

Journey to Cambodia, 16 days, from March 19th to April 3rd 2017

A new journey, an adventurous trip, a journey that took place just in the nick of time because of my last entry. We are a small group, a select group, a group of nine people, not counting our tour guide.

Here is a personal account of this particular trip, primarily for the group itself. The official itinerary is in the brochures and on the website of Djoser.

Note: Please be aware that the text of this newsletter was translated by computer from Dutch into English, It was a great job, but some of my personal style got of course lost.

March 19

An adventurous journey. You can say that. The adventure began at Schiphol. I had not been at Schiphol for several years, but it was incredible, what extensions and what a change. I now understood why we had to be there three hours before flight time. There were quite a few "hurdles" on the road. First, a long serpentine path between steel fences before we reached the check-in counters. Then an even longer ride for security where we had to half and half to undress and were scanned with raised arms and finally a passport control where the passport disappeared into a machine and where a picture was taken of us. I don't envy the people that stand in line and need to go to the toilet.

The Boeing 777-300ER Cathay Pacific flight CX270, received us warmly. The cabin was not completely full, here and there were some open seats. I sat next to an experienced fellow passenger from Djoser, who recognized me right away because of the label hanging from my backpack. He gave me an update about the in's and out's of a trip with Djoser. The adventure could begin. But it took a while. It took nearly two hours. At that time the aircraft was driven first to a parking halfway the runway because another plane was "mooring" at the gate. Later it turned out that the delay was due to the crowd at the airport and to the work carried out on the airport. That was just too bad, because we had just over two hours in Hong Kong to transfer to our flight to Phnom Penh. We would not fetch that flight.

The flight itself went smoothly. We were well equipped with pillows, blankets, headphones, meals, drinks and a lot of movies on our own private screen on the seat in front of us. Sleeping in economy class, is not for every-one. Looking out the window also did not help because it was pretty cloudy. And night time.

We went during the flight from Saturday 9 to Sunday, April 10.

20th of March

Upon arrival in Hong Kong, we got a big surprise. The flight to Phnom Penh had left but a blessing in disguise, the tour guide was traveling with us. And became immediately an excellent tour guide. The Djoser guests were identified and we were introduced to each other. Four women, two from Belgium and five men. Including an uncle with his niece and a mother with her son. Patrick, our tour guide, went straight to work. Arranging a replacement flight to Phnom Penh. That was late because we would first need to go to Bangkok and then to switch to a flight to Phnom Penh. Arranging it included our luggage and the use of the business lounge at the airport in Hong Kong where we could rest some, eating, drinking and even showering. Lovely. And what a wonderful airport. Laid out in the sea, super modern and fully equipped.

Late in the afternoon we went to Bangkok. We had to go through the mill again, through all kinds of doors and corridors, to get to the departure lounge for Phnom Penh. In one of the many restaurants we enjoyed a delicious, oriental meal. Late in the evening we flew to Phnom Penh. Once there, though quite 'cooked' by all the events, we first had to arrange a visa. That was at the airport and cost \$ 30. The process was performed by a "battery" of nine officers, seated in a row. Then we started looking for our luggage and it was happily coming along. Outside it was hot, stuffy hot. 31 degrees Celsius in the evening at 24:00. There was a large crowd at the exit, including many small children. We searched for our local guide, Nara and the driver of our van. They were found after a short time, then it was just a chat or two and we were on our way to our hotel.

The hotel was right in town. What a crowd, what a tremendous amount of roadside stalls and what a mess on the street. We checked in. The 'porters' of the Dara Reang Sey Hotel, carried the heavy luggage to the rooms and were paid by Patrick from the tip fund, into which we all contributed \$ 40. And then, what then?

21 March

It had now become 21 March and some of us were so full of adrenaline that sleeping was out of the question. So then, into the city. We passed a group of noisy prostitutes shouting to us and then out to the boulevard. We look in awe at the mighty Mekong River. Broad, majestic. We walked to the royal palace, the silver palace and 'marveled' at the garbage lying on the streets. We went into a café and enjoyed our first glass of beer, Ankor beer. There would be many to follow. Then back to the hotel because we have to leave early the next day, the same day really.

The bus leaves at 0700. Although we have slept a few hours and had spent almost 36 hours traveling, we feel relatively well. No jet lag, no headache, very special. We did touring as through the city, Patrick tells us the laws of Cambodia, gives some great advice and presented some good information. Including a map of Cambodia. Today will

be a long day. A journey of over 600 kilometers over not the best of roads to the north of Cambodia, to Banlung, close to the border with Laos. The question is whether it is wise to sit for such a long time, over 12 hours, in the bus the first day immediately after a long flight. But we were glad that we finally got to Phnom Penh. A city of two million inhabitants, filthy, crowded, packed with motorbikes and still 'suffering' under the terrible Khmer Rouge massacres that ravaged the country from 1975 to 1979. Amazing, how terrible and how cruel people can be. The fear and the pain can still be felt. More than 2 million people, their own people, were slaughtered.

The hotels serve no breakfast. It is not included in the price. We have to pay separately for breakfast, lunch and dinner and also for all the trips we want to go. But food costs almost nothing and the trips are relatively inexpensive. We stop in the town Skuon. At a restaurant located right next to a busy market, a market where you can get anything. As a specialty they sell fried frogs, scorpions, crickets and other pests. One of us buys a bag of fried creatures and enjoys it visible. Another ordered a cheese sandwich. No better way to show the differences in eating habits within the group. A roll of cheese is not there, cheese hardly exists in Cambodia, but there is always an omelet. Later the breakfasts and lunches consisted of roughly two kinds of dishes. Soup, sometimes spicy soup with noodles and vegetables, often with a bowl of white rice and omelet with bread. With bottled water, tea, coffee and beer as a beverage.

We continue along the Mekong River to the north. The road is getting worse, we are sometimes quite shaken, especially those who sit in the back of the bus. The driver drives sometimes a bit too fast, but we must go a long way this day. He is extremely skillful and it is worth a compliment to see how he guides his van through the busy traffic. Especially along the thousands of mopeds and Tuk Tuks, mopeds with a 'container' behind them for the passengers, max 4.. The engines and tuk tuks fan out in all directions. The traffic is chaotic. Getting along or right against us or across the street. Usually it goes well, people give each other space, but there are also many accidents. Every two hours there will be a sanitary stop at a gas station and smokers can light up a cigarette. We have lunch in Kratie, halfway between Phnom Penh and Banlung.

