

WHY YOU HAVE TO EAT YOUR WAY THROUGH SIEM REAP

For a dusty little town in Cambodia that's often associated with the Angkor Wat ruins, never ending Happy Hours on Pub Street and cheap massages, very few would have guessed that the real adventure lies in its food. So after you are done living out your secret fantasies as the tomb raider known as Lara Croft or just ended your bar crawl from the night before, be sure to check into one of these spots for an oh-so-gratifying meal.

#1 THE SUGAR PALM

WHAT A fine dining Khmer restaurant and bar

WHERE Street 27 (opposite Pannasastra University)

WHY Let me just get this out of my system: Dining at The Sugar Palm is the BEST way to dip your toes into Khmer cuisine, if you haven't already done so. Even Gordon Ramsay had to take a stab at learning how to cook its famed *Fish Amok* (steamed curry inside banana leaf cups, resulting in a *soufflé* like texture). We tried the Khmer Curry and the Grilled Eggplant as well (highly recommended). Plus point is that this restaurant takes vegetarians seriously (even if you don't!) and can make veg versions of select dishes.

Tip: Pre-order the *amok* when you make your reservations, as preparation time takes 40 minutes. But it's alright even if you don't, 'cos the *amok* is well worth the wait!

#2 LE MALRAUX

What A French bar and restaurant

Where Alley 1, Old Market

Why If you loved Woody Allen's 'Midnight in Paris', then you absolutely can't afford to give this one a miss. Le Malraux's art nouveau décor is capable of transporting any diner back to the heydays of the 1920s-30s. The menu itself is a celebration of authentic French classics like *foie gras* and *confit*, although you ought to find varied Cambodian dishes in there as well. We tried the refreshing Tomato Tartar with Goat's Cheese, and the Lamb with *Pommes Lyonnaise* and Thyme *Jus* (highly recommended). This establishment also has an excellent wine list for even the most sophisticated of palates.

Tip: Do check out the antique collection upstairs, especially the original recipe cards from the 1920s, proudly displayed in the lavatories.

#3 GEORGE'S RHUMERIE AND RESTAURANT

What A French Creole restaurant

Where George's Lane

Why This one is quite off the beaten path- both culinarily and geographically speaking. Armed with Google Maps, we adamantly brought along an unsuspecting *tuktuk* driver in search of this hidden gem. Every diner here is greeted with shots of coconut rum on the house (yay!). George's is

renowned for its wide array of infused rums, jams and chutneys- all of which are made in-house and available for you to take home. We started off with an appetiser of *Fromage Confiture (Reblochon* cheese melted over slices of *baguette*, and served with a selection of 6 homemade jams). I personally had to try the *Vindail Fish* just because it promised flavours from George's home in the La Reunion Island. And boy, what an explosion of flavours it was!

Tip: Avoid peak hours if you want the personal attention of George himself, or his son, Sebastien. You'll be walked through each dish and how best to pair them with the rums, jams and chutneys which they make from scratch.

#4 KHMER KITCHEN RESTAURANT

WHAT A Khmer restaurant

WHERE Street 09 and Street 11, Old Market

WHY A simple rule of thumb when you don't know where to eat: look for the most crowded restaurant. If it's filled with people, it's got to be good, right? And following that logic, we gave this joint a try and it exceeded our expectations multiple times over! Featuring traditional Cambodian and Asian dishes, the extensive menu alone will blow your socks off. Most dishes can be made with the meats of your choice and even caters to vegans/vegetarians. We tried the rustic Pumpkin in Oven, authentic Khmer Curry (again!), and the Stir Fried Noodles, which were cooked to *al dente* perfection. Truly a taste of Cambodia!

Tip: For a quieter, more intimate setting, go to the one on Street 11.

#5 THE BLUE PUMPKIN

WHAT A French patisserie, restaurant and ice cream parlour

WHERE 6 locations in Siem Reap, including the airport, Old Market, and opposite Angkor Wat

WHY Luciano Pavarotti once said that one of the nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating. So when an innocent walk to the Old Market was side-tracked by a 2 hour brunch at The Blue Pumpkin, I wasn't complaining. For those of us who hate being dictated by the conventional norms of 'breakfast time', kindly seek refuge in the fact that this place offers superb breakfast- All. Day. Long. And when you are done with that, return for the ice creams. And the ice blended smoothies. And the gorgeously fluffy *Madeleines*.

Disclaimer: This traveller might have been munching on the said *Madeleines* while writing this article.

Tip: Ask to be seated in their famous bed seats so you can have your meal breakfast-in-bed style.

"You have to taste a culture to understand it" – Deborah Carter

Surely enough, we tasted Cambodia's colonial French past, the survival of its authentic Khmer flavours, and its evolution into a fine dining, modern cuisine.

BIO- TRUSHNA PATEL

From giving stock tips on the telly, Trushna is now working on getting insider tips for travel junkies. When she is not plotting her next getaway, she enjoys the quintessentially British art of watching period dramas while sipping tea. She comes equipped with stealthy ninja level packing skills, thanks to years of flying on budget airlines.