



Sustainable Development in Cambodia

Essential Question

What are the ecological, economic, and societal impacts of development in Cambodia, and can it be done sustainably?

Description

As a UN “least developed” country, Cambodia faces significant barriers to sustainable development. True sustainable development meets current needs without compromising the needs of future generations, and it can be examined through three lenses: economy, environment, and equity. During this ECS, students will explore the various economic drivers of Cambodia, such as textiles and agriculture. They will experience urban lifestyles in the capital city, Phnom Penh, and learn about its history and political structures. A long drive to the city of Siem Reap, home of the famous Buddhist temple Angkor Wat, will give students exposure to the impacts of tourism. Continuing to the floating villages of Tonle Sap Lake will reveal a more rural way of life, as well as highlight the environmental impacts of deforestation, infrastructure development, and climate change. The area around Tonle Sap is one of the most productive ecosystems in the world, but it is rapidly declining due to these pressures. To further explore the environmental impacts, we will plan to visit other important conservation sites and/or sanctuaries. The journey of this ECS is likely to be a little uncomfortable, long, unpredictable, and unique. It’s a great match for someone with a hardy constitution, a compassionate heart, and a curious mind.

Wheels Up

By Adhista E. '24
March 4, 2024

Today our Ecs group set off on our long awaited journey to Cambodia. We could not contain our excitement to finally set foot in Phnom Penh, and our group passed long waiting times in airports by playing games, reading, or simply talking. However, we also took the time to reflect upon some of our hopes and fears for the trip. Many don't know what to expect from a place so far from home. Others have fears about the language barrier and how it will affect their experience. Personally, I am really excited to have this once in a lifetime experience.

Walking across the C concourse in DIA to get creeps and spending 30 minutes eye-shopping in a bookstore is already a moment I know I won't forget.

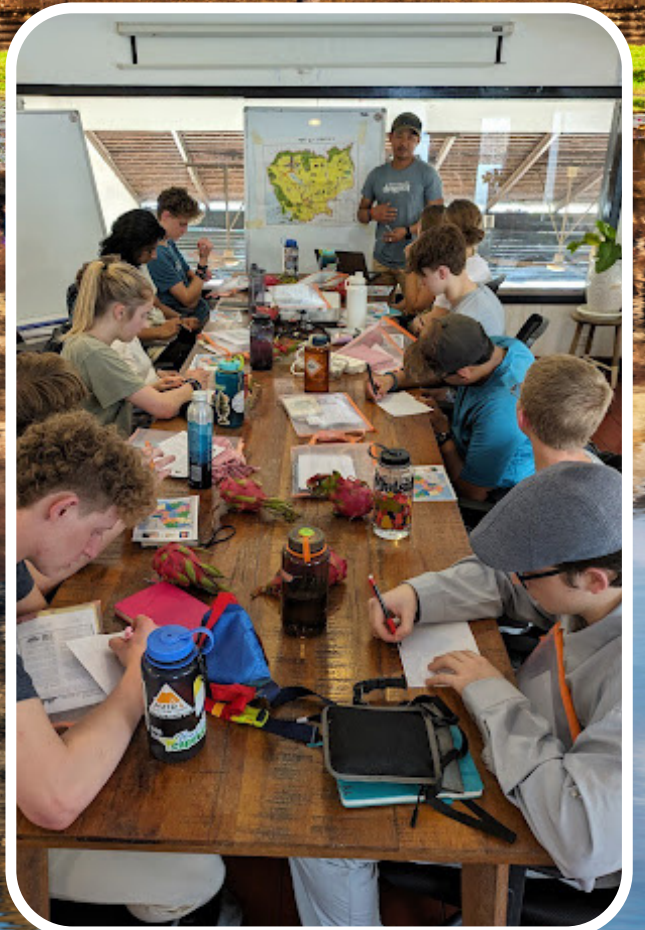


Land Ho, Weary Travelers

By Lucia S. '24
March 6, 2024

By now, most of the excitement and nervous trepidations of the group have worn off and been replaced by the weariness of seemingly never-ending travel and a sleepless night aboard a plane bound for Taipei, Taiwan. As the plane touched down (5 a.m. in Taiwan), many of us were disoriented by the time change and despite on-board meals, hungry, awaiting yet another lay over and plane ride, until we reach our final destination. The search for food lead many of us to a Taiwanese noodle place inspite of the thwarting efforts of the credit card company, we acquired our noodle dishes, satisfying ~~for~~ more than our hunger but also our want for a tasty meal.

Most of the days weariness wore off temporarily when the colorful hues of Phnom Penh buildings came into view from the plane. Upon arrival, with no incidents at customs, we immediately confronted the humidity and heat. The rest of the day was spent eating delicious meals and riding around Phnom Penh in tuk tuks, with an orientation in the mix. I suppose if learned anything, it was patience in the airport and the vast cultural differences. As someone who has never been out of the United States until now, seeing Phnom Penh was magical in its disorderly order and of yellows, blues, oranges and all sorts of other colors.



