

Preah Vihear Temple

By Anton Swanepoel

Preah Vihear Temple



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Anton Swanepoel

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Introduction

Magical Angkor Wat temple amazes more than 2 million visitors each year. However, there are more than 700 temples scattered around Angkor Wat and the nearby mountains and towns, with more than 50 temples in the Angkor Archaeological Park alone.

This book contains 23 pictures of Preah Vihear Temple, and is to serve as an introductory guide to this magnificent temple. The book will give you an excellent idea of what to expect when visiting the temple.

Note, this book is not a full guidebook to all the temples in the Angkor Archaeological Park, but only highlights Preah Vihear Temple.

For visitors planning **one to three days** at Angkor Wat, check out [*Angkor Wat: 20 Must See Temples*](#). That book contains a 3-day itinerary of the top 20 temples you must see when visiting Angkor Wat. Each temple has a short description and suggested time to visit.

For visitors planning on spending more than three days at Angkor Wat and seeing more temples, check out, [*Angkor Wat Temples*](#). That book contains over 250 pictures, and covers 30 temples inside the Angkor Archaeological Park, or [*Angkor Wat Archaeological Park*](#) with over 50 temples and over 380 pictures.

For details about visiting Cambodia, such as visas, inoculation, accommodation, etiquette, phone numbers for police and hospitals and more, see my book [*Angkor Wat & Cambodia*](#).

For readers thinking about visiting Kampot, Kep or Sihanoukville, see my book, [*Kampot, Kep, and Sihanoukville*](#), that contains over 300 pictures, and covers 95 attractions in and around Kampot, Kep, and Sihanoukville, with GPS coordinates and directions to them.

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If you intend to motorbike through Cambodia or Vietnam, see my books, [*Motorbiking Cambodia & Vietnam*](#), and [*Backpacking South East Asia*](#).

For additional Cambodian guidebooks click [here](#).

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***Get 5 Important Facts You Should Know
When Visiting Cambodia + 5 International
Travel Tips***



Get The 10 Tips Here

These 10 Tips can save you time, money, and make your trip go a lot smoother.

Pertinent Information

Date: 889 ~ 900 started, remodeling 1113 ~ 1150.

King: Yasovarman I, remodeling by Suryavarman II.

Religion: Original Hindu.

Style: Koh Ker (early structures) and Banteay Srei (later structures).

Time: 2 hours, temple alone, possible as a day trip from Siem Reap or two-day trip through Anlong Ven to see Pol Pot's grave.

GPS: 14°23'41.2"N 104°41'40.4"E start of Ancient Staircase up to temple.

GPS: 14°23'47.9"N 104°40'48.7"E causeway to temple.

Entry fee: None currently, however you need to get a pass. A \$5 donation is, however suggested.

Open: 8am ~ 4pm.

Preah Vihear temple is a mountain temple, on a 525m cliff, on the Dongrak Mountains, on the much-disputed Cambodia-Thailand border. The site is 240km from Siem Reap, and is 700m long, stretching from the bottom, at the Cambodia-Thailand border, to the edge of the cliff. The temple has four levels and four courtyards, with five entrances and pavilions.

The temple is and has been a point of friction between Thailand and Cambodia, with border conflict occurring at times. Some of the temple has been damaged in the fighting. Trenches and soldiers are still found at the temple today. The complex is now largely accepted as in Cambodia land, due to a map that was drawn up in 1907 by French officers, which included the temple in the Cambodia territory. At the time, Thailand did not dispute the map. However, when the French troops withdrew from Cambodia in 1954, Thai troops occupied the area. Cambodia protested, and a volatile situation followed, that eventually ended in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1962.

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The court ruled that since Thailand did not protest the map for almost 50 years, it is taken that Thailand accepted the boundary, and that the temple was in Cambodian land. Thailand reacted violently, but eventually backed down. Holding their pride high, Thai soldiers dug up and removed the pole and the Thai national flag at the temple, rather than lower it. The pole was erected at nearby Mor I Daeng cliff, where it is still in use today.