As we get further north the country is more sparsely populated. It is mainly flat, as in the Netherlands. Most houses are on stilts some three meters above the ground. The round floor is used, to doze in hammocks, to work, or as storage space. The top one is to sleep. All along the way we see small fields with tropical fruits. The country sometimes seems one large orchard. Pineapple, banana, jackfruit, papaya, mangoes, and later we will see how they are growing cashew nuts. Late afternoon we pass Stung Treng, a fairly large city. Here, the road splits to Laos in the north and to Banlung in northeastern Cambodia. At six hours it gets dark, very quickly, but we have to drive on for two more hours. Finally, what a day, we arrive in Banlung around 20:00. Now let's quickly go to a restaurant, before all the tents close. It is a fantastic restaurant, run by expatriate

French. For 10 to 15 dollars, we have an excellent, extensive dinner. Then to the hotel, the hotel Sovann Kiri, a beautiful, modern hotel. Here we will stay for two days. Time to relax a bit.

March 22nd

Good sleep, it cleared a bit our jet-lag. Fortunately, we have not to get up early this time. Gathering at 09:00 in the lobby. Then by bus to a restaurant in the center of town, Near a huge market. It is fun, three times a day, to eat out in an exotic restaurant. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, all outside the door. This restaurant is full of beautiful wooden sculptures of women with beautiful faces and prominent breasts. And also some Buddhas and fearsome monsters. The two main variants, soup with noodles and omelet with bread are on the table again. With coffee in really nice, old-fashioned aluminum cups placed in hot water in a bowl. The coffee has a little chocolate flavor. And what does it cost? For a bowl of soup with rice and a cup of coffee, we pay 3.5 dollars. Everything is in dollars or in local currency, the Riel. With 4000 Riel being approximately one dollar. If you pay in dollars you often get, as change, money back in Riel. There are many small denominations, such as bills of 100 Riel, or \$ 1/40. Coins do not exist in Cambodia.

This town in the north is "pure." Not yet discovered by tourists and ruined by tourists. People look at you as if we come from Mars, with big open eyes. And they laugh at you. Everywhere there are children, often very young, friendly waving at you. And nowhere will you be pressed to buy something. Great! The market, a huge market is a special experience. From the very popular Western products like vacuum cleaners, fans and iPads, to all sorts of fruits and vegetables, fish and meats and gold and precious stones. Many artisans sit at small tables doing their job. For all to see. We would have liked to stay longer. Around the market there are hundreds of motorcycles, some loaded with goods and others with entire families on one moped. Father, mother, son in front, one more between them and another one, a girl behind. Men and women are both driving mopeds. Very skillfully. And quite striking, the motorbikes make hardly any noise. They are very quiet. We can learn from them in the Netherlands.

And nowhere we see garish advertising signs along the road and certainly no signs of scantily clad women. What a refreshment. And what a shame that this will probably be gone in a few years. Due to good, paved roads, to the construction or reopening of the airport and maybe even for transport by boat. We get back on the bus and continue north. It is bump, bump again, though, but the environment compensates much. We see the first mountains and there are still pieces of pure jungle. There is little traffic. And all along the way is the national fruit of Cambodia, the cashew nut. It grows on trees. It is a curved projection sticking out underneath an orange fruit. In some trees are only a few fruits. I think what an effort it must be to harvest these fruits, pack and transport them all the way to the Netherlands or elsewhere. Where in the supermarkets bags of cashew nuts

can be bought for a just a few euros or dollars. Please think of the effort that has been made to reap these benefits. A few trees for one can of nuts!

Unfortunately, we also see large areas that are burned. All over Cambodia. There is already the first hotel, near Veoun Gai, a small town on a lake. It's an idyllic place and there are no visible tourists. We cross in a ferryboat consisting of three linked boats to each other, to the other side of the lake. Very old fashioned and very 'basic' but it works. There are even cars using heavy wooden planks to get on the boat and to drive off. We walk in the blazing sun on a deserted road to the north. Where we visit a Chinese cemetery. There is not much to see and the walk is too long and the sun is too hot. Back to the village from where we left. A real authentic village. We sit down and drink a Coke, a beer or some orange juice.

Then back to the ferry across the lake. Towards a new, special attraction. A crater lake. A famous tourist attraction. Here is music, and there are children playing. We go down a bit further, more sheltered from the noise and some go swimming. Delicious water, really lovely. Others walk around the lake. It takes one hour but the most athletic man among us, who is in training for the Rotterdam marathon, does it in 11 minutes. The cabins are in are not really made for western people. The ceilings are very low. I bump my head and it bleeds properly. In Banlung quickly back to a small supermarket for a bottle of rum, 42.8%, for only \$ 6. Fine rum, but of course primarily intended for disinfecting the wound. And it works. Then back to the hotel.

Gathering in the lobby for a trip to a seemingly good restaurant, Sal's restaurant. I overslept, must have been the rum, and woke up at 1930. In the lobby is a note from Patrick stating: "Hi Jaap. We are going to Sal's restaurant & bar. Near the hotel. "I asked at the hotel where it is, but no one speaks English. A gas station pointed me the way, not far from the hotel. I walk in the pitch-black night because there is no street lighting. Eventually I arrive at Sal's restaurant. It is quite secluded behind some houses. A woman, Sal, meets me there and says she has not seen my group. I'm looking at a cold beer in the fridge and we start talking. We talk for hours. Her name is Sal indeed, she speaks good English and she has several relationships. Now I'm relationship counselor so that's nice. I listen and give some advice. Her daughter has prepared a plate of fried rice for me and there is another cold beer. After a few hours of her son of four years old comes to her and I leave. What a special experience it. And, apparently, it had to be, the Great Helmsman, as I call Him or Her, directed me. That's happened to me more often. My colleagues have, after some wandering around, they could not find the place, gone back to the "French" restaurant where we were yesterday. What a special day!

March 23

Breakfast in the same restaurant as yesterday. I liked it, it is outstanding. This time 'noodle soup with beef, which is cheaper than noodle soup with chicken. This is of course

because the chickens here are skinny and fast. We are on our way to Stung Treng on the Mekong River. At the market I buy a huge papaya, for which you pay about 25 euros in the Netherlands. Here it was \$ 2. Papaya with lime juice is a delicious combination, try it.

Stung Treng is known for its freshwater dolphins. Just before the city is the location called Kampi Mekong Dolphin Viewing Site. Here we have to be. We pay seven dollars per person and sail down the river in two boats. An Israeli backpacker goes with us, otherwise she had to hire a boat for herself. It is exciting. Full of anticipation, we look out over the wide water. Then we see some wrinkles further away and we see briefly a fin above water. And later a black back. The boats sails fast off, the last part goes with the paddle. The dolphins, sometimes there are as many as three, are a little further on. We'll see sail up and down for half an hour and then again and then again, after the surfacing dolphins. It looks like they're playing with us and maybe they are. Anyway, the point is not so much to shoot beautiful pictures, it is the 'experience, not the pictures "Patrick lets us know.