Purified in the Pagoda

By John B. '24
March 7, 2024

What an eventful day from the streets in the Tuk-Tuk to the Pagoda. We started the day with an amazing breakfast and soon we were on our way to our first lesson at the Java Café. Through our lessons at the Java Café we learned not only many new things about ourselves, but about each other. We learned that as a group we have many similarities and differences. However, we know that it is very crucial throughout that we must accept our differences, not push boundaries, and remain an inclusive group. Another key part of our day was our Khmer lessons. With the aid of Sivi, our guide, we were able to unravel the basics of Khmer. The highlight of my day was exploring our first Pagoda. The Pagoda had around 200 monks living there and we got the honor to be blessed by one. For someone who loves meditation this was very special. We wrapped up the day with a lovely dinner, where we had eggplant, a chicken soup, and some spicy noodles. I am extremely grateful to be in Cambodia and can't wait for the days to come.



Looking Into the Past from a New Perspective

By Nora V. '24
March 8, 2024

Currently we are on a dtuk (ferry) reflecting on how the day has impacted each of us. Every one of the moments today has affected each individual person differently. From learning about the Cambodian genocide to walking around the local markets, we as a group have learned so much about the culture of Cambodia as a whole. As we reflect, each person is taking a moment to be thankful for the life they were given, and to remember all the people who have suffered hardships throughout time. I want to remember the hardships that Cambodia has suffered, but I also want to remember how they have welcomed the changing world and how they are changing with it. Keeping the more traditional way of family style meals on the ground, but now it takes place in the middle of a quickly developing city. The dtuk swaying on the river allows for a peaceful time to reflect on the day and everything we felt and saw.



The Journey Continues

By Alex H. '24
March 9, 2024

I have just arrived in Battambang. After 3 days in Phnom Penh the group has traveled to explore more of this spectacular country. I am so excited to see the rest of Cambodia. As this is my first time out of the U.S., every experience is new and exciting. Everyone is so excited to see and learn new things, that I start to get even more excited. So far, I have witnessed a different kind of traffic, and tried so many different dishes. I am really excited to start learning more about Cambodia's economy and its efforts to protect the environment. I am also looking forward to our time spent in Battambang. From what I have seen so far, it looks to be a very different city from Phnom Penh. I have seen many several green spaces, of which I hadn't seen any in Phnom Penh. As well, there are very few skyscrapers in Battambang. This makes the city feel much more open than Phnom Penh. I can't wait to explore this city and the rest of the country.

Add: where it is a free for all with few rules and communication by hawking.



Hope in Battambang

By Scott H. '24
March 10, 2024

6:00 am the clock ticks. Battambang is alive. The sun rises, illuminating morning markets, thriving merchants, families diligently set up their market booths. Our morning running group moves towards the river. March 10th was a full itinerary starting with our daily khmer lesson and leading into breakfast where many of us were put to the test, when many of us got the opportunity to share a table with local khmer people. I found this experience very significant as it was our first step towards the homestay, practicing communication while sharing a meal. After breakfast, by tuk tuk, we crossed past central city to the outskirts where we got to see intergenerational warmth first hand, meeting with various families and getting to see their work so we could better understand how developments could change these cycles. For example, one of the families we visited made banana snacks, such as dried bananas, banana chips and fried bananas. Here we got to see both mother and daughter making these snacks. The daughter wasn't only a very efficient worker but also a university student with hopes of occupation in the city. Here they also taught us how to make



fried banana chips and even let us try it ourselves which immediately showed us how they make it look so easy! I particularly appreciated this because it showed the root of a product I consumed many times before. Next we had the choice to visit one of the many killing fields of the K.R. A memorial stood with skulls displayed through glass along with a stone carved story of the suffering that occurred when the K.R. arrived. This challenging experience brought strong emotions to many yet light was still apparent. Right next to this memorial was a school. Students walk past this memorial everyday highlighting the importance of acceptance and showing how Cambodia, despite its cruel history, is trying to move forward and develop. After lunch the rest of the day was preparing for homestays. Nerves filled many, including myself, but through doing activities like sharing our hopes and fears, our teachers and instructors gave us insight to how the experience would be overall and how to approach it. Finishing the day off with a delicious dinner following a needed mindfulness debriefing. In conclusion, today was a content filled day and a step toward the homestay.



Ready for Something New!

