The temple featured in “Tomb Raider” is interesting not only for the massive trees that seem to grow out of the walls, but also for a small figure on one of the temple’s intricately carved walls. The little carving isn’t much bigger than a cell phone but it looks remarkably like a stegosaurus. That gets the mind whirling. Did the ancient Khmer people walk the earth with dinosaurs? Did they dig up an intact stegosaurus fossil? Unlikely. Ta Phrom was built in the 1100s, and stegosauruses lived 150 million years ago. Experts say the carving is a chameleon, a boar, an Asian rhino, or just something dreamed up by the imaginative artist. But it does make you wonder about the lives of the people who first lived in these elaborate temples. To find it, go to Ta Phrom’s far west edge. Walking back into the temple complex, go inside the second wall into a small courtyard. You’ll see a center doorway with a tower to the left. In the corner, to the left of a columned window, you’ll see a vertical line of carvings. They’re at a right angle to the window. At the bottom you’ll see a monkey-like figure and, above it, several figures carved within circles. The second one from the bottom is the “stegosaurus”.
Answers from the local expert

When is the best time to visit?

Mornings and afternoons.

How much does it cost?

About KHR37 - KHR72.

All temples within the main Angkor complex can be seen for the same price, a $37 1-day ticket, $62 3-day ticket, or $72 7-day ticket.

Do you have any tips?

Having trouble spotting it? Keep your eye on nearby guides with small groups; they'll likely lead their charges right to it.

Is there an official website?

Yes, you can visit www.tourismcambodia.org
About the local expert

Johanna Read

Johanna Read is a Canadian freelance writer/photographer specializing in travel, food and responsible tourism. Based in Vancouver, she loves the city’s ocean location and fabulous food. Find links to her articles for in-flight magazines, Fodor’s, USA Today, and others at TravelEater.net.