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Phnom Penh | Cambodia

A Tuk Tuk Street Food Tour with the guide Jackson took Chiara Segmüller and Marcel Gabriel (SHL) straight into the heart – and flavours – of Phnom Penh.



Phnom Penh hits you all at once. It is loud, hot, dusty and wonderfully chaotic. Cars, scooters and tuk-tuks seem to follow their own rules, street kitchens appear on almost every corner and the city rarely stands still. Yet behind all that movement is a capital full of contrasts: excellent food, stylish cafés and hidden bars, mixed cultures and genuinely warm and welcoming people.

Chiara and Marcel's way into the city was through Jackson, a Cambodian tour guide who has lived in Phnom Penh for more than 22 years. They met him after booking a Tuk Tuk Street Food Tour, which turned out to be a highlight.

Moving from place to place by tuk-tuk, Jackson took them beyond the obvious stops and introduced them to Phnom Penh through its food, markets, neighbourhoods and everyday stories. They ate where locals eat, discovered places they would never have found and saw the city from the perspective of someone who calls it home. Phnom Penh is a city of love, history

and mixed cultures – shaped by different nationalities, traditions and flavours. Life has become more expensive over the years, but the city's character, diversity and warmth remain rooted in everyday life.

Favourite Places

Brown Coffee combines good coffee and reliable Wi-Fi with thoughtfully designed interiors, making it a popular spot to relax, catch up on work or take a break from the busy streets. With several locations around Phnom Penh, it offers a comfortable setting for locals and visitors alike.

Slightly tucked away from the main streets, Bassac Lane is packed with small restaurants and intimate bars and is well worth exploring after dark. ARCH Lounge is one of the spots to discover, with a relaxed atmosphere that fits naturally into the lively neighbourhood.

For cocktails, Kravat is a hidden speakeasy tucked away in the backstreets. Excellent drinks, attentive service and its discreet setting make it a memorable nightlife stop.

SHL IN CAMBODIA

Since 2016, SHL has partnered with the Professional Institute of Excellence (PIE) in Cambodia, preparing young Cambodians for careers in hospitality through Swiss-aligned Culinary Arts and F&M Management programmes. Graduates receive an SHL-accredited diploma, bringing Swiss hospitality education to Cambodia.



Food & Drink

Kuy Teav Phnom Penh is a breakfast essential, a comforting noodle soup traditionally eaten in the morning, while Fish Amok is another Cambodian classic worth trying. For a more informal experience, head to a street-side stall near Russian Market for pork ribs, served on tiny plastic chairs as everyday Phnom Penh unfolds around you. For a more local market experience, BKK Market offers a neighbourhood-focused atmosphere away from the better-known Central and Russian Markets, with Mama Wong's making a good stop for a meal while exploring the area.

Activities & Experiences

Jackson's number-one recommendation for visitors is simple: take a food tour. It offers a way to discover Phnom Penh through its neighbourhoods, local routines and everyday stories, with food providing a natural introduction to the city. At weekends, Phnom Penh Walk Street along the riverfront is worth exploring, when parts of the riverside are closed to cars and motorbikes and transformed into a lively pedestrian space. And then there is karaoke – Phnom Penh offers plenty of opportunities to grab a microphone and experience a popular part of Cambodian social life.

History & Reflection

A visit to S21 and the Killing Fields offers a sobering insight into one of the darkest chapters of Cambodia's history. Both sites are deeply moving, confronting visitors with the scale and human impact of the Khmer Rouge regime. After experiencing a city that today feels energetic and full of life, these places provide an important reminder of Cambodia's painful recent past and the experiences that continue to shape the country.

Insider Knowledge

When visiting someone's home, always remove your shoes. In Cambodia, floors may be used for eating, relaxing or sleeping, so outdoor shoes stay outside. Jackson also recommends keeping phones and valuables close when walking around or travelling by tuk-tuk. When it comes to massages, established and professional businesses are preferable to informal street-side offers.

Personal Moments

A visit to Smiling Gecko, a Swiss aid project outside Phnom Penh, offers a different perspective on Cambodia. The project creates opportunities for the local community, while UN Fine Dining showcases Cambodian cuisine at a refined level – a striking contrast to the street food and markets of Phnom Penh. Together, these experiences reveal another side of Cambodia, where community, hospitality and cuisine come together.