We have lunch in the restaurant and enjoy the site. We order with four people, a big fish with rice and grated mango in the salt. It sounds strange but it tastes fine. Outside everything is for sale. Stunning images of dolphins, made of wood, at least so it seems, but it can also be something else. Along the way we meet an elephant. He stands under a tree by the side of the road and is stared at by all curious people. Especially the children, watching the elephant with big eyes. We get out and take some pictures. Patrick even dares even to stroke the elephant.

We drive on to Kratie, where we were also on the way up and check into the imposing Luck Life World Hotel. Built in Chinese style. And perhaps it is also Chinese. It seems that China is investing significantly in the countries in Southeast Asia, all the way up, or down, to Australia. We walk into the town. It is a prosperous place. All along the main street are mopeds for sale, most Japanese models. Interspersed with workshops where they can be repaired and get maintenance. We meet at a restaurant overlooking the river. Some of us leave a little earlier to admire the sunset on the Mekong River.

We sit down at a long table, directly above the river. We admire the lights and watch the ships on the river. What a beautiful view. The food is excellent and in addition, some of us are honored by two big gallon jugs with draft beer. It tastes excellent. Fantastic, to be with good friends, we have become good friends now, to sit at table and talk very relaxed. After a lovely evening we walk back to the hotel. We try to pin some dollars at an ATM (cash machine), but even though this place is clearly more 'tourist friendly', these ATMs are not.

March 24

Today is "Temple Day. " There is a lot on the program. So at 07:00 we gather in the lobby. Although we are in a beautiful hotel with large rooms, the plumbing still leaves something to be desired. That is the way for more hotels. The taps are loose, the shower dangles a bit and the taps do not work properly. The floors of the bathrooms do not run down properly so the water stays for too long on the floor. So watch out, do not slip. But they are learning, I think. After breakfast on our old, familiar spot, we go to Kompong Thom. That's a long drive and the roads are not too good here. The driver rides again too hard and at one point, in a deep pit, it goes wrong. Passengers in the back of the bus fly almost to the ceiling and at the back of the bus piled luggage is sliding forward. I cry out, I am very angry and from then on will sit in the front. The driver goes slower and is more circumspect driving. We are after all on a holiday.

Along the way we visit a primary school. Located in a beautiful location. The children are all wearing black and white uniforms. It is good that so much attention is being paid to education. Something this country, after the devastating Khmer Rouge war, desperately needs. We are welcome and they show us everything. Dear, dedicated teachers and very cheerful, but very disciplined children. If we are entering the classroom, they are folding their hands before their chests and start sing. Touching.

Then we visit an ancient temple located in Wat Nokor, the former capital of Cambodia, long before the time of Angkor Wat. The temple is surrounded by a multitude of new temples and pagodas. Inside are some old women holding red strings tied very skillfully to our wrist, saying a nice prayer and then ask for one dollar. What we give with pleasure. In the ancient temples I have, for the first time, seen some Orbs, you know the light bulbs that you sometimes come across on your digital camera.

Then lunch, chicken with cashew nuts this time and next heading to the Temple Mount, to Santuk Mountain Heritage. Admission \$ 2. The temple complex is a fairly high mountain where we can go up in two ways. Walking on a staircase with 800 steps, or the back of a moped. There are some boys and girls with strong mopeds ready to drive us to the top. Cost \$ 3 one way and \$ 5 for return. I choose a moped, which is again a new adventure. I am a bit scared because I think I weigh about twice as much as the driver but we go. I sit far forward with my hands on his shoulders. A little further I see one of our two Belgian colleagues, the woman who has a solid façade, pushing her body close to the boy on another moped with her arms firmly around him. I think they both like it.

We go up. We pass huge boulders. How they got there I do not know, but such a mountain full of gigantic boulders, must be a sacred place. And it's true. Atop the mountain are some beautiful temples and everywhere we see images carved in the rocks. One picture looks like a Black Madonna. The giant statues of reclining Buddha's are very impressive. The mountain also houses a few monkeys. Here I saw, moreover,

how a Buddhist monk drank a plastic bottle of water and throw the empty bottle carelessly over the wall. Yes, if even the monks waste their country this way, it will be some time before they progress as far as Singapore. There you will be fined on the spot when you drop a piece of paper on the street. But it's crazy. The temples are spotlessly clean, you must even take off your shoes before entering and outside the temple it is a mess. I would like to know more about this fascinating place, but unfortunately there are no books or brochures.

We go further and pass a street full of sculptors. Left and right of the road are over a length of several hundred meters, sculptures and sculptors. Gigantic statues, small sculptures, everything is there and everything is for sale. Meter high Buddha statues. We drive on, to our final destination of the day, to Kamong Thom, where we stay in the hotel Arunras. But we first went to an old French mansion, situated along the Stung Sen River. A house surrounded by tall trees. For a special event. In the trees are large colonies of bats and they fly off just after sunset. We wait patiently with our cameras at the ready, while further along the boulevard various gymnastic exercises are held. Finally the bats are moving, but it's too late and too dark to see it properly. Later this trip we will see a mass exodus of bats. Millions of bats.

We go with two Tuk Tuks to Sambor Village, a good restaurant just outside the city, surrounded by greenery, where we enjoy an extensive \$ 15, excellent meal. A dinner that would cost at least 50 euros in the Netherlands.

March 25

We gather again at 0700 in the lobby of the hotel. And go to the breakfast corner. Tom Yang soup is very popular. The food is cooked both inside and outside the restaurant. Very simple and very effective. It smells fantastic. And there's actually a working ATM where a colleague and I have to refuel our money bags. We pins each \$ 200. These are our 'handed out' in the form of two bills of \$ 100. But we cannot use it in Cambodia, they are too big nominations. Even with 10-dollar bills people are starting to look at us frowning. So to the adjacent bank, where they are using four employees, it is after all to create jobs, to break up our 100-dollar bills.

We then drive to a magical forest where with three temples. It feels like a sacred place.

That's because of I think, the trees. High trees. Different kinds of trees and trees with strange deformities. In the forest we meet a group of monks. A wonderful opportunity for a picture. Also, this would have been another one of the ancient capitals of the Cambodian empire. It is a huge complex surrounded by walls made of colored red, volcanic rock. Again, I see a few orbs and a strange purple light. At the entrance is a cart where they are squeezing sugar cane stalks. You see them everywhere. I give it a try. It is

a yellowish juice, sweet and yet fresh. Without ice because that will be made from tap water and does not always agree with Westerners.

