



Som Leng

Hanuman Tourism Newsletter

April 2008

Welcome...

Suorsdei Chnam Thmei! Happy Cambodian New Year! 2008 is 2552 in the Buddhist calendar and we celebrate Khmer New Year from 13-16 April.

Welcome to our latest quarterly newsletter, a special edition dedicated to ecotourism and community-based tourism in Cambodia, which is slowly but steadily taking off. We will follow up with Laos and Vietnam in our next edition, looking at emerging ecotourism adventures in these countries. Hanuman has a great reputation for innovative tours in Cambodia and the Mekong region and we are doing our best to harness this to responsible and sustainable business practices to help these countries develop. As communities and NGOs plan their projects, Hanuman is often top of their list for advice and assistance and this helps us to stay ahead of the competition in terms of knowledge and experience. We are seeing these projects before their launch and are able to share them with you as they take shape.

Tourism has had a huge impact on a small economy like Cambodia's but much of the benefit has been concentrated in urban centres like Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Here at Hanuman, we are keen to see the benefits spread far and wide to smaller communities in the countryside and will do all that we can to promote community-based ecotourism activities. Join us on an adventure that helps Cambodia.



Kulikar Sotho
Chief Executive

Mekong Discovery Trail

The mighty Mekong River cuts through the heart of Cambodia and the upper stretches around Kratie and Stung Treng are home to some of the world's rarest river dolphins. Many of our trips already include a visit to view these shy creatures at Kampi pool near Kratie, but now Hanuman has joined forces with the Mekong Tourism Development Project and the Ministry of Tourism to help promote the Mekong Discovery Trail.

Stretching from Kratie to the Lao border at Voen Kham, the trail is a community-based ecotourism project to introduce visitors to life and culture along one of the most wild and beautiful parts of the Mekong River. Highlights along the trail include: mountain biking around the peaceful island of Koh Trong opposite Kratie, home to friendly fruit farmers and a small Vietnamese floating village; the 100 pillar pagoda of Sambor, the largest temple in Cambodia, where it is possible to spend the night learning more about Buddhism or watch a traditional village show; kayaking through protected wetlands that are home to rare bird species; the chance to take a dip in secluded waterfalls or gentle stretches of the mother river; a homestay in the traditional village of O Svay; and boat trips through flooded forest with a picnic on a remote stretch of sand.

Some of the activities are already available, including cycling around Kratie and along the riverbank (using our own Trek mountain bikes for now), the pagoda stay at Wat Sor Sor Moi Roi, homestays at O Svay; and boat trips along scenic stretches of the river. We will introduce some of the most interesting elements into some new tour options such as Pakse to Phnom Penh or overland trips to Ratanakiri. Please be aware that this trail is still in its infancy, so facilities are basic, but for those that want a real Cambodian experience that brings them closer to life on the river and the wonderful Khmer people, then this is a unique opportunity. A homestay in O Svay may not be for everyone, but it is perhaps more interesting than staying in a bland hotel in Stung Treng. It is also possible to view river dolphins at O Svay, which gather in pools near the Lao border. Sitting on a sandbar, sipping a cold drink, watching rare dolphins glide past, is a memorable experience indeed.

Although not officially part of the trail, Hanuman is also able to offer trips that include stretches of the river to the south of Kratie towards Kompong Cham. Attractions here include: the port of Chhlong, one of the best preserved colonial-era towns in the Cambodia; Wat Roka Kandal, one of the oldest pagodas in the country, located on the edge of Kratie; the pre-Angkorian hilltop temple of Wat Hanchey, with impressive views of the Mekong; and Wat Mohaleap, one of the oldest surviving wooden temples in Cambodia.

Some of our senior team recently travelled the trail and will be devising some new community-based tour options to promote sections of the Mekong Discovery Trail ready for Autumn 2008.



Opening up the Cardamom Mountains



The fabled Cardamom Mountains have been described as Asia's last great wilderness, a vast area of jungle-clad peaks rolling across Southwest Cambodia. Much of this area has been considered off-limits for a long time due to a combination of land mines, illegal logging and poaching, but as conservation organisations gain control of more areas, new ecotourism initiatives are under development. The remote peaks and isolated river valleys are home to almost 60 globally threatened animal species and more than 100 species of endemic plants. It is one of two places in the Mekong region where unbroken forest connects mountain summits to the sea and is currently under consideration as a World Heritage Site. Hanuman is working closely with these wildlife

and environmental organisations to help them promote their new products to a wider audience.

