

# ESCAPE FROM ANGKOR 逃出吳哥

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MARK JONES finds a way

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PHOTOGRAPHY GARY NG

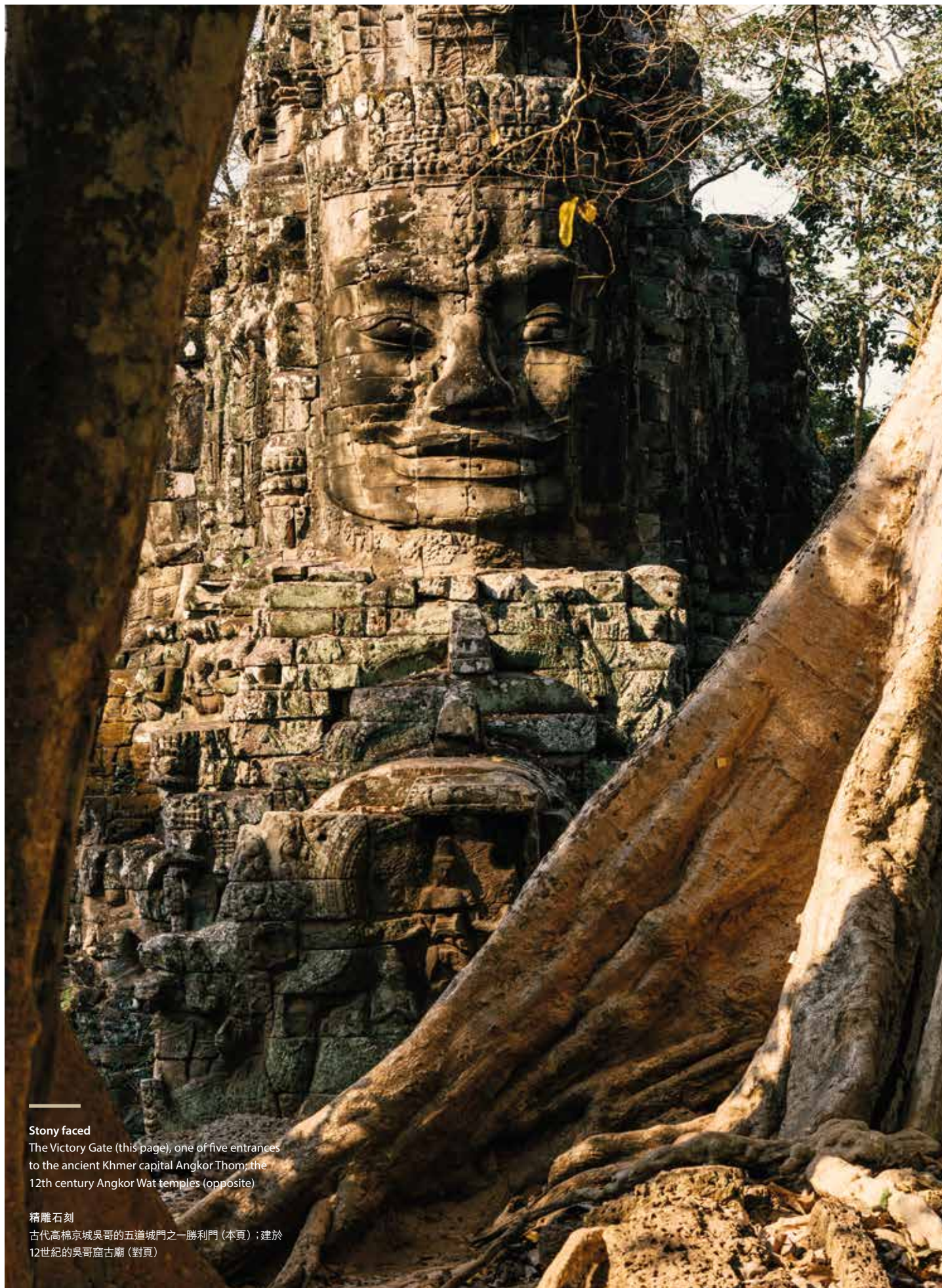
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Mark Jones 發現了避開遊客人潮，在靜謐的氣氛中細賞吳哥著名的廟宇的妙法

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Is it possible to see the famed temples of Angkor without the tourists?