A little further we stop at an old bridge. Which dates back to the eleventh century. It can only be used by cyclists, motorbikes, Tuk Tuks and pedestrians. It is a beautiful, imposing bridge. There are a few tents where we can buy some snacks because we are going on the big lake and there are no lunches there. There is a toilet, which we need to flush using a small plastic pot floating in a large bowl of water.

Then we go to the lake, Lake Tonle Sap. A gigantic, freshwater lake that is directly connected to the Mekong River. And it has a very stabilizing effect on the water resources of Cambodia. In the wet season, when the monsoon rains fall, so between May and November, the lake fills with water. Then, the water level rises a few meters. In the dry season when the Mekong River is low, the lake empties its water on the river, so there is all year enough water in the river. There are now plans to build dams and power plants in the river, but whether this is ecologically wise, is doubtful.

We drive along a dirt road to the lake. Along miraculous houses built on meter high wooden poles. What a colorful and picturesque sight. The boat ride across the river to the lake, which also supports several floating houses, is a breathtaking journey. It costs \$ 20 per person, but is well worth the effort. We pass high on their legs standing houses. And people fishing in the river. Along pieces of land with corn and other vegetables. Studded with playing children and children swimming in the brown water and frolicking. With all kinds of large and small boats sailing up and down the river. Boats with a long shaft, far protruding aft. The structures are simple but it works. On the lake itself are a number of floating houses. Poor people, they say, people who cannot buy or rent houses. On the lake it is free. But most houses have a satellite dish.

Back at the dock we buy some presents for home. Small copper sculptures of elephants, Buddha's and other figures, for only \$ 1 each. Statuettes that later in Angkor Wat will cost 5 dollars. Just before Siem Reap we enjoy a late lunch at a beautiful spot. Here we can rest from all our experiences. As we approach Siem Reap it is getting busier. Finally we arrive in the city and check into the Marvel Holiday Villa hotel. Located just outside the center and the hustle and bustle of the city. A beautiful hotel with luxurious rooms, great bathrooms, a pool and a restaurant. Here we will stay for three days. A great opportunity to turn in our dirty laundry. We do not need to eat any more. A can of beer, which we can buy in a shop nearby and some chips are sufficient. I went to a massage parlor 50 meters from the hotel. I needed it after all of the bumping into the bus. I got a full body massage for an hour, my pants stayed on course, for only \$ 5. Perfect.

And then to bed. With my compliments to Djoser for the great choice of this hotel!

March 26

The next three days we are on our own. We must make our own plan. Patrick has provided us with information about Angkor Wat, everything is neatly on paper and he gave us some good advice. The guide Nara and our driver got three days off. We will now have to travel with Tuk Tuks, but they are plentiful. The best is yet to reserve one of the Tuk Tuks related to the hotel. Those are the most reliable. Various groups are formed, who either go together on the road or who choose to spend one or more days in the hotel and have a relaxing break. I have found my partner, a man of my age with whom I get along fine. We agree to meet at 0700 at breakfast. This time we can have breakfast in the hotel. Cost \$ 5.

I can only describe the routes we took and the things that we have experienced. And I will mention what our colleagues experienced. We go to Angkor Wat, the main purpose of our trip. The largest temple complex in the world. The main temple, the actual Angkor Wat, stands prominent in the national flag of Cambodia.

We begin our journey, and that applies to all visitors to this temple complex at the Ticket Office. A modern building complex, surrounded by shops. In the parking lot that morning are already many buses. There are annually about two million visitors to Angkor Wat. We have three choices. A pass for one day, which costs \$ 37; a pass for three days which costs \$ 62, and a pass for a week, which costs \$ 72. That may sound strange but the temple complex is so vast and encompasses so many different temples and temple complexes, that you easily spend a week visiting just the most interesting places. At the ticket office, things proceed professionally. They even take a picture of you, which is then printed on your card. You must show pass regularly. We buy a pass for three days. I later learned, that Vietnam has invested a lot in Cambodia and especially in Angkor Wat and that 80% of the revenue from the ticket office goes to Vietnam!

First, a word about Angkor Wat. That means "temple city" or "city of temples." It is not only the name of the 'main temple, but the whole area. It was from the 9th to the 15th century the capital of the Khmer Empire (802-1431). This empire included not only current Cambodia, but also southern China, Vietnam, Thailand and Burma (now Myanmar). The temple complex is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the main temple is also known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The main temple covers an area of 126.6 hectares (Wikipedia). Originally a Hindu temple complex, as can still be seen in the oldest Roluos group, later in the 12th century it went slowly into a Buddhist temple. That temple is dedicated to the god Vishnu. The main temple, built by the Khmer King Suryavarman II in the early 12th century consists of a temple mountain, a kind of stacked temple complex, surrounded by temple galleries full of reliefs. At the front is a beautiful lake.

The area is so vast that it can only be visited using tuk tuks, or minibuses, or else a motorbike or bicycle, which is especially popular with the Dutch. Each tuk tuk has a card with this five possible routes, routes which each occupy an entire day. 'Temple tour 1', the 'small tour' with the main temple herein, the "Temple tour 2, the 'big tour' and Temple tour 3 ', the 'Roluos group and last but not least 'Temple tour 4', the 'Banteay Srey group.'" There are also eleven other interesting places marked on the map. A very useful map. The tuk tuks can be hired for a whole day, with costs, after some negotiations, about \$ 20 per day. But usually a trip does not take a whole day. Around two o'clock in the afternoon we have seen so much and it is so hot that we go, exhausted, back to our hotel. For a nap in our air-conditioned room, or a light lunch and a swim.

We choose the first day for tour 3 to the Roluos group, the oldest temple complex of Angkor Wat, which lies 13 kilometers east of Siem Reap. The journey is going there is an experience. You see a lot more from a Tuk Tuk, sitting in the open air and driving at a speed of 30 kilometers per hour, then in a bus. The temples were built of bricks. We first went to Lolei to a Shiva temple, built between 875 - 893. There is only one word, or rather two words for these temples: impressive, very impressive. Then further south to Ko Preak temple and a little further still to Bakong, the oldest mountain temple of Angkor Wat. This temple is the prototype of all temple mountains built afterwards. Beautiful, secluded in the middle of lush nature and not swarmed by tourists. What can I say further? Look at the pictures to tell you their story.

There are some children who want to sell original silk scarves, three for \$ 10, pretty scarves yes, but not silk. Nevertheless, I buy three of these scarves, always a nice gift. I also buy the book "Ancient Angkor" a beautifully illustrated book with good stories and excellent information.

