

## General presentation of Phnom Penh

Thursday, 22 November 2007

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The city is located at the confluence of four river arms, the Lower and Upper Mekong, the Tonle Sap and the Bassac Rivers. It sprawls out along the southern shore of the Tonle Sap river. The sometimes suffocating tropical heat is conducive to a rather slow pace of life. Near the riverfront is the spectacular, brightly colored yellow, orange and green Royal Palace, home to King Father Norodom Sihanouk.

Large groups of saffron-robed monks can be seen walking or stopping to meditate along the gracious palm tree lined riverfront. Families also enjoy a relaxing outing along the river, while all kinds of hawkers offer exotic fruit, refreshments, lotus seed pods, deep-fried locusts or a chance to release birds for good luck. Scores of raggedy children can be seen, often barefoot, wandering about, begging for riels, kicking around a ball, selling cigarettes or offering shoe-shine services. There is something quite touching about them. They are beautiful, although not always very clean and often timid. Out of their poverty come the most enchanting smiles, something no money in the world can buy.

Everywhere in Phnom Penh, signs of the thirty years of war can be discerned; people's looks, their bodies and souls, betray evidence of the horrifying genocide committed by the Khmers Rouges, followed by the Vietnamese occupation, coups d'etat and bloody gangland killings. Now, after the chaos and the ensuing night of blood, like Cambodia as a whole, Phnom Penh is struggling to come alive again.

The former "Pearl of Asia", despite rampant corruption, assaults by developers and the onslaught of motor vehicles, hasn't lost the exquisite charm of the past.

At dawn, down on the riverfront, crowds of people come to contemplate the harmonious river of alternating flow, a people once crushed but now hopeful of better days to come.