The temple is said to have been the last place to fall to Khmer Rouge soldiers, on May 22, 1975, with the Khmer National Armed Forces walking down and crossing the border to surrender to Thailand forces.

The site however is washed in blood, not only from soldiers.

In 1979, General Kriangsak Chomanan who took power by a military coup in Thailand, rounded up, and sent thousands of Cambodian refugees to Preah Vihear temple. An American Embassy official watched the buses pass him, and estimated around 42,000 Cambodians were taken to Preah Vihear, where they were pushed down the steep escarpment. Some hid in the bushes at the top, while others climbed down by using vines with their children tied to their backs or chests, while Thai soldiers threw big rocks at them.

Those that survived the way down, faced almost 5km of landmine fields, placed there by the Khmer Rouge. People used the bodies of the dead that had stepped on landmines, as stepping stones to cross the minefields. An estimated 3000 people died, with another 7000 people unaccounted for. It seems the site has not had its full with blood, as temple ownership is still today a dispute, with military clashes between Cambodia and Thailand as recent as February 2011 at the time of writing.

Preah Vihear Temple

To get to the temple, see the direction under Beng Mealea temple in Siem Reap chapter to get to and past Beng Mealea temple. From Beng Mealea temple, continue on the same road as to Koh Ker. At the Koh Ker turn off at $13^{\circ}42'22.2''\text{N}$ $104^{\circ}32'34.1''\text{E}$, turn right, and keep on national road 64, for 34.2km, through Kulean city. The road ends in a T-junction in national road 62, turn left at $13^{\circ}49'08.1''\text{N}$ $104^{\circ}48'31.7''\text{E}$. Go on for 54.4km, until you come to Choam Ksant junction at $14^{\circ}14'02.0''\text{N}$ $104^{\circ}47'52.1''\text{E}$. Turn left onto road 2626. Follow this road for 7.9km towards Sra'aem, then go right at the roundabout onto national road 62 at $14^{\circ}14'17.4''\text{N}$ $104^{\circ}43'55.6''\text{E}$. Follow N62 for 23.6km, then turn right up to the temple road at $14^{\circ}22'43.5''\text{N}$ $104^{\circ}39'47.5''\text{E}$, after you got your pass a short distance before. (Note that N62 makes a 90 degree left turn at $14^{\circ}22'12.4''\text{N}$ $104^{\circ}43'17.5''\text{E}$). The road is mostly well marked, and easy to follow.

