TOUR CODE

SE6

ADVENTURESABROAD

CAMBODIA & MYANMAR

19 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Phnom Penh*

Today we arrive in Phnom Penh, the capital and largest city in Cambodia.

Engineered by the French, Phnom Penh was once filled with beautiful tree-lined streets and colonial mansions. Today many of the old buildings exist, although they are in a severe state of disrepair. Depending on the time of our arrival, we may accomplish some of the sightseeing as described tomorrow, today upon arrival.

Overnight in Phnom Penh. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Phnom Penh: Tuol Sleng Prison & City Tour*

Today we tour Phnom Penh and its surrounds.

We begin with a visit to the infamous Tuol Sleng Prison, now a museum illustrating the atrocities committed by Pol Pot during the 1970s, and the nearby Choeung Ek, aka the "Killing Fields." The buildings at Tuol Sleng are preserved as they were left when the Khmer Rouge were driven out in 1979. The regime kept extensive records, including thousands of photographs. Several rooms of the museum are now lined, floor to ceiling, with black and white photographs of some of the estimated 20,000 prisoners who passed through the prison.

Back in town, we visit the National Museum, which houses one of the world's largest collections of Khmer art, including sculpture, ceramics, bronzes, and ethnographic objects. The museum's collection includes over 14,000 items, from prehistoric times to periods before, during, and after the Khmer Empire, which at its height stretched from Thailand, across present-day Cambodia, to southern Vietnam. The Museum buildings, inspired by Khmer temple architecture, were constructed between 1917 and 1924.

We then walk the short distance to the Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda. We also stop in at Wat Phnom, a magnificent temple overlooking the town, said to be the spot whereupon the city was originally founded.

Overnight in Phnom Penh. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Phnom Penh - Beng Mealea - Siem Reap & Angkor Wat*

Today we travel by road to Siem Reap, gateway for Angkor Wat / Angkor Thom.

En route to Siem Reap, we will stop at the ruined temple of Beng Mealea, almost the same size as Angkor Wat but reclaimed by nature a millennium after it was first built. Beng Mealea is special because it's one of the Angkor temples that's been left to be reclaimed by nature, unlike most of the other temples which were restored by the French in the 1800s after centuries of neglect. If you want a sense of what it was like for the first French explorers when they discovered Angkor, this would be the nearest you'll get to it.

We continue the short distance to Siem Reap and check in to our hotel. Later we wander the magnificent grounds of the splendidly preserved 12th Century temple of Angkor Wat. Considered the best example of ancient Khmer architecture, it is the largest and most impressive of all
Cambodian monuments and generally regarded as one of the finest religious structures in the world. We will also be visiting the South Gate of Angkor Thom, Bayon Temple, Baphuon, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King.

NOTE: The order of Siem Reap sightseeing may vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Ovgernight in Siem Reap. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Siem Reap: Angkor Thom*

Today is dedicated to seeing the remaining highlights of the Petit Circuit -- Angkor Thom (Bayon), with its haunting images of the God-like Avalokitesvara and its magnificent murals, and Sras Srang (Pool of Ablutions), Ta Keo (the first Khmer temple built entirely of sandstone) and Ta Prohm, in its natural overgrown setting.

We will also see much of the Grand Circuit, including the great temple of Preah Khan and the brick sanctuaries of Pre Rup. It is not hard to imagine how this vast complex, covering several square kilometers, with carefully engineered canals and reservoirs to control flood waters and survive droughts, was once (by some estimates), the largest city in the world, housing as many as one million inhabitants.

Overnight in Siem Reap. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Siem Reap: Banteay Srei*

Today we visit some temples a little farther afield, including the exquisitely carved Banteay Srei.

Banteay Srei is something of an anomaly. It wasn't built by a king, but rather a spiritual teacher, Yajnavaraha, the Brahman of King Jayavarman V, in AD 967. At that time it was called Tribhuvana Mahesvara, and stood in a town called Isvarapura. The name Banteay Srei means the "Citadel of Women", and is one of the first temples to be restored by the French.

We will also have time to have a boat excursion on Tonle Sap Lake.

Overnight in Siem Reap. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Siem Reap, Cambodia - Yangon, Myanmar (Burma)*

Today we fly to Yangon (Rangoon), possibly via Bangkok. Yangon is Myanmar's former capital and main port. Founded in 1755 by King Alaungpaya, it grew into a trading port after the British annexed lower Burma in 1826 and became the capital after the whole of Burma fell to the British in 1890.