Wildlife Alliance (formerly Wildaid) has a pilot community-based ecotourism project underway in the Chipat area of the southern Cardamoms. Plans include village homestays in Chipat, boat trips along pristine stretches of river, treks through the unique rainforest environment, cycling routes through the forest, and animal hides near freshwater ponds in the jungle. Wildlife Alliance is working with an educational NGO called Live and Learn to arrange specialised mountain biking tours that will help support education projects in the southern Cardamoms. Future initiatives include a canopy walk to view gibbons and monkeys in their natural environment and a wildlife rescue and release centre.

This is another project in its infancy, but we will be travelling to Chipat in May to take a look at what is available and help advise them on how to move things forward. Hanuman will be offering a new range of ecotourism adventures around Chipat, combining boating or kayaking, biking, trekking and wildlife viewing. Short day trips will be possible for visitors entering or exiting Cambodia via Koh Kong and longer multi-day trips for those who really want to see this great wilderness. In time there are plans to offer challenging treks across the Cardamoms to link up with the Conservation International project in the Areng Valley (see below). Hanuman will also be able to use its comfortable 'Temple Safari' tents at designated camp sites under development and near the animal hides, in return for contributing to the community fund.

Chipat lies about four to five hours from Phnom Penh or just three hours from Sihanoukville and Koh Kong and is accessible via National Road 48 which crosses the Cardamoms from Sre Ambel to Koh Kong. Access is via a dirt road (bumpy) or a scenic river trip from Andong Teuk. As part of next month's trip through the Cardamoms and along the remote South Coast, we will also be looking at remote beaches and islands to offer a combination wilderness and beach experience for those wanting something truly unique. See the Cardamoms, one of the most pristine environments in the region, before enjoying private tropical beaches on remote stretches of coastline.

Further west in the Cardamoms, Conservation International is encouraging ecotourism activities in the Areng Valley. A remote and beautiful valley, this river is home to the rare Dragonfish, one of the most sought after species in the region, and the only population of wild Siamese crocodiles left in the world. It is possible to stay at a new guesthouse in Thmar Bang and try treks and boat trips in the area. However, sadly this area is also under threat from development and during our exploratory visit last March, we saw Chinese dam workers measuring up the river. We will be revisiting the area as part of the May trip and will assess the potential for our guests.

Other areas just beginning to take off in this region include: Botum Sakor National Park, occupying a headland jutting into the South China Sea that is ringed by pristine beaches, and is home to forest elephants; Peam Krasoap Wildlife Sanctuary, a unique maze of mangrove swamps that shelter rare birdlife and some incredible stilted fishing villages that perch above the sea; Koh Kong Island, the largest in Cambodia and ringed by stunning sandy beaches with not a beach hut in sight; and Tatai Waterfall, a scenic spot in the Cardamoms with a new ecolodge, located 22km from Koh Kong.

All these and more will feature in our new 'Cardamoms and Coast' discovery tours that are currently under development for later this year. For those that thought of Cambodia as an add-on destination to Thailand or Vietnam, it may be time to think again.

Trekking in Virachey National Park

Virachey National Park is one of the largest protected areas in Cambodia, stretching east to Vietnam, north to Laos and west to Stung Treng. The park has never been fully explored and is likely home to a number of larger mammals, including elephants, leopards and tigers. It was designated an Asean Heritage Park in 2003. Hanuman has long promoted Ratanakiri and trekking around this remote province. However, for those who are more serious about their trekking, we can now offer multi-day treks through this pristine area. There are three treks available in Virachey, from a two-day trek to a week-long workout.



- **Kalang Chhouy Sacred Mountain Trek (2 days/1 night)** This shorter trek includes a night by the Chai Chanang Waterfall. On the second day, continue to Phnom Gong, a sacred mountain for the Brao people and swim at the Tju Preah rapids.
- **O'Lapeung River Valley Trek (4 days/3 nights)** This medium trek starts with a boat ride on the Tonle San and O Tabok rivers to the Brau village of Phum Yorn where trekkers enjoy a homestay. On the third day, the route passes along a section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and it may be possible to see some war relics.
- **Phnom Veal Thom Wilderness Trek (8 days/7 nights)** The longest trek into Virachey starts with an overnight homestay in a Brau village. The trek goes deep into the heart of the Phnom Veal Thom grasslands, an area rich in wildlife such as sambar deer, gibbons, langurs, wild pig, bears and hornbills. Trekkers return via a different route and pass through beautiful areas of evergreen forest.

World class Birding Destinations in Cambodia

Cambodia is world renowned for its temples and gaining recognition for its laid-back colonial-era cities, its blissful beaches and its remote areas of outstanding natural beauty. However, what is less well known is its incredible birdlife, including many of the world's largest water birds.