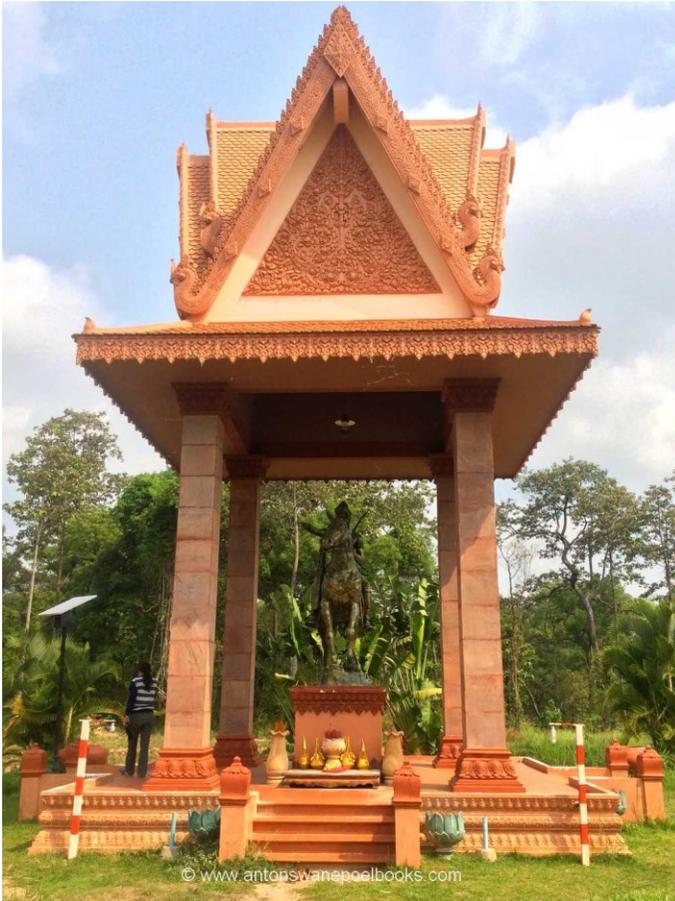
Preah Vihear Temple

Monument on The Way

Time: 6 minutes.

GPS: 14°16'46.2"N 104°42'58.9"E.

This monument is on national road 62, on the way to the temple and worth a stop to stretch your legs. Eco Global Museum is situated 300m further on, if you have time. The museum displays some of the artifacts archeologist Thuy Chanthourn and his team uncovered, in iron smelteries nearby, that dates 1,200 years old. The smelteries are believed to have provided the iron to make weapons and armor for Khmer soldiers during the Angkor area, as well as iron bars in use for temple building.



Preah Vihear Temple



Preah Vihear Temple

Preah Vihear Temple



The temple sits atop this 525m mountain in the Dongrak Mountains.

As you approach the temple site from the Cambodia side, the mountain it sits atop will be visible in the distance. This stretch of land down from the mountain is where an estimated 42,000 Cambodians were pushed down the steep escarpment to face 5km of deadly landmines fields while Thai soldiers threw big rocks at them. As you pass this spot, think about the estimated 3000 people that died beneath your feet, and the estimated 7000 people that are unaccounted for.

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Start of steps. 14°23'41.2"N 104°41'40.4"E.

If you have the time, and are brave enough, you can use the around 1000 steps to the top. Distance is 1.6km, and is on average a 2 hours climb. Note that there is no transport from the top, thus you will have to make the trek back if using the steps. To access the steps, you have to take a side road before getting to the main turn off for the road leading up the mountain. A sign was up at last check in 2015, indicating where to turn off from the main road. Use the GPS coordinates provided to help you stay on the right roads. Pictured above, is the guard station below the steps. Do ask in what condition the steps are in, before you blindly climb up, you may need to turn just before reaching the top.

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If you feel like a 1.6km, 2 hours climb.



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Road up the mountain.

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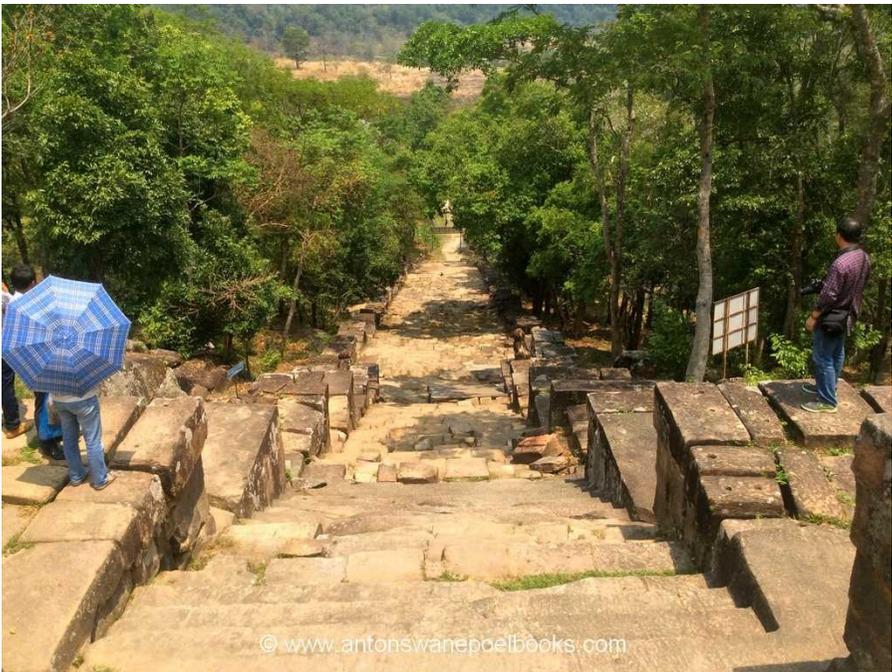
The road up to the top of the mountain is in excellent condition and gives good views of the surrounding Cambodia countryside. Do note that as you near the top, the road becomes very steep. If you are two up on a motorcycle, you may need to have your pillion climb off to make some of the sections. The road does fork, where you can either go to the bottom of the temple complex and restaurants by going left, or go further up to the top of the temple complex by going right at the fork.