Later we visit the Shwedagon Pagoda. This golden stupa dominates Yangon, and it is the spiritual rallying point for much of the population. Somerset Maugham said it was "like a sudden hope in the dark night of the soul". The Pagoda is said to date back 2,500 years, and was built to house eight sacred hairs of the Buddha. Its bell-shaped structure is covered in almost 60 metric tonnes of gold-leaf, and on top of the Pagoda there are gold and silver bells studded with

rubies, sapphires and topaz. The diamond orb is encrusted with 4,350 diamonds and crowned with a 76 carat diamond. Legend has it that two Burmese merchants travelled to India and met the Buddha under the sacred bodhi tree.

Overnight in Yangon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Yangon - Bagan: Site Tour*

Today we fly north to Bagan, where across 40 sq km stand thousands of pagodas and temples. Bagan was once the largest and most splendid city ever built in Burma and it was a rival to Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Its pure Hinayana Buddhism had no rituals, no sacrifices and no priests; only monks, vowed to poverty and meditation.

Upon arrival we'll begin our sightseeing program,* which will include several temples that are unique or important in some way. Many of the monuments are undergoing restoration, and may be either closed or obscured on a rotating basis, but there are plenty to choose from! Our program usually includes Sulamani Temple, restored after the 1975 earthquake, utilising brick and stone, with frescoes in the interior; and Ananda, as important as it is huge. Considered to be the best surviving masterpiece of Mon architecture, Ananda is the finest, largest, best-preserved and most revered of the Bagan temples. We'll aim to be at Shwesandaw Paya at the end of our day -- an excellent place from which to view the sunset.

* The exact order and content of our Bagan area sightseeing will likely vary depending on restorations, weather, group interest, and Tour Leader preference.

Overnight in Bagan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Bagan Area Tour*

Today we have a full day in the Bagan area, visiting some of the more important and picturesque monuments therein.

We will visit the Manuka temple, with its reclining Buddha image, which records a captive king's impression of life in prison; the fine stone carvings of Nanpaya Temple; Thatbyinnyu Temple, the tallest in Bagan; and Bupaya Pagoda (to name a few). We may also have time to travel to a viewpoint overlooking the Irrawaddy River.

Overnight in Bagan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Bagan - Mt Popa*

Today we travel by bus to the monastery at the summit of Mt Popa. On the way, we stop at one of the roadside mills where you may watch docile buffalo slowly circumnavigating the central stone, grinding palm seed into oil. This is a good opportunity to taste some 'jaggery', the local candy made from palm sugar.

Mt Popa is an incongruous extinct volcano that dominates the area. However, Popa's attraction today lies not so much in its geological aspect, but more in its religious and mystical attributes that are still prevalent. Popa is popularly recognized as an abode of many "Nats," or spirits of ancient ancestors, who dwell in various parts of the mountain. In the days of old, it also used to be referred to as the "Mountain of Spirits". The evidence of these beliefs is abundant in the form of Nat shrines, ceremonial offerings, annual representative festivals, and a never-ending stream of pilgrims. We will have time to ascend the hill on foot before continuing to our nearby hotel (Mt Popa Resort), which features spectacular views.

Overnight near Mt Popa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Mt Popa - Mandalay*

This morning we travel by bus to Mandalay, the "Golden City", founded in 1857 by King Mindon after a legend that told of the Lord Buddha's visit 2,400 years previously when he prophesied the founding of a holy city. It lies on the east bank of the Irrawaddy, about 805 km (500 miles) north of Yangon. It was Burma's last capital before it came under British rule. The magnificent Mandalay Palace was burned down during the Second World War and only a scale model remains in the palace grounds, which are surrounded by a moat. However, many pagodas and monasteries still stand.

Time permitting today (or tomorrow), we will stop at the U Bein Wooden Bridge (named after the former town mayor), constructed out of materials salvaged from the forsaken Ava Palace. The bridge, the longest made from teak in the world, is about three-quarters of a mile in length.

Overnight in Mandalay. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Mandalay: Amarapura*

This morning we drive to the ancient capital of Amarapura, the "city of immortality," described in its heyday as a microcosm of Burmese civilization. As a capital it was founded by King Bodawpaya in 1783, the year after he came to the throne. Bodawpaya died in 1819 and his grandson Bagyidaw shifted the capital back again to Ava in 1823. That was not the end of Amarapura though, for in 1841, during the reign of Tharrawaddy (the brother of Bagyidaw), it became the capital once more. Sixteen years later, with King Mindon in power, Amarapura was finally displaced by Mandalay.

Back in Mandalay we visit Bagaya Monastery with its myriad Buddha images and vast collection of various antiques. During our time in Mandalay, we will also visit Shwenadaw Monastery, Mandalay Palace, and see how gold leaf is produced.

