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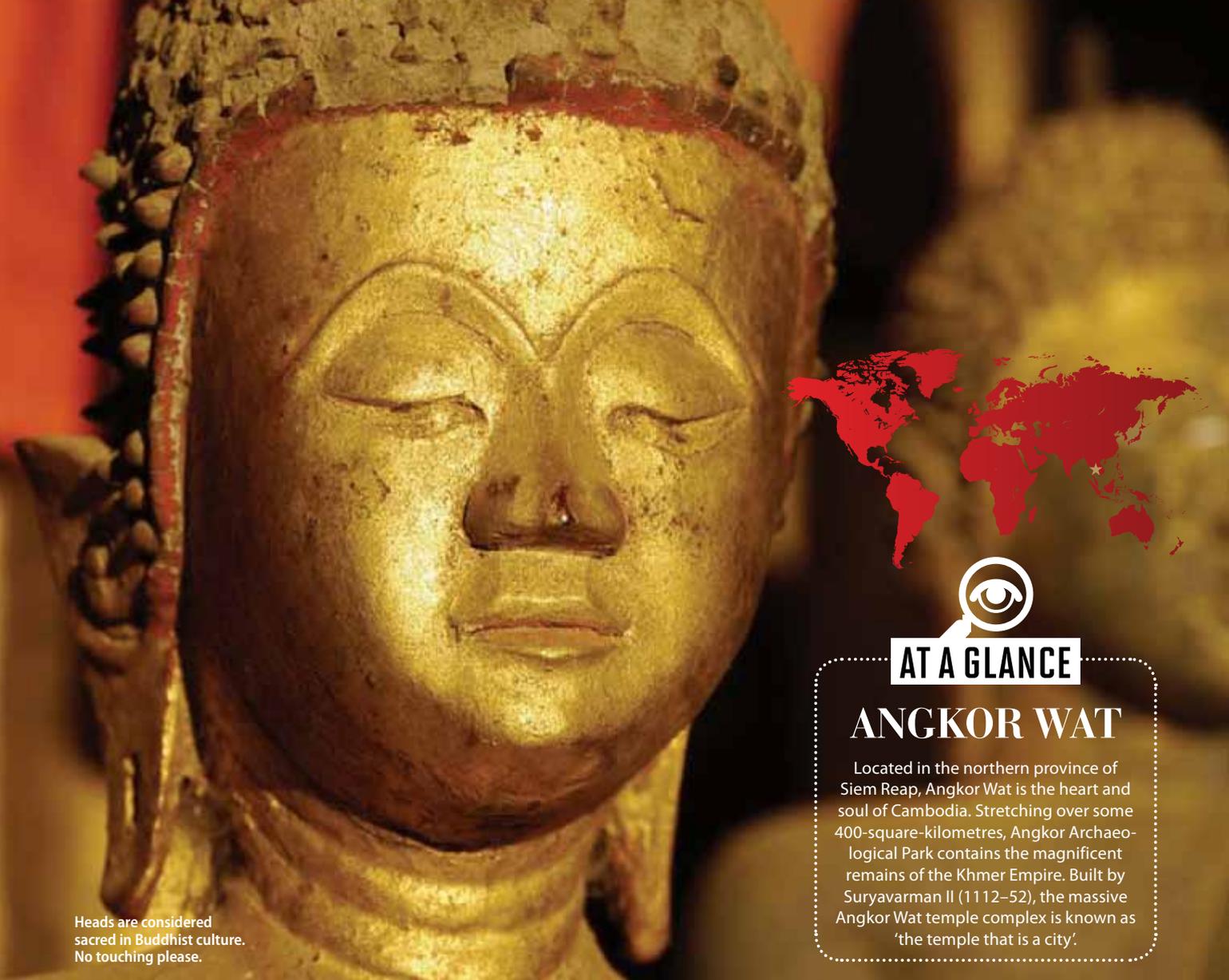
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Heads are considered sacred in Buddhist culture. No touching please.

AT A GLANCE

ANGKOR WAT

Located in the northern province of Siem Reap, Angkor Wat is the heart and soul of Cambodia. Stretching over some 400-square-kilometres, Angkor Archaeological Park contains the magnificent remains of the Khmer Empire. Built by Suryavarman II (1112–52), the massive Angkor Wat temple complex is known as ‘the temple that is a city’.

CULTURE

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, I CAN'T WEAR MY TANK TOP AT ANGKOR WAT?