I do ask myself, as I do with all the holy places that I have visited, like the Borobudur in Indonesia, the temples of Bali, Palenque in Mexico, Machu Picchu in Peru, not to mention Rennes-le-Chateau in France and Glastonbury in England, what it is that such a place is a sacred place. Is it the energy, the energy that you are feeling, or special mountains or caves, or is it the location on an intersection of ley lines or energy nodes, is it the strategic position, or is it because there is water nearby, a lake or a river? Or are the sacred sites located at ancient sites of previous civilizations such as Atlantis and Lemuria, places from fables, myths and legends? Or is it the impressive rock formations, such as Stonehenge or Carnac, or the special nature, the vegetation, the trees? I do not know. I asked, but no one could give me an answer. At Angkor Wat it could well be a combination of the above factors. The geographical position, the energy, water, trees, who knows.

Before noon we finished seeing the Roluos Group temples. The "official" tour then praises a visit to the floating village 'a bit further lies to the east,' but that we have already seen. We discuss when drinking a juice, the clear fluid of a green, not yet ripe coconut. The thick shell at the top is expertly cut off by women with sharp blades, after which we can drink the cooled coconut water with a straw. Fresh and good thirst-quenching. And for only \$ 1. The green coconuts are then thrown away. The mature brown coconut pulp are used for various purposes, including making coconut milk is made. We decide to visit another attraction, the Silk Farm on the other side of town. So we choose to go to the Silk Farm. For \$ 5 extra, because it is a long way.

We drive through the city of Siem Reap. It's awfully busy, especially around the market. And that goes for all markets we visited. We take the road to Battambang and stare at the vast amount of giant hotels along the route to the airport. And the giants that are still under construction. So glad we did not stay here between those colosses, but it does indicate that tourism around Angkor Wat has soared high and continues to do so.

At the Silk Farm it is relatively quiet, it is March 26, a Sunday, but that's not saying much. We are very professional awaited at the entrance by an English-speaking guide who first points out politely where the toilets are. How thoughtful. Then we are guided by him personally over the entire complex. Where some 400 people, mostly women, work. It is extremely interesting. Everything is done by hand and/or feet, no electricity is involved. We walk along the mulberry fields, see the little caterpillars and the big yellow cocoons, and see how the threads of the cocoon are spun into silk threads. Then we follow the process of cleaning the threads and putting it on blocks and then color the silk. Then we proceed to the weaving of the fabrics and the application of patterns of the substances. An incredibly labor intensive process. At the end of the tour we come into a large exhibition area, with some beautiful costumes.

It will not surprise you that next we arrive in a spacious, air-conditioned and gift shop. What a wonderful items they have here. Most of it is naturally for women, but there is also something for men. My colleague and I each buy a beautiful shirt. For me a shirt of a deep blue color, for only \$ 90, and for him a sober black shirt with a red tie to wear at the wedding of his daughter. Then, completely satisfied, we return to the hotel. To cool off in the pool. Then the sky clouds over. Dark clouds contract and later we have a small thunderstorm. For me a nice opportunity to get some more Orb pictures, because they like to show up in rain and thunderstorms, when the air filled with water vapor and free electrons.

Thereafter, a small group of five men, including our tour guide, armed with umbrellas from the hotel, go to a fancy restaurant. Which of course is filled with tourists. First a cocktail, then soup, hot spicy chicken with rice and a few beers, because we don't have to drive. We conclude with flambéed banana. All for 22 dollars, expensive for Cambodian standards, but very cheap compared to Dutch prices. What a day, what a day!

27 March

The long journey. And it is indeed a long journey. We drive and drive and drive, but that does not matter because there is much to be seen en route. Temples, lakes, beautiful scenery, and here and there a couple of roadside stalls. Today five temples, namely Preah Kan, Neak Pean, Ta Som, East Mebon and Pre Rup will be visited. I made several beautiful pictures and one of our colleagues, a professional photographer, has created truly beautiful pictures. His photos often have a personal touch while I have more photos of buildings and landscapes. Together we can provide a fascinating report. Photos of special reliefs, of artful sculpture, of long corridors with heavy gates and round pillars, of high towers with Buddha images. Photos of altars with a large round stone sticking up out of a square, symbols of the masculine and feminine. Of dancing goddesses, beautiful women with beautiful breasts, high walls of reddish volcanic rock, wide paved roads and squares of impressive moats and flooded lakes containing some dead trees, lakes with graceful lotus flowers in bloom. There is so much to see. Enjoy the pictures!

What is most striking is that there are many images where the heads have been cut off. Some say that this happened because in the images gold and jewels were hidden, others argue that the heads are stolen to sell them to wealthy merchants in Thailand. And so much has been destroyed by the Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, it is striking that in some temples black colored Buddha's and black colored female goddesses can be seen. Reminding me of the Black Madonna in France, Italy and Spain.

Furthermore, a lot of places are being restored. By universities from all over the world. Some temples are half demolished or collapsed, some are closed to the public and around other temples are masses of large stone blocks.

We have lunch at a stall next to one of the temples. Hot chicken curry cooked on the spot, because then the risk of food poisoning is low. We meet two Dutch volunteers involved in placing water pumps, which go 25 meters deep in the ground in order to find clean drinking water. Beautiful people doing good work! I pay tribute to them. We continue to climb and visit many temples. Some are so steep that people are clinging to the wall and sitting on the stairs going down. If they dare to climb up at all. High up the Temple Mountains we admire the impressive statues of lions and elephants.

A special attraction is the Ta Som temple complex. Where giant trees are rising up from the temple walls and where huge roots are swinging erratically through the temple corridors. Some trees are cut down, but some trees, trees that are artful curved around the stones are left alone. Because these are such spectacular images. Here one finds always groups of Chinese who one after another posing for these places, taking their time and then all viewing their photos. You have to have some patience if you want to shoot a

picture. The Chinese do not seem to be bothered by other tourists who also want to take a picture.

Then, walking across a long wooden platform, built in the middle of a large lake, on the road to Neak Pean temple, right in the middle of a small lake, we find a stall with musicians. Something we have seen at other places as well. They are all people who have lost limbs as a result of accidents with landmines. The whole country was littered with mines during the Khmer war. And there are still many more. Mines that are not intended to kill people but to maim them. We give some money to the musicians.

We are at 1500 back at the hotel. Happy and devastated. We take a short break. That night some of us go to a Cambodian dance party with dinner. Very colorful and with beautiful costumes. We are going 'down town' to the heart of the city. The outlet center of Siem Reap, called "Pub Street." The well-known gathering place for adventurous tourists and backpackers. Here we see something we haven't seen anywhere in the temple complexes of Angkor Wat. Bare legs. For the majority the beautiful legs of young women. Here it is allowed, but the temples have strict dress codes. No bare legs and not even bare shoulders. In and around Pub Street it is full of restaurants and stalls. Colored lights everywhere, there is music everywhere and the scents from the outside ready meals and perfumes of the ladies are spreading out through the streets. We eat in a packed restaurant. The food is fine although it is slightly more expensive than elsewhere. Another beautiful experience. Another great adventure.

