

*Cambodia*  
Calling

LINDSAY YAP enjoys a weekend getaway in a newly revamped property in Siem Reap.

I've always loved staying at smaller hotels. I feel more like a guest (and more like I'm on vacation!) rather than one of hundreds jostling in buffet lines and swimming pools. During my recent stay at the 80-room FCC Angkor, I was reminded of that wonderful feeling.

### The Stay

This historic property recently went through a makeover and is now managed by AVANI Hotels & Resorts. It's vibrant and beautifully decorated while maintaining plenty of old charm; it was once the home of the French colonial governor and then the Foreign Correspondents' Club. I was pleasantly surprised at how quiet and peaceful it was despite being in the middle of the city.

I stayed in a Deluxe Courtyard room looking out to the saltwater pool. The room was nicely spacious for two, with a tasteful décor of warm hues, whitewashed walls and wooden furniture. I loved the geometric floor tiles, which were



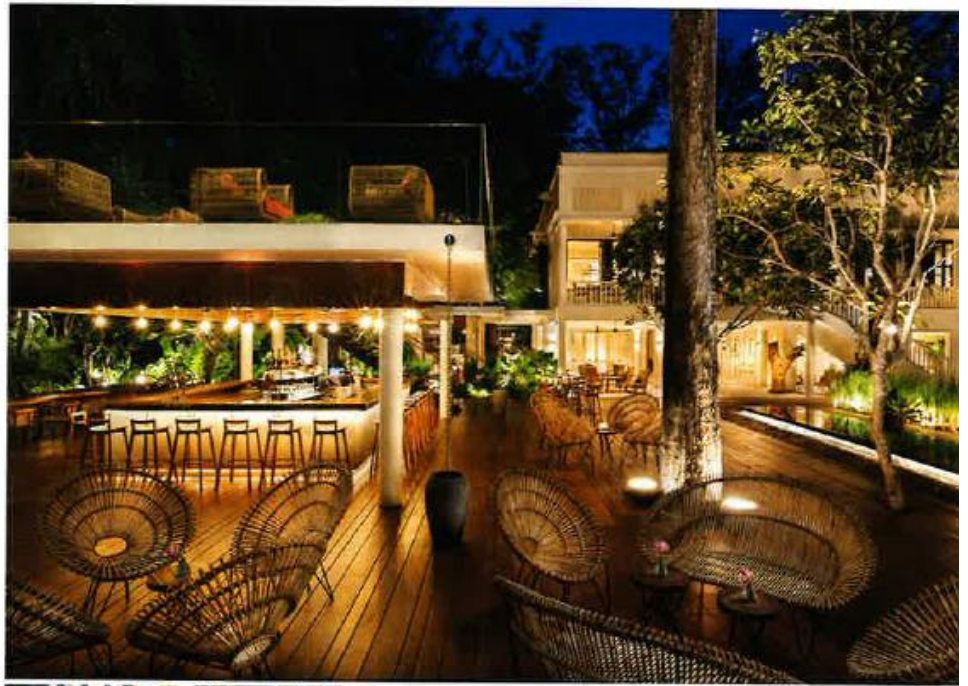
replicated on the bathroom feature walls. Sliding aside the louvred French doors behind the bed revealed a pretty marble countertop with a copper sink, and a walk-in shower and toilet at the sides. Special touches around the room included a vintage typewriter and rotary dial phone (yes, a working one!), paying tribute to the property's past. Outside the room was a small porch with a table and two chairs.

Not sure where to visit in town? The hotel concierge can offer suggestions and help you organise activities, from a tour of Angkor Wat to a cruise on the Tonlé Sap.

### Eats & Drinks

Breakfast is served each day at The Mansion, the hotel's all-day restaurant located in the original governor's mansion. (You can also choose to have it sent to your room.) On my first morning, I decided to sit at The Mansion's outdoor space overlooking the street and Siem Reap River. The menu has everything you'd want, including cereal, pancakes, eggs and the works, along with local dishes such as Khmer rice porridge. Dishes are made to order, and you can order as many items and mix and match as you like (I opted for sausage, eggs and pancakes!). A basket of Danishes was also brought to the table for me to choose from. As I dug into my yummy breakfast, I looked out onto the street, and watched people and *tuk-tuks* go by.

