



**វិទ្យាស្ថានសភាកម្ពុជា**  
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## **THE PROMOTION OF CULTURAL TOURISM: PROGRESS, DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND CHALLENGES AT KOMPONG THOM AND PRAEH VIHEAR PROVINCES**

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## 1 Introduction

Tourism, both cultural and national, has been determined as “Green Gold” by the Royal Government of Cambodia as this sector is an important part of the green economy and has been a leading source of employment and economic growth, contributing to around 12 percent of gross domestic product in 2016 [1, p. iii] (travel and tourism). Tourism revenues also play an important role for social benefits as they can help preserve cultural, historical and environmental assets [2]. According to the Tourism Strategic Development Plan 2012-2020, cultural tourism is prioritized for Cambodian tourism development along with other tourism sub-sectors beneficial for social development[1]. Approximately 80 percent of Cambodia’s tourism sector is comprised of cultural tourism, given the thousands of ancient temples located within the country[3]. Cultural tourism contributes not only to economic development but also to local community empowerment and regional integration [3]. Cultural tourism has become a fundamental pillar of Cambodia’s tourism development and is also one, among other sectors, contributing to poverty reduction[3, 4]in Cambodia through job creation in the country. The number of international tourist arrivals increased from 2.5 million in 2010, to about 5 million in 2016 [1, 3], a 5 percent increase compared to 2014. Meanwhile, tourism receipts rose from US\$1.8 billion to US\$3.2 billion in 2010 and 2016, respectively [5].

This significant increase indicates that Cambodia has had success adopting the Tourism Development Strategic Plan 2012-2020. However, while some cultural tourism sites have made substantial progress in terms of both social and economic contributions, some others lag behind due to the lack of support, participation and strategic attention. To be precise, while Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear province are endowed with ancient temples to attract visitors, the promotion of the sector remains challenging. Therefore, the study attempts to review the performance and remaining challenges of cultural tourism specifically in Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear provinces. However, where the data and information is not available, the review takes into account the country context.

## 2 The performance and progress of cultural tourism in the targeted provinces

### 2.1 Kompong Thom Province (Sambour Prey kuk Temple)

According to the population census in 2008, the population of Kompong Thom province was 631,409 persons, equal to 4.7% of the total population of Cambodia[6]. The province has a variety of natural resources including fertile land and an abundant water supply, enabling it to develop various agricultural crops such as rice, cashew nuts and peanuts as well as rubber. The province also has significant tourism potential in attracting national and international tourists to its exotic lakes, rivers, forests, mountains and a number of significant Angkorian sites with ancient temples like Sambour Prei Kuk and Prasat Andet temples[6]. Kompong Thom province attracted 203,525 tourists (18,180 international and 185,345 domestic tourists) in 2016 [7].

Moreover, tourism activity in Kompong Thom province is to be developed based on natural, cultural, and historical resources in Sambor Prei Kuk temples and other sites in the province. According to the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), Sambor Prei Kuk (Ishanavarpura) was constructed in the early seventh century during the reign of King Ishanavarman I[8, 9]. This temple was on the tentative agenda for world heritage designation since 1992[8, 10], and was inscribed to UNESCO's World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee during the meeting held in Krakow, Poland on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Table 1 shows that the number of tourists visits to these cultural tourism sites in the province keep increasing year by year. The increasing number of tourists helps promote a positive image of provincial tourism development.

Table 1: Number of Tourists Visited Sambor Prey Kuk Temple from 2011-2016

Number of Tourists in Sambor Prey Kuk from 2011-2016						
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Domestic Tourists	660	n.a	n.a	3,865	7,103	108,699

International tourists	205	n.a	n.a	2,033	3,459	16,301
Total	865	n.a	n.a	5,898	10,562	125,000

Source: Annual Report of Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts: 2011, 2014-2016[11] and see also Dap newspaper, More than 120,000 national and international tourists visit Sambor Prei Kuk Temple in 2016, 2017[7].

### Community-Based Tourism

Tourism activity in Kompong Thom is developed based on the natural, cultural, and historical resources found in Sambor Prey Kuk, which is one of the main tourist attractions in Kompong Thom and its surrounding areas within the province. Active participation of local communities in these sites can contribute to conservation management through adopting protective environmental activities as well as providing secure income for local people derived from hosting tourists.

