

Cambodia

With ancient temples, idyllic beaches, tropical jungles and flowing waterfalls, Cambodia impresses on several levels. But what about its spas? We sent Mark Smith on a spa hunt, Asian style.

Located right in the middle of Vietnam and Thailand, Cambodia has been a natural stopover for backpackers heading between the two countries for decades. But new boutique hotels, funky bars and reputable restaurants have altered the lay of the land, attracting a different type of holidaymaker, with an appetite for Cambodia – and Cambodia alone. More and more visitors are coming

to admire the awe-inspiring temples of Angkor Wat, getting lost in its creative ambition and spiritual devotion, with hotels, restaurants, bars and cafes opening as a result. From large heritage properties with royal connections to boutique places with quirk and charm, you'll find it all here.

Twin Angkor Wat or Phnom Penh with The Southern Islands and you've got a recipe for a holiday of a lifetime. Endless stretches of soft white sand, hammocks swaying in the breeze, the pitter-patter of

raindrops on the roof of your thatch bungalow as you enjoy a Cambodian massage...

But it's the country's capital, Phnom Penh that has received the lion's share of investment, leading the way with increased air routes, International restaurants (some with Michelin stars) and luxury hotels from prestigious brands like Raffles and Sofitel. And where you find a luxury hotel, you'll also find a decent spa. How decent, though?

Read on...



Phum Baitang Siem Reap

» First impressions

After a 15-hour flight, the sight of green rice paddies coming into view as we neared Phum Baitang was exactly what the doctor ordered. Designed to replicate a traditional Cambodian village, this luxury all-villa resort is made up of a series of traditional wooden houses built on stilts. Set in eight acres of lush tropical gardens, all you can hear is the gentle sound of the breeze rustling through the trees and the tuneful hum of tropical birds.

'After a day wandering around the nearby temples of Angkor Wat, Phum Baitang is a stylish retreat worth returning to again and again.'

Look up and marvel at those lush paddies (the resort harvests its own rice for the restaurants), sit under a swaying palm tree or say hello to the resident water buffalo. After a day wandering around the nearby temples of Angkor Wat, Phum Baitang is a stylish retreat worth returning to again and again.

Did we mention that Angella Jolie is a regular guest? If it's good enough for her...

» What's on offer

All 45 individual villas are as chic as accommodation gets. Handcrafted in local wood, interiors are calming and neutral, with bare-wood floors, soft linens and hand-selected antiques. Bathrooms require a special mention with free standing baths,

walk-in showers, double sinks and organic, hand-made Phum Baitang toiletries. Modern touches include flat screen TVs, fully-stocked minibars and Nespresso machines. Take your first cup of coffee of the day out onto the terrace and watch as resident geckos scale the walls.

You can borrow bikes to get around the resort - we used them to reach the refreshing 50-metre infinity edge pool whenever the tropical heat got too much. After a swim, relax on a sun lounger, cocktail in hand, or grab a spot at the Bay Phsar restaurant, which is where breakfast is also served.

The spa, aptly named Spa Temple, has been designed in keeping with Angkor Wat - the same motifs from the façade of the main temple can be seen replicated here. Inside, the spa has muted tones, polished floors and walls, antique furniture and soft lighting.

» Tell us about your treatment(s)

I tried the Touch of Cambodia Massage (80 minutes, £50) in a modern and spacious treatment room, where I remained fully clothed throughout. In this massage, deep, rhythmic pressure is used to ease tension in the legs, back, shoulders and arms.

The treatment began with a refreshing foot cleanse and scrub using salt and fresh lime.

Lying face down, my therapist then applied warm compresses filled with lime leaves and lemongrass through my clothes to relax the muscles in preparation for a vigorous massage. At different stages of the treatment, my therapist would sit or kneel directly on the bed to apply more pressure where needed.

The massage on my back and legs was sturdy and effective, and the procedure was repeated on my front after half an hour. A blissful head massage and a ginger tea in reception ended this glorious treatment, which made me feel lighter than air.

» Food facts

Dining is a delight at Phum Baitang - breakfast like the locals and try the noodle soup (which is more refreshing in the tropical heat than it sounds).

Chefs cook individual dishes for guests at Bay Phsar in the evenings, while Hang Bay features top international cuisine, as well as local favourites. Don't leave without sampling the local speciality Fish Amok, a dish made with fresh water fish from nearby Tonle Sap. Baked in coconut milk and spices, it's both light and fragrant. There's a good wine menu on offer, too - and even better cocktails.

» Who do you think would like it?

Foodies will love the cooking classes which include a trip to a local market and a wander around the garden to select ingredients to cook in the resort's kitchen.

Design fans: Phum Baitang will appeal to modern design aficionados.

» Don't miss

The boutique: exclusively-designed products and signature homewares are on sale here.

Sunsets from the cocktail lounge: these are almost as impressive as the sunrise at Angkor Wat but without the crowds.

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