Stick to these five golden rules at Angkor Wat and the locals will love you

Words and Images by Johanna Read

WE'VE ALL SEEN *THAT* TOURIST... The one who, oblivious to causing any discomfort, takes photographs of local people. The one who hands out candy and coins to kids who should be in school. The one who loudly comments “*everything here costs practically nothing!*” or complains about how dirty everything is. And yes, the one wearing next to nothing and shouting “*What do you mean I can't wear my tank top?*” while being refused entry into Cambodia's Angkor Wat.

We all know that you have enough common sense not to do that, but there are some golden

rules that can help you get through Southeast Asia without causing any offence whatsoever.

1. Not Buddhist? Observe from a Distance

A local resident may encourage you to participate in the dawn alms-giving ceremony—but don't. Well, unless you're a practicing Buddhist yourself, that is. Instead, observe the ceremony silently from a distance, because unless you understand all the nuances of the Tak Bat ceremony, you will inadvertently disrupt the monks and alms-givers. It's okay to take photos—from a distance—

during the Tak Bat, but manually turn off your flash. You can also take non-flash photos in most of the temples, but stay silent and remain a respectful distance from anyone who is praying.

2. Watch your Head

The head is a sacred part of the body, so while you might tousle the hair of a child at home, you should never touch the head of a Buddhist person. Everyone is also supposed to keep their heads lower than a monk's, so don't watch the Tak Bat from a bus or a balcony. However, there's no need to crouch if you see a monk in the market.

IN SHORT



Cambodian school girls; keep them in school!

3. Be Aware of your Hands

You can show respect if you accept or give important things with both hands. This is especially true for business cards, which you should examine briefly before you carefully tuck away for safekeeping.

If you buy a valuable or handmade object, accepting it with both hands shows the seller how much you appreciate it. Handing over your cash or credit card with both hands represents the same thing.

4. Be Careful with your Feet Please!

Feet are considered unclean, so be aware of what you do with them. Remove your shoes before you enter a temple or a home. However, on the street it's rude *not* to wear shoes.

Pointing your feet at someone is also considered to be rude, so tuck your feet under yourself while sitting on the floor and be careful not to point your toes or soles in the direction of a Buddha statue. Stepping over someone sitting on the floor is also impolite, so walk around them.

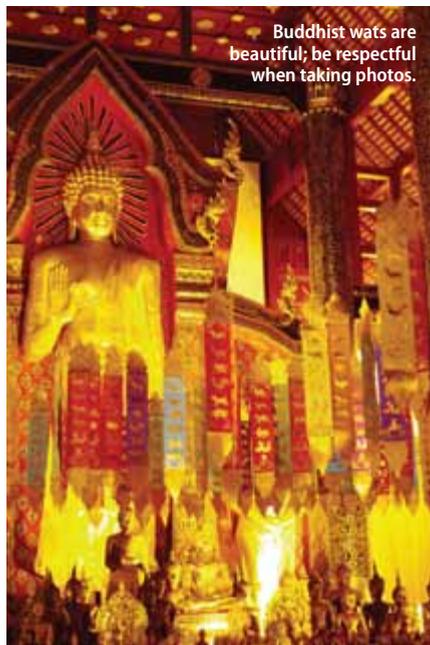
5. Modesty is Best

If you dress and behave modestly, the local people will appreciate it.

Women should cover their shoulders, cleavage, bellies and preferably their knees too. Men should keep their shirts on, despite the heat, and avoid sleeveless shirts. Covering shoulders, knees and everything in between is important if you want to gain entry into the main Angkor temples.

And avoid public displays of affection. Handholding and a quick peck are tolerated, but cuddles or big smooches will make others uncomfortable.

Keep these simple tips in mind and your visit to Cambodia will be as serene as the Buddhas that you'll see just about everywhere. ☺



Buddhist wats are beautiful; be respectful when taking photos.

WHEN YOU GO

- US dollars are as commonly used as the Cambodian Riel, and even the Thai Baht is acceptable in some places. Most hotels, restaurants and shops set their prices in dollars. Small transactions are usually done in Riel, so always carry some for motorcycle taxis and snacks.
- There are two distinct seasons: the rainy season (June to October, average 27 - 35°C) and the dry season. The dry season is divided into two sub-seasons, the cool (November to February, average 17 - 27°C) and the hot (March to May, average 29 - 38°C).
- Cambodia is a pretty safe country for travellers these days, but remember the golden rule in remote areas: stick to marked paths because of landmines.



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