Overnight in Mandalay. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Mandalay: Mingun*

Today we travel up the Irrawaddy River to Mingun and the Myatheindan Pagoda. The seven wavy terraces around the pagoda represent the seven mountain ranges around Mt Meru, while the five kinds of mythical monsters can be found in niches on each terrace level. Mingun has two remarkable objects which we see on our tour, both the brain-child of King Bodawpaya -- the Mingun Bell and the Pagoda.

In 1838 an earthquake struck and part of the building collapsed; today you can still see a huge fissure in the giant slab. Guarded by a pair of dilapidated brick chinthes, the Mingun Pagoda is truly a bizarre and incongruous sight. This may not have been the largest pagoda in the world, but it does have the world's largest uncracked bell, 14 times the size of that of St Paul's. It is possible to crawl inside, and pray that none of the entourage of giggling kids rings it while you're underneath! Not surprisingly, the bell fell off during the earthquake of 1838 and it lay on the ground until 1896 when it was re-mounted. It is now covered by a shelter open on all sides.

Overnight in Mandalay. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Mandalay - Heho - Inle Lake*

Today we fly from Mandalay to Heho from where we continue by road to Inle Lake via a stop in Kalaw where we do a quick town tour and visit a local market.

Inle Lake actually has two meanings: "little lake" and "four lake" (because there are four big villages on the lake, though 200 in all). People began migrating to the lake area as early as the 14th Century, completing their resettlement during the 18th Century. To survive, they became fishermen and developed their unique style of leg-rowing and catching fish in conical traps. Since the land fronting the lake belonged to the Shans, they were forced to build their homes and villages on the water itself.

Depending on the timing of today's flight, we may be able to accomplish some of our sightseeing program today upon arrival.

Overnight at Inle Lake. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Inle Lake Area*

This monring we have a boat excursion to Indein Village, located at the western side of the lake. Passing Nyaung Ohak Monastery and following a stair path lined with many hundreds of wooden columns, we reach the impressive Shwe Indein Pagoda complex. From the hillside we have great view over the lake area. On the way back to the boat, we walk through a romantic bamboo forest at the riverside.

We then return to Inle and have afternoon visist to Nga Phe Kyaung Monastery, a silver and goldsmith, observe cheroot making, as well as the blacksmith, cotton and silk weaving industries.

Overnight at Inle Lake. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Inle Lake & Kakku*

Today's day trip from Inle takes us deep into the Shan Hills to the hidden 'forest of temples' at Kakku. Travelling from the flatlands around the lake, we drive higher and higher into the hills, criss-crossing the railway line and passing through small villages inhabited to the Pa-Oh people. At Kakku, we are rewarded with a spectacle: more than 5,000 stupas from the 11th century rising high above the plain. We are able to wander amid these mysterious stupas in an area closed to visitors for many years.

In addition to visiting the temples, our local will introduce you to the customs and lives of the people as we pass thgrough nearby villages.

Return to Inle Lake.

Overnight at Inle Lake. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Inle Lake - Yangon*

Today we fly back to Yangon.

On arrival we'll accomplish any Yangon sightseeing missed during our first visit, such as the National Museum and other sites, such as the Sule Pagoda and / or Reclining Buddha.

Overnight in Yangon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Yangon - Mount Kyaiktiyo (Golden Rock)*

Today we travel by road to Mount Kyaiktiyo, the third most important Buddhist pilgrimage site in Burma after the Shwedagon Pagoda and the Mahamuni Pagoda. A glimpse of the "gravity defying" Golden Rock is believed to be enough of an inspiration for any person to turn to Buddhism. Balancing on the cliff top at its peak, this huge boulder, covered in gold, is without doubt one of the most magical destinations in Myanmar.

The legend associated with the pagoda is that the Buddha, on one of his many visits, gave a strand of his hair to Taik Tha, a hermit. The Hermit, who had tucked it in the tuft of his hair safely, in turn gave the strand to the King, with the wish that the hair be enshrined in a boulder shaped like the hermit's head. Kyaiktiyo Pagoda has become a popular pilgrimage and attraction. At the peak of the pilgrimage season (November to March), an atmosphere of devotion is witnessed at Kyaikhtiyo pagoda.

The latter part of our journey involves an 11km ride in an open truck with no top (be prepared for rain or sun!). After this point, there is a 4 km walk on a steep path which ascends 500m to the Golden Rock. Those who are not confident in their ability might consider travelling part of the the distance by 'palanquin' (sedan chair) for US$16, payable on the spot. Your Tour Leader will be aware of your suitability by this point and will do their best to advise on the best option for you.

Overnight in the vicinity of Mount Kyaiktiyo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Mount Kyaiktiyo - Yangon*

Today we travel by road back to Yangon with the balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Yangon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Departure*

Departure from Yangon.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.