

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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Today we see The Angkor! What? Yes, exactly! - March 24, 2023

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SUMMARY

You've heard of Bikram yoga? Today we did Bikram stairmaster/treadmill at the hot and steamy temples at and around Siem Reap. Up at 4:00 a.m. to meet our guide and got to Angkor Wat in the pitch dark (side benefit was good star-gazing!) We got primo seats to watch the sunrise over the main temple complex and then had a great guided tour. Also visited the ruins of Bayon temple, Ta Prohm (of *Tomb Raider* fame, and my favorite), and Banteay Kdei. Afternoon of relaxing in the pool and (surprise!) - halfway decent Mexican food and margaritas for dinner!

As predicted, we've reached the ABA (Anything but Asian) stage of vacation dining. - Karen

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DETAIL

[Prolog - Undoubtedly unnecessary for such a bright group such as y'all, but just in case: What's a Wat? No, it's not a unit of measure for lightbulb power consumption. It's a temple, here in these parts. Now back to our show.]

We wake at 4am. It's pitch black and will be for another two and a half hours. At 4:30 our guide Noy (as in "We're a-Noy-ed to be awake at this hour") picks us up. We're in a very nice Lexus and our driver's name is pronounced Tier (but spelled Tor). We warm up to him quickly for his habit of presenting us with a chilled, damp washcloth, and a cold bottle of water, every time we get back into the car. Even at 4:30 am it feels great.

Our target today four Wats, four temples, the first being the famous Angkor Wat. The plan is to be there when it opens, well before sunrise, and stake out our space, so when the sun does finally come up, we get the best pictures (if we're awake). After a short, quiet drive we're dropped off. We're at a turn in the road and what's in front of us looks like a metal bridge that's blocked off. We feel as if we're about to be part of a clandestine prisoner exchange.

I want to tell Noy that he'd accidentally left the flashlight on his phone on, but realize he has this on for us, so we don't trip. Where his flashlight doesn't shine it's pitch black. Karen instinctively looks skyward and sees lots of stars. There's no agricultural burning, that we can see, and the sky seems quite clear. The "metal bridge" we thought we saw is arches with lights attached. New year's is coming in a couple of weeks (2023 here) and this is in anticipation of the celebration.

We sit for a bit just at the entrance. It's not open yet. Around our necks we each have our entrance tickets, on lanyards, in plastic cases. Each ticket has instructions of what we can and mustn't do. There's a QR code and a our picture. We won't be selling these bad boys. It also says we'd paid US\$38 and that we can go into quite a few Wats.

After the gate opens up, and our credentials have been verified, we walk across the long, floating, temporary bridge. We're walking across a very wide moat protecting the Wat. The moat is 1.3 x 1.5 kilometers in size. And it's wide. We're not sure what, at the Wat, it's protecting, but anyone foolish enough to try is definitely going to get wet during an attack.

We follow the smartphone flashlight quite a ways, being aware of big stone structures on either side of us, but which we can't see in the dark. We're told they're libraries. The documents therein, back in the day, were written on leaves, animal skin, and stone tablets. We're sure they were happy to eventually get smart phones and the cloud.

Where we install ourselves we can start to see Angkor Wat off in the distance. It has five towers but for us one is obscured. Other tourists follow along and park themselves in lesser 'seats' than ours, on the stairway to a building facing the Wat. We hear chanting off in the distance. It's to wake up the younger monks. It goes on for quite a while. They must need a lot of help waking up.

Noy tells us that, per The Google, the sun rises at 6:06 am today, and we believe him. Of course, that's when the sun crosses the horizon, so when we can see it (above the Wat) it will be quite a few minutes later. Noy says others, not as clued in as we, will be here til just after 6:06 and then take off (and miss the best part).

The sunrise is very moving. We enjoy it and take lots of pictures. Eventually we head over to the reflecting pond for more pictures, and then inside to see all of the carvings. It really is amazing. It's huge. So many carvings and so many stories.

Apparently when the carvings were being done they would occasionally make a mistake, so they'd cut out a rectangular piece where the mistake was made, add in a replacement piece, and continue on. Like old-style White-Out. Later, when the looters arrived, they would see this block and say "AH HA! Here is where they hid the loot!!" and pry out the fixed carving, just to find nothing (but maybe some old-style glue) behind.

We tour more and more. So much up and down. To cause the worshipers crawl to the top on their hands and knees (the better to show penitence) the stairs are wicked steep. We're lucky to get up and down all with all our faculties intact. At one point my watch congratulates me for doing so many stairs.

Eventually we go to a second Wat (Bayon), and then a third (Ta Prohm). Each has its own story. For the second, the king who built it (er, had it built) didn't want to spend the money and time to get the good sand stone (by elephant and slave) the 40 KM from the local "Wat Stone Quarry", so they used less durable lava rock. It's weathered and stained something fierce. The third Wat is where they have the trees with the roots swallowing up entire buildings, it seems.

We stop for breakfast. Everything on the very long menu is between US\$3.50 and \$5. It's all stuff for lunch or dinner but they offer it for breakfast, why not? I have chicken pineapple fried rice and Karen has vegetable fried rice (same as mine but no chicken or pineapple).

