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SACRED SPACES

Buddhist Architecture,
Southeast Asia





KHMER HOSPITALITY

When visiting Siem Reap, the home of the magnificent temples of Angkor, opt for accommodation that offers the best of Khmer heritage and hospitality.

Sokha Angkor Resort

My travelling companion and I arrived at the Sokha Angkor Resort just as I'd finished freshening up with a cold towel that was offered by my driver. In that quick 10-minute drive down Airport Road to the resort, I was transported to the French colonial days of Cambodia.

The image of the doorman will not be easy to forget. I'd never before been greeted by a man in Khmer headdress, white jacket, knee-length *sampot chang kben* (folded cloth worn on the lower body) and white knee-length socks. Heritage – from the lobby's carved wooden accents and pillars covered with bas relief replicas to the paintings and vintage photographs scattered throughout the hotel – enveloped me, welcoming me to Siem Reap.

It was my birthday weekend and I was glad to be booked into one of the 96 Deluxe Pool View rooms, which like the 144 Deluxe City View rooms, were 409 square feet in size. For those who need more space, there are five classes of suites ranging from 645 to 3,444 square feet.

A basket of fruit, a platter of chocolates with my name spelt out in chocolate syrup and a handwritten note from the management instantly made me feel very special.

I let out a gasp when I opened the glass door to the balcony. The gush of water sounded so loud and close that I thought I'd get wet, but there was no cause for concern, as the grand waterfall that was flowing into the saltwater pool — without a doubt the focal point of the resort — was a good distance away. The pool's grandeur was heightened by statues of Khmer lions that spewed water from their mouths, and stone blocks that resembled the sandstone

from the Angkor temples. Ringed by flowering frangipani trees and palm varieties, the pool was so inviting that I had to take a dip to escape the heat of the Cambodian sun.

Later, I proceeded to the romantic Le Chantou restaurant for a superb three-course dinner. Delicious appetisers included pumpkin soup in light coconut cream and green mango salad with smoked fish, while my main course, the Cambodian classic, fish *amok* (fish curry custard steamed in banana leaves), served with stir-fried kale with garlic sauce and Khmer fried rice, was simply heavenly. Somehow, the scrumptious Asian fare did not seem at all out of place in a dining room decked out in Louis XV-style furnishings.

For my birthday, I wanted to catch sunrise at Angkor Wat, so the concierge booked a 5.00am *tuktuk* (motorised rickshaw) pickup. The concierge hires uniformed drivers accredited by the hotel for the safety and convenience of guests.

Exploring the temple complex early in the morning was fantastic as there were still relatively few people around and it was not as humid. I could have brought breakfast in the hotel's takeaway box but I opted to return to the hotel for breakfast, which was a wise choice. The Lotus, the resort's casual all-day dining restaurant, has a full Western and Asian breakfast spread that is worth the return trip. Lunch here is also recommended, with a buffet and set menus on alternate days.



TRÉSOR D'ANGKOR VILLA & RESORT This is an intimate resort sited within a tropical paradise, halfway between the temples of Angkor and Siem Reap town centre. Trésor's spacious pool villas, set surrounding a large fresh water pool, blend traditional Khmer design elements with contemporary comforts, making for a charming escape. 📍 **KROUS VILLAGE, SANGKAT SVAYDANGKUM, SIEM REAP**



BOUTIQUE INDOCHINE D'ANGKOR HOTEL AND SPA Book yourself into one of the 27 French colonial rooms here, each with a unique style and size, in keeping with the personality of the original residents. Amenities include a rooftop restaurant serving up Cambodian fare and the on-site Indochine Spa, which offers a traditional Khmer massage. 📍 **7 MAKARA, WAT BO VILLAGE, SALA KOMROEK COMMUNE, SIEM REAP MUNICIPALITY**



SHINTA MANI RESORT Shinta Mani Resort is located in the French Quarter and features courtyard-style accommodation with poolview rooms, poolside garden rooms and a 60-square-metre Junior Suite. Amenities include the Shinta Mani Spa with a wide variety of treatments and Bai Tong, an all-day dining venue serving up Khmer street food and international favourites. 📍 **JUNCTION OF OUM KHUN AND 14TH STREET, SIEM REAP**



ROYAL ANGKOR RESORT & SPA The building design of Royal Angkor Resort & Spa celebrates the best of colonial and Khmer architecture, with décor hand-made by local artisans. Facilities include an 18-hole golf course designed by Nick Faldo, a spa where guests can experience 'Four-Hands Massages' and Royal Apsara Theatre where guests can watch a traditional Apsara dance performance. 📍 **HIGHWAY NO.6, PHUM KASEKUM SIEM REAP, PO BOX 93279 SIEM REAP**



The lunch buffet features salads; main courses like spaghetti *amatriciana*, pan-fried dory fillet with basil cream sauce, braised pork spare ribs with honey, and chicken curry; a noodle soup station; fresh fruits; and desserts. I enjoyed the selection, and washed my lunch down with the Sokha Svakum (Sokha welcome drink), a delicious mix of fruit juice and strawberry syrup. If you're hankering for Japanese food, Sokha Angkor's Takezono Japanese restaurant offers *teppanyaki* and *teriyaki* sets — complete with *sashimi*, *chawanmushi* (egg custard), *miso* soup, rice and fresh fruit — big enough to be shared by two.

In the afternoon, I visited the Jasmine Spa, Sokha Angkor's signature spa. Here, all treatment rooms are named after herbs, spices and flowers. I opted for the Blissful Unity massage,

an aromatherapy spa experience. I lay down on the massage table to the sound of flowing water and a Khmer flute, and the masseuse used light strokes to tenderly apply lavender oil to my body. It wasn't long before my companion began snoring in the next room, a testament to the calming effect of the massage oil.

Once we were done, I received a little surprise: an orange mousse birthday cake with my name on it! That definitely made me feel extra special.

Thanks to Sokha Angkor, my birthday weekend in Siem Reap turned out to be a lovely one filled with sweet surprises and warm gestures. And, to be surrounded by reminders of an ancient civilisation, made me realise that I'm not so old, after all. 📍 **NATIONAL ROAD NO 6 & SIVATHA STREET JUNCTION, SIEM REAP**