



Travel Postcard: 48 hours in Kampot, Cambodia

Fri Jul 17, 2009 9:43am IST

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KAMPOT, Cambodia (Reuters) - Got 48 hours to explore Kampot? The quaint, riverside town in southwestern Cambodia is attracting more tourists with its relaxed atmosphere and run-down yet fine French architectural legacy.

FRIDAY

6 p.m. - Relax with a drink at one of many bars on Riverside Road, which runs along the Kampong Bay River. The east bank has spectacular views of Bokor Mountain.

7 p.m. - Dine at Ta Eou, a charming place built on stilts over the river. The menu is extensive and includes lots of seafood. Crab with peppercorns is a favorite.

8 p.m. - Drop by the Kampot Traditional School of Music for Handicapped and Orphaned children -- near the old market -- which teaches children traditional music and dance. The performances are free but donations are welcome.

SATURDAY

7 a.m. - After a quick breakfast, head out for a day-long jungle trek in Bokor National Park, the main reason most travelers venture into Kampot. There is a road up to Bokor Mountain but it is sometimes closed to visitors. Check with local guides first.

Most tours consist of a challenging three-hour trek and then a drive up to the top, where the first stop is the Black Palace, the remains of the residence of former King Sihanouk.

Other attractions include the abandoned buildings of Bokor Hill station -- a Catholic church and the eerie French hotel and casino. Some locals say that gamblers who had lost everything at the casino often jumped to their death from the mountain.

In its heyday, Bokor was a getaway for French officials, who headed up the mountain to escape the tropical heat. But years of neglect have left ghostly ruins, often shrouded in fog and clouds. If the clouds pass, admire the spectacular view of the coast and the cool mountain air.

Bokor National Park is also an important wildlife reserve -- however the average visitor is unlikely to see much. Tigers are present but very rare, although gibbon can often be heard.

The two-hour trek back down includes a stop at a waterfall for those who want to refresh themselves with a swim.

7 p.m. - Back in Kampot, head to one of the town's massage parlors where blind masseurs will help take away the aches of the day's trek.

8. p.m. - Enjoy a well-deserved drink at the rooftop balcony bar Rikitikitavi, which also has a charming restaurant that serves a mix of Khmer and international food.

SUNDAY

9 a.m. - After breakfast, head out to a pepper plantation. In Cambodia's colonial days, Kampot pepper was the king of spices in Parisian kitchens but during the rule of the Khmer Rouge, most plantations were destroyed. Today, local farmers have started to grow and sell black peppercorns again.

11 a.m. - Limestone caves dot the landscape around Kampot. Some have exotic rock formations and Buddhist shrines and are worth a visit. The Phnom Chhnork caves shelter a pre-Angkorian ruin.

2 p.m. - In town, stop off at the Epic Arts cafe to enjoy cakes, bagels and shakes -- the homemade chutney and banana jam are a must-try. The cafe, which employs disabled staff, also sells cards and handicrafts.

3 p.m. - Take a walk around town and soak up the relaxed atmosphere. Although small, Kampot has charming quiet lanes, and architecture influenced by both the Chinese and the French.

4 p.m. - Set sail on the Kampong Bay river, and stay on the water to catch the sunset. If the water level is high enough, head to the Tek Chhou rapids, a popular swimming area.

Passing by lush green scenery, watch fishermen getting ready to go out to sea and sail past dozens of huts on stilts.

(Editing by Miral Fahmy)

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