Sambor Prey Kuk (SPK) Conservation and Development Community is a community-based tourism project, consisting of 600 members in 7 villages which focuses on protecting the community and the sites and selling tourism-related services to generate income. The project was first set up by the World Food Program in 1998, and later implemented by Waseda University from Japan with the approval by the provincial governor and collaboration with the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). With the target to promote tourism activities with the overall goal to reduce poverty in the commune, GTZ has extended the partnership to the private sector to jointly improve the services and promote the attractions of the community to the tourism market. This has resulted in the establishment of the Isanborei Tourism Project.

The Isanborei Community Tourism Project is an informal group of tourist service providers based in Sambor District. The project is a cooperation program between GTZ and Khiri Reach Foundation, with the following targets:

- To promote the development of community-based tourism in Cambodia;
- To increase the number of visitors and their average length of stay in Sambor Prey Kuk; and

- To provide information to tourists and the local and international tourism industry.

The goals of this group are to attract tourists to the Sambor area and to provide livelihood to local villagers. The project plans to develop Sambor Prey Kuk as a new cultural destination in Cambodia which shows a different aspect from existing destinations.

### Collaboration

Waseda University, Japan: The university started a major research project on the structure of Sambor Prey Kul temple in 1998, and later began working with the Kompong Thom Department of Culture and Fine Arts, to started sustainable maintenance work and the discovery of more temple sites. The project has also focused on a feasibility study on three main areas: research, preservation and documentation designed for future restoration operations. The project continues to work on conservation and restoration to address the damage of several main parts of the temple threatened by such things as walls leaning, soil sinking and cracking of the structure.

German Technical Cooperation: GTZ-PSP adopts a participatory approach to explore the development potential of tourism in at the provincial and community level in Kompong Thom, in which Sambor Prei Kuk is taken as a good example of a community based initiative. The program supported by the GTZ-PSP includes training for local tour guides, establishment of a handicraft hut, and community based tourism (CBT) at Sambor Prei Kuk through a Public-Private Partnership, covering CBT (Community Based Tourism) service training, development of CBT products, and agreements for investment and promotion activities. Other support includes the establishment of local service networks and links between tour operators and the Cambodian Community-based Ecotourism Network (CCBEN).

Khiri Reach: the Kiri Reach Projects centers on local communities and conservation, aiming at helping the disadvantaged to improve their living conditions. As part of the projects, Kiri Reach's role in CBT project at Sambor Prey Kuk is to help develop tourism as a mean to reduce poverty and preserve the cultural heritage for the local people by providing support through marketing, quality control and technical advice include training, developing a homestay program, and creating cultural exchange activities.

Cambodia Community Based Ecotourism Network (CCBEN): the CCBEN is the only ecotourism network in Cambodia created to serve, support, and promote community conservation, poverty alleviation, and capacity building. CCBEN works with national and local conservation and development organizations, academic institutions, and private companies/travel agencies as members, and has implemented projects related to capacity building and quality assurance and marketing of CBT products.

Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) [12]: JFPR Project for Improving Market Access for the Poor in Central Cambodia 2011-2014 successfully demonstrated the benefits of pro-poor tourism, the projection of a highly valuable cultural heritage site, and protection of the environment[12, 13].The project is being implemented by the Cambodian Ministry of Tourism in Phnom Penh and a multi Sector Project Implementing Team in the province which aims at enhancing poverty reduction in 11 primary villages near and around Sambor Prey Kuk temple[12].

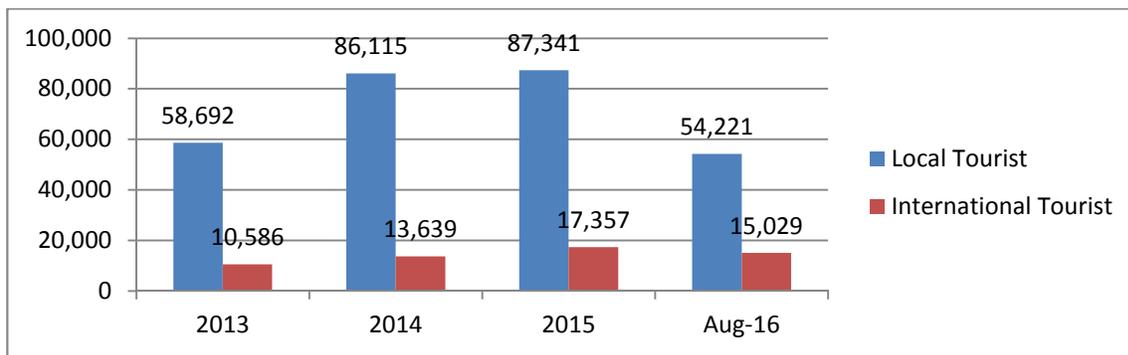
The purpose of the Sambor Prey Kuk project is to increase incomes and create more jobs for local poor families through product establishment and the sale of Khmer handicrafts and foods in the locality[12].The project has close collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, and Fine Arts, WASEDA University of Japan and local communities to ensure that market infrastructure does not negatively impact the adjacent landholders, the communities' use of riverside swimming areas, damage to monument remnants close to the site, and conservation of existing forest within and adjacent to the site[12, 13]. Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism has provincial tourism offices in this province that are closely linked with the provincial governor's office. This office comprises 86 staff undertaking mainly monitoring and supervisory roles[14]. To strengthening the potential tourism in this site, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts has developed and improved the Law and Royal Decree of Sambor Prey Kuk Authority in 2015[14].