## 逃出吳哥

# ESCAPE FROM ANGKOR



**Stony faced**  
The Victory Gate (this page), one of five entrances to the ancient Khmer capital Angkor Thom; the 12th century Angkor Wat temples (opposite)

精雕石刻  
古代高棉京城吳哥的五道城門之一勝利門(本頁)；建於12世紀的吳哥窟古廟(對頁)

The itinerary promised I'd get to see Siem Reap and the Angkor temples without the crowds. When I told friends and colleagues, they all made various verbal and non-verbal expressions of profound scepticism.

Some two million people visit Siem Reap every year; and people I met there thought the official figures vastly understated. If you had visited 25 years ago, as Cambodia began to open up to the outside world after two horrifying decades, you'd almost have had the place to yourself: annual tourist numbers were in the thousands. Now every backpacker in Asia visits, along with a cityful of tour buses.

But I did manage travel to Siem Reap like it was 1993. Here are the nine places I visited to do that.

#### 1 A WEBSITE

If we use a tour operator to put together these articles, we usually supply a link at the end of the piece. I'm putting About Asia ([aboutasiatravel.com](http://aboutasiatravel.com)) higher up because it was a section of its site called 'Angkor without the crowds' that first caught my eye. Over the days I spent with my guide, Pheakdey Sieng, it was uncanny how often we managed to leave just as the groups were arriving; and how much quality time I got to spend alone, even in Angkor Wat itself (see point nine). But there's no mystery. He and his team spend hours studying footfall figures and tailor the trip accordingly: canny, not uncanny.

About Asia is in the 'luxury' category. But 100 per cent of the profits from that luxury experience go to supporting education for this still-struggling and troubled country.

#### 2 A PADDY FIELD WEST OF THE CITY

The first part of the plan worked well by avoiding Angkor Wat altogether.

Phum Baitang ([zannierhotels.com/phumbaitang](http://zannierhotels.com/phumbaitang)) isn't in the thick of things. It lies a few kilometres west of Siem Reap, set in three hectares of working paddy fields (and the rice it produces is the finest I've tasted outside Japan). Oxen roam the paddies and lemongrass meadows, and if it weren't for the guests coasting along the raised wooden walkways on their bikes between spa, restaurant and luxe rooms, then sipping cocktails at sunset, you really could imagine yourself in a rural Cambodian village. Until you visit the real thing...

#### 3 A SANDY PATH IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

In the slow, hot country north of the airport, I picked up my ox cart. The two white oxen were waiting patiently, their large, floppy ears twitching inquisitively in the softening late afternoon sun.

I climbed into the back and sat on a rattan matt as we trundled on ancient wooden wheels along the scrubby, sandy paths.

The neighbourhood houses were surrounded by a market garden of banana, cashew, jackfruit, coconut, orange, pomelo and lime. We met a grandmother in a faded 'Burberry' shirt, who spends her days weaving coloured birds from dried palm leaves and welcoming the occasional visitor with melon juice. The whole scene in the midst of these quiet and plentiful fields felt bucolic and timeless. Then we learned that she had lost two children to illness and malnutrition during the Khmer Rouge days. That shadow still falls upon these fields.

#### 4 A DECKCHAIR IN THE GARDEN OF A TRADITIONAL VILLA

My cart took me to the huge West Baray reservoir. We sped across it in a low fisherman's motorboat. As I alighted, a man in a polo shirt gave me an ice-cold glass of champagne – not something most fishermen enjoy after a spell on the water.

And here was Kouk Tnout, a proper Angkor village: barefoot toddlers in football shorts and party dresses; people gossiping on plastic stools outside their wood and rattan-roofed huts; rice cakes on the griddle; a bar, sort of, with cheap whisky and mineral water on improvised shelves; a shop, kind of, with a glass cabinet randomly stuffed with trainers, flip-flops and socks.

We crossed the river and into the garden of the Villa Chandara ([villachandara.com](http://villachandara.com)),

**當**

我告訴朋友和同事，我的旅遊行程保證可以避開擠擁的遊客，靜心細賞暹粒和吳哥的古廟時，他們要不是高呼難以置信，就是一臉疑惑。

目前每年到訪暹粒的旅客約有200萬人，但我在當地遇見的人都認為，官方數據遠較實際數字低。25年前，柬埔寨在經歷了20年的恐怖歲月後，開始對外開放，全年遊客人數僅數千人。但是現在所有到亞洲旅遊的背包客也會到此一遊，還有多不勝數的旅遊巴士載來大量旅行團遊客。