Many people have heard of Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary near the Tonle Sap Lake, but this is not the only place to see endangered birdlife around Siem Reap. It is possible to witness some of Cambodia's rarest birdlife at close quarters on pioneering ecotours that are working with the community to protect the species.

Large groups of Sarus Crane are found in Ang Trapeng Thmor in Banteay Meanchey during the dry season. This tall bird has a vivid crimson head and is depicted on bas-reliefs at the Bayon. The site also provides a habitat for other birdlife, including 18 endangered species. Due to road improvements from Siem Reap, about 100km away, it is now a straightforward day trip and arguably easier to access than Prek Toal. This is a must for all bird enthusiasts.

The Giant Ibis has attained near-mythical status for birdwatchers thanks to its rarity. It is found in the Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary near Tmatboey village in Preah Vihear Province. This location is also famous as the only nesting site in Asia for the White-shouldered Ibis. It is possible to undertake a challenging 4WD adventure into this area to see these rare birds and assist the local community in their struggle to protect these birds. This can also be combined with a Temple Safari tour to the remote temples of Preah Vihear.

Hanuman is also proud to work with Osmose promoting eco-tours to the Prek Toal Biosphere, one of the premier birdwatching sites in Southeast Asia. Prek Toal is home to breeding colonies of large water birds now extinct elsewhere in the region and is a pristine flooded forest environment. Some of the more accessible birds include lesser and greater adjutants, spot-billed pelicans and milky storks. These incredible birds have huge wing spans and construct large nests in the trees of the flooded forest. The Prek Toal Biosphere is about two hours from Siem Reap by a combination of road and boat. Osmose is a non-profit NGO working in conservation, environmental education and sustainable development. The Osmose eco-tourism project offers alternative livelihoods to the local communities through opportunities in guiding, paddling, providing food and accommodation and the sales of water hyacinth handicrafts.



Recommended Reading on Responsible Tourism

As this issue has been dedicated to ecotourism and community-based tourism, it seems only sensible to direct readers to some more sources of information on responsible tourism in the Mekong region. Stay Another Day is an excellent source of information for all those interested in learning more about responsible businesses and projects. They produce guidebooks to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, listing a whole range of experiences to encourage visitors to stay another day. Check out their website at www.stay-another-day.org.

Also look out for the forthcoming Responsible Travel Guide to Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam, featuring around 90 businesses and projects around Indochina, and including Hanuman Tourism thanks to our work with the Hanuman Foundation and our innovative Temple Safari trips.

Find out more about a network of organizations, travel agencies, educational institutions and communities in Cambodia who are promoting and supporting a series of community-based ecotourism projects in the country. The CCBEN (Cambodia Community Based Ecotourism Network) website at www.ccben.org has the details. Hanuman Tourism is proud to be one of the very few private sector supporters of CCBEN and will be contributing to the organization of the first community-based ecotourism conference in Cambodia on 28-29 May in Phnom Penh.

Hanuman's Top Ten Restaurants that help Cambodia

Hanuman is always on the lookout for ways to contribute to good causes in Cambodia and one of the easiest ways is to introduce our guests to restaurants and cafes that assist Cambodia's development.

- **Epic Arts Cafe** A friendly little café in Kampot with delicious cakes, assisting the deaf community and promoting arts for the disabled.
- **Friends A** Phnom Penh landmark, serving tasty tapas, fusion food, delicious shakes and cool cocktails, all to help street children.
- **Jardins des Delice** Part of the Paul Dubrule Hotel School in Siem Reap, offering Sofitel standard cuisine at affordable prices.
- **Joe to Go** Coffees before sunrise are the order of the day here in Siem Reap, all to help in the fight against child trafficking and sex tourism.
- **Le Lotus Blanc** This professional French restaurant provides hospitality training for children from the Stung Meanchey dump area in Phnom Penh.
- **Le Rit's** A small garden restaurant next to our head office in Phnom Penh, this place assists vulnerable women and the HIV-positive community.
- **Mekong Blue** This quiet café near Stung Treng is part of a silk-weaving cooperative seeking to assist disadvantaged women.
- **Romdeng** Beautifully housed in a colonial building in the capital, this is the place for traditional Khmer country cooking, including deep-fried tarantula.
- **Sala Bai** A Siem Reap restaurant training school to help disadvantaged Cambodians, there is a choice of Asian or Western food here.
- **Starfish Bakery** A leafy garden café in the middle of Sihanoukville, they serve great cakes and shakes, all proceeds supporting community projects.



