Banteay Chhmar – Travelogue
April 2012

I had the pleasure of being invited to an opening of a bank office of ACLEDA Bank in Odtar Meancheay province of Cambodia. I had to look up Odtar Meancheay, so I will share the map below. From Phnom Penh, it was about an eight hour drive, and near the Thai border. The good news was it was not Preah Vihear province where the fighting has occurred. I had heard about a temple referred to as Angkor Wat (2) - the Banteay Chhmar temple and wanted to plan a trip. After the opening, the hosts organized an all-day siteseeing tour of the area, several temples, including Banteay Chhmar! It was built in the same period and about two-thirds the size of Angkor Wat. Here is the story of the trip.


I have a good number of friends in Cambodia who want to organize a trip to Banteay Chhmar, so I am writing this to include the bank opening tour, plus the stop in Siem Reap, to give perspective.

We left Phnom Penh at 8:00 a.m. and made it in time for the official ceremony in Odtar Meancheay. The branch was decorated, and a large tent closed the main road in town. The staff performed many of the traditional dances.

Once the official ceremony was complete, we toured the new office, and the staff set up tables for dinner and more dancing.
Just after the speeches, rain poured down for about an hour. Late April is the beginning of the rainy season. Several of the staff jumped to help. This guy is soaked to the skin, but loving his job. A great corporate culture and staff attitude!

We stayed at the biggest and best hotel in town.

The next morning, breakfast at 7:00 and departure at 8:00.

A quick visit to a small office.

Inside the front gate was a “bunker.” The bank built it to protect their staff as the Thai were firing a few artillary rounds into Cambodia in an indiscriminate manner. I guess we were closer to Thailand than I thought!

The caravan takes off to the temples – maybe 40 vehicles including two 15 passenger vans.
**Banteay Chhmar Temple** - is 1.9 kilometers by 1.5 kilometers, surrounded by the moat.

Can you imagine what it took to dig this moat by hand? ↓

Entrance – the temple is in ruins.

Typical scenes around the temple.

↑ Note the carved face just above the center of the photo. Identical to those seen in the temples around Angkor Wat.
A lot of work to be done, or should they just leave it?

This is a forest area, and a root can run through the cracks between the stones, make 90 degree turns and continue down. As the root grows and expands, the rocks get pushed apart. Several hundred years of jungle growth has destroyed the temple.

A small group of people are starting the restoration project.

All the stones get numbered and will hopefully be pieced back together.

A typical Cambodian house. Cassava was being dried on a blue tarp near the road. (Pretty good shot as it was from a moving car!)
A more prosperous Cambodian residence.

Next stop - **Ta Moan Temple**

We could not take the vans up the hill, so we all loaded into the pickups and SUVs.

At the top, the Cambodian army was standing to welcome us.

Oh my! They mean business! How close were we to Thailand? Up the path 50-100 meters is the temple. (See the next page to see how close the thai troops are from the machine gun.)

This is also the area of Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge built their stronghold in their final days.
Me with my friends Brett and Channy.

Photo opportunities were all over.

Note the dense jungle in the background. I noted the different uniform and asked if this was Cambodian Special Forces? Oops, note the insignia on his right arm - THAILAND. They explained that we had to get special permission to enter this “disputed territory.” The Cambodian military were within 50 years of the border.
They were using a John Deere tractor on the site.

The army was really digging in.

The structures were built to stay awhile.

One of our group helping the soldier stand guard.

It was loaded!

On the way to the next temple, we saw many brand new houses. These were built by the government for the families of the army personnel who were stationed at the temple. Guess they plan to stay awhile.
**Third temple – Ta Krabey** – a walk up through the jungle to a one structure temple.

**Pol Pot’s Grave** – I was there about five years ago, and it was in the middle of a field. Now a casino is open within a couple blocks and they are building a high-rise hotel. Thais will come across to gamble in spite of the border tensions.

It was interesting to watch the people who were with us. Many of the Cambodians were young enough, they were born after the Khmer Rouge.

**Ta Mok’s House** – this is the house of “brother number 5” or one of Pol Pot’s close associates.

View from the living room.

Cage for human prisoners.
↓ Pol Pot’s old radio truck.

↓ Painting of Angkor Wat in the house.

Next stop Siem Reap – about an hour and a half drive.

← Our hotel in Siem Reap.

Several in the group had not seen Angkor Wat, so we made a quick trip around the Angkor Wat temple complex.

The moat – very similar to Banteay Chhmar.

↓ Gate to temples, note the same face as Banteay Chhmar.
Bayon Temple – with the throngs of tourists. May 1st is Labor Day in the entire world except the USA. We heard there were 50,000 tourists from Vietnam for the long weekend.

→ A new addition – explanation of levers. A good exhibit to teach physics to school children.

The long horizontal pole lifted the stone, while the poles on the sides were used to rub the stones sideways, to polish them, or grind them to a perfect fit.
Stopped at a new restaurant on the way back from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh.

I missed some shots on this trip as I was using a different camera. It did take better shots while moving. (5 of these were taken from a moving car.)

Hope you enjoyed the trip. Banteay Chhmar is fabulous. Tourists will start going there more regularly, so if you want to see it in the current state, better plan now. We are looking at organizing a trip, in December possibly (end of rainy season), so if you want to be included, let me know.

A big thank you to my hosts, the management and staff of ACLEDA Bank.

Jim