不過，我的確能夠如同重返1993年一樣閒遊暹粒。以下是九個我前往一遊的地方：

#### 1 網站

如果本雜誌的遊記行程是由旅行社安排的話，我們通常會於文末提供一個連結。但我卻將About Asia ([aboutasiatravel.com](http://aboutasiatravel.com)) 放在最前面，是因為旅行社的網站上有一個名為「Angkor without the crowds」(沒有擁擠人潮的吳哥)的欄目，引起我的注意。在數天的行程中，導遊Pheakdey Sieng帶我遊覽不同景點，我們不但往往在旅行團抵埗時已完成參觀離開，甚至獨享許多珍貴時刻，就連到吳哥窟參觀亦不例外(見第九點)。實在不可思議。理由其實很簡單：他和團隊花許多心思研究遊客的流量，並花同樣多的心思為我度身編排行程，如此而已，絕對沒有什麼不可思議的法術。

About Asia提供的旅遊服務雖屬「奢華」類別，但收益全數用作支援柬埔寨教育，為這個仍在困境中掙扎求存的國家出一分力。

#### 2 城西的一片稻田

計劃的第一部分完全避開吳哥窟，進展非常順利。

Phum Baitang酒店([zannierhotels.com/phumbaitang](http://zannierhotels.com/phumbaitang))遠離鬧市，位於暹粒以西數公里外，四周是佔地三公頃的優質稻田，生產的稻米是我在日本以外嚐過最美味的。放眼可見公牛在稻田和香茅草原上漫步，如非看見賓客在水療中心、餐廳和豪華客房之間的高架木板小徑上悠閒地踏單車，或於日落時分淺呷雞尾酒，還會以為身處柬埔寨的鄉郊農村。直到真正踏足農村……才知道完全是另一回事。

#### 3 郊野的沙礫小徑

在暹粒機場以北的郊區，炎熱的天氣令一切顯得懶洋洋。我坐上牛車，兩頭白色公牛耐心地等待著，在傍晚的柔和陽光下，牠們豎起巨大而柔軟的雙耳，彷彿在細聽我的動靜。

我坐上車後方的藤製座墊，老舊的木車輪在灌木叢夾道的沙礫小徑上緩緩轉動。

周圍的房屋被滿植香蕉、腰果、大樹菠蘿、椰子、香橙、柚子和青檸的直銷蔬果環抱，我們遇上一位身穿褪色「Burberry」恤衫的老太太，她以風乾的棕櫚葉織成彩色小鳥打發時間，偶有遊客到訪，便以蜜瓜汁款客。此情此景，真是一幅歲月靜好、現世安穩的田園圖。可是後來我們知道，老太太有兩個孩子於赤柬時期因疾病和營養不良逝世，昔日的陰霾依然籠罩著這片平靜的田園。

#### 4 傳統別墅庭園裡的躺椅

牛車帶我前往旅行團絕跡的West Baray水庫參觀。我們乘搭漁民的快艇，在湖面上飛馳；下船時，一個身穿反領T恤

Photo: Mark Jones



Field of dreams  
Phum Baitang is a century-old farmhouse turned resort, surrounded by rice paddies, just outside Siem Reap

田園之樂  
Phum Baitang位於暹粒郊外，是由上百年歷史的農莊改建而成的度假村，四周有大片稻田圍繞



**Roots manoeuvre**  
Clockwise from top left: a cruise on the moat of Angkor Thom; Ta Prohm Temple; an oxen cart; Artisans Angkor

**文化根源**  
左上圖起順時針：在吳哥城的護城河上遊船；塔普倫廟；一輛牛車；吳哥的手工藝匠人



**DISCOVER SIEM REAP**  
Cathay Dragon flies to Siem Reap from Hong Kong four times a week

**探索暹粒**  
國泰港龍航空設有由香港飛往暹粒的航班，每周有四班

a house rebuilt into an idyllic country restaurant run by About Asia. A trio playing *roneat ek* (a Khmer xylophone), *khimm* (a hammered dulcimer) and *khloy* (bamboo flute) were in the middle of a jam session. I parked myself on a wooden deckchair, watched the villagers coming back from the fields on their bikes with their oxen in tow and thought the world was all right after all.

