

The temple of Angkor Wat in Siem Reap region



Bang goes Sam's evening entertainment



If you like it swampy, you'll love Cambodia

LAND ROVER IN CAMBODIA

Land Rover has been reinvented in Cambodia as a luxury marque. I saw plenty of Range Rovers, Evoques and Sports, but almost no Defenders in my travels. The import taxes are enormous for British vehicles – a new TDCi 110 costs nearly £78,000! Japanese vehicles, on the other hand, get tax breaks because they're made in Asia, so the number of Land Rovers in Phnom Penh is a real success story.

Staff at the main dealer, RMA, are committed enthusiasts of all types of Land Rover – especially Paul Varley, the General Manager, and Tola Meas, his Cambodian colleague. The dealership is new and keen to work with all Land Rover owners.



beasts. The most famous is Angkor Wat, a huge structure covering an area the size of a British village and covered with intricate carvings. There are many others, similarly awesome, but the one I wanted to see is Ta Prohm, around five miles away, which was used in the movie Tomb Raider.

In the film it seems like some organic thing, with jungle growing into and through it. Sure enough, in reality the roots of great trees interweave the temples as if they have come to depend on each other. A monsoon arrives as I scramble around the ruins and I shelter in among the ancient stones – but Angelina Jolie, who played Lara Croft in the movie, isn't around, so there's not much point in staying once the exploration has finished.

So it's back to Siem Reap for food – a mixture of crocodile (tough), snake (tasteless) and frog (like firm chicken) on my plate that evening.

Much of the driving at this point is on tarmac and the TDCi proves what a capable engine it is at road work – give it a big bootful to get round a tuk-tuk towing a huge load of farm produce or a truck crammed with 30 workers getting home, and the engine purrs and rises to the challenge. More hi-tech maintenance-intensive it may be, but it's got the horses.

Eventually we head back to Phnom Penh, travelling via the huge Tonle Sap lake where

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we stay awhile at the network of floating villages. Dinner consists of a water snake stir-fry – gritty, slimy and tasting of soil, I wouldn't recommend it. The red mud roads and tracks are slippery from the frequent monsoon rains, but the Land Rovers are surefooted.

Pulling back into Phnom Penh, I reflect on my first experience of this vibrant, friendly country. Torn apart by civil war and genocide inflicted by its own people, invaded by neighbours, crippling poor, yet Cambodia is still welcoming, friendly and warm of heart – and they love their Land Rovers! **LRO**

● Since we travelled through the jungle together, Kurt tragically passed away in Washington DC. This piece is dedicated to his memory. RIP Kurt Smolek – an adventurer with a heart as big as his Land Rover.