## 2.2 Preah Vihear Province (Preah Vihear Temple)

Preah Vihear province, borders Thailand and Laos to the north and is home to three of the most important temples of the Angkorian era: the Preah

Vihear temple<sup>i</sup>, the Koh Ker temple, and Preah Khan Kampong Svay temple[15]. Among these, Preah Vihear Temple is the most visited cultural tourism site in the province . The population of the province was 208,263 in 2011[15]. Figure 1 indicates that the number of tourist arrivals increased 64 percent from 2013 to 2015. This increase serves both economic and commercial purposes, representing assured safety and security within the visiting area.

Figure 1: The number of tourists in Preah Vihear Temple from 2013-August 2016



Source: National Authority of the Preah Vihear Temple (2013-August 2016)[16, 17].

The Preah Vihear National Authority was created in 2006 to help with the preservation and promotion of the temple [18]. Preah Vihear Temple was divided into four protection zones aiming at facilitating visits around the area [19]. To promote tourism development in this province, in 2014, the Royal Government of Cambodia planned to build a new village for villagers that were settled around the Preah Vihear temple [20]. This new village is called “Samdech Techo Eco-Village”. Along with this development, with the cooperation of stakeholders and UNESCO, a cultural center, called the Eco-Global Museum, was created in the province in 2008[21].

The Tourism Development Strategic Plan for 2012-2020 shows a clear and long term vision for tourism development in Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear provinces by focusing on the potential of cultural and natural resources. Cultural tourism has been prioritized in the tourism development

<sup>i</sup> Preah Vihear temple was built in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century by four Khmer Kings and is well known as one of the recently named World Heritage Sites. Preah Vihear temple was listed and declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO on July 8, 2008.

of these two provinces together with the enhancement of ecotourism which is a new tourism vision and goal that contributes to promoting world heritage. The government has put strong effort into protecting and developing these two provinces.

### 3 Development Plan for the Tourism Sector

#### 3.1 Government Tourism Development Planning

The Tourism Development Strategic Plan 2012-2020 has been launched as a common strategic framework to determine vision, principles, goals and major plans in managing and developing Cambodia tourism. In a broad sense, the main vision of the tourism sector is to encourage both natural and cultural tourism development in a responsible and sustainable manner, in a way that contributes to social and economic gains, creates jobs and reduces poverty [22]. Following the vision, tourism development prioritizes both quantity and quality of the tourism products and/or destinations including, cultural, eco-community-based, recreational or sport tourism by utilizing all the existing capacity while at the same time improving the competitiveness of Cambodian cultural values in the regional to international standards. The government of Cambodia has targeted to attract approximately 6.8 million international tourists in 2018 and 7 million in 2020, increasing from 5.7 million in 2016, as listed in Table 2. If the target is achieved, the economy would earn USD5 billion in revenue. To ensure this strong commitment, the main direction of the action plans are summarized below[22]:

- 1 Enhance tourism product development and product quality
  - a. Enhancing tourism products to reach international standards level and making Cambodia a World-class tourism destination.
  - b. Promoting both public and private investments in tourism products and supporting infrastructure development.
  - c. Making tourism an important export sector that makes a crucial contribution to speeding up the implementation of Cambodian export policy.
- 2 Improve tourism marketing and promotion
  - a. Setting up strategic plans and promotions for the medium and long term for each priority tourism market.
  - b. Building up capacity and efficiency of marketing research.

- c. Continuing human resource development to enhance tourism marketing and promotions.
  - d. Setting up tourism representative offices along in the most important markets and strengthening the offices' activities.
- 3 Improve travel facilitation, transportation, and regional and international connectivity
  - 4 Improve tourism safety and management of negative environmental, social, cultural, and economic impacts.
  - 5 Strengthen legal systems and management mechanisms.
  - 6 Improve human resource development.