Top Ten Projects that Hanuman support

- **Apsara Arts Association** Teaching orphans and underprivileged children the art of Cambodian classical dance, it is possible to witness their rehearsals.
- **Artisans D'Angkor** An artisan cooperative dedicated to the rebirth of traditional arts and crafts, offering employment to impoverished youngsters.
- **Cambodia Landmine Museum** Learn more about the scourge of landmines with a visit to this flagship museum promoting mine awareness and education.
- **Cambodia Living Arts** Dedicated to the revival of Cambodian classical dance and traditional music, with regular performances in Phnom Penh.
- **Cyclo Centre** Take a cyclo tour of Phnom Penh with these experienced riders and help support a drop-in centre for these migrant workers in the capital.
- **Mekong Blue** A silk-weaving centre in Stung Treng Province that offers employment opportunities to vulnerable women in the far north of Cambodia.
- **Phare Ponleu Selpak** A circus training school in Battambang promoting the dying art of traditional circus, visit their campus for a set meal.
- **PSE** Supporting youngsters from the Stung Meanchey Dump in Phnom Penh, PSE offers free training, including hospitality at the Lotus Blanc Restaurant.
- **The Elephant Valley Project** Learn how to be a mahout for the day in Monduliri and help contribute to the well-being of elephants in the northeast.
- **Weaves of Cambodia** Visit this remote silk-weaving project in Tbeng Meachey, Preah Vihear, that offers employment to disabled women.



News

CAMBODIA

Inflation in Asia Hits New Highs

As you know, the global economy faces an uncertain future and it is beginning to impact on the Southeast Asian economy. Food prices are rising particularly fast and already there have been 25% increases in the first quarter of 2008 alone. Rice has tripled in price in a short space of time and other basics are increasing at an alarming rate. Fuel is also rising fast and is now three times the price of five years ago. Hotel rates are also beginning to rise, reflecting higher costs in the region. As a business we have a responsibility to match these new realities with higher wages and our wage bill continues to rise rapidly, far outstripping the wage increases in the West. This is creating many hardships for local people in this region. As a leading travel company in the region, it is also creating a number of headaches for us, but we are trying our best to absorb these costs and not pass them on to our partners.

Srepok Wilderness Area in Monduliri

Isolated and remote, the Srepok Wilderness Area retains much of its rich biodiversity, ranging from crocodiles and exotic fish in the Srepok River to large cats and wild cattle roaming the surrounding plains. Once described as the Serengeti of Asia, its pristine isolation is currently threatened by commercial logging, land grab and the illegal trade in wildlife. To counteract those threats, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is developing an ecotourism venture that's geared towards conserving the environment and generating benefits from the river and its forest for the local villagers.

WWF's plans include an ecolodge nestled alongside the Srepok River, bird-watching, river-fishing, cycle tours and safaris into the forest with the Park Rangers. This is another project at an embryonic stage in its development and we will keep you appraised of on-going developments. The Srepok Wilderness Area is at the centre of the much greater expanse of the Lower Mekong Dry Forest Ecoregion, one of 200 large landscapes identified by WWF as being of global importance.

Access to Bokor Mountain

The road to Bokor Mountain on the South Coast is open again. Expected to be closed for a long period, the Sokha Group who are renovating the road and the buildings at the summit of the mountain have re-opened it ahead of schedule to allow limited use of the road for tourist traffic. So we're pleased to report, Bokor Mountain is back on our itineraries.

HOTELS

During the off-peak months, some hotels are using the opportunity to renovate and refurbish their rooms and facilities, including the popular **La Residence d'Angkor** in Cambodia's Siem Reap, who are closing their doors from 20 May until 31 July. On re-opening, they will have enhanced their facilities with a new barbeque restaurant, fitness center and conference room.

The South China Sea will be the backdrop for two new resorts opening along the coast of Vietnam. The stylish **L'Anmien** at Mui Ne, Phan Thiet will redefine luxury with 29 gorgeous villas with private pools and another 69 contemporary rooms housed in the main building. www.lanmienresort.com

At the **Princess d'Annam Resort** (pictured right), in the secluded bay of Khe Ga, luxury will also be much in evidence with its 57 exclusive villas and eight swimming pools. www.princessannam.com



It will be busy in Luang Prabang, Laos over the next few months. Both **Villa Santi** and the **3 Nagas** hotel are undergoing renovation though will remain open to customers but with limited availability, whilst the 24-room **D'Lyon Hotel** has just opened its doors for the first time.