Start of the causeway to the lower section.

Pictured above is the pathway leading from the parking area near the restaurants, and lead to the bottom of the temple complex. If you want to see the Cambodia-Thailand border, this is the path to follow.

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Looking down at the border into Thailand.

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There is no border post or guards at the border itself, just an archway. However, there are many soldiers around on both sides of the border, as it is a much disputed temple site. Thus, do not blindly walk over the border into Thailand.



Trenches still used today.

All around the bottom of the temple site, you will find a number of trenches dug. They are still in use to this day, as occasional clashes between Cambodia and Thai soldiers do occur. Although highly unlikely that a clash will occur while the site is open to the public as it is closed down when tensions escalate, the trenches is however the first place I would run to in case of a dispute erupting.

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Causeway from first level to second level.

The temple has four levels that is each connected to the other by a paved causeway. At some sections, large rocks where used as part of the paving (pictured below).

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Causeway to the 3rd level.



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Last causeway to the 4th level.



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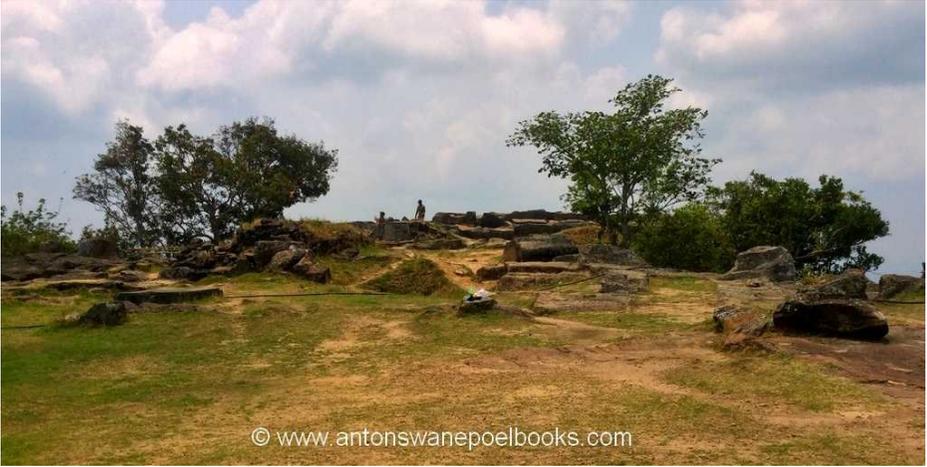
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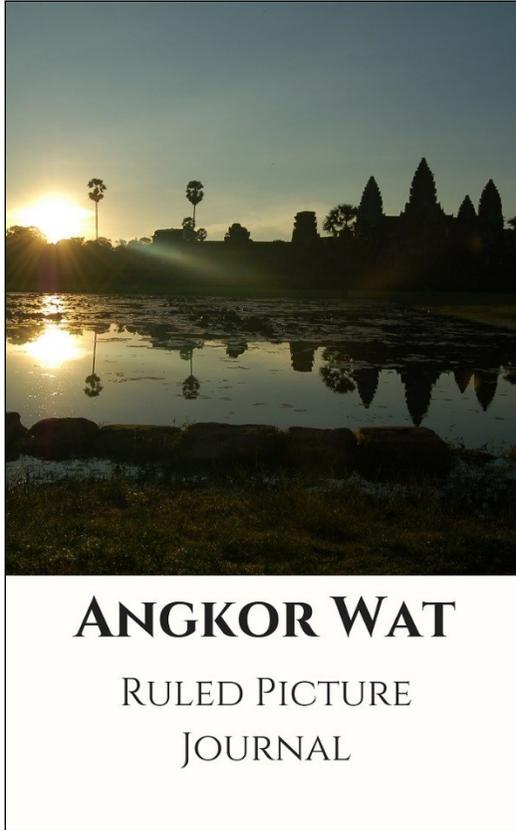
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Edge of the cliff.