### 3.2 Cultural Tourism Development Planning

With a strong link between tourism and culture, preservation and promotion of the rich heritage and tradition in Cambodia continue to be a high priority. The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MOCFA) aims to ensure the preservation and sustainable development of heritage and promotion of creativity in the arts, cultural industries and cultural entrepreneurship. With guidelines from UNESCO cultural conventions, the MOCFA plans to carry out the following activities [23]:

- Making Cambodia a cultural product promotion destination
- Conserving heritage areas
  - Register, conserve, and promote heritage areas, especially major sites in remote areas including Sambor Prey Kuk, Banteay Chhmar, and Preah Khan Kampong Svay.
  - Strengthen officials' capacity through cooperation with relevant institutions, particularly the Apsara National Authority and Preah Vihear Authority.
  - Encourage public participation in the preservation of heritage.
- Strengthening institutional capacity and partnership
  - Strengthen effectiveness in the delivery of cultural services.
  - Increase the control of the existing legal regulations and formulate new regulations.
  - Continue encouraging development of officials' capacities.
  - Support art education in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and vocational training for artists, practitioners and other professionals in the field of culture.
  - Develop monitoring guidelines on evaluating the performance.

- Improving performing arts promotion to strengthen the positioning of Cambodia as a cultural destination.
- Making Cambodia a welcoming destination of foreign film making.

Table 2: Key Tourism Indicators, 2014-2018

Indicators	Unit	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
International Tourists	million	4.7	5.2	5.7	6.1	6.8
Domestic Tourists	million	8.7	9.0	9.3	9.5	9.8
Tourism Employment	thousand	425	455	500	550	600
Tourism Receipts	million USD	2,802	3,054	3,359	3,729	4,139
Accommodations	rooms	50,328	53,851	57,621	61,078	64,132

Source: RGC, National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 [23, 166]

### 3.3 Stakeholders

#### ADB Tourism Support Program

The ADB support program includes concessional loans, grants and technical assistance for the support of tourism-related public infrastructure and capacity building from 2003 to 2014, and Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Tourism Infrastructure starting from 2014 [24]. The program is consistent with inclusive social development objectives and the strategic focus of ADB Strategy 2020. Under this program, the GMS tourism projects have been designed to improve access infrastructure and environmental services in tourist destinations and strengthen the capacity of government and the private sector to boost regional tourism investment. GMS Tourism Infrastructure for inclusive growth project in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Viet Nam, emphasizes enhancing connectivity between urban and rural areas, strengthening market linkages, and providing jobs for semiskilled and unskilled workers living in underdeveloped segments of GMS corridors.

#### Private sector

National tourism organizations recognize the important role of private sector in investment and destination marketing and, thus, coordinate strategic planning and policy dialogue with other private enterprises and

government agencies through national tourism sector advisory boards, sector working groups, and industry associations, including:

- 1 The Cambodian Association of Travel Agents (197 tour operators and travel agents): focusing on advocacy for tourism growth, strategic tourism services, and national and international networking, and aiming at sustainable economic growth for the long-term benefit of Cambodian tourism and the people.
- 2 Cambodia Tourism Marketing and Promotion board: forming legal mandate as a public-private partnership
- 3 Cambodia Hotel Association (94 members, mainly large hotels and hospitality-related enterprises):
  - a. working as a collective voice of the hotel industry promoting advocacy, networking, marketing and promotion.
  - b. working with government to resolve issues affecting the hotel business and tourism in general.
  - c. encouraging best practices through workshops, forums, and training opportunities to develop and strengthen the hotel industry in Cambodia.

#### 4 Remaining Challenges

While there is good progress in the efforts to enhance tourist safety and security, prioritizing travel and tourism, international openness, health and hygiene in major tourist destinations, and ICT readiness, the Cambodian tourism sectors still face some major constraints including a weak business-enabling environment, shortages of skilled tourism workers (human resource), environmental management, and insufficient protection of natural and cultural heritage assets. Insufficient infrastructure also persists due to the lack of paved roads linking urban centers and rural attractions, a shortage of airports and inconvenient ground/sea access [24].

##### 4.1 Tourism Infrastructure

Inadequate standards in both products and services

Tourism activities are heavily concentrated in a few main tourist centers with limited linkages to other cultural tourism areas. For instance, the majority of hotel rooms and guesthouses are located around Siem Reap, Phnom Penh and Sihanukville, while they are limited in other parts of the country and harder to access in rural tourism areas in the northwest part of

the country including Kompong Thom, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Preah Vihear [2]. Also, inadequate standards in tourism both in product and service is one of the main challenges in implementation of the Tourism Strategic Development Plan [23]. Despite the low costs of hotel and restaurant services, issues around the quality of food hygiene and sanitation persist due to the lack of a proper monitoring system for testing food quality in compliance with international standards [2, 23] (CTIS, NSDP). The ADB stated that “the annual economic losses resulting from lower visitor numbers and reduced spending by visitors who become sick from diseases related to poor sanitation and hygiene ... [is on average about] US\$73.7 million in Cambodia” [24, 18].