By Mia L. '24
March 11, 2024

Today everyone woke up with butterflies in their stomachs. Even though we had a full day of learning in front of us the thought of moving into our homestay houses had us all holding our breaths. The dragons program has truly thrown us straight into the fire, in a good way. By having us sit next to random people in the market for breakfast we were forced to us our Khmer. Many students asked peoples name "Shmuy ai" or to the younger children how old are you "A you pon man". We have learned that small interactions and effort are greatly appreciated and make the CES students stand out. As we walked the streets of Bhatom Bong we explore and observe the art work around us. The many murals were equally beautiful but all sent different messages. Art is only recently becoming more popular in Cambodia and Bhatom Bong is an area that is pushing to make art more popular. We learned about all different forms of art. For example, the temples are decorated with clay carving and the murals are painted by hand. Coming to Bhatom Bong was refreshing from our big city experience but it was time for a change in location. During our long car ride we were far from bored. We had journals and assignments, and a quiz to complete. As we immerse ourselves in this culture we are also learning about sustainable development. The mixture of both development educational learning and also exploring is an unbelievably amazing experience.



The dragons program has incorporated learning in so many new ways to push us to become better travelers and people. As we begin to meet our host families and start to us all the Khmer we have learned over the last 5 days. In this moment I am grateful for all I have and this experience and the next three days in BTC have so much potential.



Temple Exploration

By Alex K. '25
March 12, 2024

Today we started off our day with a delicious breakfast of omlets and bread. The night before, one of the students got a melon from their host family, so brought it to share with everyone. Pretty quickly after breakfast, we went to interview the head doctor in the village. After learning about some of his experiences as a doctor in a small village, we headed back to our outdoor classroom. Our lesson was about responsible vs. irresponsible travel. We learned how to be responsible travelers and how to be respectful in a new culture. We then had a delicious lunch and afterwards had a bit of a break. Later in the day we got to go see the temple in the village and also had dinner at the temple. After getting to enjoy the view, we went back to our host families. One of the things that many of us found interesting was that most of the patients the doctor sees have diabetes or high blood pressure. One of the highlights from today was definitely ~~the~~ getting to see the temple. We left the temple feeling great admiration and enjoyment.



A Blessed Village

By Xander T. '24
March 14, 2024

Today we cooked with our homestay families. We went to the market to get supplies. Then our homestay mother gave each of us jobs for prepping food. All of the houses took the food we made to the pagoda where we offered it to the monks. In return we received a blessing. The blessing they gifted us was cold to say the least. The chants brought us to a calm level of living and refreshed us all. Personally, I loved it. The monks way of giving us a way into their culture/religion really made us happy. After the blessing, all the students went back to their separate houses and spent the morning with their host families. Spending time just listening to the families talk really opens your mind to the real meaning of family. Not being able to understand them does not stop you from feeling included and cared for.

Our last interview is a good one. Being able to talk to a teacher of the local school gives our group a look into the life of a local kid. From the things the school does well to the things they need help with. The local school does a good job educating, but not as good of a job keeping students going past primary school.



After the interview we had a scavenger hunt. Our task was to find 20 things using our Khmer and translation skills. My group had a blast! This task really pushed the group out of our comfort zones. Learning to really communicate with Khmer in a real life situation. Ending the night with a "parting ways" celebration with dancing and a big feast made this experience very wholesome. I was very happy about today and here are a few things I'd like to share.

Sounds / Smells of the Village

- Music • Honk • Kids playing • Soccer
- Fish • Fresh • Laughter • Focus
- Hot • Splash • Rustling • Dogs
- Squeal • Yelling • Deals being made
- Peace • Anger • The last ride on coyone
- Crickets chirp • Marriage drums • chants
- Meaningful chats • Reclining chair



Mixed Emotions

By Kate F. '25
March 17, 2024

There are many emotions flowing throughout the group as we ride the bus from Gian Paga Road to Phnom Penh. Adrianna and Lucia are chatting light heartedly with Ryker and Alex Hill, Angel, John, and Mia are reading peacefully. Beatt is looking out the ~~side~~ window, Kaden is trying to take a picture, and ~~Horatio~~ Nora and I are writing in our journals. Everyone is trying to ignore what is coming: our flights back home. Some are trying not to think about the long flights that start with them and their families. Others are trying not to consider leaving this country where we've called home for two weeks. Most are doing both.

We just said a painful goodbye to one of our guides, Seangy. He has been a fantastic leader, and frankly, a fantastic big brother for the past few weeks. Our other two instructors, Kim and Spencer, are still with us. They are sitting so far back in the front row, staring out the windshield. These three guides have all had a profound impact on the trajectory of our lives, especially ~~that~~ Seangy. He taught us countless lessons, from life skills and wisdom to the ~~language~~ local language of Khmer and friendly jokes. Even though we've only known him for two weeks, he has given us more tools for life than many people get in a lifetime.

Although we miss Seangy desperately, we are all excited to be back in Colorado and out of the heat. Only a few plane rides to go! See you all soon!