28th of March

The main dish. The short trip. We saved the best for last. We go early in the morning, right after breakfast. With our 'own' tuk tuk driver. Wrestling is through the noisy, whirling traffic of Siem Reap, where curiously everyone gives each other some space. Everything runs smoothly, only the really big buses do not fit into this landscape. They block the flow. We arrive at Angkor Wat. It is a breathtaking sight, truly fabulous, to see that beautiful temple far away in the distance, to see emerge out of lake, situated against a blue sky and green forest. Magic.

Surrounded by water on the front, lined with tall palm trees, set against the green forest at the back, it's a true fairy tale. We walk along a long bridge over the water to the temple complex. Along with hundreds of other tourists, for in spite of the early hour it's already pretty busy. There are especially many Chinese. Dressed either in colorful robes, and many in white and often equipped with colorful umbrellas. The umbrellas do not really match the scenery of this temple complex. These brand new Chinese tourists behave a bit like the 'Ugly Americans' from the past and like the later flow of Japanese tourists. But now they have parasols, shiny sunglasses, their own iPhone, and worst of all their 'selfie' equipment. They seem to be addicted to taking pictures of themselves. Which caused my

friend to confess: "I will never take a Chinese woman, how beautiful they may be. They are too preoccupied with themselves. "

Incidentally they usually stay on the beaten path and I love being everywhere else making trips to other places and seeing the temple complex from different angles. It is really fantastic, a true wonder of the world. How the people at that time were able to deliver such incredible performance? I make hundreds of photos. Of the temple reflected in the water, of the Buddhist Monks, of long walls filled with reliefs, arranged over the full length of the surrounding galleries. Performances that mostly battlegrounds are displayed. With bows, spears, horses, chariots, boats and even elephants. I look or something more spiritual scenes can be discovered, but it is worthless. We can also still one of the high towers look inside, but there is such a long line for the high kick, that we do but abandon.

We wander through this huge temple complex. Each has its own approach and walks in his own pace. Yet we are both at about the same time back at our starting position. And yes, "What more can I say?" It's overwhelming, truly overwhelming. We are quiet, silent, impressed. After almost two hours we return to the place where our tuk tuk waits. And every time the driver meets us from afar. And every time he treats us to a bottle of water from the cooler under the seat of his cart. Delicious, and all included in the price, leading afterwards to a nice tip.

We drive from Angkor Wat to the Bayon complex. A huge complex, which is surrounded on four sides by walls, with a north, west, south and east port. It is a kind of miniature version of Angkor Wat. A temple complex that unfortunately is in a rather worse state. But again with magnificent galleries, with beautiful reliefs and appealing images. Especially the large Buddha heads atop the temples are impressive. In the tuk tuk parking place are also some elephants. With a basket on the back for the passengers. And a kind of walkway to the side to get to the top of the elephant. A strange sight. On the one hand, a pair of elephants with carry-on baskets and twenty meters further a modern tour bus.

We drive to the Ta Keo temple complex that is located just east of the Bayon complex. It is a complex with a number of equally high temple towers adjacent to each other. And again magnificent sculptures and reliefs. And a very, very steep staircase. Spectacular. It does not stop. We continue to the great temple complex of Ta Phrom. It is almost as large as Angkor Wat itself and also built in a square. It is set back from the road, so we walk on a clay road through a beautiful green forest. And another thing, quite remarkably, here it clean. The entire Angkor Wat complex is kept meticulously clean. They should be cleaning up elsewhere in Cambodia. Let the schoolchildren start, for a small reward, of course. Then it can go very quickly. This temple is famous for its temples with huge overgrown trees. Trees with roots that fan out across a wide plaza, trees that rise vertically from a temple, trees with that wide asteroid feet and tree roots that have a

gallery full in their clasp. Spectacular. Extensive restoration work is in place. There is still much to do in Angkor Wat.

Exhausted and overwhelmed we go around 1500 hours back to our hotel. And rest. In recent days I gained so many special experiences that I just skip dinner that night. I grab my washed and neatly folded clothes, it only costs three dollars per kilo, take a shower, eat a papaya with a few drops of lime juice, drink a few beers, a box of potato chips and set the alarm for 7:00. And sleep.

29 March

The next morning we gather at 0800 in the lobby. We journey that day to Battambang. That's not so far away. We hear what our colleagues have seen and experienced. Cambodian dancing with dinner. The dance was a bit disappointing, but the dinner was perfect. And the trip to Banteay Srei, 37 kilometers north of Siem Reap, the site of the pink temple and the beautiful relief work. The Cambodian Cooking Cottage, where they teach you the authentic Cambodian. Kbal Spean, the river of 1000 lingas (effigies), with beautiful waterfalls. Where in the rocky riverbed thousands of statues and reliefs are carved. We could easily have stayed a day longer in Siem Reap.

But now back on the road. However, the bus is broken, a faulty radiator. No worries; after half an hour there is a new and moreover clean bus on the sidewalk. So en route to Battambang, Cambodia's second city, situated on the River Sangker. A city where you can still see a lot of French influence. The first toilet stop is at a stone quarry. With colored images of Buddha's, roosters and even see a mermaid. A mermaid whose breast is tightly clamped by a wild-looking warrior. But she does not mind because she puts her hand on his hand, the hand covering her breast. Next Patrick promised us, even before we arrive in Battambang, a surprise. And what a surprise, the "Bamboo Train."

It consists of a series of carriages, each with its own engine, which drives the shaft of a railway wheel by means of a V-belt. A bamboo bed is situated on the two rail wheels. On the bed can three to four people can be seated next to the "driver." The track is 4 km long. We sit on the carts and are bouncing along the track with a good speed on the not too straight rails. Then we meet some oncoming cars, and it is single track. No problem, they take the bamboo platforms off and put them aside, then the axles are, after being disconnected from the drive belt, removed from the rails and also put aside. And we continue. There are some beautiful shots made by of this trip using the state 'film' on our cameras.

We have lunch in Battambang and then check into the modern Vy Chhe Hotel. It's not a luxury hotel as before but the airco, TV and shower are in order. I walk into the town and look at the shops and restaurants. It is a prosperous city with beautiful buildings and of course again a big, busy market place. I try one of the stalls in the market to buy a coin, a silver coin, dating from the French colonial era. A souvenir that I like to take away from

every country I've been to. But this currency is nowhere to be found. I try it in the flea market, but there is nothing. And the few "antique" items that are for sale in a kind of 'brocante' are outrageously expensive. The members of the Khmer Rouge have destroyed everything luxurious and decadent, the owner explained to me.

