

## FAQ: Preparing for Your Trip to Cambodia

Welcome! We are thrilled you have chosen to dedicate your time and energy to supporting children in Cambodia. This guide is designed to help you prepare for a culturally sensitive, safe, and profoundly rewarding experience.

### Before you go

#### 1. What documents do I need before entering Cambodia?

- **Passport:** Must be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry into Cambodia.
- **Visa:** Most travelers need a **tourist visa** (T-class). The easiest way is to get an e-Visa online in advance through the official government website (<https://www.evisa.gov.kh/>). You can also get a Visa on Arrival at major airports, but the e-Visa is faster and more reliable.
- **Travel Insurance:** This is mandatory. Ensure your policy covers medical emergencies, hospitalization, evacuation, and repatriation. Also, verify coverage for any activities you plan to do.
- **No-Criminal Records Clearance:** As you will be encountering children in the rural communities, it is essential for you to provide a "No-Criminal Background" certification. Subject to your home country arrangements, you may be able to obtain the certificate from the local authority (i.e. police department). Some countries offer this service via on-line i.e. <https://www.nationalcrimecheck.com.au> for Australian; <https://www.police.gov.sg/E-Services> for Singaporean.

#### 2. What vaccinations do I need?

Consult a travel clinic doctor 6-8 weeks before your trip. Recommended vaccinations often include:

- **Routine Vaccines:** MMR, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis.
- **Hepatitis A & B:** Highly recommended.
- **Typhoid:** Recommended for most travelers.
- **Rabies:** Recommended, especially for those working with children or animals.
- **Malaria:** The risk is often low in major cities like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, but prophylaxis may be recommended for travel to rural areas. Your doctor will advise.



**Embrace the Journey. Beyond Siem Reap.**

### 3. How should I pack?

Cambodia is hot and humid. Pack light, breathable clothing, but be mindful of cultural norms.

- **Clothing for Work:** You must dress modestly, especially when at the project site.
- **Shoulders and Knees Covered:** For both men and women. Pack lightweight long trousers, capris, or long skirts. T-shirts that cover the shoulders are essential. Avoid sleeveless tops, short shorts, and low-cut necklines at the project.
- **Footwear:** You will remove your shoes before entering buildings, temples, and often even homes. Easy-to-remove sandals or slip-on shoes are best. Also, pack a pair of closed-toe shoes for protection when performing physical or building tasks.
- **Essentials:** High-DEET insect repellent, High-SPF reef-safe sunscreen, Wide-brimmed hat and Sunglasses, Personal medicines and a basic first-aid kit, Flashlight or Headlamp (power outages can occur), Hand sanitizer.

### 4. How can I prepare culturally?

- **Learn a Few Khmer Phrases:** This shows respect and will be hugely appreciated.
  - Hello: Chum-reap sou (formal) / Sua s'dei (informal)
  - Thank you: Aw kun
  - Yes: Baht / No: Ot te
  - Sorry/Excuse me: Sohm toh
  - Read About Cambodian History: Understanding the impact of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) is crucial to appreciating the resilience and current context of the country. It explains why there is a generation gap and deep-seated trauma.
  - Understand Theravada Buddhism: This is the predominant religion and deeply influences culture, values, and daily life.

## Cultural Awareness & Etiquette

### 5. What is the most important thing to know about Cambodian culture?

Respect and saving face are paramount. Cambodian culture is hierarchical, gentle, and non-confrontational. Avoid raising your voice, showing anger, or publicly criticizing someone, as this causes them to "lose face" and is considered deeply disrespectful.

### 6. How should I behave and interact with people?

- **Greetings:** The traditional greeting is the sampeah: palms together in a prayer-like gesture with a slight bow. The higher the hands and the lower the bow, the more respect is shown. A handshake is common with Westerners, but wait to see if a woman offers her hand first.
- **Body Language:** The Head and Feet: The head is considered the highest, most sacred part of the body. Never touch a person's head, even a child's, playfully. The feet are the lowest. Never point your feet at people or sacred objects (like a Buddha statue). Sit with your feet tucked behind you, not stretched out.
- **Handing Items:** Always use your right hand, or both hands together, to give or receive something. The left hand is considered unclean.
- **Showing Affection:** Public displays of romantic affection are frowned upon.

