, guided tour and lunch.

The Pochentong International Airport was empty when I arrived at 7 a.m. for my 7 a.m. flight aboard Kampuchea Airlines.

"It's changing every time," said government guide Noun. "It can leave at 7 or 8 or 8:30."

It left at 8:30 a.m. that day, after flight attendants overloaded the 48-seat plane by continually cramming three people into two seats. It didn't really matter; the seatbelts were broken anyway.

"Don't worry," said Noun as the propellers began to whirl. "It's Russian pilot."

As soon as the blue and white plane was in the air, cool smoke billowed through the cabin.

"Don't worry," said Noun. "Air conditioner."

After swooping over thatched huts and waterlogged fields, the plane landed on a concrete runway that appeared to be in good repair.

Passengers climbed aboard an orange and white Angkor Tourism bus, and when they wanted the bus to stop, they shouted or banged on the back of the driver's seat. Last stop was the moldering yellow colonial Grand Hotel, headquarters for Angkor Wat tours.

Rediscovered by a French archaeologist in 1855, the temples emerge from a torrid jungle less than 100 miles from the Thai border, where fighting among warring factions continues today. Occasionally, a single blast of gunfire slammed the still air.



Bruce Chambers/Press-Telegram

Angkor Wat (Temple City), was built by King Suryavarman II, who reigned from 1113 to 1150.

Local farmers shooting birds, the guide said.

Angkor Wat, which means Temple City in Cambodian, was built by King Suryavarman II, who reigned from 1113 to 1150. It is a Hindu temple, and the stories of Vishnu, Krishna and Rama are carved on the sandstone walls.

Horses rear and elephants below and warriors wield shields. Winsome apsaras — maidens of the gods — dance on other walls, mysterious come-hither smiles on their faces.

Some of the carvings, rubbed by centuries of hands, glisten like black marble.

There are war wounds. A few carved warriors are pierced with real bullet holes, and rockets

have sheered slabs off battlefields. Black mold surges through many walls.

But a crew from India is supervising restoration of the temple, and many of the delicate carvings already have been chemically cleaned. Kramas wrapped around their sweating faces, Cambodians dig irrigation ditches beneath the broiling sun.

Suryavarman's reign was one of conquest, and one of his victims — Champa, a state in what now is Vietnam — returned the favor by sacking Angkor Wat in 1177. The Cham eventually were driven out by King Jayavarman VII, who completed Bayon Temple at the beginning of the 13th century. Because the Hindu gods had failed to protect Angkor

Wat, Jayavarman dedicated his temple to Buddha.

Like Angkor Wat, Bayon is etched with bas reliefs. But they are deeper, bolder. Strung with tendrils of green mold, they depict everyday life.

A crocodile snaps at a man who fell out of a boat; a tiger growls at a man in a tree. Women pick lice from their hair. Men bet on a cock fight.

Above it all, beside it all, behind it all are the giant Buddhas — 216 faces, 216 serene smiles.

Susan Pack and Bruce Chambers recently returned from special assignment in Cambodia. Their stories and photos appeared in the Press-Telegram last week.

If you go

How to get there: It isn't easy to obtain a visa to enter Cambodia. Contact your travel agent or send a telegram to Phnom Penh Tourism, 313 Karl Marx Boulevard, Phnom Penh, People's Republic of Kampuchea.

You can enter Cambodia only from Vietnam, which also requires a difficult-to-obtain visa. You can fly from Los Angeles to Bangkok (\$1,120 round-trip aboard Thai Airways), then fly from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh

City (\$254 round-trip aboard Thai Airways).

If you book early, you may get a seat on the 48-seat Kampuchea Airlines, which flies every Thursday from Ho Chi Minh to Phnom Penh for about \$80 round-trip (beware: prices are fluid in Cambodia, especially for Americans). For a fee ranging from \$100 to \$300, the Kampuchean consulate will provide you with a car and driver to take you across the border, a grueling nine-hour ride.

When to go: Temperatures soar into the 90s during March and April, the steamiest months. Monsoons rake the summer months. Kinder months are October through February, when temperatures generally brake at 82 degrees.

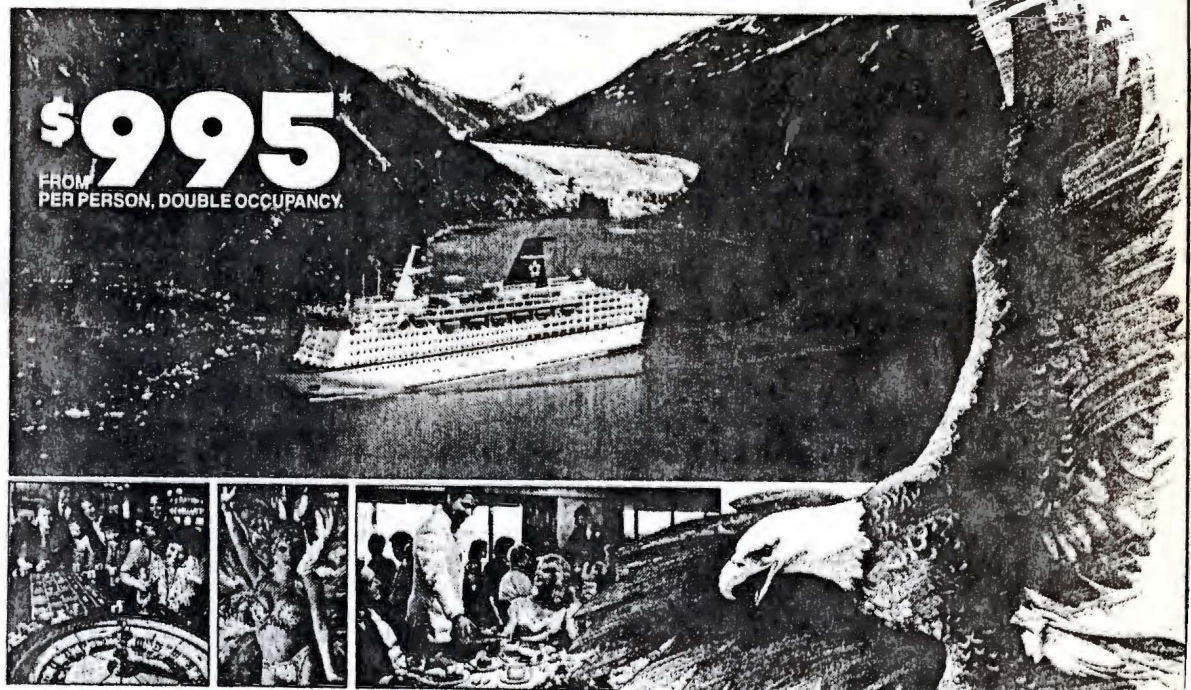
Where to stay: The duplex pagodas at Motel Cambodiana are a 10-minute pedicab ride from downtown, and the plumbing is capricious. But they're

cool, comfortable and set in lush grounds at the edge of the Mekong River. Doubles are \$22, singles \$18.

Among the downtown hotels are Hotel Sukhalay and Monorom Hotel, where rooms generally range from \$14 to \$19. The restaurant on the sixth floor of the Monorom is particularly popular with foreigners. Not only does it become a disco every Saturday night, but it also features steak and fries for 75 cents.

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