I don't want to dine that day. It's been nice. A beer and some water. A handful of crisps and some nuts, that's enough. I watch TV and read the newly purchased, extremely poignant book "First They Killed my father." Written by a girl who was 5 years old when the "cleansing operation" started in 1975. Whose father and mother were murdered, but who survived. She eventually ended up in America thanks to the support of her family and has written a gripping account of her experiences in very simple terms.

30 March

Battambang. This morning a bike tour with a local guide who speaks good English, is on the program. The weather is fine, not too hot and little wind. We are four people, including Patrick. The rest of the group remained at the hotel. Cycling through the busy streets of Battambang is an experience. But it is not too bad. A little flexibility, a bit give and take, take time to look around, a healthy dose of courage and then you're fine. We cycle out of town, across the river, to the north. The real countryside. We first visit a crocodile farm. That is a bit of a scary experience. We walk on a concrete wall, with not too high fences and watch the crocodiles that lie a few meters below. Seemingly very quiet, but as the owner of the farm throw a branch down the crocodiles fly at it with gaping jaws. If you were to fall down there you would be torn apart in a few moments. Adult crocodiles are sold for about \$ 600 each. To Cambodia for the meat, to Vietnam for the leather and to China for the drug industry.

We cycle on quiet roads where along the side of the road the rice is being dried. Rice sheets are made at our next destination. You know, the semi-transparent sheets in which vegetables are rolled. It is a labor-intensive process. The people are working all day, for a few dollars. All gardens have large clay tanks that are bent inward at the top. Vessels for the storage of water. These casks 'breathe' slightly in the sun. The water penetrates to the outside gently of the clay wall and evaporates, a process that draws heat from the barrel, so the water is cooled inside the vessel. Ingenious. Then we visit a place where banana chips are made. Banana's are cut very thin, then sun drying, gently roasting and finally sealing them in plastic bags over a candle flame. Like chips. Primitive but effective.

We go on. To a place where rice wine is produced. A fascinating process. First, the rice is cooked, then fermented with a yeast solution, then heated, distilled and cooled down again. We buy a bottle of rice wine, a half liter, with an alcohol content of 40%. It tastes delicious. Our next visit is to a bamboo/rice business. Where cooked rice is packed in hollow bamboo stems, which are then lightly roasted. Whereby the bamboo stalk releases its flavor to the rice. This product is very popular and is almost everywhere in Cambodia for sale.

Our last visit is to a farm where fish is processed. From afar, we can see the fillets drying on bamboo racks in the sun. They are frequently turned over. It smells awful. The fish are delivered in trailers, but there are also special fish-cars. The entire car, except the driver's seat, is full of fish. The fish are carried in baskets inside, like the cheese carriers in Holland. Then the heads are cut off, the fish are eviscerated and fins are cut off and then the fish is cut in parts. Everything happens at breakneck speed by skilled women with steady hands, sharp eyes and very sharp knives. Nothing is lost. The heads together with surplus vegetables are scooped in a large mill, where they are ground into a dirty, gray-green mush. That's the feed for the crocodiles! It is nice to see how all sorts of basic hand skills are being kept alive. And how dedicated the people are. We cycle back through a vast landscape and breathe the fresh air. Just before returning to Battambang we take a beer to properly disinfect our throats.

In the afternoon we collect at 14:00 hours in the lobby. We first go to a sacred mountain next to the lake. A nice place. A long staircase with many steps, is leading upwards. But I have, after the ride, not so much the energy. Fortunately there are, at the entrance along the water, several huts with hammocks. Delicious.

Then we take the bus to Phnom Sampov 12 kilometers west of Battambang. To the 'Bat Cave' and the 'Killing Caves.' Admission \$ 1. We drive in a noisy, bright red four-wheel drive, costing five dollars per person, up the hill. A special place where some beautiful temples stand. A place with a phenomenal view. But also a place with a vivid sculptural depiction of Hell. With images of people going in a horrible way to hell, to atone for their sins. A little further we come to two deep caves. The "killing caves." A horrible place. A place where during the Khmer 'cleansing' as many as 10,000 people have been killed. Thrown into the deep caves. A large cave for adults and a smaller cave for children. Horrible. The energy of the spot penetrates deep into my pores. I do not stay too long. And then you realize once more that we can count ourselves lucky, because we have had a good time over the past 70 years, after the Second World War. Even though this is not visible on everyone's face.

We admire the temples, watching the ceremonies where people enter a temple and push a banknote against the lips of a Buddha statue. And we enjoy the carefree monkeys having their way, accustomed as they are to the tourists. We drink a beer, for fear, create a group picture and then go down the hill again. There it is very busy. Along the road are hundreds of people. Look at a special spectacle, the "bat cave." Where at sunset, and that it is now, millions of bats fly out of the cave. Looking for mosquitoes, flies and whatever else, to come back in the morning before around 04:30. It is a fascinating sight. Those huge swarm of bats. And it goes on and on, for over half an hour, incredible. We take great shots.

In the evening the group is out, eating in town. This time I'm not going. The killing caves are still too vivid in my mind. I want to be alone. That's all right. I, like my colleagues, have a delicious dinner. A papaya salad, a chicken curry with rice and two beers, all for 12 dollars. Not expensive, but by now I have to be careful with spending money. Money is flying out of my wallet and even though it is in small amounts, it adds up. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and access to several attractions. That takes you quickly to about \$ 40 per day. Djoser's estimate of \$ 175 per week is a bit low.

March 31st

We gather at 07:00 in the lobby. We leave early because it is a long journey, more than 600 kilometers to Sihanoukville on the coast. There is no direct way along the coast. So we have to detour a long way. We did cut a piece off by driving on a bumpy road along rice fields. A beautiful sight, but the continuous bumping was pretty tiring. Fortunately, there are breaks for breakfast and lunch, alternating every two hours with a sanitary stop and smoke break. During the lunch break we went to a special, new coffee shops along the main road from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville. Where with many hands and an impressive machine, delicious coffee is made. Three men were about 5 minutes busy for preparing one cup of coffee, but it tasted great.

At the next stop we were treated to a beautiful rainbow. A good sign. Finally, as at 20:00 hours we arrive in Sihanoukville, our last stop. It was a long day. We check into the Ponleu Reas Thmey Hotel in the center of the town, near the beach. The hotel has seen better days, or has been used extensively since Sihanoukville is a known tourist destination, but it is adequate. We go into the city, that is, we go to the beach. We see and smell the sea. What a colorful and what a noisy place. We again will have to get used to it. Along the beach, in a kind of promenade are numerous bars and cafés, each with their own colors and their own music. An El Dorado for backpackers. On the beach are chairs everywhere and places to eat and drink. The food is brought to the beach from the restaurants on the boulevard.