**5 TA NEI: THE BARK OF A TREE AND THE WALL OF A TEMPLE**  
Picture the Angkor temples and you see those huge castellated terraces rising above the canopy. But the close-ups are just as eloquent. In the ruins of the Ta Nei jungle temple I took a shot of a strangler fig bark, scoured and lumpy like rough plasterwork, the aerated crust of the basalt walls and the faded ridges of the ornate carvings. History can be tactile, too.

The forest temples are the storybooks of Angkor and the frontispiece is that gothic image of rock-hard tree root tentacles clamped to carved temple walls. Maybe your story is a romantic poem about the futility of past empires or a Hollywood blockbuster about an aristocrat's daughter on a fantastical adventure; maybe you're Percy Shelley or Angelina Jolie, maybe it's *Ozymandias* or *Tomb Raider*; or maybe you're just a

tourist lost in a forest – but the sight of those strangled walls makes you shiver.

## 6 A WORKSHOP ON STUNG THMEY STREET

There are lots of craft shops in Siem Reap, but not much of the 'craft' is made by Cambodians, let alone for them. A very honourable exception is Artisans Angkor ([artisansdangkor.com](http://artisansdangkor.com)). You can tour the airy, busy workshops where they create wonderful objects in silver, soapstone, lacquer, silk and wood. The store is a delight: the souks of Isfahan, Iran, aside, this is the best place I've ever spent my tourist dollars.

## 7 A FACE AMONG THE TREES

You can always gauge how total a totalitarian ruler is by the number of images of themselves they like to plaster around the land. It's as true now as it was in the 12th century when Jayavarman VII had his physiognomy chiselled 216 times into the Bayon temple. Big King really is watching you.

There's something cartoonlike about the place, with the macaques lounging around in the grass and dead leaves at the foot of the temple. The long frescoes of daily life, the fishing, the battles and courting are more affecting – like reading a daily newspaper rather than a government proclamation.

It's a more sinister experience coming across Big J on the gate in the quiet south gate of Angkor Thom. (You thought you'd escaped him here in the forest and remote gullies. Think again.)

## 8 A LILY PAD ON A LAKE AT DUSK

There aren't many boats on the moat of Angkor Thom at dusk. The oarsman points his carved mythical bird-headed prow to the west, you accept an offer of a gin and tonic as you skim languidly through the lily pads, the dragonflies dancing in and out of the rays piercing the dark canopy of trees.

And finally...

## 9 A VERY FAMILIAR VIEW AT AN UNFAMILIAR TIME

It's 4:45am and the sky is as black as my mood (I like my sleep). The sounds of a wedding party that's been going on all week are the only evidence of humanity as we gingerly enter the grounds of Angkor Wat. We stop at a spit of grass and sand, across the moat on the right side of the temple. Then, in twos and threes and sixes, other footsteps approach. The

sleepy words of a dozen people make a kerfuffling babble, interrupted by the hopeful clicking of phones and the unfolding of tripods.

It's still pitch black. I take one of those hopeful shots. In the centre of the frame, there's a faint irregular line, like a crease in velvet. The crease becomes a line of trees set against a purpling background. The purples turn to pinks and blues and what you thought were conifers become the cone-like towers of Asia's most celebrated temples. The lake in front now reflects the turrets and spiky palms: swallows and parakeets begin to swoop and caw.

And there, at last, are the lotus towers of Angkor Wat. In the hungover light, lined along the water's edge is a haphazard crowd, like the tired aftermath of a music festival. On the other side of the bridge, it's more like a stadium crowd – ranks upon ranks. There, at last, are all the people you haven't seen all week. ■

的男人遞上一杯冰涼香檳，這是大部分在水上辛勞工作的漁民無福消受的奢侈。

我們抵達地道的吳哥村莊 Kouk Trout。赤腳的幼童身穿足球短褲和派對連身裙；居民坐在膠凳上，在藤製屋頂的木屋門前閒話家常；米糕堆放在煎盤上；在自家湊合的酒架上陳列著廉價的威士忌和礦泉水，就成了酒吧；而所謂的商店，就是在玻璃櫃裡隨意堆滿運動鞋、人手拖和短襪。

我們過河後，走進滿眼翠綠的花園，來到 Villa Chandara ([villachandara.com](http://villachandara.com))。這裡原是一所古老大宅，後來被改建成洋溢田園氣息的郊外餐廳，由 About Asia 經營。三位樂手正在即興演奏 *roneat ek* 高棉木琴、*khimm* 揚琴和 *khloy* 竹笛。我坐在木製躺椅上，望著村民從農田踏單車回家，後面拖著牛的情景，覺得世界依然美好。