## 7. What are the specific cultural norms for working with children?

- **Physical Contact:** While Cambodians are warm, be very mindful of physical contact. Avoid hugging or kissing children. Patting on the head is a major cultural taboo. A hand on the shoulder or a high-five is usually acceptable, but always observe and follow the lead of local staff.
- **Photography:** Always, always ask for permission before taking a child's photo. This is a matter of basic respect and child protection. Do not post photos on social media without explicit permission from PeopleStories.
- **Building Relationships:** Smile, be patient, and use play and games. Your calm and respectful presence is as valuable as any specific task you perform.

## Health, Safety & Money

### 8. Is the tap water safe to drink?

No. Drink only bottled or filtered water. Ensure the seal is intact on bottled water. Your accommodation and the project site will likely have filtered water you can use to refill your bottle.

### 9. What about food safety?

Street food is a fantastic part of the experience! To stay safe:

- Eat at busy stalls with high turnover.
- Ensure food is cooked fresh and served hot.
- Avoid raw vegetables and fruits you cannot peel yourself.
- Stay hydrated, but stick to sealed bottled water or canned/bottled drinks.

### 10. Is Cambodia safe?

Cambodia is generally a very safe country for travelers, with friendly people and low rates of violent crime. However, petty crime like bag-snatching (especially by thieves on motorbikes) can occur.

- Be vigilant: Don't flash expensive phones or jewelry.
- Secure your bag: Wear your backpack on your front in crowded areas.
- Travel Smart: Avoid walking alone in poorly lit areas at night.

### 11. What money should I use?

The US Dollar (\$USD) is widely used alongside the Cambodian Riel (KHR). You will rarely need anything else.

- Small Bills: Bring plenty of crisp, new \$1, \$5, and \$10 bills. Old or torn bills are often rejected.
- Riel: You will get change in Riel (approx. 4,000 Riel = \$1 USD). Riel is used for small purchases under \$1.
- ATMs: Are widely available in cities, dispensing USD.

## During Your Project Work

### 12. What is the concept of "voluntourism" and its potential harm?

Be aware that short-term volunteering, especially in orphanages, can unintentionally cause harm. Constant rotation of volunteers can disrupt a child's attachment and development. We follow a child-protection first policy.

### 13. What is the Child Protection Policy?

You will be required to read and sign this. It includes:

- A strict code of conduct regarding interaction with children.
- Zero tolerance for any form of abuse or exploitation.
- Guidelines on photography and social media.
- Prohibiting visits to children's homes outside of organized project activities.

### 14. How can I be an ethical and effective volunteer?

- **Be a Learner, Not a Savior:** Come with humility. You are there to support and learn from the local staff, not to "fix" things.
- **Be Flexible:** Things may not run on a strict Western schedule. Embrace the "go with the flow" attitude.
- **Listen More Than You Speak:** Your most valuable role may be to provide enthusiastic support and a caring presence.
- **Follow the Lead of Local Staff:** They are the experts in their community and culture. Respect their guidance and authority.

### 15. What if I face a challenge or feel unwell?

- **Communicate:** Your primary point of contact is Victoria Miloschewsky. Report any issues, concerns, or illnesses to them immediately. Reach her via WhatsApp @+61406 533 622 or call her Cambodian mobile on +855 15 389 121 or Telegram @VictoriaMiloschewsky
- **Medical Care:** There are reputable international clinics in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap for serious issues. For minor ailments, local pharmacies are widely available.

We are here to support you every step of the way. Thank you for your open heart and mind. Your respectful and prepared approach will make this a transformative experience for both you and the children you serve.

**Chum-reap sou and welcome to Cambodia!**