We settle down in armchairs around a huge table, near the sea. And order food and drinks. It is of good quality. There is continuous firework; the popping and dazzling lighting effects are not from the air. The firework arrows are offered for sale on the beach. A little further some guys are juggling with torches. Also a spectacular sight. And if that was not enough, a thunderstorm is brewing in the distance. The lightning flashes are getting closer and closer and it is oppressively hot. Suddenly it begins to blow and soon after a terrific thunderstorm is bursting loose. Torrential downpours ravage the beach. We flee inside the small restaurant, which has brought us food and drink. It is very enjoyable here. Very cozy. We are closely packed together, and shelter from the storm. I make several grandiose Orb photos for thunderstorms are especially 'good' for orbs.

After an hour the storm takes a break. Some colleagues remain in the restaurant to chat and drink in the bar, but we go back. Along the music tents is extensive dancing and feasting. And the street to the hotel street has turned into a small, fast-flowing river. Another adventurous day.

April 1st

The weather has cleared. The air is clean, the streets are polished to a shine, most road debris is washed away, probably to the sea. We have a quiet breakfast and discuss what to

do. There are various possibilities. The trip chosen by me, a trip over sea and along the mangrove swamps, has been canceled. The roads are impassable due to the storm yesterday. North and south of Sihanoukville are several beaches. Beautiful white sand beaches. Nice places. We can also take a boat trip to the islands off the coast. A short trip to an island just off the coast costs \$ 15,- or a longer trip to some islands further away, cost \$ 25,-. A trip with lunch. I choose the latter option. Are there any other island lovers? No, there are not. Most want a quiet day, stay inside and lie on the beach.

At 09:00 I am picked up at the hotel and taken to the port where the boat is. It is a relatively small port with a few impressive cranes. There are some ships moored at the quay, not super large vessels, but they will come. The country is still under construction. The port itself is well worth a visit. On the ramp are beautifully colored ships and just down the road a new ship is being built. The wooden framework is a magic sight. Other ships are caulked (plugging the seams with cotton) and painted.

I go aboard my ship and wait for things to come. Slowly the ship is filling up. All sorts of fruits and other food items are brought on board and just before ten the skipper of the vessel arrives. A cheerful, capable man. If we leave shore I see that I am the only European on board, among a group of 50 Cambodians. But that does not matter. The people are very friendly. The older women smiling occasionally look at me, but the young girls sullenly looking away. They are too busy with their own beauty and 15 minutes later they are asleep. There is coffee, tea and water on board. After an hour sailing, the ship stopped at one of the small islands off the coast and is the buffet open. It is a bit crowded, but there is plenty. Delicious dishes, but I'm a bit cautious and take only some fried rice and fruit.

Next to us is the 'party' boat. The boat that sailed to the islands near the coast. A four-deck ship full of half naked white bodies, screaming children and blaring music. I'm glad I did not go there. We sail on; it is still a long way. All in all it is about two hours by boat from Sihanoukville to the islands. But it's worth, it's very rewarding. We moor at 12:30 at a long quay and are told that we should be getting back on board again 15:00. It is an idyllic spot. An island with beautiful wide, white beaches, fringed by palm trees. With here and there a small restaurant, which parasols and benches. And a bright blue-green sea. I undress, put on my swimsuit and walk into the sea. Lovely. Beautiful clean water at a very pleasant temperature. I swim some, driving around in the clear water and feel the salty seawater caressing my skin. So good!

Then out of the water and to an Italian restaurant for some food. Pinacolada with spaghetti. What a party. I go back into the water and swim some more. Lovely. Just before 15:00, I'm back on board. But not everyone is in. The skipper waits patiently and 20 minutes later the last guests, a couple of good looking boys and girls hurry in. We return to Sihanoukville. A fantastic trip. The low sun is beautifully reflected in water. The

clouds contraction over the land are a majestic sight. At 17:30 pm we are back ashore, where a special taxi takes me and a colleague, to the hotel. All perfectly arranged.

I take a shower and put on clean clothes. Because tonight is the last night we are together. Our last supper. We say goodbye to Nara and the driver with a word of thanks from Patrick and two well-filled envelopes. Then we go with two tuk tuks to a restaurant north of Sihanoukville. A nice spot where some colleagues stayed during the day. One of our Belgian colleagues soon has her birthday, she is already well into the 70ties and thankful she is still alive and kicking. She offers us a drink. There is a wide selection of cocktails with inspiring names like "sex on the beach." We also have a gift for her. Then it's my turn to thank our tour guide Patrick, on behalf of the group for taking good care of us. He has done very well.

He helped us out when the plane was delayed, and always provided us with excellent information and advice. Always cheerful and always ready to help. That the journey was sometimes long and tiring,

Was not his fault. Besides, it was an experiment. He will discuss it with Djoser, he said. Our thanks, of course, were accompanied by an envelope with contents. Then late in the evening, through a dark forest, back to the hotel.

April 2

We need that day to be in the lobby at 10:00. Plenty of time to pack our stuff and have a breakfast around the corner. Now we want to go home. Towards Phnom Penh airport it is getting busier. And there is a storm. Along the way we take a cup of tea, but we don't want to linger too long. There is talk of long queues in Phnom Penh and we don't want to miss our flight. But we made it. We have plenty of time in the modern, but small Phnom Penh airport. We order some food and drink and check in. In the departure hall we can buy some last items and take one last bowl of soup. And spend our Cambodian money. The flight, an Airbus A320, only departs at 18:20 and arrives at 2,5 hours later later in Hong Kong. We have more than two hours to move to our flight to Amsterdam. Departing at 23:35 am. We fly again in a Boeing 777-300 ER Cathay Pacific flight number CX271. The duration of the flight is a whopping 12.25 hours!

April 3rd

It's a long flight with not enough room for my legs. The flight is fully booked; there are no spare places. Along the way, the day turns into April 3rd. The aircraft flies just a little slower than the earth rotation. Along the way we have our dinner and breakfast and we can see the rest of the films. Not much sleep. The arrival in Amsterdam is scheduled for 6:40 pm. It is a little bit later, but that's no problem. The passport control is partly done by the military police and partly by machines. Then on to the baggage claim. Our luggage has come along nicely. There is really no time to properly say goodbye to each other. The group has scattered after passport control and baggage claim. Maybe next time, or at a

reunion. With stories, photos and snacks. It's just an idea. I say goodbye to Patrick and then go home. It was a special and very adventurous trip. A trip with an excellent tour guide and nice colleagues. Thanks!