Looking down over Cambodia.



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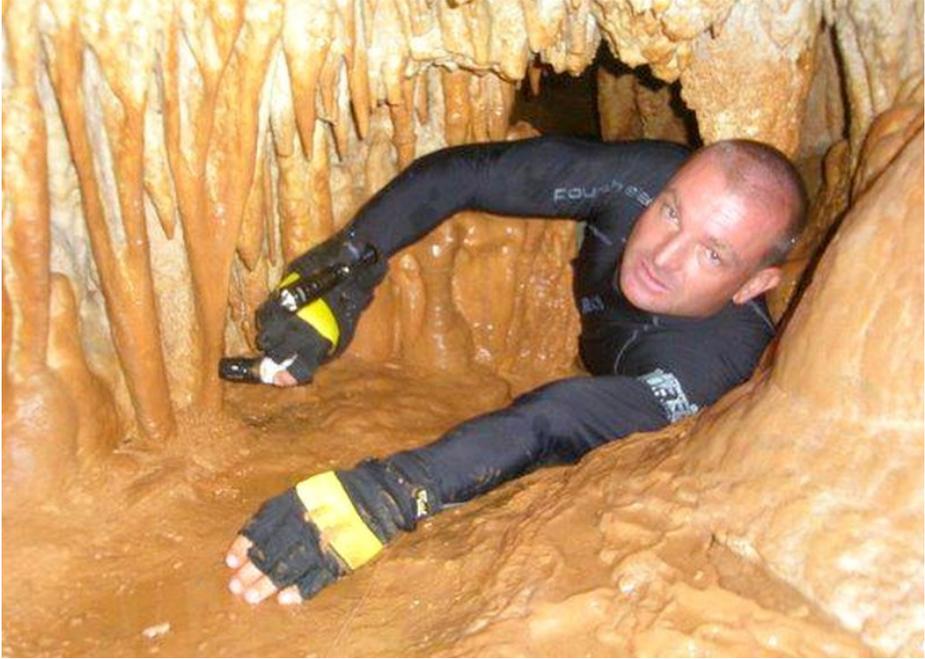
Thank you for taking the time to read *Preah Vihear Temple*.

If you enjoyed this book or found it useful, I would be very grateful if you would please post a short review because your support really does make a difference. Alternatively, consider telling your friends about this book because word of mouth is an author's best friend and much appreciated.

Anton Swanepoel

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anton@antonswanepoelbooks.com

About the Author



As a Technical Diving Instructor and Cave Diver with over seven years' experience working in different places, including the Cayman Islands, I have come to believe that limits are what you set for yourself. I used to be afraid of water until I forced myself into a diving course, and then things just kept going and the thing I feared gave me what I dreamed of doing, travel. Having dived to over 400ft on open circuit, I realize how much of life we miss if we let fear run our life.

Sometimes, life is like a dark tunnel that feels like it is going to squeeze the life from you. However, if you just keep going, you are bound to come out the other side. I love writing, travel, diving, caves, motorcycles, and speed, but as a Reiki Master Teacher, I know you have to balance your life with love, and compassion. Be proud to stand firm in your quest for your dreams, but humble enough to ask for help in reaching them.

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