Our fourth Wat (Banteay Kdei) is less famous but equally amazing. This is where Angelina Jolie filmed her "Laura Croft, tomb raider" movie, in that wholly impractical (but oh so sexy) outfit. Away from Cambodia, Angelina took not only credits for this movie but one of her adopted children, as well. [Karen says the third Wat, and not this fourth one, is the one where Ms. Jolie filmed that movie. I'm going to say she's right because 1) I want to stay happily married, and 2) I think she's right.]

Having gotten such an early start we're back at our hotel before noon and quickly in to the pool. The rest of the day is a blur of swimming and happy hour. For dinner we walk back to the hopping part of town and try to find a different French restaurant. It had relocated and so we settled for a Mexican place. \$6 margaritas and \$2 tequila shots. (We shan't say how many.)

Photos



Where we were dropped off to start our day. We had the uneasy feeling we were unknowingly a part of a prisoner swap.



Crossing the temporary floating bridge across the moat surrounding the Angkor Wat.



Awaiting the sunrise from our perch



The moment we've all been waiting for



Ditto, but this time from the reflecting
pond



Proof we were there



Sooo many doorways, each with a tall lentil
? sill ? to be stepped over



Stone-age equivalent of White-Out. Make
a mistake, chisel it out and put in a
replacement piece (and start over)



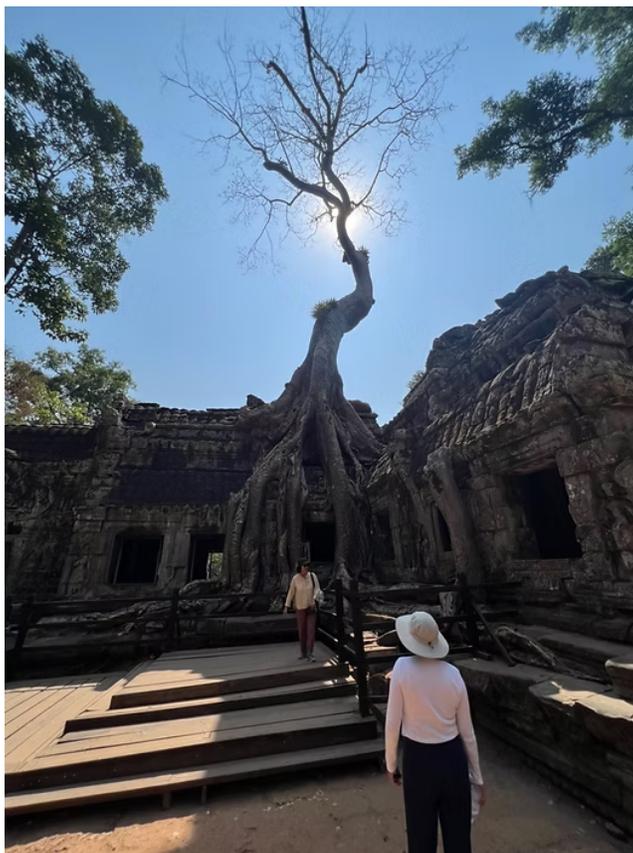
Turned stone balustrades. Not as easy as it looks, without power tools, and it doesn't look easy.



Part of where Angelina Jolie filmed Laura Croft: Tomb Raider

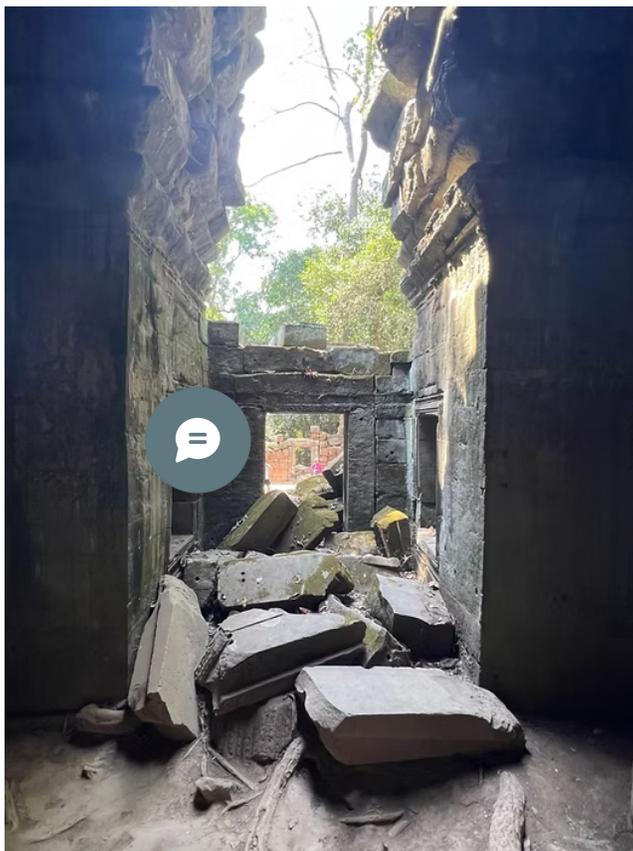


Some tree apparently wants its land back



FARNSNIENTE





We don't believe we actually caused this,
but hightailed it out of there quickly,
nonetheless



Many of the smaller 'rooms' we passed through had a funny, musty smell and lots of whitish splotches on the floor. Looking up we saw why.



Cool at last, cool at last, thank the pool,
cool at last.



Inexpensive foot massage or cheap way to feed piranha?



Getting ready for the New Year celebration (in two weeks). Woo Who!



Can't find that damn French restaurant?
Who cares??

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