## 5 塔內寺一大樹的枝幹和寺廟的牆壁

提起吳哥的寺廟，不期然就會想起層層疊疊的巍峨建築高逾樹冠的景色，原來近看亦同樣精采。我在被大樹包圍的塔內寺遺跡內，拍攝盤根錯節的榕樹，老樹光禿結瘤的枝幹猶如粗糙的灰泥，還有氧化的玄武岩石牆和褪色的華麗浮雕，為歷史帶來真實而鮮活的觸感。

隱沒於叢林深處的寺廟有如一本吳哥的故事書，卷首的影像必定是猶如石般堅硬的樹根，延伸四散，牢牢抓緊精雕細琢的寺廟牆壁，帶著哥德式的陰沉氣氛。無論故事內容是雪萊筆下描述古代帝國衰敗的浪漫十四行詩《Ozymandias》，或是 Angelina Jolie 化身貴族千金展開奇幻探險旅程的荷李活賣座猛片《盜墓者羅拉》，抑或只是在森林裡迷路的旅人心聲，古樹吞

噬牆壁的景象，絕對會令你內心感到戰慄。

## 6 Stung Thmey街上的作坊

暹粒有許多工藝品店，但由柬埔寨人製作的道地手作並不多，為當地人而造的手工藝品更罕見。因此 Artisans Angkor ([artisansdangkor.com](http://artisansdangkor.com)) 可說是非常難能可貴的例外，匠人在開揚而繁忙的作坊裡，以銀、皂石、漆繪、絲綢和木材製作出色的精品，這是在伊朗伊斯法罕的露天市集以外，我最樂意大破慳囊的好去處。

## 7 樹林裡的一張面孔

獨裁者在其治下的疆土張貼的個人肖像數目愈多，反映其獨裁程度愈高，這準則在現代或12世紀同樣通用。當時的柬埔寨國王闍耶跋摩七世，命人將其頭像雕刻於巴戎廟，一共有216個之多，讓大王時刻監視著你。

我看見獼猴在巴戎廟腳下的綠草和枯葉上閒坐，與廟宇的莊嚴氣氛有點格格不入。而描繪釣魚、戰爭和求愛等日常生活畫面的長壁畫則相當動人，彷彿在閱讀報章，而並非政治宣言。

當穿過大吳哥城恬靜的南門時，城門上的「大王」俯視眾生，那感覺才更陰森可怕。如果你以為在森林和偏遠的河谷就能逃出其魔掌，實在大錯特錯。

## 8 日暮湖上的荷葉

日落西山時，吳哥護城河上只有小艇三兩。艇家將其刻有神秘鳥頭像的艇頭轉向西面，我接過一杯氈酒加湯力，小艇徐徐飄過荷葉之間，落日餘暉穿透幽暗的樹頂灑下來，蜻蜓在光線之間穿梭飛舞。

最後……

## 9 陌生時刻裡的熟悉情景

凌晨4時45分。無法窩在床上呼呼大睡的我，心情就如天色一樣陰沉。我們躡手躡足地走進吳哥窟，附近有個舉行了一周的婚禮派對，是黑暗中唯一可聞的人聲。寺廟右邊的護城河對岸，有一片長滿綠草的沙洲，我們就待在那裡。接著，三五成群的腳步聲自遠而近，約有十多人聚在一起，交談的聲音有如夢囈，氣氛開始變得鬧哄哄，再夾雜著用電話拍照和打開三腳架的聲音。

天色仍然極暗。我拍了一張頗滿意的照片：畫面中央隱約可見一道不規則的線條，像絲絨布上的皺痕。這道皺痕是一整排樹木，映襯漸呈紫色的天空。霞光由紫色漸變為粉紅和藍色，照出「松柏」的真面目，原來是這個亞洲最著名寺廟建築群中的錐形尖塔。前方的湖泊倒映出角樓和尖葉棕櫚樹的影子；燕子和長尾鸚鵡從樹上俯衝而下，放聲啼叫。

吳哥窟蓮花塔的景致，終於展現眼前。在模糊不清的光線中，湖邊的人群隨意佇立，猶如搖滾音樂節散場後疲憊不堪的樂迷；橋的另一邊是重重排列的人群，就像擠在體育館裡的觀眾。他們正是我整個星期以來都不曾遇上的遊客。■