The Mansion serves lunch and dinner too, and they're equally as good. My recommended starter is the southern fried chicken wings, while my favourite main was the sea bass fillet served with Lyonnaise potatoes and a Grenobleise sauce – well cooked and beautifully flaky. There's a nice selection of desserts, too, including *crème brûlée*, sticky date pudding and passionfruit sorbet. If you enjoy your drinks, drop by Scribe, the hotel bar that whips up cocktails, craft beers, wines and sharing plates.



### Temple Time

What's a trip to Siem Reap without visiting the famous temples of Angkor? With more than 500 known buildings (and others that are yet to be discovered), Angkor Archaeological Park sprawls across more than 400 square kilometres. I chose to do a half-day tour, giving me just enough time to explore Angkor Wat and Ta Prohm. If you want to leisurely explore all the temples, though, you'll need to set aside more than a day.

My knowledgeable and animated guide Bunna covered everything, from the stories behind the handcrafted wall carvings (battles between gods and demons, and more) to other interesting facts, such as how the temples were built. It was a great insight into the beliefs and traditions of the Cambodian people and the country's past.



Bunna also acted as my personal photographer. Having led Angkor tours for the past 13 years, you can trust him to know all the good spots for a nice shot! This wasn't my first time visiting the temples, but I didn't feel bored at any point – there was so much to see and learn about.

After exploring the temples, I had lunch at Sister Srey Café, a social enterprise started by two Australian sisters. The popular joint serves local and Western fare (including gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian options) and is known for its coffee. A portion of the profits go towards supporting the work of APOPO, a non-profit organisation that clears landmines in the country.

### Circus Fun

Want something to do after dinner? Catch a show at Phare, The Cambodian Circus. Profits go towards supporting performing arts students at Phare Ponleu Selpak, an arts school in Battambang and students are offered employment opportunities after they graduate. Phare's circus performers all studied at the school and trained for more than 10 years.

There are various productions that are on rotation, so even if you've gone before there's a high chance a different one is showing. I saw *Khmer Metal*, and it was nothing like what I expected. It was a refreshingly edgy and lighthearted story set in a local bar where a guy and a girl fight over the same guy. Enough said! The



performers were incredibly talented; they had us laughing at their expressions and dialogue one moment and holding our breaths the next. I also liked the mix of old and new instruments – for example, a rock-and-roll drum kit being played alongside a *roneat ek*, or traditional Khmer xylophone. There's also something about watching a show in a big-top tent that makes the experience all the more fun. Definitely something to make time for.

### Shopping & Spa

Another great place to visit is Kandal Village, a lovely neighbourhood with galleries, cafes, shops and spas in French Colonial-style shophouses. During my visit, I got to meet Nat and Terry, the friendly owners of TRIBE Cambodia, an art gallery and bar. The retired Londoners moved to Cambodia in 2018 and set up the gallery with the aim of empowering local artists and promoting Cambodian art. Some ways they offer help include funding art scholarships and teaching artists practical business know-how. They're doing great work, so pop by if

you have the chance! While there, Nat also took me to check out Coconut Alley, a nearby passageway filled with beautiful street art by some of the gallery's artists.

On my last morning, I returned to the enclave for a massage at Frangipani Spa – who can say no to a spa sesh? The treatments came highly recommended and I wasn't disappointed. My aromatherapy massage had me feeling great for the rest of the day and was the perfect end to my time in Siem Reap.

### FACT FILE

**Getting There:** SilkAir and Jetstar fly direct to Siem Reap International Airport, which is 20 minutes from the city centre.

**Angkor Tours:** Contact Bunna at [bunnalean@gmail.com](mailto:bunnalean@gmail.com).

**FCC Angkor:** To make a booking and for more info, visit [avanihotels.com/angkor-siem-reap](http://avanihotels.com/angkor-siem-reap).