Moreover, the leakage of revenues due to imports of foreign goods to satisfy tourism demand including food, agro-food and labour is limiting the contribution of this sector to the economy. The loss was estimated to be around 25 percent of total tourism revenues [22].

#### Limited capability in management and promotion

The MOCFA reported that the challenges in managing the cultural sector include [23]:

- Damage to ancient temples in remote areas due to inadequate understanding of investors and local residences, as a result of the slow process of information dissemination by Cultural officials at the district level.
- Limited regulatory framework in cultural management and implementation due to severe bureaucracy at the ministry level.
- Limited ability in cultural promotion and information sharing due to the inconsistency between the scope of the tasks and the available resources.

#### 4.2 Physical Infrastructure

Air and road transport infrastructure remains a challenge for the promotion of the tourism sector. First, the issue of flight connectivity includes three main issues: 1) no direct flights from long distance tourism markets, 2) limited scope national airlines and local connectivity as there is not yet a local flight to either Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear, which impedes the local authority/community to market itself in the package tour segment, and 3) long flight times and high airfares compared to other regional destinations, especially during the high season [22]. Second, certain gateways do not yet have proper facilities and hospitality services such

as passenger buildings and tourism information centers. Third, insufficient paved roads linking urban and rural attractions have not kept pace with demand, mainly due to funding for construction and maintenance and low density of population in rural areas. Other related infrastructure issues include high costs of electricity for tourism operators and frequent black outs in tourist centers, lack of well-maintained roads, sanitation, wastewater treatment, flood protection, and inadequate clean water supply [22, 24].

#### 4.3 Human Resources in Tourism

Tourism is both a semi-skilled and skills -intensive sector, estimated to generate about 980,000 jobs directly in 2016 and forecasted to grow by 9.1% in the following year (World travel and tourism council). Continued growth of international arrivals will further increase demand for skilled labor in the travel and hospitality industry. Industry stakeholders reported that the lack of well-trained workers is one of the main barriers to improving tourism competitiveness and service quality. While training in hotel management is provided in several local universities, training at the vocational/technical level is very limited (CTIS). The government reported that the number of professional tourism training schools are insufficient to meet the demand for training human resources to be ready for receiving four to six million tourists—requiring 500,000 to 700,000 skilled laborers. In addition, there is a shortage of government officials with appropriate professional skills , particularly at the District and Commune Cultural Department [25].

#### 4.4 Private Sector Environment

The tourism sector in Cambodia, as well as in Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear, is highly fragmented—ranging from small family run businesses—across accommodation, transport and other related services. In addition, the lack of compliance with quality standards for food hygiene and sanitary facilities is a key constraint. Also, while there are some industry associations such as the Cambodia Hotel Association and the Cambodia Restaurant Association, they are more likely representing larger enterprises. The private sector, particularly small enterprises, are facing difficulties in influencing the government regarding tourism issue due to the lack of a unified voice . As a result, a reliable and efficient public-

private partnership is important to ensure the collaboration both within the industry as well as between public and private sector agencies.

## 5 Conclusion

This briefing note studies the promotion of the Cambodian cultural tourism sector, particularly in Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear, by reviewing the performance, strategic plan and remaining challenges of the sector. Over the past decade, the tourism sector has been performing well as both international arrivals and revenues have increased. Total tourist visits to Sambor Prey Kuk Temple almost tripled during the past five year, increasing from 865 in 2011 to 125,000 in 2016, whereas the visits to Preah Vihear Temple increased about 50 percent, increasing from 70,000 to 105,000 in 2013 and 2015, respectively. To further promote the cultural tourism sector, the government has undertaken several strategic policies including the enhancement of products and service quality, conservation of heritage areas, and improvement of institutional capacity and partnerships.

Despite the substantial progresses, cultural tourism has faced some challenges. The improvement of quality standards, particularly for food hygiene and sanitation could be a priority. In addition, to ensure sustainable development of the sector, tourism activities could be diversified to various heritage sites linking urban and rural community participation. This could be achieved through the promotion of public private partnerships (P3) and the enhancement of transport and tourism infrastructure.

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