

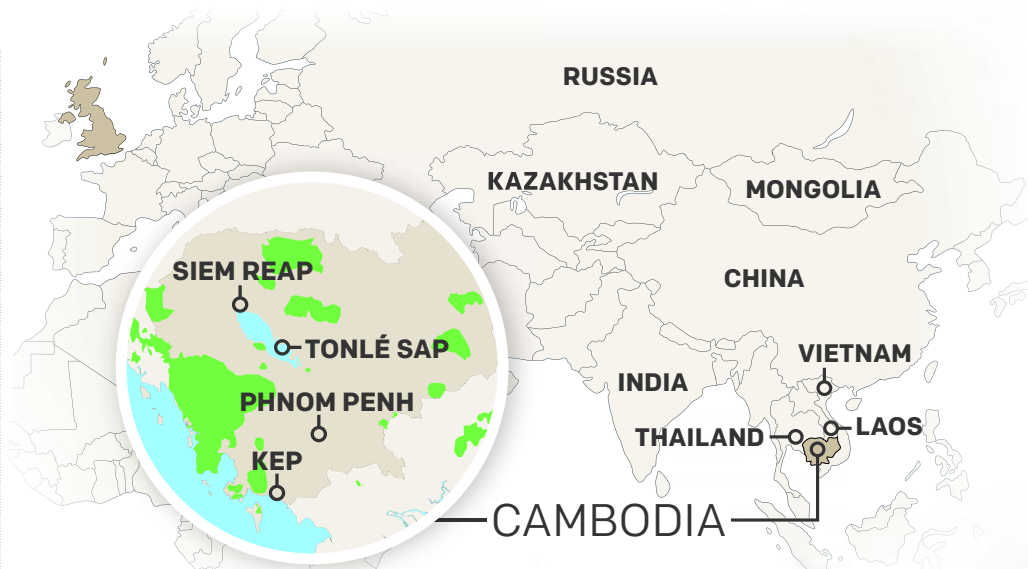
IN SEARCH OF LARA CROFT

Sam Watson travels through Cambodia's swampy jungle terrain to the Ta Prohm temple, made famous by the Tomb Raider movie

Lara Croft, the Tomb Raider, roaring through the jungle to a mysterious Cambodian temple in her 110 Hi-cap V8. That's the image many Land Rover enthusiasts of a certain age have of the country. Either that, or memories of news reports from the Khmer Rouge genocides of the 1970s. Whichever, it's not usually one of those places one normally associates with overlanding in a Land Rover.

It was with excitement, then, that I arranged to visit my American friend Kurt Smolek, who had recently moved to the capital Phnom Penh, and with whom I'd made plans to explore Cambodia off-road. Kurt and I had lived in the same area of Cairo before he moved to Cambodia. He took Penny, his four-cylinder petrol Defender 110, with him.

We planned to visit large chunks of Cambodia in Penny, and we were also able to borrow a Defender 130 TDCi workshop unit to travel alongside her from the very supportive local main dealer, RMA Land Rover. RMA's general manager in Phnom Penh is Paul Varley – both he and his father are long-standing LRO readers. As soon as he found out about



our trip, Paul was itching to come into the jungles with us, but work commitments foiled that plan. The third vehicle in our convoy was the Defender 110 of the ever-cheerful Jason Thatcher, an Australian buddy of Kurt's who runs Cambodia Motorcycle Tours. He volunteered to be our guide.

My arrival in Cambodia coincides with the start of the monsoon season, and having just come from Cairo I'm wearing desert boots. However, a visit to Phnom Penh's Teuk Thla market, site of a dozen manufacturers of military equipment, kits me out with jungle boots, poncho and other nifty jungle kit.

