



Destination
Cambodia

Sun Worshipping... Cambodian Style

By Rob Keating

My alarm goes off in the darkness...it's 4:30am. I'm wondering if I'd made the right decision last night, over dinner and red wine, to embark on this outing. Half an hour later and I'm sitting on the bus with other members of my group, who braved this early hour, taking the short drive from our hotel to the iconic Angkor Wat temple complex in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

The temple is the largest religious monument in the world and visiting at this hour is extremely popular. I'm told the photo opportunities are well worth getting up early for. It's the tenth day of my 12 day 'Ho Chi Minh to Angkor Wat' cycle trip with World Expeditions. As we approach the gates in the darkness, I'm amazed at the sheer number of people who have showed up at this wee hour. One might think we're getting in line for a store to open to buy some limited edition shoes, however we are here to witness the sunrise over the famous 12th century temple.

Armed with the big-boy zoom lens on my camera, I move through the crowds with my group and attempt to find a good vantage point to witness the daily spectacle. Easier said than done as clearly many others have the same idea! 'Espresso?' a street vendor offers. I'm thinking 'Oh yes please!' but sensibly decline her offer in order to keep up with my group. The scene here reminds me of attending a rock concert in an open air stadium - any minute now the lights will come up and a stage will be revealed. As people ready their camera gear (some on large tripods) I'm waiting for a celebrity to appear in a long sparkly gown.

Around 40 minutes later we see the first glimpse of the sun peaking over the towers and the dawn sky slowly illuminates. Angkor Wat itself seems to come to life as shades of red and orange glisten between the ancient towers.



At that moment, I am reminded of the beauty and wonder of everyday occurrences such as this. From here on there is a hush over the crowd as the sun continues its ascent, changing colours over the surrounding landscape. I notice one girl, sitting and holding two lit candles, chanting something I couldn't understand. Photography buffs would be in their element at this point - and there are many here today. We stand in awe as the massive orange orb rises over all five of the temple's famous towering peaks and beyond into the cloudless sky.

After another half an hour of sun worshipping, it's time to board the bus again and head back to our hotel for some sustenance in the

form of breakfast (with a side visit to a certain western coffee chain down the street to finally get that espresso fix!). We return to Angkor Wat around 9am to tour the temples and cycle around part of the perimeter. The quiet, dirt track alongside the moat, shaded by mature trees is a lovely ride and a great way to take in the splendour of this place. You really get a sense of just how large it actually is - at approximately 162 hectares it certainly has a large footprint on the landscape. We tour the temple sites as the heat of the day intensifies, and find its mind boggling to imagine how these massive, detailed structures were built so many centuries ago - all without today's machinery and tools. The fact that they still stand

today is a testament to the creators' workmanship.

As our day draws to a close, we leave the wonders of Angkor Wat. Today would be the first of two days of exploring this magical place as we wind up our tour. I enjoyed every minute of the tour, and, to end it in such an ancient, magical place was the icing on the cake. Oh and getting up at 4.30am was totally worth it to experience the splendour that is sunrise over Angkor Wat. 🌅



facts:

Rob Keating travelled on World Expeditions 'Ho Chi Minh to Angkor Wat' 12-day cycle tour

.....
www.worldexpeditions.co.nz
 or phone 0800 350 354



*Travel as much as you can , as far as you can ,
 as much as you can .
 Life's not meant to be lived in one place.*



*Helping travellers find the paths less travelled for 40 years.
 Let us help find yours.*

**For more information visit:
www.worldexpeditions.co.nz
 Phone: 0800 350 354
enquiries@worldexpeditions.co.nz**

